

# Relevance of Taboo Practices in Contemporary Akwamu Traditional Society

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## Abstract

This study investigated the place of taboos in contemporary Akwamu traditional society. Its primary aim was to examine practices of taboo and their relevance in the maintenance of social order in contemporary Akwamu traditional society. A qualitative design and phenomenological approach were used in this study. The main instruments used in gathering relevant data for the study were interview, observation and relevant information from documentary sources. In all, forty respondents comprising family heads, chiefs, queen mothers, Christians and Muslims were purposively selected for the study based on their knowledge in the relevance of taboo practices in Akwamu traditional area. The findings of the study revealed that taboos which were instituted by traditional leaders to direct the political directions of chiefs in the past are still relevant in contemporary times because of its divine power. The study also concluded that both traditional leaders and non-traditionalists in Akwamu traditional society respected the taboo laws to ensure harmonious living and also to maintain their identity. Beliefs and practices of taboos promote unity and corporation among the people of Akwamu. It is therefore recommended that financial assistance must be given to the chieftaincy institution to organize training workshops and durbars to increase people's awareness about the importance of taboos to the Akwamu society.

## Keywords

Taboos, Contemporary, Akwamu, Traditional, Society

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## 1. Introduction and Background

Every society has practices that are meant to socialise its members so that their behaviour and ways of conducting themselves in public are within the expected norms as per their traditions and culture. These practices according to Michael Gelfand are called taboos [1]. According to Quarcoopome, taboos constitute an important source of maintaining moral values in traditional African societies therefore disobedience of taboos is strongly believed to bring evil to the society or the individual [2]. He contends that any breach of a taboo is considered as an offence against God, the

deities, the ancestors and other authorities. Taboos reveal that the Supreme Being, the gods and the ancestors are real and have powers which can influence human activities. Taboos indicate that the sacred spiritual beings must not be defiled since they act as a link between the supernatural ruling powers and the living [2]. Taboos are a means of social control and serve as agents of religious and social integration which help in uniting people into one common behaviour, hence they are obeyed so as to avoid punishment from the deities and ancestors [2].

Although the Akwamu people have felt the impact of the full weight of the influence of Western culture, they have continued to cling on to some of their cherished values

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including taboos. They still believe in the reality of taboos as mechanisms of social control and order from time immemorial. They hold on to taboos as crucial indigenous social control mechanisms that are used in enforcing desirable human behaviour. They also believe that violation of taboos would bring misfortune such as barrenness on people who violate them. In view of this, no one is prepared to act in ways that will invite the wrath of the ancestors. Those found guilty of serious moral or legal violations of taboos are made to undergo ritual cleansing as a means of moral purification and transformation. The roles played by taboos make Edward Cassier concludes that though taboos are not written in any revealed law, people learn them, practise them and teach others in the society [3]. In his study of the Akan people, Gyekye posits that the closest equivalent to taboo in the Akan is “Akyiwade”, something which is forbidden or prohibited, and “mmusuo” [4]. The latter term is however reserved for prohibitions against very serious or extraordinary moral evils such as murder, suicide, rape, incest and religious sacrilege. Taboos may be promulgated and transmitted in the form of religious ordinances, creeds or vows. For this reason, taboos are taken more seriously and the ‘mmusuo’ type of taboos may require blood sacrifice for the pacification and forgiveness of the gods and ancestors who might visit their wrath on the living in the form of epidemics, drought and infertility [4]. Since these taboo sanctions are believed to be instantaneous and automatic, most people will not intentionally violate them, even if they are doubtful of their metaphysical presuppositions.

The threat associated with taboo makes traditional societies live morally acceptable behaviour and as Ackah puts it, the sins or offences which are believed to be taboo, because punishments for them are automatic make people refrain from committing them for fear of inevitable consequences [5]. A critical deduction from Ackah’s assertion is that taboo is not a culture to be waved off so easily, because it is a fruit of every traditional society and Akwamu being no exception. Notwithstanding the positive recognitions given to taboos in traditional Ghanaian societies, Mike Anane argues that indigenous knowledge and beliefs are being lost as more traditional societies have become subordinated by Western culture and religions [6]. Golo and Yaro agree with Anane’s assertion by saying that “many lands were once considered sacred, not to be disturbed; today all the noble values are destroyed under the cover of modernity and new religions” [7]. Yet, the important role of taboos has motivated many scholars to carry out research on taboos in many Ghanaian traditional societies. For instance, scholars such as Agyekum, Sarpong, Asare Kofi Opoku and Ansah have done research work on taboos among the Akans and Ewes of Ghana in general. The erosion and lost of taboos raise concern about

the future of taboos in indigenous societies in general and Akwamu traditional society in particular, because should things continue this way, Akwamu people will not be able to harness the full potential of social control mechanisms for her people and society as far as morality is concerned. In view of the above argument, the study sought to examine the relevance of taboos in contemporary Akwamu traditional society. The study was guided by this research question- How relevant are taboos to the maintenance of social order in contemporary Akwamu society?

