

# Thematic Analysis of the *Aboakyer* Festival Songs & Libation Texts

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**Abstract-** *This paper analyses the underlying themes in the songs and libation texts of the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu in the Central Region of Ghana. The paper argues that the central theme and sub-themes of the songs and libation texts of the Aboakyer festival, reflect the worldview of the Effutu tribe of Ghana. The songs and libation texts reveal the Effutus as appreciative, religious, and haters of evil-doers.*

**Keywords-** *Religion & Spirituality, Social Criticism, Theme, Moral Lesson.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Aboakyer* Festival, of the Effutu in the Central Region of Ghana, like any other festival, is accompanied by various songs and libation texts. The composition of these songs come about through a variety of experiences of the community as well as by intuition. This work will first discuss the central theme of the festival. This will be followed by the sub-themes of *Aboakyer*. The final exercise will relate the central and the sub-themes to the world view of the Effutu. Thanksgiving, honour and appreciation of *Penkye Otu* the Winneba State god, which is the central theme has been discussed. The sub-themes including religion and spirituality, social criticism and reflection on life, history of the people and the theme of unity have also been discussed. The researchers' observation is that the history of the Effutu constitutes an integral part of the thematic analysis of the songs under review. Again, the performance of these songs serves as a commentary on both positive and negative social attitudes, values and events. Finally, there is a hint on the people's spirituality and allegiance to the spirit world. The work concludes on the note that the worldview of the Effutu is reflected in their festival songs and libation texts just like any other ethnic group. Again, the performance of these songs is not a mere routine at festival time but rather a forum that provides useful lessons and knowledge about the culture and life of the Effutu.

## 2. CENTRAL THEME

The central idea of a literary work is what critics call the main theme. It serves as the hub of a wheel from which all parts of the work radiate like the spokes of the wheel. Elizabeth McMahan, Susan Day, Rubert Funk, in their *Literature and the Writing Process*, explain the theme or central idea as:

*The central idea or thesis, the central thought; the underlying meaning, either implied or directly stated; the general idea or insight revealed by the entire story; the central truth; the dominating idea, the abstract concept that is made concrete through representation in person, action or image. (1989:102)*

Every literary work, is therefore supposed to have a central idea on which the various actions hinge. In addition to the central idea, we may have other sub ideas. The central theme of the *Aboakyer* festival is thanksgiving and remembrance. The *Aboakyer* festival is celebrated to honour and give thanks to the Effutu state god, *Penkye-Otu* for guiding and protecting the Effutu people throughout their migratory past to the current location. This thanksgiving and honour is extended to the seventy-seven lesser gods of the Effutu land. Again, the *Aboakyer* festival is celebrated to honour and remember *Osim Pam* who was a great warrior of the Effutu and who was also with them during their migration. The Effutu use this festival to thank and honour their state god and other lesser gods by offering the meat of the sacrificial deer to them. According to the account of the festival, the meat of the deer is cut into seventy-seven pieces and cooked to feed the gods of the Effutu land. The significance of this ritual lies in the fact that it shows the loyalty and allegiance of the Effutu to their gods, an allegiance which is demonstrated every year.

## 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The first major sub-theme that has been incorporated into the *Aboakyer* Festival songs and libation texts under examination is the theme of religion and spirituality. In his collection of essays entitled *The African Predicament; Collected Essays*, Awoonor observes that, "The African

experience is a religious experience; being an African means you are a religious person.”(Awoonor, 2006:2015). Writing on the religious nature of the life of the African, Mbiti also observes that, “It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious world.” (Mbiti, 1976:262). Among the Effutu of Winneba, religion and spirituality go hand in hand. Indeed, in spite of the impact that both Christianity and the Moslem religion have had on the lives of the people, many of them are still unable to distance themselves completely from traditional African beliefs and practices. Embedded in their religion and spirituality is ancestral worship. Indeed ancestral worship is one of the sub-themes of *Aboakyer*. The worship of their ancestors is an important feature of Effutu indigenous religion. This worship is based on the solid conviction that the spirit of man never really dies; but that after death, his spirit continues to influence the life of the living community from the spiritual world. In fact names of ancestors, divinities venerated by the various clans and villages as well as different titles used to designate God form an integral part of the appellations and anecdotes in the songs and libation texts under discussion. For instance, the Effutu have a war song sung to praise one of their greatest warriors.

