

## African Religious Concepts and Practices as Portrayed in Achebe's Novels

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### ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to explore how successful Achebe is in portraying the African religion concepts and practices in selected novels by Achebe. Sudanese Nuba's traditional religion in the Nuba Mountains is taken as a reference to support the view that these novels really depict Igbo's religion concepts and rituals. The study traces Igbo religion concepts, and practices including funeral rites in Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God and No Longer at Ease, and then compares them with those of the Nuba's. The research employs the descriptive analytical method, and in it is shown that there are considerable similarities between the two communities in religious beliefs, and funeral ceremonies. These similarities definitely support Achebe and other African writers in their argument with their European counterparts, who contend that the Africans have no culture of their own. Igbo and Nuba believe that there is one creator, the almighty, who created the universe. But they claim that there are other lesser gods and goddess and spirits, who help the almighty god. However, they think that their dead ancestors protect their living descendants, punish, or bless them as the god the almighty's mediators. They also believe in life after, thus their funeral ceremonies are highly ritualized; including drumming, animal sacrifices, and dancing. The study reveals that Africa has a great and rich religious system, which had organized people's way of life spiritually, socially, and politically. The study is believed to benefit students of literature, linguistics, history, to instigate religious debates and comparative researches on the topic.

**Key words:** *Traditional religion, reincarnation, rituals, ancestral beliefs.*

### المستخلص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الوقوف على المعتقدات الدينية القديمة لقبائل " النوبة " السودانية ومقارنتها بالمعتقدات الدينية لقبيلة "أقبو" النيجيرية ، من خلال بعض روايات الكاتب والروائي النيجيري (جنوا أجيبي). إذ ركز هذا الكاتب في معظم رواياته على وصف عادات قبيلة "أقبو" التي ينتمي إليها ، واستعراض أسلوب حياتها، وراثتها الثقافي والروحي. وتسعى هذه الدراسة إلى مقارنة الطقوس الدينية التقليدية لدى هاتين القبيلتين ، إلى جانب أشكال المعتقدات الأخرى المتمثلة في:طقوس الجنائز والاعتقاد في الأسلاف ودور المرأة في الحياة الاجتماعية والدينية ، والديانات وأهميتها ودورها في تنظيم حياة المجتمعات القديمة روحياً وثقافياً. اتبع الباحث في هذه الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي ، مستقيماً معلوماته من مصادر البحث الرئيسة المتمثلة في الروايات الثلاث - موضوع الدراسة - إلى جانب المصادر الأخرى.خلص هذا البحث إلى نتائج أهمها وجود تشابه كبير بين معتقدات وطقوس قبيلة "النوبة" السودانية و"أقبو" النيجيرية ؛ خاصة الدينية والتي تتجلى في صور أهمها الاعتقاد الراسخ في الحياة بعد الموت وما يتبع ذلك من طقوس من ضرب الطبول وذبائح ورقص. هذا التشابه يبيّن أن وصف (أجيبي) لعادات وتقاليده قبيلته لم يكن مجرد صور خيالية وهمية صاغها لتشكيل بنية أدبية فحسب؛ وإنما هي حقائق واقعية موثقة وسوف يدعم بقوة رؤية الكتاب الأفارقة في دحضهم فكرة الكتاب الأوربيين الذين يظنون ان الأفارقة لم تكن لهم ثقافة قبل مجئ الأوربيين. يخلص

الباحث إلى أن النوبة في السودان لهم إرث غني ، وان هذه الدراسة ذات فائدة كبيرة لطلاب الدراسات اللغوية ، والأدب ، والتاريخ ، والمختصين في الأديان المقارنة .

*الكلمات المفتاحية :- الديانة التقليدية، الاستسناخ، الطقوس، الاعتقاد في الاسلاف*

## INTRODUCTION:

Many African societies worship a single God, while some recognize a dual God. They do this by paying allegiance to the God through lesser deities. Some African societies deify entities like the earth, the sun, the sea, lighting or the nature. Each deity has its own priest or priestess. According to a report by the African Child magazine, In Zimbabwe, some ethnic groups like the Ndebele have a trinity – a fundamental family group-made up of the God father, God the mother, and God the Sun. Among the Fon in the Republic of Benin, God, who is called "Vondu", has male and female traits.

