

# **BELIEF IN THE SUPREME BEING IN OGOLOMA IN OKRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT, RIVERS STATE**

**APPAH S.T.K.**

**Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island  
Amassoma Bayelsa State.**

## *Abstract*

*This article traces the existence and worship of a supreme being in Okrika LGA in Rivers state. It argues that Tamuno which is the Supreme Being in Okrika LGA traditional religion is overwhelmingly evident in the indigenous names borne by the indigenes of the locality. The article therefore challenges the veracity of earlier researchers who claim that Okrika people did not worship a supreme god.*

## **Introduction**

Ogoloma is one of the nine main towns that made up the Okrika City-State alongside Kirike (Okrika), Ibaka, Ogbogbo, Ogu, Bolo, Abuloma, Isaka and Ele. Okrika (Wakirike) which is the name used in referring to the area, is located at the Eastern area of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Ogoloma is one of the major towns of Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. Ogoloma is as old as other prominent pre-colonial towns and areas like Bonny, Brass, Nembe, Opobo, etc. The major commercial activities in the area are fishing and trading. The trade pattern was earlier based on trade by barter before the introduction of cowries and monetary trading.

The sea was the only means of livelihood of Ogoloma town, while majority of the men go to the sea with local canoe boats alongside their fishing nets and hooks, the other party which are the women in majority also go to the sea with their town tools to hunt sea foods like periwinkle (Isamu) and Ingbe. The men are prominent in catching fishes, while the women are for other sea foods like Isamu and Ingbe which are very common in every local delicacy of Ogoloma people.

One noticeable act of the trade pattern of the Ogoloma people is that both the men who go for fishing and the women who are the wives, take part in the trading or selling of the catches. The man can decide to trade his catch at the riverside to buyers or take it home for his wife who will shade the product and sell or take it to the market to sell after which, the quantity required for the household use had been removed.

Generally, in African society, there is a belief that is common to particular people that might seem slightly different from the other group, and Ogoloma is an exception. The people of Ogoloma believed in Supreme Being; whom they either worship directly or indirectly through intermediaries (Ancestors, divinities and spirits) either by group (which is family group or generally (the whole town coming together) or personality individual worshipping).

Also, though Ogoloma community believes in the Supreme Being, the most common practice is divinations, Ancestral appreciation or worship, depending on the person studying the

people. Because of hunger, poverty and other material or immaterial needs, the people engage in Ancestral and spirit worshiping. This does not mean that the people of Ogofofa do not believe in the Supreme Being as wrongly conceived by visitors to the town.

The people of Ogofofa refers to the Supreme Being as Tamuno and in every of their activities, it is either Tamuno is contacted directly or through the intermediaries like Finibeso and Akaso ancestors or other spirits which the people believe can deliver their request to Tamuno (Supreme Being), while others do direct worships to their spirits or ancestors. That notwithstanding, the people of Ogofofa believe in the Supreme Being (Tamuno). One major proof of tier belief in the Supreme Being is the local names which are given to children, either based on experience or an occurrence/situation. For example, the following names and their English translations that proves their belief in the Supreme Being:

Tamuno-Omie	=	The Supreme Being exists
Tamuno-itekena	=	The Supreme Being answers my payers
Tamuno- Tonye	=	What the Supreme Being permits
Tamuno-Imama	=	Thanks to the Supreme Being

According to (Onuwa, 1990:12), in his book "Study in Igbo Traditional Religion" "the polemic of African Belief in the Supreme God or not is an over flogged issue... although many igbo people belief in clan deities, their belief in the Supreme Deity has been confirmed by many other early scholars like O'connell, Schon, and Crowther, Talboth, Basden, Meek, etc".

However, he tries to picture the acknowledgement of the Supreme Being by the Igbos, which he referred to as the Supreme Deity, in as much as the people's strong belief in other lesser spiritual beings which he referred to as clan deities. Same can be applied to the Ogofofa people. Njoku (1980:1) In his contributions stated that:

*"the Igbos believe firmly in the Supreme God whom they address by his attributies; Chukwu- the great God, Chineke-God the Creator, Obasi bina Igwe-The God who lives in heaven"*

Thus, he tries to expose the fact that the Igbos believe in the Supreme Being by stating some attributes that has been in use far before the arrival of the colonial master.

In another dimension, Opumu (1978:27) had also stated thus:

*The Supreme Being is a being without concrete form. He is therefore never represented in the form of Images or worshipped through them. God (the supreme Being) is also thought of as different from all other spirits and divinities, His powers transcend theirs and He has the unique attribute of immanence".*

This expresses how highly placed and regarded is the Supreme Being to the people and the level or rating of the Supreme Being among other lesser beings.

However, Awolalu (1979) as also opined that:

*For the Igbo, Chukwu is real. He is not an abstract conception but a personal spirit that has dealings with this world. He is not a duex absconded, a withdrawn God as many observers would have us believe. Unlike God in Christian theology, Chukwu is not jealous of people's associations with other spirits.*

In his expression, Awolalu stated further that the Supreme Being (Chukwu) is not vexed at anyone who associates with lesser spirits as long as the acknowledgment of his supremacy stands.

