



EDELE FESTIVAL OF THE ITIGIDI PEOPLE OF CROSS RIVER STATE AND ITS IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

The significance of cultural festivals in fostering the resilience of a people cannot be over-emphasised. These festivals are increasingly being celebrated by communities globally. This paper focuses on Edele festival of the Itigidi people in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Itigidi town is currently the headquarters of Abi Local Government Area. Hitherto referred to as 'Little London' by admirers, Itigidi has had so much impact on the surrounding communities through her history. Early in history, it acted as the centre of learning and missionary influence along the Cross River. Edele festival stands out as one of the annual festivals celebrated by Itigidi people in December. This paper argues that the benefits derivable from participating in Edele cultural festival are multi-dimensional. The festival ushers in peace, unity, and hard work among the participants and audience, and provides a forum for reflection among the people about their endeavours in the year. It symbolises the enduring legacy which their forefathers bequeathed to them, and rekindles in them a sense of commitment to the cause. In the process of gathering data for this study, the writers conducted interviews with some elder statesmen within and around the area on the significance of the festival. Findings confirmed that the Edele cultural festival has had far-reaching implications on the lives of the people and their neighbours. This paper is an attempt to examine the characteristics of Edele as a festival that should be sustained in the community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Itigidi town, otherwise known as Ibam, which is at present the headquarters of Abi Local Government Area in Cross River State is made up of four main wards, namely: Evachiel, Lekpachiel, Ikamine and Agba. Itigidi, like other towns and villages, has many festivals such as

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Ekowa, Gizaminakwol and Edele. The Itigidi people call their yam festival Edele, while the other three Agbo towns- Igbo Imeabana, Adadama and Ekureku- call theirs Aji. With such varied nomenclatures, it could be said that Edele festival has wide implications. On its origin, there are views that during the period of migration, the festival was brought to Itigidi from Ezillo; some say that it was brought from Ijekwe and others say it came from Idobo all in the present Anambra State. (Bassey, 1983) There is a claim that the people of Agba ward, who were the last Itigidi group to cross the Western bank of the Cross River, brought Edele to Itigidi. (Ibid) Another school of thought maintains that there was some crude form of Edele festival connected with deities, but with the advent of Christianity, it came to be refined and lasted until the present form. (Ibid)

To some people who have little or no knowledge about Edele festival, this is merely a form of dance for entertainment purposes and is to be celebrated as an end of the year dance. Others hold the view that Edele festival, apart from being a dance for mere entertainment, has some important effects on different aspects of development such as social, economic, religious and moral, on the lives of the Itigidi people. Therefore, the aim or purpose of this paper is to examine the social, economic, religious and moral impact of Edele festival on the lives of Itigidi people, from early times up till the present period. The paper will also consider the effects of the said festival on the neighbouring towns of Itigidi such as Ediba, Ugep, Abba Omege, Ekureku, Adadama and others. The writer believes that Edele festival came with the Agba people. It is further assumed that the said festival has the social effect of bringing all the indigenes together at least once a year. The festival also encourages Itigidi farmers to work hard and produce sufficient food for their consumption, presentation at the ceremony and for the market to derive some income. The said festival also gives the participants an opportunity to make sacrifices to their gods and it also teaches them respect for elders in the community. In carrying out this research, the writer interviewed some selected people in Itigidi and the surrounding villages. Again, the writers are from the area and have written from their personal experience. Besides oral interviews, some secondary sources have been used.