In Ghana, the Ewe people conceive of the high God as a female-male partnership. Mawu who is a female is often spoken of as gentle and forgiving. Lisa who is a male god, who passes judgment and punishes. Among the Ewe it is believed that when Lisa punishes, Mawu may grant forgiveness. This shows the complementarities of male and female that characterizes many of the traditional African religions.

In Sudan, the Nuba Mountains is one of the places in Africa which has a female high Goddess, whose culture has matriarchal traits. The Nuba conceive of the creator Goddess as the "Great mother" who gave birth to earth and mankind.

In most African communities, God is often worshipped through consultation or communion with lesser deities and ancestral spirits. The deities and spirits

are honored through libation, sacrifice of animals, vegetables, or precious metals.

The will of God is sought by the believer through consultation of divination or oracular deities. In many African traditional religions there is a belief in the cyclical nature of reality. The living stands between their ancestors and the unborn. According to Gottlieb and Mbiti (2006)<sup>(1)</sup>, traditional African religions embrace natural phenomena –ebb and tide, waxing and waning moon, rain and drought- and the rhythmic pattern of agriculture.

Religion plays a vital role in the lives of most Africans. Wherever the person is, there is his religion with him: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop.

Religion among most African ethnic groups was not simply a faith or worship system; it was a way of life, a system of social control, a provider of medicine, and an organizing mechanism. Right from womb through birth, infancy, puberty, marriage, and funeral many Africans societies have religious rituals for each phase of life. Each begins with prayer, offering of kola nut and pouring of libation.

### Statement of the Problem

In his novels, Things Fall Apart (1958)<sup>(2)</sup>, Arrow of God (1964)<sup>(3)</sup>, and No Longer at Ease,(1960)<sup>(4)</sup>, Achebe mainly focuses on the clashes between traditional Igbo religion and European new religion. The Igbo people are an ethnic group in Southeast Nigeria. Reading Chinua Achebe's novels would

make one feel as if the writer is writing about Sudanese Nuba, in the Nuba Mountains.

In this paper, it is attempted to trace Sudanese Nuba traditional religion beliefs and practice in Chinua Achebe's works, and then compare them with Igbo's traditional religion in Nigeria. Comparison will be held between the two African communities (that of Nuba and Igbo), by examining their religious rituals, concepts, practices and funeral rites, in addition to the role of women within the context of these beliefs.

### **Objectives of the Study**

In this research it is attempted to:

- 1- Expound Sudanese Nuba traditional religious concepts, belief and practices and compare them with those of Nigerian Igbo.
- 2- Probe the role of traditional religions in organizing and ruling indigenous Africans (Igbo and Nuba) life before British colonization.
- 3- Ascertain that some of the traditional African (Igbo) religious beliefs that are mentioned in the selected novels are to be found in some parts of Africa, especially in the Nuba Mountains in Western Sudan.
- 4- Underline the impact of the new religion (Christianity) on the local African traditional religion.

### **Research Questions**

- 1- To what extent does Chinua Achebe succeed in depicting real African religious beliefs and practices through his fictional works?
- 2- Do the traditional religious practices of the Igbo and Nuba societies determine their fate?
- 3- What is the role of women in Nuba and Igbo communities' religion?

### **The Significance of the Research**

This research is expected to be of importance to both Igbo and Nuba people. For it underlines their valuable heritage of traditions and cultures. Also, the research is believed to be useful to those who are especially interested in African culture and literature, the mirror of traditions and customs. Folklorists and anthropologists are likely to find it a resourceful store of information. Also, the research will be of use to scholars of social sciences who are concerned with the study of the interaction between people. Research centers, English language scholars and learners may well benefit from it.