## 2. Review of the Literature

Emmanuel Afi contends that the absence of security system such as the police force to maintain law and order, society relies on other means to maintain social order. It is in this regard that taboos become relevant to maintain law and order in African traditional society. There are certain limits a person must not exceed if he is not to offend the laws of the land. Restrictions are therefore put in place ostensibly to check individual excesses. Most of these restrictions are deeply rooted in the traditional religion of the people [8]. However, Elo Ibagere observes that taboos have continued to be less relevant in today’s daily existence. He points out that some attitudes and behaviour which were outright taboos with serious consequences in the past are no longer regarded as violations [9]. Noting the erosion of taboos, Ibagere concludes that “The effect of westernization which has now translated to globalization is quite devastating to Africa in the sense of a lamentable and sometimes deliberate alteration or outright destruction of values and norms of African people and societies” [9]. Philip Thody also argues that Christianity and Islam, coupled with modernity claim that taboos stem from myths that do not correspond to historical chronology and therefore the belief in the potency of taboo is tantamount to primitivism, backwardness and superstition. He concludes that to obey a taboo is therefore considered absurd and incongruous with development [10].

It can be inferred from Ibagere and Thody’s assertions that the adoption by Africans of Western values which continue to view certain traditional norms as uncivilized is largely responsible for the erosion of taboos. For example, the endemic corruption in African traditional societies in recent times is as a result of lack of value system that is attached to taboos. Mike Anane also observes that with the introduction of formal education in Africa, local residents often learn values that conflict with indigenous beliefs. He contends that the missionaries and colonial masters who flocked Ghana and other parts of Africa saw some traditional religious practices as a hindrance to development because the missionaries discouraged traditional practices by describing them as

idolatry and heathen [6]. Appiah Opoku agrees with Anane when he notes that indigenous knowledge and beliefs are being lost as more and more traditional societies become assimilated into Western culture and religion. He observes that formal education contributes to the demise of indigenous beliefs either by commission or omission. He explains further that formal education admits children into a new world which lies outside the boundaries of indigenous communities and for that matter it tends to promote Western science and values at the expense of indigenous beliefs and values. It also fails to put forward indigenous beliefs and knowledge as worthwhile subject matter and therefore create attitude in children that militate against the acquisition of indigenous beliefs and knowledge. Opoku concludes that as a result of formal education, traditional leaders such as chiefs who serve as representatives of the ancestors and for that matter as custodians of traditional cultural values no longer see these cultural values as relevant to modern world [11].

Furthermore, Ogbu U. Kalu suggests that African's adoption to Western style of development is a key cause for the marginalization of indigenous knowledge of conservation in environmental policies. He argues that indigenous knowledge of conservation is seen as savage, superstition and counter-productive [12]. In similar vein, S. Luthfa, observes that indigenous knowledge of conservation is seen as superstitious and useless as compared to the useful scientific knowledge of conservation. He noted that Western style of development is in conflict with indigenous knowledge of conservation in that whilst the Western style of development seeks to exploit natural resources for economic development now, the indigenous knowledge of conservation seeks to preserve the natural resources for the future generation through measures such as the institution of sacred grove, the belief in totemic animals among others [13]. Saleem A. Ali also contends that the Western perception of nature is viewed through the lenses of science, which is envisaged as a process that yields objective, rational and positivist data, hence decisions which are consistent with Western scientific knowledge often command acceptance and are more secured than indigenous knowledge and beliefs [14]. John P. Jordan also argues that a whole system of taboos has controlled the entire life of Africans unfortunately, these whole of taboos are no longer strictly observed because of the influence of Christian doctrines and this explains why there are so many crimes in traditional communities today [15]. As Chuta puts it, the introduction of Western education in Africa brought in Western idea of rationalism and individualism into Africa and this made Africans begin to doubt their religious traditions and consequently decided to live without it [16].

In terms of politics, Christopher Ugwu argues that the king is brainwashed and indoctrinated into accepting that leadership

which has no meaning here on earth and that nobody rules except God. According to him, African traditional political leaders no longer follow religiously laid down rules and ritual practices that guide their offices because of their contact with the west and this is causing serious problem among the so called "His Royal Majesties" and their subjects [17]. Ugwu further argues that the powers of most of the divinities, deities and totems are undermined, underrated and treated with contempt and levity [17]. The arguments raised by the above scholars suggest that indeed, the impact taboos exercise on African traditional societies seems to have been diminished due to the influence of western culture.