2. BACKGROUND ISSUES

Before delving into the subject matter, it is pertinent to give background information covering all aspects of life of the Itigidi people from early times till present date. Itigidi town lies on the mid way of Cross River. (Interview with Mrs. Lucy A. Bassey, 1982) It is situated on the western bank of the said river at point longitude 8.05° E, latitude 5.9° N. Itigidi lies 58 kilometres south of Abakaliki in Ebonyi State, but it is about 130 kilometres from Calabar, capital of Cross River State. Itigidi is one of the four towns constituting Agbo clan. The other three are Adadama, Ekureku and Igbo Imeabana (Bassey, 1983). It is believed that the Agbo clan itself belongs to the big heterogeneous group of the upper Cross River- the Ekois and they are Bantiod in origin. History has it that the people of Agbo clan including Itigidi first settled near the southern bank of river Benue, very close to Tiv settlements and it initially comprised twelve villages. Being outnumbered by the Tivs, the Agbo people migrated and this culminated in the loss of some villages. The migration was precipitated by internecine wars and boundary disputes caused by their Tiv neighbours. (Interview with Willie E. Eni, 1982; Ecoma, 1992)

In the course of migration, one village moved to Oban hills, the other eleven moved southward. Out of the eleven villages, two moved: one to Otigidi in Wanakom and the other to Atam Nselle in Ikom Local Government Area. The remaining nine villages moved to Ishielu in Abakaliki. These Igbo neighbours became hostile and the nine Agbo villages moved to Enyim Itanga (Interview with Chief Sam Efem, 1982) near Abba Omega. It is believed that the non-Igbo speaking people who still inhabit Ikwo area might be fragments of Agbo groups that did not continue with the migration.(Bassey, 1983) From among the Agbo that settled in Enyim Itanga, occurred yet another migration resulting from accommodation problem. Thus Itigidi moved to Egbara. Here, a prominent chief- Eval Elowo went on a hunting spree and came to discover the expanse of the river. When he returned home, he narrated his discovery and the Itigidi people immediately packed to the western bank of the river and named the place "Ibam" meaning "sound repose". Out of curiosity, some Itigidi people crossed to where Ediba is now and settled there. At this time, Itigidi people lived on both banks of the river. After some time, some of them voluntarily rejoined their kin on the western side of the river. The remaining groups on the Ediba side were driven off by the Ediba people. It is known that the last Itigidi group to cross over to the western bank was the Agba ward.(Ibid)

The Itigidi community is matrilineal and this had led to the indigenes being named after their mothers in early times. Every family has a head that is the symbol of authority. B. A. Bassey, in his *General Study of Agbo*, states that all Agbo families are patrilineal.(Bassey, 1983) The writer strongly agrees with this statement in that Itigidi as one of the Agbo towns is presently having a patrilineal family pattern. This is the reason why some Itigidi men marry outside in order to secure patrilineal succession.(Interview with Mrs. Isogon, 1982) Their belief is that the children of a foreign woman will be named after the husband. That apart, the Itigidi community is graded in age sets which stimulate joint labour.(Interview with Dr. I. Mbotu, 1982) Like most people in Nigeria, the people of Itigidi and Agbo as a whole, are essentially subsistence farmers. Some take to game hunting, fishing and the like; but the most important economic activity in the town is farming and it is a mass occupation.(Interview with Prince I. A. Bassey, 1982) For the indigenous worker, a small farm is not only a saving on living cost but a praise earner for being hardworking and industrious.(Fafunwa, 1974) Since the economic structure of any community is to a great extent, determined by geographical factors, we believe that is why the economy of Itigidi is largely rural.

The life of the Itigidi people before the advent of Christianity was conditioned by their traditional religion. This religion was and still is characterised by very subtle ritual ceremonies consisting of prayers and sacrifices to the gods of the land. They have different deities such as *Ibritam* deity which is connected with harvest and it is usually invoked before Edele festival starts.(Ibid) Other deities are: *Evalnteme*- the protector of lives and property, *Evunini*- river god, *Ekpanadu*- protector of children, *Itomono*- god of war, *Ato Agba*- located in Agba ward and the shrine is the repository for all sacred materials for Edele dance.(Bassey) The different family heads were those who acted as intermediaries between these gods and their kin group. The people had a system of education which was traditional. Its main aim was to educate the indigenes on the approved folkways and don'ts of the community. According to Babs Fafunwa, "every society whether simple or complex has its own system of training and educating its youth and education for the good life has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history".(Ibid) As it