### **Literature Review:**

In various religions around the world, death is believed to be an inevitable end. But according to African traditional religion, it is believed that men are not born to inhabit the earth and live forever. They must go back to their original abode where they belong to. They are not considered as permanent dwellers upon earth. Thus, the funeral ceremonies have complex and elaborate rites which include drumming, dancing and fireworks. This is stated by Nehring (2002)<sup>(5)</sup>:

"Among the Igbo of Nigeria, death is traditionally highly ritualized event filled with the deep mourning. The traditional burial rites involve not one, but two funerals whose main intention is to safely escort the deceased from the realm living to the spirit world. After a successful second funeral can the deceased pass from the time of "ita okazi"—a period of torment—into state of peace and contentment".

However, Anthony (2014)<sup>(6)</sup>, in his article, Death in Igbo African Ontology, classifies death among Igbo society into three types: violent death, natural death

and bad death. The first type is natural death, when a person reached an old ripe age and attained a life of accomplishment before dying. Death at an old age is regarded as a blessing, thus is celebrated with feasting and the sons and daughters of the deceased have the duty to ensure that the deceased is given a befitting burial that would send him to the world of the ancestors. This type is vividly shown in *Things Fall Apart* (121), chapter thirteen, when Ogbuefi died, the people of Umuofia celebrated his death with lots of food, drinking and dancing. The nine representatives of the ancestral spirits, the *egwugwu*, and various types of masquerades came to pay their last respect. There were gun salutes, the beating of drums and the brandishing and clanging of machetes. He was given a befitting burial because he was one of the oldest men in Umuofia.

The second type is called bad death, which includes those who die of swollen body, leprosy, swollen stomach, small pox, cholera, suicide or killed by an anti wickedness deity like Amadioha through lightning. All these kinds of death in Igbo religion are not given full funeral rites. This type is shown in chapter three of *Things Fall Apart*. In this chapter readers can learn that bad fortune followed Unoka even to his death. He died of swelling in his stomach and limbs, which is an abomination to the Igbo god Ani, the earth goddess. Thus he could not be buried, so he was taken to the evil forest and left there to die. In Achebe's words:

Unoka was an ill –fated man. He had a bad *chi* or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. He had died of the swelling

which was an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil forest and left there to die (page 18).

In Igbo religion, there is no funeral ceremony for someone who commits suicide, even at old age. No one is allowed to cry publicly for the deceased. Finally, cleansing ceremonies are held by the deceased's family so that such an evil will not happen again. The elders would offer sacrifices for peace in the land and for the extinction of such thought and illness from the land. Again this type of death is portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, chapter twenty five, Achebe records the conversation between Obierika, Okonkwo's friend and the District Commissioner:

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead. "Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him," said Obierika. "We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming." The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs. "Why can't you take him down yourselves?" He asked. "It is against our custom," said one of the men. "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That why we ask your

people to bring him down, because you are strangers. (207-208).

As expressed in this quotation, Okonkwo was a great warrior and wrestler, and took the ozo title in Umuofia, fought very hard to preserve his traditions and religion and ended up committing suicide, the most horrendous of all offenses against the earth goddess. His clansmen as a result of his crime could neither touch his corpse nor bury him.

The third type of death is violent death. According to Anthony (ibid;11), this type of death is usually the death of a young person who dies from a violent accident or killed for stealing. Those who die this way are said to have a bad personal god, *chi*, this kind of death is usually believed to cause by a deity as a punishment for an offence. An excellent example for this type is Ikefune's death in *Things Fall Apart* (57):

"Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father."

Furthermore, the Igbo also believe in the existence of the Ekwensu, the equivalent of Satan, whose prime occupation is to lead people astray. Readers are introduced to such belief in *Things Fall Apart* (122), chapter thirteen. During the funeral ceremony of a warrior who had achieved three titles in his lifetime. It is attended by the all people of the village and the *egwugwu*. The *egwugwu* spirits appear from the underground and they were terrifying the people and one of them warns the people that Ekwensu (Satan) is entered his eye, thus his action may not be controlled. This act indicates

that the Igbo people believe in existence of Satan.