A chief according to Addo Dankwa is "an individual who in accordance with customary law has been nominated, elected, enstooled or enskinned and installed as such or as the case may be, appointed and whose name for the time being appears as a chief in the register of chiefs" [18]. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana Article (277) defines a chief as "a person, who hailing from the appropriate family and lineage has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskined or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage." [19]. As Kwame Arhin puts it, a chief is defined as "a person elected or selected in accordance with customary usage and recognized by the government of Ghana to wield authority and performs functions derived from tradition or assigned by the central government within a specific area." [20].

The various definitions show that chieftaincy institution is backed by law. It is important to note that studying chieftaincy in Africa without the knowledge of stool or skin taboos, as suggested by Malefijit Annemarie de Wal, is tantamount to breaking not only the spiritual reinforcement of the society, but also the total religious and moral fabric woven around the ancestors, deities and the supernatural beings [21]. Asare Opoku argues that taboos are implicitly attached to every stool or skin and the system of such prohibitions is common in traditional priesthood, chieftaincy and leadership institutions in Ghana and other West African countries [22]. Opoku further argues that leaders who are restricted by taboos do not only abide by their individual religious beliefs, but also observe such social restrictions resulting from traditional conventions. He concludes that as a custodian of the stool or the skin, it is the responsibility of a chief to ensure that all offenders in the community are punished [22]. Awedoba, Gundoona, Nachinaba, Abobo, Anyiam and Alongya indicate that the dignity which is associated with the chief and his office is symbolised by particular prohibitions regulating his behaviour. These prohibitions include language, diet, dress, demeanor and etiquette [23]. Kofi Abrefa Busia also asserts that taboos are

leadership cultural icons for all and for that reason every chief must swear an oath at the beginning of office taking. The oath swearing is indeed a seal of approval, assuring the state that as a leader, all the taboos in the community would be observed. The misuse of the oath is the transgression of an ethnic taboo. Taboos then become the traditional commandments through which leaders are protected from social and spiritual ambivalences [24]. Busia further explains the chief's position as follows:

*From the moment that the chief is enstooled, his position becomes sacred. This is emphasized by taboos. He may not strike or be struck by anyone lest the ancestors would bring misfortune upon the tribe. He may never walk bare-footed, lest he stumbles. If he does stumble, the expected calamity has to be averted with a sacrifice. His buttocks may not touch the ground. That again would bring misfortune. All these taboos remind the chief and everybody else that he occupies a sacred position. He is the occupant of the stool of the ancestors (ɔte nananom akonwa so). For this reason, he is treated with the greatest veneration [24].*

Owusu Brempong observes that the position of the chief is shaped by taboos therefore he must exhibit good moral character and must have the charisma. He concludes that since chieftaincy is a spiritual duty these qualities cannot be achieved without being guided by taboos. He concludes that to ensure the observation of various taboos, "a good chief must have a high level of training before he assumes office and such training must help him to establish effective working relationship with the ancestors and other supernatural beings. By going through such training, the chief is expected to behave adequately to make full sacred and emotional response to his traditional heritage." [25]. Kwame Gyekye also argues that "in African traditional society, the chief is considered as both a political head and a religious head. In this regard, the taboos relating to his conduct and mannerism are all intended to remind him and his subjects and others that the position he occupies is sacred" [25]. In Ghanaian societies, some of the taboos associated with the chief are: "a chief is not supposed to walk bare-footed and if he does that and his feet touch the ground some misfortune will befall not only on him but the community at large. Also, the chief is not supposed to strike anybody neither should he be struck. If this happens, the ancestors will bring misfortune upon the person who struck the chief and vice versa." [25]. Ansah Owusu asserts that among the Yoruba, women in menstruation are kept at a distance because menses are thought to pollute the chief rendering him less efficacious when menstruating women touch food items that are used to prepare food for him. According to Owusu, women in their menstrual period are

believed to be a source of danger to people who have certain powers such as kings, traditional priests and medicinemen. For this reason, the palace architect provides a special space for women so that they would not break the taboo by contacting and polluting the chief. This is to ensure that the chief does not come into contact with the menstruating women who at that period are considered unclean to render his powers powerless. [26].