was with other African and Nigerian societies, the ultimate aim of traditional education as noted by Babs Fafunwa was “to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day”.(Interview with Dr. E. E. Ecoma, 1982) In the early times, every Itigidi citizen therefore grew up to meet up with the expectations of his/her community and believed that he/she has a parent deity that protected him/her. They in turn tried to conform to the norms of the deity. With the advent of Christianity, this traditional religion has since been refined, and some forgotten completely. The education, marriage and trade contacts of Itigidi people with people from other tribes- the missionaries, Efiks, Igbos have made the Itigidi people to adopt some of these people’s culture in their mode of dressing, beliefs and other aspects of life. Of all the facts of social life in Agbo, dances reign supreme.(Interview with Chief Eval Idah, 1982) This claim is also applicable to Itigidi being one of the towns in Agbo clan. In Itigidi, dances are numerous and are of various types. It may be communal or segregated, mixed or single-sexed. For communal ones, performances take place at annual local feasts- Edele, Aji. Here, every native and resident is free to participate. In segregated dances like *Gizaminakwol*, *Akata*, *Obon*, all members can participate.(Ibid) There are masquerade dances like *Ekowa* and series of others. A close examination of Edele festival will show that it is one of the most significant of Itigidi dance festivals.

3. THE EDELE FESTIVAL

Itigidi which is now the headquarters of Abi Local Government Area comprises of four main wards namely: Levachiel, Lekpachiel, Ikamine and Agba. During the period of migration, the people of Itigidi took up a somewhat settlement at Ezillo, Ijekwe and Idodo. According to Dr. E. E. Ecoma, the people of Ijekwe (called Itigidi) Ijekwe speak Itigidi dialect and Edele must have originated from Itigidi Ijekwe.(Interview with Dr. E. E. Ecoma, 1982) It is held that the people of Itigidi migrated from Idodo (now in Anambra State). The Idodo people have Edele and through migration, Edele came to Itigidi.(Interview with Dr. S. E. Imoke, 1982) There is another theory that the people of Agba ward of Itigidi were the last Itigidi group to cross to the western bank and that the Agba ward brought Edele to Itigidi (Ibid) because Edele is normally called *Edele Agba*. This theory concerning Agba seems to bear some truth because there is a parent deity- the Ato Agba deity- owned by a ward in Itigidi. This serves both the interest of its ward and that of the whole town. The shrine of the *Ato Agba* deity is located in Agba ward in Itigidi. The shrine of the said deity is the repository of all sacred materials for Edele.(Interview with Dr. I. Mboto, 1982) Thus it is clear that Edele came to Itigidi in the course of the migration of Itigidi people in general and of the Agba ward in particular.

The four towns constituting the Agba clan have annual feasts. They are: Aji of Ekureku, Aji of Imeabana, Aji of Adamawa (all celebrated around) and the Edele of Itigidi. Edele came to be played during Aji in Itigidi and as the Agba ward brought this annual festival, the whole town decided to adopt it. In Itigidi, Edele is a yam festival celebrated just before new yams are harvested.(Interview with Chief Elemi Adu, 1982) The celebration is concluded with various sacrifices to deities- Ibritam- the aim being to appease the gods so that the harvest would be plentiful and future yam cultivation would produce rewarding yields. The harvest season normally falls between June and August every year. This is why the three Agbo towns- Adadama, Ekureku

and Imeabana- hold their Aji feast around June and July every year. In Itigidi, Edele is fixed in December of every year. Thus as soon as a decision is taken on the date that yam harvesting would commence, a day would be fixed. This is usually on a special market day called Eke and ends on the third market day- Evoge.(Interview with Dr. E. E. Ecoma, 1982) Thus among the Agbo towns, Itigidi celebrates Aji last.