"Sometimes he turned round and chased those men, and they ran for their lives. But they always return to the long rope he trailed behind. He sang, in a terrifying voice, that Ekwensu, or the evil Spirit, had entered his eye".(122)

Obadike (2008)<sup>(7)</sup>, in his book *Igbo Culture and History*, pointed out that Igbo people believed that Ekwensu used people to commit crimes against other people would then turn around and punish the same people who served him. Ekwensu had several servants who helped him to carry out his evil thoughts. One of them is death itself, the malicious being who would visit a man on the day he enjoyed his life the most. Ekwensu was Chukwu's principal enemy and at the same time his faithful servant. Nuba tribes of the Nuba Mountains, on the other hand, have a similar belief that death is not the end and there is a life after. This has instigated the highly ritualized funeral ceremonies. Yunis (1922)<sup>(8)</sup> has given the following portrayal of death rituals among Daju society in the Nuba Mountains:

In the death ceremonies, the Kujur would occasionally break into strange gestures and yawns, which were regarded as mysterious manifestations of her superior functions, while the rest of the women were bowing before her, and reverently handing her some of the ornaments, which Daju women wear. The celebration was shared by men enjoying *merissa* (wine) and meat, followed the whole party dancing under the baobab tree. These death rituals are similar to those of the Igbo's in part and different in other aspects. Both communities used to drink wine and



enjoy their feasts during their funeral ceremonies.

The third example is a burial ceremony, which was reported by Nobbs (1938)<sup>(9)</sup>, it involves the obsequies associated with the burial of Mak Lima at Dungor, seven miles south of Heiban. He was buried together with five goats of the same size, which were killed by beating with a heavy stick, water and grain to provide adequate food and company for his journey in the after-life. This act indicates their belief in another life after death and this is typically the same custom that Igbo have, they make animal sacrifices when they buried an important person.

#### **Method of Research**

In This research, the descriptive analytical method is used, and a comparison between the Igbo traditional religions and those of the Nuba's is made. In other words, the study traces Sudanese Nuba's traditional religious concepts, belief and practices in Achebe's selected novels and compare them with those of Igbo's.

#### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Achebe through his novels Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God has successfully portrayed African (Igbo) religious concepts and practices and how through them the people's way of life spiritually, socially and politically is organized. In Africa, there are five elements that go into the making of African traditional religions. These are belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine. These five beliefs are vividly shown by Achebe in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. As in many African indigenous people's religions, the concept of Igbo traditional religion is based on the belief that there

is one creator known as Chukwu, who created all things in the universe. However, the creator can be approached by other numerous deities and spirits in the form of natural objects. According to their religious beliefs, Chukwu is the creator of the universe and the human beings together. Chukwu dwells above and beyond the heavenly dome. The Igbo do not feel his presence in their daily lives, for they believe that he has gone far away from human beings after creating them. Achebe depicts the concept of Igbo religion in Things Fall Apart (1958:179) chapter twenty one, through debate between the white missionary, Mr. Brown, and one of the elders of the clan, Akuna. The two men are talking about the forms, actions and attitudes of their respective gods.

"You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth," said Akuna on one of Mr. Brown's visits. "We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods." "There are no other gods," said Mr. Brown "Chukwu is the only God and all others are false. You carve a piece of wood-like that one" (he pointed at the rafters from which Akuna's carved IKenga hung), "and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood." "Yes," said Akuna. "It is indeed a piece of wood. The tree from which it came was made by Chukwu, as indeed all minor gods were. But He made them for His messenger so that we could approach Him through them. It is like yourself. You are the head of your church."

This talk indicates that the Igbo believe in other deities beside the great god, Chukwu, to help him. As Akuna explains to Mr. Brown, below Chukwu are the non-human spirits, deities, and

oracles. They claim that these lesser gods and goddesses get their power from Chukwu, and act as intermediaries between him and human beings.

However, each one of these gods and goddesses has a shrine of his own. They also have priests and priestess who protect their shrines, divine their wills, and accept sacrifices that are brought by their worshippers. There is no shrine for Chukwu, and no sacrifices made directly to him. He is thought to be the ultimate receiver of all sacrifices made to the minor deities.