*Ei! mbo ei mbo, ŋhen Takyi mbo  
Wɔma no mbo ei  
Ei mbo, ei mbo ɔsafohen  
Ŋhen Yaw ei ei ei  
ɔkatakɔyi, okita mbɛntsir ɔma no mbo  
Warrior Takyi  
(Congratulations  
congratulations Yaw the Warrior  
We congratulate you  
Congratulations! Head of the Asafo  
The Mighty Warrior with strong  
shoulders, congratulations!)*

The pouring of libation at various stages of the festival serves as a reminder to the gods and ancestors of the incumbent duty of the living to honour the gods and ancestors and worship them every year. During the *Aboakyer* festival, libation is poured before the hunt, after the safe arrival of the hunters with their catch and also at various stages involving the slaughtering of the deer. These libations are done with special recitations soliciting assistance from the ancestors and the gods for a successful hunt and a successful celebration as well as protection and guidance in the ensuing years. For example, during the libation process mention is made first of God and then of some specific deities and ancestors to help the people in the community. The libation before the hunt, for instance, goes like this;

*Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!  
Twerampon Nyankopɔn, Asaase Yaa,...  
Bosompo Kofi,...  
Mbonyi, Kaiko,  
Ayensua Kakamoah,*

*Akrama ɔboadze ɔkyerempon,  
(Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!  
Dependable God, Asaase Yaa  
Bosompo Kofi,...  
Mbonyi Kaiko, Ayensua, Mbonya,  
Kakamoah, Akrama the creator)*

#### 4. SOCIAL CRITICISM AND REFLECTION ON LIFE

The second major thematic feature in the *Aboakyer* Festival songs and libation texts is social criticism and reflection on life. The songs are used as a platform to comment on issues and events that are all of relevance and concern to the community and society at large. Even though the lessons to be drawn from the criticism are not always specified for the audience they are able to decipher the import of and digest such criticism and make the necessary adjustments to their way of life.

The reflection usually exhibits philosophical lessons and values that are pertinent to life. This is because these reflections are often heavily influenced by everyday life and so they contain practical lessons which can be very useful to the community. As a result of this cultural, moral and religious lessons or values are often incorporated into these reflections.

An instance could be cited with the song which was composed almost immediately by a rival *asafo* company when it was detected that the other company had stolen a Catholic Priest's (Roman father's) deer.

*Wɔmma ɔnye ntem wɔmfa nkɔe  
Roman father ɔregyen' aboa  
Wɔmma ɔnye ntem wɔmfa nkɔe  
Take it back as soon as possible  
The Roman father wants his deer  
Take it back as soon as possible*

The lesson to be drawn here is that stealing is wrong and hence once a theft case is detected, the stolen item should be immediately returned to the rightful owner.

Another example is the song which one *asafo* company, the *Dentsifo* used to express their feelings and their candid opinion about the leadership of their rival *Asafo Tuafo*.

*Asem yi wɔnnka!, Asem yi wɔnnka!,  
Asem yi wɔnnka!  
Asafo Tuafo aka fa ɔpete edze hene...  
Adze a wɔ reyɛ wɔ kyire ooo!  
(Abomination! Abomination!  
Abomination!  
AsafoTuafo have enstooled someone  
who looks like a vulture  
... what they have done is an  
abomination and is forbidden.)*

Repetition of *Asem yi wɔnnka* holds everybody in suspense; wondering what it is that should not be said in public. There is the use of a powerful imagery (hyperbole) of a vulture for a chief. The vulture which is despised for its dirty habits contrasts with a chief whose habits are

expected to be a model for society. The effect is extreme humour, since the *asafo* leader is being ridiculed.

The comparison between the leader and the vulture paints several mental pictures in the minds of the people who hear the song. It is a known fact that the vulture is not good-looking. So the comparison here paints the picture of a rather ugly person who has been enstooled as a leader. Again, the vulture is homeless. There is a known Akan song entitled *kɔkɔsekyi* written by J T Esuman. In the song the vulture is ridiculed as being homeless and at the mercy of the weather. In the song the vulture pledges to put up his own house *ɔkyina* (tomorrow) no matter the weather condition. However as soon as there is good weather the vulture soars high into the sky forgetting that he has pledged to provide shelter for himself. So if a leader is compared to a vulture, one gets the impression that the leader is not sincere and does not keep his promises. Such a person is completely irresponsible. It is also known that the vulture's meat is not edible.