### **Belief in Supreme Being in Ogoloma**

According to Chief Idasefiema, Ogoloma like any African community is very active in religious practices and the existence of Traditional Religion cannot be ignored, According to a source, "though the worship of lesser beings is most popular among the people of Ogoloma, the belief in the Supreme God (Tamuno) also exists". Also of note, is the instance where the Supreme Being is generally known as Tamuno while other beings were known by their separate names in accordance to the field of which they are operational.

Though, during this research period in Ogoloma, there was no visibly available proof of the existence of any shrine, separately created for the Supreme Being, but there were available shrines at least two (2) in every polo or biri as it is called. But some elderly indigenes testified that most of these divinities serve their immediate needs in their specific areas - that is to say these divinities separately have areas or specialty.

Another source tried to explain that Tamuno is the one and only name used in reference to the Supreme Being and the name has been in use since time immemorial. The people of Ogoloma believe in the Supreme Being since their existence and still believe in the existence of the Supreme Being.

In addition, random names and their meanings were taken from different individuals of the community, which shows that the people of Ogoloma have belief in the Supreme Being. The following names were taken from individuals of age-range 30-72 who also testified that the names were given to their parents or some dead parents as the case maybe:

*Tamuno-lyowuna = the Supreme Being hears my cry.*

- *Ibi-Tamuno = all Good Supreme Being*
- *Tamuno-Nengiye Ofori = Nothing is greater than the Supreme Being*
- *Tamuno-Wengibifiri = The good works of the Supreme Being*
- *Tamuno-Omie= The Supreme Being exists*
- *Tamuo-ltekena= The Supreme Being answers my prayers*
- *Tamuno-Tonye= What the Supreme Being permits*
- *Tamuno-Imama= Thanks to the Supreme Being etc.*

However, this is to show the age long belief in the Supreme Being of the Ogoloma people.

### **Siteme**

According to Mrs. Lilie C. Davis, Siteme is the evil or bad spirit tormenting mankind. Siteme is always associated with the devil because, they believe that anything bad or evil is of the devil and Siteme is devil's spirits. Also, when in any occasion or endeavour a member of any family in Ogoloma is always unsuccessful, it is believed that Siteme is responsible. On the other hand, when a woman gives birth within a particular period or years, and the child dies, it is believed that Siteme is responsible for the occurrence. It is generally believed that any bad or evil outcome of any activity or event is the making of Siteme.

### **Ibiteme**

While Mr. Nemi Joseph stated that, Ibiteme is the good spirit from the Supreme Being. Ibiteme is the opposite of Siteme. Ibiteme brings good fortune. Any success in a man's endeavour is believed to have been attracted by the Ibiteme which is following that man. In addition, when a success of any nature occurs either expected or unexpected, it is believed by the Ogoloma people to have been brought by Ibiteme (the good spirit) which is associated with the Supreme Being. It is also believed that Ibiteme according to the Ogoloma people is more preferable because of the good fortune that comes with it while others prefer Ibiteme to Siteme because Siteme brings sadness and evil, while Ibiteme brings joy and good.

### **Superstitious Belief**

According to Mr. Idawari Davis, superstition is a state of fear and ignorance resulting from things that cannot be explained by reason. The people of Ogoloma has a strong belief in superstition. When someone is expecting something good, and a wrong occurs on the way, it is believed that Siteme is trying to distract your good fortunes from Ibiteme.

During wars or communal clashes, if an indigene of Ogoloma safely travels into the town, they usually says "Inyan oh, As Ibara Inyan soume"- meaning I commit my self into your hands. Committing ones self into the protection of the land is part of their religious belief and, if a person is about to go out on his or her endeavour of the day, and get a mysterious sign or a sign believed to be mysterious, it is always regarded as bad omen. For example, if the person's leg hits a stone on the way out or on a general occasion, there is a storm during a celebration.

In addition, when a young person sneezes or even when an elderly person in the community sneezes, they usually respond by saying "Aso-eke"-meaning "It would not enter". They believe that sneezing is caused by evil gathering on the person sneezing. Even when a person's name is called and the person cannot locate or identify his or her caller, it brings fear into the person, and the person being called would meet someone he/she knows to call back the persons name, and the person would answer. It is believed that when someone is called by an unidentifiable voice, that voice belongs to a bad spirit who is calling the person to death, and by meeting someone to recall the name, it averts the dead calling.

### **Sacrifices**

Mr. Idawari Davis added that the making of sacrifices and offerings is common all over the shrines in Ogoloma. They believe that physical and material things are given to divinities and spiritual beings. It is believed that offering of sacrifices brings about speedy delivery of their requests. Sacrifices are offered as thanks to divinities and spirits for accomplishment or request of an individual or group in the Ogoloma town. Sacrifices of forgiveness are also made to spirit or divinities that are offended to appease them.

In addition, a priest added that a sacrifice is commitment of a spirit or spirits and divinities which are invisible by an individual who is on a mission, either spiritually or physically. Sacrifices usually involve shedding of animals, birds etc and also offering of other sorts, The following are materials used in offerings and sacrifices; Fowl, dogs, goats, pigeons, fishes, yams, plantain, minerals, eggs, chalks, local gin, cloths, etc. These animals are either killed and cooked or let loose to roam about, while other food items are collected or cut into smaller pieces to throw around. So also are the gin, chalk and the cloths that are used to decorate the shrine or used in dressing the priests or the person making the offerings.

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