In addition, the different regions of Igbo land have different versions of these minor gods. Below are the most common Igbo gods, as shown in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God:

Ani, is the earth goddess. She is associated with fertility both of human beings and of the land. According to Faghfori (2012: 18)<sup>(10)</sup> Ani, is the most powerful deity in Igbo religion. She is in charge of fertility of the womb and of the soil. She is the mother of earth because she bears in her womb the dead living ancestors. She is also the arbiter of morality and ethical conduct. Therefore, violation of morality like adultery, the killings of one's clansman, robbery, or giving birth to twins are offenses against Ani.

Ogbaa (1999:131),<sup>(11)</sup> remarks that the Igbo feel Ani's presence, when they plan their crops, bury their dead kinsmen, wrestle in the village ilo (playground), dig up the earth and turn it into mud for building homes, take oaths or make pacts between clans and villages, and in their everyday activities. However, every person in the Igbo society has a personal god known as Chi. The chi is an individual's personal god, whose merit is determined by the

individual's good fortune or otherwise. Achebe depicts this concept of personal god in chapter 14, Things Fall Apart: a "man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi". Furthermore, Chigachi (2009)<sup>(12)</sup> provides this definition: Chi is one's guardian spirit bestowed on him at birth by Chukwu (god). You excel or fail only with the consent of your chi, the following quotation from things Fall Apart supports this belief:

*"Is it true that Okonkwo nearly killed you with his gun?"*

*"It is true indeed my dear friend. I cannot yet find a mouth with which to tell the story." "Your chi is very much awake, my friend."*

It is made obvious through this conversation between Okonkwo's wife and her friend Chielo that they think she was not shot dead because her personal god (chi) was awake.

These depicted African (Igbo) religious concepts and practices by Achebe are believed to be real, and are compared with those of the Nuba as follows: The Nuba, in their traditional religion and before some of them converted to Islam and Christianity had the same Igbo belief. They believed that there is one almighty god, who has created the earth, heaven and the all human beings. An excellent example that can be given is the fact that Nuba Tira have the same belief. This confirmed by Avajani (2012:45)<sup>(13)</sup>, who states that:

"The Nuba Tira believes that there is one God the Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, but he has many spiritual beings who work for Him. He rules the world through human mediators, who are believed to be the Nuba Tira's ancestors, called iddanga lamizatte nanyu kalu yamitta ( the living dead who have gone ahead in the land of living).

Similar to Nuba religion, throughout the Igbo land, there is belief that ancestors protect their living descendants and are responsible for rain, harvest, health and children. It is believed that the spirits of their ancestors keep a constant watch on them. Thus, the living show appreciation for the dead and pray to them for future well being. Those ancestors, who lived well, died in socially approved ways, and were given appropriate burial rites, live in one of the worlds of the dead which mirror the world of the living. They are periodically reincarnated among the living and are given the name *ndichie* – which means the returners. However, those who had bad death and received inappropriate burial rites cannot return to the world of the living, or enter that of the dead. They wander homelessly; expressing their grief by harming the living. The ancestors' belief is demonstrated in chapter 13, *Things Fall Apart* (p: 122) as in the following description:

"The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors."

According to Avajani (2012) the Nuba Tira tribes also have similar belief that the ancestors are able to punish, discipline, bless, or curse people as God the Almighty's mediators. They are thought to have direct authority over the people.

However, priests and priestess (known as *Kujur* in the Nuba Mountains) play an important role in the communities'

religion. Kafi (2010)<sup>(14)</sup>, a Nuba politician, intellect and writer, describes *Kujur* as "a popular sacred spiritual person who conducts many spiritual deeds". Therefore, *Kujours* and priestesses take the chief part in the celebrations of popular harvest festivals known in the Nuba Mountains as *Sibir(s)*. These harvest festivals in the Nuba Mountains are directed by the *Kujur*. The start is often announced by the *Kujur* climbing a hill above the village and burning a bundle of sorghum for all to see.