Therefore, another mental picture painted here is that the leader may be a useless person because the meat of the vulture is not edible and hence useless. Again, if the vulture's meat is that hard then the *Tuafo Asafo* leader is likely to be a very difficult person who may be adamant and who may only take entrenched positions on issues and thus will not be a good leader. It may take a lot of persuasion to get such a person to change his mind or position on issues. Thus the main objective of the composers is to draw the community's attention to and to allow the celebrants to reflect on these issues that constitute the subject of criticism. Thus dignity, grandeur and powers of persuasion are to a very large degree, derived from the images used in the *Aboakyer* songs. It is worthy to note that the images used by the personae, dramatists or soloists display skillful references to nature.

## 5. RELEVANCE OF THE PAST

Relevance of the past is also given adequate expression in the *Aboakyer* Festival songs and libation texts. History features prominently in these selected oral texts due to the appellations with which they are often associated. The appellations do not usually treat history in detail as one may expect to find in written documents. They highlight some of the major exploits or peculiar characteristics of their founding fathers. Even though detailed information is not provided there is a merit associated with the way in which the appellations limit themselves to major highlights of history. The advantage resides in the fact that it makes complete memorization easier and possible in a culture that is primarily oral in nature. It could be described as an enduring method that is used by the people who cannot read and write to preserve their history and to pass it on from one generation to another.

An example of such festival songs is titled *ɔhen Takyi mbow* (congratulation to warrior Takyi). It is sung by the *Asafo Dentsifo* to appreciate one of their greatest warriors.

In this song, mention is made of *ɔhen Takyi* as the pride of the *asafo* company.

<i>ɔhen Takyi mbo</i>	Warrior Takyi
<i>Ei! mbo ei mbo, ɔhen Takyi mbo</i>	Congratulations,
<i>Wɔma no mbo ei</i>	We congratulate you
<i>Ei mbo, ei mbo ɔsafohen</i>	Congratulations the head of the Asafo
<i>ɔhen Yaw ei ei ei</i>	Congratulations Yaw the Warrior
<i>ɔkatakɪ, okita mbentsir ɔma no mbo</i>	The Mighty Warrior with strong shoulders we congratulate you.

*ɔhen Yaw Takyi na ne mbanyimba nye  
mbanyin reba,  
hom mma yemma hɔn mbo, hom mma  
yemma hɔn mbo ara  
na wɔyɛ mbanyin mba, akofo edzi ako  
ara atɔr. Hom mma hɔn mbo.  
Mbanyin edzi nkonyim, hom mma hɔn  
mbo na yɛ.  
Asafo papa na wɔresen oo  
Asafo Okotoo no wɔ hen?*

*The warrior Yaw Takyi and his warriors are  
approaching  
Let us congratulate them, let us congratulate  
them because  
They are brave when most warriors have  
fallen. Congratulate them  
The brave have won, congratulate them  
The great Asafo Company is passing by  
(Where are the cowards?)*

This song informs both the present and future generations that there was ever a warrior whose bravery, dedication and commitment cannot be over emphasized. The words *ɔkatakɪ* and *okita mbentsir* describe the extraordinary strength of *ɔhen Takyi*. Even though the performance of the song does not mention specific exploits of the great man he is described as a hero and a fearless warrior. Thus the present generation gets to know that they have ever had heroes/heroines and it behoves on them to also fight gallantly and shed their blood in defense of the Effutu State.

## 6. UNITY

The theme of unity is also evident in the festival. This is seen at the stakeholders meeting prior to the festival; where the *Omanhen*, sub chiefs, elders and leaders of the two *asafo* companies meet as a united people to plan and prepare for the festival. Due to economic and other reasons not all the sons of Effutu land reside in the Winneba state. One can say that they are scattered all over Ghana and beyond. However, during the time of the festival, almost all members of the Effutu state come home for the festival. Some even come along with friends who are non-natives of Winneba. Through this, a sense of unity is enforced



among members of the individual families as well as the entire Effutu community. Indeed, one can say that the spirit of togetherness is depicted by the sharing of thoughts and ideas as well as fun. This togetherness will undoubtedly enable the people of the state to live together in peace and harmony.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from the task of analyzing the themes in the selected *Aboakyer* Festival songs and libation texts include the fact that the festival has both a central theme and sub themes which collectively reflect the beliefs and way of life of the Effutu.

Again, the *Aboakyer* Festival songs and libation texts, like most Ghanaian festival songs and libation texts, reiterate values that are relevant to the communities in which they are performed and to the entire country. At the end of the exercise, the selected songs have been used to elucidate the functional aspect of these themes in contemporary Ghanaian society and have ultimately brought out their utilitarian values.

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