In the Akan verbal taboos, Kofi Agyekum explains that it is a taboo to mention the bare name of a chief. He points out that the rationale or the philosophy underpinning this taboo is that the chief has been transformed from his original personality to a position believed to elevate him to a status spiritually higher than before and also placing him humanly higher than his subjects [27]. Generally, the chieftaincy institution existed long before the arrival of the Europeans on the shores of African countries. This institution is recognised as the custodian of the culture and traditions of a people; hence its responsibility is to enact rules to preserve certain values of the society. However, these values in recent times are being threatened by modernity and westernization. In many traditional societies in Ghana for example, Yankah observes that during traditional festivals, it is only the "fɔntɔnfrɔm" drum is used to welcome the paramount chief and his entourage to the durbar ground. While the "fɔntɔnfrɔm" is performing, all other bands particularly contemporary bands present are expected to remain silent. Again, it is a taboo for a traditional chief to keep contemporary music instruments in his court or dance to contemporary music publicly. Yankah however says that nowadays, we see "fɔntɔnfrɔm" accompanied with instruments of Western origin such as table-top organ, a jazz set and a pair of tall traditional drums called conga. As tradition demands, the chief is normally accompanied at traditional functions by the "fɔntɔnfrɔm" band. Unfortunately, this traditional norm according to Yankah could not be maintained during traditional events because of frequent interruptions by the western instrument. As a result of this, Yankah concludes that some concerned observers begin to remark, "Na den ben koraa na ɛrekɔ so yi?" which is translated as "but what at all is going on?" [28].

Among the Akans of Ghana whatever the chief has to say is expected to pass through the ɔkyeame (spokesperson) whom Yankah describes as the focus of all formal interaction in the royal domain, whether social or verbal. Contrary to traditional protocol, this important role of the ɔkyeame has been subordinated to what is referred to as a "master of ceremonies" (M.C) because of modernity and rapid social change [28]. Assimeng has noted that some years ago, it was a taboo for a woman to greet a chief or go near him while in her menses. He noted that in the days when communal war was rampant, chiefs needed to fortify themselves spiritually

against their enemies. They were cautioned against contact with women in their menstrual period. The menstrual blood according to Assimeng has the potential of neutralizing the spiritual powers of the chiefs. It was for this reason that women were not supposed to greet chiefs when they were in their menses. Unfortunately, this tradition according to Assimeng appears to have been overlooked in this contemporary times as we see all categories of women, both young and old during traditional functions going round one after the other to greet the paramount chief publicly. While the traditionalists may be thinking of a possible case of women being in their menses, majority of the people may frown upon this belief because of their Christian faith [29].

According to Gyamfi Adu, the term “totem” which comes from a North American Indian language, refers to animals that are revered by individuals, particularly group of people as holy [30]. Totems are considered as emblem such as animals or plants that serve as symbol of a family or clan. According to him, totems are used by different group of people for different reasons including the conservation of natural resources. For this reason, Robert John Alun contends that people who believe themselves to be of one blood, descendants of common ancestors, and are bound together by common obligations to each other by common faith revere that totem [31]. Alun further posits that totem animals are used against killing the totemic animal and against having sexual relations between members of that clan. This according to him suggests that totemic objects are believed to be ancestrally related to an ethnic group, clan, or family as a tutelary spirit which they attach deep feelings to [31]. Similarly, Charles Lumor argues that family members who are related to a totem do not eat, kill or trap such totemic animals. He again explains that when a totemic object dies, members of that group show respect by mourning and burying it as in the case of a human being [32]. In Ghana, indigenous belief system including totems has played significant roles in the conservation and management of natural resources. In his work, “traditional and indigenous methods of conserving biodiversity”, Ntiamoa Baidu identifies totems as the key indigenous methods for conserving biodiversity. He indicates that totems represent traditional institutions where religiously governed norms define human behaviour. [33].

It is also evident from a biblical point that God used a tree to signify life, hence the tree of life served as God’s totem of covenant between Him and man. The evidence from the Bible indicates that totems are important and have been part of human life since creation [34]. In most cases, killing the totemic animals or mishandling such objects in communities can bring curses or calamities on the people. Others believe that they are being protected by the powers in such objects.

In some cases, people try to emulate or exhibit the qualities of their totems. For instance, those who have parrots as their totems are believed to be very eloquent when it comes to speech, hence, the local saying “Akoo te brofo”. The rationale behind this is that parrots are vocal and could even speak human language with time when reared in the home. Apart from its unique nature, totems are communication channels that chiefs, families, and communities use to communicate their identity to other people.