Edele, which is ever so fascinating, is played in instrumental rhythms, without singing of any kind.(Interview with Dr. I. Mboto, 1982) The instruments used include three drums- Lebis, Lekuma and Ipele which is the one that introduces the chief to the dance. There is “Iwulasasa” made of basket shingles and “Etutu” a sort of horn used as a trumpet. Before the Edele festival is celebrated, Meyeye feast- a feast which ushers in the festival- is held on Nkwo, a market day in Itigidi. The feast is observed by elderly members of the community at a secret spot. It involves sacrifices to the gods, preparation of soup and pounded yam, which, the elders consume there. After two Nkwo market days following the Meyeye feast, people hail the approaching Edele by shouting “*Ahe he! Ahe he!*”(Ibid) This is done only after the completion of Meyeye feast. The male folks then beat the wooden drum- ‘Ikolo’ to announce the festival to the public. It is worthy to note that it is only after the Meyeye feast that Edele is made public.

Once an Eke market day is fixed by the Head Chief (Eval) and his aides (akpans) for the commencement of Edele, an announcement is made by the town crier. The town crier is always delegated by the Head Chief to announce the day Edele starts in full swing. A few days to the Edele, four to five age grades are summoned by the chief and directed to clear the playground- Lekuma. This playground is virtually located in Agba ward. It is believed that many deities inhabit the playground.(Interview with Mr. Etta Ikpete, 1983) As indicated earlier, Edele has to be played for three days, beginning on an Eke market day. The first day is known as *Edele Abege*. The play starts at about 3:30pm and it is primarily meant for children. On the second day, Edele is played specifically for adults and members of the public.(Interview with Dr. I. Mboto, 1982) Visitors and people from neighbouring villages could participate in this. This is a more popular day and is referred to as Edele “Atulukpa”. On the third day, the war chief, dances (Itomono/AtoAgba). He comes from Agba ward and he is tall and huge. The festival is rounded off by moving round all the four wards in Itigidi.

The women have a special form of dressing. They all cover what is called “Ekoliko”(Interview with Dr. E. E. Ecoma, 1982) on the head while dancing. They disappear from the playground when the head chief arrives with his aides. This is because the Eval is not expected to see the “Ekoliko”. The male folks also have their form of dressing mainly wrapper and shirt similar in a way to be Efik style of dressing.(Interview with Chief Elemi Adu, 1982)There is a line of dancing. All the age grades line up together and they are led by elder members. In recent times, each age grade decides on what colour and form of dress to wear. Heroic achievers have arm fur as a part of their regalia. While the celebration is going on, the male folks fire their guns near their wives or their loved ones “*Nto ekwen*”(Interview with Dr. I. Mboto, 1982) to usher in the festivity. As the elderly women in their respective age grades dance towards where the drummers are seated, they present their items en bloc to them. The gifts consist mainly of cash crops, kola, yams and any other gifts made up of what they have harvested from their farms. Once the drummers sit down to play, they

do not get up for any reason until the celebration is over. It is a belief in Itigidi that anyone who gets up would die within six months.(Interview at Chief Elemi Adu, 1982)

Half way through the days of the festival, that is on the second day of Edele, the paramount ruler- Eval Lezekpan- and his ward leaders (akpan) attend the festival. On arrival, there is a prepared shelter for him and his akpans. Silence is maintained. The Eval and his akpan come in with “*Ikpali*” containing kola nuts, dry fish and a pot of palm wine which are all presented to the drummers en bloc. After sitting for a while to watch the dancers, the paramount ruler in his full regalia and locally made staff of office exchange pleasantries with the people and moves to the centre of the playground, and steps on a spot where a sacred stone is believed to be buried. The stone is invisible to the naked eye. Special rhythms (four in all) are played by the drummers for him to dance. He dances briefly in a stylish manner (Ukeje, 1979) to these rhythms one after the other. Each rhythm is punctuated by him. This could be seen as he raises his staff of office and points same in front of the drummers.