In his *Arrow of God* (1964:1), Achebe portrays the role of the priest *Ezeulu*, the main character of the novel and the chief priest of *Ulu*, a god created by the people of the six villages of *Umuaro*. As chief priest, *Ezeulu* is responsible for safeguarding the traditions and rituals of the people. For example, every month he watches for the new moon. He eats a sacred yam and beats the *Ogene* to mark the beginning of each new month.

However, throughout the Igbo fictional villages of *Amuaro*, only the chief priest of the god *Ulu* can name the day for the feast. Thus the role of the village crier is depicted by the author:

"GOME GOME GOME GOME. Folks of the village. The chief Priest of *Ulu* has asked me to tell every man and every woman that the Festival of the first Pumpkin leaves will be held on the coming *Nkwo* markedday"(66).

Achebe is inclined to use literary devices to convey his message and make his novels interesting. He does not only attempt to inform his readers that African people have deep, rich religious systems but also criticizes those European writers, who are intent on portraying the Africans as barbaric people. Ironically, one of the main



differences between the two religions (African and Christian) is the extent to which killing is allowed. The British may kill the inhabitants of an entire village in vengeance of the murder of one white man, while showing refrain from the local people's killing and fighting each other over religion. Indeed, the Igbo traditions forbid the killing of any clan member.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the *egwugwu* are symbol of religious traditions and independence of the Umuofia. They are seen as ancestral gods, although in fact they are only Umuofian masked elders. They serve as respected judges in the community, listening to complains and prescribing punishment. They are symbolically the spirits of the clan and when the *egwugwu* lost power in the community and are replaced by a white man's court, the clan religion and independence are lost.

However, readers of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are made aware of one important fact that the Igbo have respect for the royal python and treat it like a god. They strongly and spiritually believe that the python is a revered animal. So, Enock's act of killing and eating the pythons, disregarding Igbo's reverence for it is symbolically the discontinuity of the colonialist and the loss of indigenous moral and religious values.

In many African traditions and customs, including Igbo and Nuba, death is regarded as a passage that reunites an individual, who has gone home to live forever, with the ancestral spirits. They believe that those who have gone away are not dead, Africans (including Igbo and Nuba), it is believed that the link between the departed (dead) and the remaining (living) continues. This

Africans deep-rooted belief that the link between the present living and dead continues and is underlined in *Things Fall Apart*, through Okonkwo's agony over the loss of his first son, Nwoye. Hence his call on his other sons to unite and realize the gravity of their brother's decision to abandon the religion of his forefathers:

"You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so I can curse him. If you turn against me when I am dead I will visit you and break your neck. (172)

The Igbo and Nuba have similar customs of compensation in murder crimes. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe tells the readers that ten thousand men of Umuofia gather in the marketplace. Okbuefi Ezuogo, a powerful orator, gives the traditional opening: he faces four different directions, raising a clenched fist, and cries "Umuofia Kwenu," to which the men all cry "yaa!". He greets them this way a fifth time, and then he informs them that the neighboring village of Mbaino, has killed a girl from Umuofia. The men discuss the case and decide to follow the normal course of action: they will issue an ultimatum, demanding a boy and a virgin as compensation.

Okonkwo is chosen as emissary. He is treated with respect, and he returns with a young boy and a virgin girl. The girl goes to the man whose wife was murdered. As for the boy, the clan is in no hurry to decide his fate.

The same custom is to be found among the Nuba Tira tribes, who conceive of

human life as the most precious. They follow the custom of compensation even in accidental death. Avajani points out that in Nuba Tira's custom, if a human life is taken away accidentally by someone, it must be replaced by human life. The community believes in life exchange as a ransom. The family of the murderer would seek peace with the family of the murdered by giving away a child to compensate the lost one. This process has to go through several stages; through the spiritual leaders who are in charge of the two clans, and often other spiritual leaders. After the period of mourning is over, the process of ransom begins through sacrifices, prayers, reconciliation. The two families feast together, and then a girl or a boy will be handed over. If the family of the murderer does not act in this manner then the family of the murdered will seek revenge from that particular clan. Some families would accept the murderer himself, if he or she is still young. Thereafter, the cycle of life continues as normal.