In Ghanaian traditional society, males and females from families or clans using the same totem are not allowed to marry, because they are blood relations. The Akan word for totem is “akyeneboa” or “atweneboa” which literally means an animal relied upon for spiritual inspiration [35]. According to Awuah-Nyamekye, there are many myths surrounding how each clan came to be associated with a particular totem. Common to all is the belief that these totemic objects play significant role in the lives of members of the clan and their ancestors [36]. The Akan tribe consists of eight different clans with each clan having its own totemic animal which depicts the characteristics of its members.

**Table 1.** Akan Clans and their totems.

Clan	Totem (Local Name)	English Name	Symbolic Meaning
Asona	Kwakwadebi	Crow	Wisdom
Bretuo	osebo	Leopard	Aggressiveness
Aduana	okraman	Dog	Humility/friendliness
Asakyiri	Opete	Vulture	Intelligence
Asene	Apan	Bat	Diplomacy
Èkuona	Ekoo	Buffalo	Uprightness
Agona	Ako	Parrot	Eloquence
Oyoko	Akromas	Falcon/Hawk	Patience

Source: <http://www.abibitumikasa.com>.retrieved, 10/11/16

Quarcoopome argues that animals are chosen as totems because they are said to have qualities which people would want to emulate; therefore, people identify themselves with such animals [1]. Nkansah Kyeremanteng also contends that totems play political, social and religious roles in traditional societies. He argues that Fomena people of Ghana have vulture as their clan totem. These animals are considered as deities which represent their soul. David Millar also claims that traditional institutions such as totems play key role in ensuring that those who break the rules are punished. He notes that these collective actions are expressed through religious beliefs and moral sanctions [37]. In spite of roles played by totems in the management of natural resources, Eneji Ntamu asserts that these traditional beliefs have worn away as a result of Christianity which sees the practice rather inimical to the growth, unity, peace and cohesion of communities [38].

Deity taboos refer to taboos associated with the worship of a deity. These taboos provide directions to the cultic priests,

servant and the adherents in terms of who, when, where and how to worship. Examples of these deity taboos include visiting the shrine with slippers on, having sex near a shrine, visiting the shrine with the sandals on or the cloth not off the shoulders, showing disrespect to a deity priest, deity priests not violating their vows or sexual purity. The significance of these deity taboos can be seen in the contribution they make to the promotion of a life of holiness and righteousness. Initially, this may be realised in and around the shrines, but overtime this consciousness can permeate and resonate in the lives of the entire society within their domain of religious and moral influence. According to Awuah Nyamekye, deities are believed to reside in natural substances such as rivers, trees, mountains, caves and animals [36]. Awuah further explains that all the deities have particular objects as taboos and this belief influences people's attitude towards the deities. Awuah Nyamekye seems to explain why in Akan traditional society, most taboos related to deities are taken seriously as they are believed to have been imposed by traditional rulers and priest in the general interest of the community. In view of this, Joseph Osei concludes that people do not temper with deity taboos because failure to observe the taboos associated with these deities may result in mishappening such as ill-luck, disease, untimely death, drought and social sanction [39].

The Akans believe that deities called "abosom" are personified spirits and they are believed to be the children of God and have their respective jobs assigned. According to Cephas Omenyo, deities are believed to inhabit in natural objects like water, rock, caves and houses called "fiabosom". Each of these divinities has its area of competence such as agriculture, morality, fertility and wealth [40]. Some of these deities as Joseph Osei puts it specialize in healing people who are barren or impotent. Others according him are also good at combating the negative influence of witches on individuals or on the entire community [39]. Asare Opoku says that the deities are believed to administer punishment to those who inringe upon the moral code. For this reason, he concludes that deities are believed to have powers and they are placed above human beings [41]. Among the Akan, the fear of being punished by deities compels them to observe taboos associated with them. For instance, Geoffrey Parrinder observes that spirits that inhabit in trees are responsible for making the Akan people fertile, therefore it is a taboo to cut trees such as the Iroko and Mahogany because these trees are abodes for spirit powers and it is believed that people who cut spirit inhabited trees are made infertile, therefore the fear of infertility and retributions from totemic powers prevents people from destroying trees. This implies that the Akans use taboos related to deities to conserve the environment [42]. In order to protect water bodies such as rivers, sea, lagoons and lakes, the indigenous Akan culture has instituted taboos to

protect the water bodies from pollution. Also, these taboos ensure the quality of water for the inhabitants who reside near the river. It can therefore be inferred from the above scholars that taboos associated with land, water bodies and trees demonstrate how the symbolic function of Akan culture regulates human behaviour.