Thereafter he would call on one of the deities by shouting “*Ibritam-me-me*”. This refers to the ancestral god and this would be followed by echoes from the citizens. The paramount ruler would proceed to call the names of neighbouring villages from which the different people came. He calls on “*Akalala*”- the white men who brought westernisation. At this stage, there is a response via salvos of dane guns at each call of any village. He then calls the neighbouring towns. This action of the paramount ruler reflects his admiration for the neighbouring towns of Itigidi such as Ediba, Ekureku, Adadama, Igbo Imeabana and others. He does this because they live in harmony and mutual respect with these neighbouring villages. The paramount ruler then commences his Royal Address to his subjects. This address is more or less an appraisal of the general performance of the town. The issues he touches on include the behaviour of men and women in the town and invocation of the gods for fecundity (*Atimaleman*). He also prays for plenty of food (*Lize*) and good season of the year by encouraging the citizens to be hardworking. He also advises on the behaviour of Itigidi people outside the town and adds that where any Itigidi citizen behaves well and any mishap befalls him, the citizen should rise and ensure justice. Finally, he would advise each citizen to know his farming boundary and not to meddle with someone else’s wife. After the general advice, the head chief sits down. Later, he gets up and call his “akpan” and says “*ze go vog domume*”,(Bassey) meaning “this is my right hand of fellowship, take it all of you”. Thereafter, he leaves with his “akpan” and the drummers continue to play. The Edele festival is rounded off on the third day. This is done by paying visits to each of the wards. In the end, the chief of Edele, formerly Chief Ekpe Nkanu, takes the instruments to his house.

Apart from December of every year, there are other times that Edele is celebrated. That is during the death of an akpan (ward leader) and during the death of a paramount ruler (Eval). On such occasions, Edele would be celebrated whether it falls in December or not.

4. SOCIAL IMPACT

The human being begins his socialisation in the society made up of other people. Each society develops a culture which moulds the behaviour of its members. Thus the local culture becomes a basis for further socialisation.(Interview with Mr. B. Johnson, 1983) Edele offers an opportunity for the indigenes and other people from far and near to participate in the festival such as Ediba,

Adadama, Ekureku, Ugep, Igbo Imeabana. This helps to bring about unity, integration and understanding among the natives and their visitors. For example, expatriates from Holland who worked as Medical Doctors in Eja Memorial Hospital, Itigidi usually participated freely in Edele gathering. This also offered an opportunity to these Whites to understand and mingle freely with the Itigidi people and vice versa.

In all facets of social life, Edele festival reigns supreme in Itigidi. Edele festival offers an opportunity for the indigenes of the area to re-unite at least once a year, as a people to appreciate their culture, mark their identity and ensure the continuity of their tradition. Such all-embracing assemblies of chiefs and citizens ensure continuous social integration and bring about effective general mobilisation. Mobilisation here connotes free movement. As a result of this, free movement and friendly relations exist between Itigidi people and their neighbours. The neighbouring villages are ready to help the Itigidi in the event of any difficulty. This is due to the respect they have for the Itigidi people. All these emanate from Edele festival.

The Edele festival denotes a period of rest from hard work.(Interview with Chief Sam A. Okon, 1982) It is also a period of recreation and merriment for all. At this time, non-indigenes and citizens gather together to watch the festival. The usual reaction to Edele is emotional fascination which is entertained. People dance in rhythms to Edele music. The enthusiasm with which people clamour to watch the Edele is traceable to the beautiful dance styles and variations of the music. Not surprisingly, indigenes and non-indigenes always look forward to the festival's celebration with nostalgic feelings. Apart from being an attractive spectacle, Edele refreshes in the participants, those cheerful thoughts and beautiful sights that relieve boredom. This could be seen as people with video tapes and radio cassettes run to the playground to record and tape the Edele festival which they later listen to at their leisure or when they are bored. During the festival, the village surroundings are kept tidy. Age grade associations help in communal clean up. By working to clear the playground and other places, they derive satisfaction. This also enhances interaction between the age grades. The contributions of the various age grades during the festival enable them to fulfil their civic responsibilities to the community- thus encouraging patriotism among Itigidi citizens.