Some ancient traditions and customs among the Igbo and Nuba communities decide the fate of children. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe informs the readers that the first convert in Mbanta (the Igbo fictional village) is a woman, who has four sets of twins who have been thrown away. The Igbo believed that there was something abnormal and mystical about twins. After leaving the babies in the bush to die, the mother would have extensive rituals intended to prevent her from bearing more twins. If appropriate measures were not immediately taken, not only the parents of twins but the entire community might suffer harm.

However, some Nuba tribes have traditions and customs which may

decide the fate of their children. MacDiarmid (1924:125)<sup>(15)</sup>, points out that there is a custom which once existed among certain section of the Nuba, it was the burying of their children with their dead mothers. According to MacDiarmid, in some cases, the father could resist the custom, and the child would be given a chance to live. But if the father of an infant was to die, the mother would keep the child inside the hut for two month for fear that the spirit of the father might take the child away.

In *No longer at Ease*, Achebe is demonstrating the negative consequences of destroying African (Igbo) traditional religion by Christianity. The Igbo's lost of their moralities, traditions and customs is underlined in Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart*. In the former the author has successfully depicted the spread of corruption in Nigeria after independence. Some people are shown to offer money; while some women offer their bodies in return for services. Obi Okonkwo, the main character of the novel, takes a job with the Scholar board and he is immediately offered a bribe by a man who is trying to obtain a scholarship for his sister. When Obi rejects the offer, he is visited by the girl herself who is prepared to offer sexual favors for the scholar ship.

#### **Conclusion and Findings:-**

The last four or five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature written by European writers who portrayed Africa in very bad light and Africans were dehumanized and were declared barbaric and uncivilized. The reason for this has to do with need to justify the slave trade and slavery. In responding to European writers, who depicted Africa's

inhabitants as a race of savages who have no culture of their own, Achebe is intent on projecting a positive image of Africa and its people and falsifying and refuting the Western writers' biased idea.

Achebe through his novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* has successfully portrayed African (Igbo) religious concepts and practices through which people's way of life is organized spiritually, socially and politically. In Africa, the traditional religions of Africans consist of five basic elements; belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in the spirits, belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine. These elements are vividly shown by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, to prove that those religions concepts and practices are to be found in the real life of Africans. The study takes the ancient Nuba religion in the Nuba Mountains as reference. It traced the Igbo religious concepts, practices in these selected novels and then compared them with those of Nuba.

The study results show considerable similarities between the two communities. The people in the both communities believe that there is one creator, who created the earth, the heaven and all things in the universe. Furthermore, they believe that there are other deities beside the great almighty god to help him. They claim that these lesser gods and goddesses get their power from the almighty god, and act as intermediaries between him and human beings.

In addition, they believe that the dead ancestors protect their living descendants and decide their fate and are responsible for bringing rain, good harvest, health and children. However, like

many Africans they do not consider themselves as permanent dwellers on the earth, they believe in the life after. Thus, their funeral ceremonies have complex and elaborate rituals including the drumming, singing, dancing and gun firing.

Other similar religious customs are those of compensation in cases of murder. Taking away the life of human being must be replaced by another living in compensation. This is obvious in the story of IKemfun in *Things fall Apart*. A boy and a virgin girl are given to Umuafia by the neighboring village as compensation. This is not only fictional event that Achebe has created, but really practiced custom by the Nuba tribes of Sudan, in the Nuba Mountains.

In their traditional marriage customs, the two communities are known for their practices of polygamy in which a man is allowed to marry as many wives as he wishes. The priests and priestesses play important roles in religious and in social life. They play a major part in the celebrations of popular harvest festivals which are held annually. The harvest festivals in the Nuba Mountains are directed by the Kujur, and likewise the priest Ezeulu's role in *Arrow of God*.

It is recommended that students of English literature, linguistics and history be encouraged to acquire knowledge about the rich cultural, religious and social heritage of the Nuba tribes and research on these aspects of their life.

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