Notwithstanding the positive influence of deity taboos on social order in African traditional societies, Jacob Olupona points out that modernity constitutes a threat to indigenous traditions because it alters the authenticity of such traditions. He explains that urbanization and movement of people from rural areas to urban centres has led to cultural adulteration as rural people lose their cultural identity to modernity in the cities because of employment [43]. Baidoo-Ntiamoah stresses that although taboos associated with deity exist, the reverence that was usually attached to these taboos has gradually eroded and the gradual decline of the powers and fear of the taboos is as a result of the perception that the gods and other spirit beings do not live in the forest [44].

The idea of sacred groves is well-known in traditional African societies in general and among the Akan traditional societies of Ghana in particular. Several studies have confirmed that the concept of sacred grove is popular in Asia and Africa [44]. Sacred groves, according to Awuah Nyamekye are the "indigenous reserves that have been strictly protected, and in some cases many centuries ago due to their religious and cultural significance." [36]. According to Nyamekye, the institution of sacred groves continues to thrive in the Akan society because of the religious underpinning attached to them and it is the belief of the Akan that, such groves are the habitat of the gods, ancestors and other spirit beings. In his view, for any sacred grove, there is a reigning deity that oversees and controls all forms of vegetation and waters of the grove. He concludes that only qualified members such as priests, priestesses, chiefs, and family heads are permitted to enter the sacred groves to undertake official rituals on behalf of the entire community [36]. Sarfo- Mensah also argues that the creation of sacred groves was informed by religious and cultural motives, but recent studies among indigenous people including those of the Akan have shown that the concept of sacred groves is also underpinned by conservationist motives [45].

According to Nyamekye, different Akan communities have different local names for sacred groves and prominent among them include "nananom mpow", "mpanyin pow" and "nsaman pow" which are literally known as ancestral groves, ancestral forest and *burial* grounds respectively. To him, within the Akan traditional society, forests are regarded as essential natural resource for humanity therefore influenced by their religion and culture, have established certain measures to preserve their forests in order to guarantee their

sustainable use. He concludes that the institution of sacred groves has been one among many means the Akan use to conserve forest [36]. Within the Akan society, Nyamekye opines that taboos serve the purpose of not only to preserve trees in areas marked as “sacred”, but also various species of animals, fishes and rivers in such groves. He claims that the taboo attached to the “Koraa” sacred grove in the Akan town of “Biadan” prohibits people from fishing in the river “Koraa” located in the grove and that, people who eat fish or crab from the river would experience stomach troubles or even death. In citing another purpose of taboo associated with sacred groves, Nyamekye explains that taboos play an important role in the institution of sacred groves because of the belief that such groves are the abodes of the gods and ancestors and that the gods and ancestors prohibit people from exploiting these groves. He confirms that “Osudum” sacred grove located at Aburi-Akuapem is believed to house the river goddess called “Osudum Ama”. This grove is said to have a pond with a lot of alligators and it is believed that these alligators are the children of the goddess and is a taboo for any of the alligators to move out of the grove, as this is said to bring bad omen to the entire community [36].

The above explanations demonstrate that environmental consciousness had been part of the traditional Akan mind centuries ago. However, it is observed that with the arrival of foreign religions and formal education, some of these traditional beliefs are steadily losing their value in these communities and as a result has led to the termination of many animals and putting at risk so many others.

### 3. Methodology

A qualitative design and phenomenological approach were used in this study. Triangulation was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through interview, observation and relevant information from documentary sources. The population for this study included all the heads in tradition and religious institutions in Akwamu traditional area (family heads, sub-chiefs, queen mothers, Christians and Muslims) in the eastern region of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study. All the forty (40) respondents comprising three (3) family heads, six (6) sub-chiefs, one (1) queen mother, fifteen (15) Christians and fifteen (15) Muslims based on their knowledge in the relevance of taboo practices in contemporary Akwamu traditional society were selected for the study. The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative method based on the themes arrived at during the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by respondents.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

This section presented the place of taboos in contemporary Akwamu traditional society. The essence was to address the research question which sought to examine the relevance of taboos in contemporary Akwamu traditional society. The key themes arrived at, in this study were non-traditionalists’ views on taboos in Akwamu Traditional Society; taboos in contemporary Akwamu traditional society; and taboos and moral life in Akwamu traditional society: taboos such as chieftaincy, totem, deity, taboo days, suicide and sacred grove in contemporary Akwamu traditional society.

### 4.1. Non-traditionalists’ Views on Taboos in Akwamu Traditional Society

This section sought the views of non-traditionalists on taboos in Akwamu traditional society. This was to find their level of awareness of the various taboos in Akwamu traditional society and as to whether they comply or otherwise with taboos in Akwamu community. The researchers found out from the respondents how taboos influence their lives. In all, 30 respondents made up of 15 Christians and 15 Muslims were selected for the interview. The respondents were asked whether they were aware of the various taboos in Akwamu traditional society. It was found out that all the 30 respondents indicated that “*they were aware of the various taboos in Akwamu traditional society*”. This suggests that both Christians and Muslims are not only limited to their values but they are also aware of the traditional values in the community they find themselves.