As the paramount chief and his akpans enter the playground, peace and quiet is observed as a sign of respect for constituted authority. This also indicates co-operation among the Itigidi people. The demonstration and circular movement by the different wards on the third day of Edele enhances social integration. Singing of Aji songs during Edele brings back the idea of the past and paying of tributes to the late heroes of the town, for example, the late paramount rulers. This spurs the younger generation to emulate those heroes. The presentation of gifts by the paramount ruler, the elders and members of the community to the drummers together connotes equality and fairness. Those who witness this occasion always have something to tell at home- that the Itigidi people are a people who cherish equality and fairness. Such non-indigenes often emulate these qualities from the Itigidi people. The shooting of dane guns by the male folks near their loved ones clearly shows a happy mood. The chief calls with thanks, names of neighbouring villages who attend the festival as well as *Akalala*- White men- who brought Western civilisation. This is indicative of the fact that Itigidi people appreciate people who render assistance to them.

From the foregoing, it is fair to state that Edele festival offers a wide scope for public display. Since Edele festival is always celebrated in the open, Itigidi people and those from neighbouring villages enjoy an abundance of open air relaxation during the celebration.

Lastly, according to Chief Sam Efem, the Edele festival ushers in 'Etabala' (Bassey) meaning that Edele has a social impact of bringing in peace and unity among the Itigidi people from within and without.

5. ECONOMIC IMPACT

The impact of Edele goes beyond the social; it embraces the economic too. During the festival, the paramount ruler in his Royal Address to the people normally gives them words of admonition. One of such admonitions is that each citizen should know and identify his farm boundary, (Ibid) signifying farming as the most important economic activity in Itigidi. This, as B. A. Bassey opines, may be called a mass occupation. Every indigene is engaged in it, but the extent of involvement differs. For the average Itigidi citizen, it is a self and family sustaining activity. All farm land is communally owned. Any unused plot, according to tradition, is apportioned to other members who can make immediate use of it. A single farm- the size notwithstanding is planted with assorted vegetables, tubers, grains and fruits. Every farmer therefore produces yams, cassava, maize, vegetables, etc. but rice or groundnuts are cultivated separately. A farming session usually stretches from February to November, after which Edele festival commences. Thus December becomes a month of harvesting.

Apart from farming, the town is rich in wild but highly economic trees such as oil palm, raffia palm, date palms and iroko, all of which grow quite luxuriantly and abound in vast numbers. The iroko tree provided valuable export lumber during the 1950s and continues to supply some of the wood required for house-building. The date palm has very strong trunks which provide material for house-building, for ant-roof scantlings while the leaves are used for weaving fans. Other products from the palm include wine, roof mats, raffia, and rope fibres. According to B. A. Bassey in his *A General Study of Agbo*, 'the most important of these wild-growing trees is the oil palm, which has high domestic and economic value'. (Interview with Dr. S. E. Imoke, 1982) It supplies oil, kernels and wine- all industrial and export commodities apart from their food value- to the Itigidi people. The people also engage in economic activities like hunting and trading. They hunt elephant, boar and other animals which they sell for money. Surplus meat is normally preserved for local consumption. In trading, the Itigidi people buy goods that are not available in Itigidi like salt, stockfish from neighbouring towns and they bring these to sell in Itigidi and make some profits. Traders from other towns and villages also buy from Itigidi traders to sell in their towns and villages.

These economic activities which have been referred to above and others have been made prominent as a result of Edele festival. Every Itigidi indigene now looks forward to the Christmas season which is in fact, the harvest season. This is because Edele festival is celebrated in the Christmas season. Each citizen of Itigidi now bears in mind the implications of the Royal Address. As a result through hard work, he endeavours to abide by the Royal Address. The Royal Address originates from Edele festival and it stimulates the spirit of hard work, and offers the Itigidi community to be self-sufficient in food production.

The Royal Address also has a considerable influence on the neighbouring towns and villages of Itigidi. It makes them to emulate the Itigidi people in being hard working. The attendance of people from neighbouring villages in Edele festival encourages mutual understanding, which in turn promotes trade relations between Itigidi and its neighbours. From this trade, agricultural products are exchanged and money is obtained. As already stated, Itigidi people sell the surplus produce to their neighbours. Thus Edele playground- 'Evama'- serves as an advertising spot for Itigidi farm products; and thus serves as a local trade fair. Besides being the basis for socialisation, Edele festival provides a means of livelihood and sustenance to the people.

6. RELIGIOUS AND MORAL IMPACT

As the saying goes, religion and morals are interwoven. One cannot discuss religion without bringing in morals and vice versa. On this ground therefore, it is necessary to consider the religious and moral impact of Edele festival together, for they are inseparable. Edele festival was traditionally celebrated between the months of July/August every year. However, with the advent of Christianity, Edele was shifted to December just to fall in line with Christmas. (Interview with Prince I. A. Bassey, 1982) This was in response to the advice of the late Rev. Ejemot Eson Ecoma, who was the first reverend gentleman of Itigidi. Prior to this time, the offering of sacrifices to gods before and after the Edele was rife. But Reverend Ecoma implored the Christians not to dance to Edele music unless the sacrifices to deities were discontinued. As a mark of acceptance of Christianity, the Christians readily adhered to his plea for he was held in very high esteem by the Itigidi people. The introduction of Christianity, Western Education and rural/urban migration have all led to a reduction in the attendance of people at the festival but all these factors have, however, not stopped the popularity of the festival. The moral exhibited thereto is shown by the Itigidi people as being law abiding and ready to accept the advice of their most respected Reverend- the late Ejemot Eson Ecoma. Edele festival has now been associated with Christmas when Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of Christ. Besides the change to Christianity, the Royal Address by the paramount ruler of Itigidi during Edele festival imparts a lot of morals on the citizens of Itigidi and the neighbouring villages. According to Chief Eval Idah, the paramount ruler advises his people present in Edele playground, among other things, that they should not steal, they should not tamper with someone's wife and also admonishes his people to live a good life. The advice if clearly examined is in consonance with the Christian principles contained in the Ten Commandments; (The Holy Bible, 1831) which stipulates as follows: Thou shall not kill, Thou shall not covert your neighbour's wife and others. These morals in effect make them to live by example as good Christians and citizens. The Itigidi people and people from neighbouring villages- Ediba, Ekureku, Adadama and others- now learn to live in unity and to love and respect each other and hatred becomes a thing of the past. It follows that whenever any Itigidi citizen or those from neighbouring villages want to act, they remember the religious and moral instructions imparted by the chief at the back of their minds.

The Edele festival also inculcates in the citizens respect for elders and for constituted authority in the community. This is shown when the paramount chief and his aides (akpans) first enter the playground- *Evama*. Peace and order is maintained. The female and male dancers immediately give way to the chief and his aides to take their seats. The quietness maintained by the participants

marks the good behaviour of the Itigidi citizens. It is also an honour acknowledged by the community and it forbids anyone obstructing the chief's way while he is moving to the playground.(Interview with Mr. Asibong I. Asibong, 1982)