On the question about whether the respondents comply with taboos in Akwamu traditional society, 26 of the respondents representing 87% made up 13 Christians and 13 Muslims said “*that they comply with taboos in Akwamu traditional society*”, whilst only 4 of them representing 13% made up of 2 Christians and 2 Muslims claimed that “*they do not comply with some taboo rules in Akwamu community with the reason that those rules infringe on their right*”. A Christian respondent had this to say, “*I don’t comply with the taboo which forbids people for travelling on taboo days in Akwamu traditional area because it violates my right of movement.*” However, a respondent among the Christians said that their reason for complying with taboo rules stems from what the Bible says in Mark 12:7 that “*give unto Caesar’s what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.*” This suggests that as a Christian, you should obey rules which have been enacted by traditional leaders from where you live. The Muslim respondents who claimed that “*they comply with taboo rules gave their reason that Muslim are required to respect the dignity of mankind, regardless of religion, race, nationality or place of birth and that all mankind should be honored*”. A

Christian respondent who declined complying with taboos said that,

*“every community has an owner whose rules must be respected, but those traditional laws which are in conflict with Christian doctrines will not be condoned. He gave an instance where an infringement on a taboo attracts purification rites to ease the anger of the ancestors. To him, he does not see it useful, because according to the Bible in Hebrew 7:27, man has been once and for all reconciled with God by the death of Christ. They suggested that taboo rules should be friendly to all persons”.*

#### **4.2. Taboos and Moral Life in Akwamu Traditional Society**

This section solicits views from respondents about how taboos influence the moral lives of the people in Akwamu traditional society. The respondents include 10 traditional leaders, 15 Christians and 15 Muslims. On the question of how taboos influence the moral lives of the respondents, all the 40 respondents admitted that *“taboos have positive impact on their lives”*. One Christian said that:

*“as for him due to the instant justice associated with taboos particularly associated with “taboo days” and sacred grove when one breaks the taboo rules, he has decided to comport himself to avoid being punished and this has straightened his life and that he has been able to live harmoniously with everybody in the community”.*

A Muslim respondent also said that: *“taboos associated with chieftaincy have taught him how to give maximum respect to rules which have been instituted by traditional leaders in the community”*. All the 40 respondents admitted that:

*“taboos provide guidelines for moral behaviour in the society and so whether you are a Christian, a Muslim or a traditional religious practitioner, you are expected to conform to certain standards of behaviour in whichever society you find yourself. To them if taboo rules are followed, it will go a long way to promote good interpersonal relationship among members in the society”.*

It is for this reason that they comply with taboo rules which are associated with the deity called “*ɔbosom Ayensu*” in Akwamu traditional society.

In relation to taboos associated with “taboo days” when one is not supposed to engage in any economic activity, a Christian respondent said that:

*“observing such taboos reinforces the communal values of solidarity, identity and unity among all the people. He cited an instance where during Aday festival, everybody, irrespective of his or her religious affiliation participates*

*in the celebration and observes all the rules associated with the occasion”.*

A Muslim respondent also said that:

*“he has benefited from observing taboo rules in Akwamu traditional society and that has improved his moral standard. He said that during taboo days when everybody is prohibited to go to farm or sea to work, he sees people violating the rules, but he complies with the rules. He said that he has benefited a lot from complying with the rules because apart from the fact that he uses the day to rest in order to preserve his health, he is being respected in the community as a law abiding citizen”.*

Another interesting finding noted from one of the respondents, who is a chief is that:

*“in Akwamu traditional society, members are encouraged to observe environmental ethics that helps them to regulate their interactions with their natural environment to the benefit of all members in the community. He cited example that, people in the community who have their houses close to the sacred grove at Akwamufie do not have their roofs ripped off during heavy storms, because the tall trees in the grove act as windbreaks to protect people’s houses”.*

This finding shows that in many rural communities such as Akwamu traditional society, traditional belief systems such as taboos remain the prime factor for guiding people’s moral conduct towards the exploitation of natural resources. One traditional leader told the researchers that *“the ritual rites that one undergoes when a taboo is broken in Akwamu traditional community are so severe that every member in the community is obliged to make sure that these rules are observed”*. The respondent added that until recently, when a person violated taboo rules such as being caught for eating bush pig or bringing a person dead through suicide into the community, he or she was made to pay a huge sum of money together with seven sheep and seven bottles of schnapps to perform propitiatory sacrifice to the gods. These measures make people live morally upright lives in the community.