Just as the 'amphictyonies'(For an elaboration on this point: Lemche, 1977) or religious councils of the Greek city states helped in bringing all the Greeks together, so Edele festival helps in uniting the Itigidi people and their environs into one faith- the Christian faith. Through Edele festival, the natives have come to associate the anger of the gods with the festival. Even though the writer had stressed earlier that the Itigidi people had accepted the Christian religion, there are still some groups who practice traditional religion to the core and hold tenaciously those values. It is the belief of this people that if Edele is not celebrated yearly, the gods would plague the Itigidi community. As such, every citizen tries to fulfil the necessary rites of the Edele festival without reservations. At a time, there was a controversy between these groups and the church- the Eval (Eval Lezekpan of Itigidi) and the Presbyterian Church as to when Edele festival was to hold when it fell on a Sunday- 26th December, 1982. The then Reverend and Presbyters of the Presbyterian Church, Itigidi met and discussed with the Chief to shift it to the next Eke day- from Monday to Wednesday being 29th of December, 1982. Surprisingly, the Chief bluntly refused for fear that the gods would be angry and the situation could bring about his death. Members of the church were equally warned not to participate in the Edele festival music on Sunday as this would be at variance with the Christian doctrine which admonishes all Christians to keep the Sabbath day holy. Such developments between tradition and the Christian faith clearly marked the religious impact inherent in Edele festival. Each of the two factions tried to satisfy their respective beliefs- a compromise which is hitherto upheld.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the Edele festival impacts various facets of life in Itigidi. Apart from being an annual ritualistic dance for entertainment, the festival effects far reaching implications on the social, economic, religious and moral lives of the Itigidi people and their neighbours. In considering the social impact of the said festival on the Itigidi people and their neighbours (Ediba, Adadama, Ekureku and Igbo Imeabana), it was discovered that this festival is a part of Itigidi culture which can be learnt through social interaction. Edele festival is normally held once a year during which an opportunity is provided for the indigenes to come together and interact freely. Indeed, all indigenes and non-indigenes who participate in the festival can learn a great deal about Itigidi culture and by this, Itigidi people also transmit their cultural values for posterity.

As famous Greek Olympic games held once in every four years served as a bond of unity to all the scattered Greek city states into one nation- Greece, so also is Edele festival helping to unite all Itigidi people and their proximate neighbours as members of one community. Edele ushers in 'Etabala'- social equality as noted by one of my informants. The Edele playground is a meeting place where beautiful dancers are lauded, old friends meet once more and even new acquaintances are made. The festival enhances cordial and commercial relationship between Itigidi and its neighbours. This is evident at the 'Evama'- Edele playground- where all the farm harvests are presented. Participants within and around Itigidi surroundings remark that the Itigidi people are hardworking and productive as is evident in their rich agricultural products displayed at the Evama

(playground). In this regard, the Edele playground indeed serves as an advertising spot for Itigidi farm products. The all-embracing impact of Edele on the lives of its indigenes could be likened to that of 'Izu Ngwa Cultural Festival' held in Isiala Ngwa North in Abia State. This annual cultural festival forged unity among the Ngwa people, created their identity as a people and preserved their cultural traits.

As noted earlier in this paper, Edele has an impact on the religious and moral life of the people. Religion and morals are inseparable. Earlier, attention was drawn to the fact that initially Edele was celebrated yearly around June/July among the Itigidi people. As a sign of Christianity, the period was shifted to December of every year to commemorate with the birth of Christ. As a result of this conversion, Edele which was a ritualistic dance in early times has since been refined. More so, the Royal Address by the chief during Edele imparts a lot of morals on the participants. The morals are based on the religious life of the Itigidi people. The chief advises the citizens to be honest, not to take part in any crime, to not covert their neighbour's wife, but to lead a good life and keep to their farming boundaries etc. Participants benefit from this admonition. The writers hope that these morals if strictly adhered to by all, will assist immensely in the nation-building process in Nigeria- a nation of one mind, one people, one faith. On the whole, the advantages which are derivable from Edele festival cannot by any stretch of imagination be compressed into this write up. But suffice it to say that the Edele festival has some important impact on the social, economic, religious and moral life of Itigidi people and their neighbours in Ediba, Ugep, Abba Omege, Ekureku, Adadama and environs.

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