#### **4.3. Taboos in Contemporary Akwamu Traditional Society**

Notwithstanding the enormous contributions of taboos to the welfare of the people have argued that taboos are seen to be less relevant in today’s daily existence as people begin to buy into Western values as a result of Christianity and Islam [12]. It is observed for instance that formal education has contributed to the demise of indigenous belief in taboos and has admitted the young ones into a new world which lies outside the boundaries of indigenous communities and for that matter it tends to promote Western values at the expense of indigenous beliefs and values [12]. This suggests that



some of the taboos have to be reviewed in order to promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence towards one another in the community. In view of the above, this section focuses on taboo practices in contemporary Akwamu Traditional society. The purpose is to examine which among the taboos under study have been retained, amended or have been completely dropped out in Akwamu traditional society. Also, reasons behind why some taboos have been retained, amended or completely dropped out are discussed here.

#### 4.3.1. Chieftaincy Taboos

In this section however, the researcher sought to find out from the respondents which of the chieftaincy taboos have been maintained, modified or abolished as a result of this contemporary time and reasons for their justification. On the issue of oath-swearing, all the 6 sub-chiefs and the 3 family heads alluded to the fact that *“oath-swearing has been maintained up to day and it is taken seriously among the people of Akwamu”*. This is because it is a means by which leaders subject themselves to spiritual, moral and social conditions. It was realized that when a chief is installed into office in Akwamu, he takes an oath before the elders and his subjects promising to abide by the moral and the religious injunctions attached to the stool which he has willingly accepted to occupy. The respondents affirmed that the reason why oath-swearing is being maintained up till now is its potency to check traditional leaders to become responsible leaders who stand by their words. They said that even though most of the chiefs do not live in the traditional area as a result of their jobs in the urban centers, they visit their jurisdictions almost every week. Other chiefs have also delegated their powers to their sub-chiefs to represent them at their traditional areas in their absence. A respondent said that, *“as for Nana Ansah Kwao IV, he is always present in this community every weekend to honour his traditional duties”*. The respondent also indicated that other chiefs who have brought their office into disrepute have been destooled. This suggests that oath-swearing is a contract between the chief and his elders which one needs to uphold.

With regard to chieftaincy taboo associated with menstruation, the 6 sub-chiefs had similar views in terms of their maintenance in this contemporary era. They admitted that menstruation taboo was put in place to protect the sanctity of their chiefs. The respondents said that the reason why a chief may engage many wives in the olden days was because if one of the wives menstruated, she would be relieved by another wife to cook for her husband. One respondent said that *“in this modern times, many chiefs are Christians and therefore they do no longer observe these taboos strictly because of the idea of monogamy.”* One of the

respondents said that many chiefs still have their wives who spend their menstrual periods in small shelter behind the palace, especially if the palace shrine observes a menstrual taboo. The respondent gave this explanation:

*“in the olden days, many chiefs secured war medicine to protect their communities and these medicines were buried in the palace and it was believed that these medicines would be rendered ineffective if menstruating women were allowed to live in the palace with their husbands, but now that Akwamus are no longer at war with any tribe, medicines are no longer buried at the palace therefore punishments which were formally leveled against women who were caught to have entered the palace in their menses have reduced to a mere pouring of libation to appease the gods.”*

It has been noted that in Akwamu traditional society, in the olden days, it was strictly prohibited for a chief to set eyes on a dead body because it was considered as unclean and would defile the chief. According to a respondent, chiefs in recent times attend funerals to set eyes on the dead laid in state and after the funeral a purification ritual is performed to cleanse the dirt from them. In the past, it was also a taboo to publicly announce the death of a chief until a ritual is performed. All the 6 sub-chiefs admitted that this tradition is still observed strictly by the Akwamus in spite of the proliferation of social media which spread the news as soon as a chief dies. A respondent said that, *“if a chief dies, we do hear the news from the media before it is made public”*. The respondent however indicated that this does not prevent people from being punished when they publicly announce the death of the chief. This shows that taboo associated with announcement of a chief's death is maintained.

A respondent admitted that in the olden days, if a chief's bare name was mentioned, whoever violated that taboo was made to offer seven sheep and seven schnapps for purification rituals but in recent times, the person is made to offer only two sheep and two schnapps. The reason for the reduction is to temper justice with mercy. The respondents however said that the fine which has been reduced from seven sheep and seven schnapps to two sheep and two schnapps respectively is only limited to the sub-chief, but that of the paramount chief remains because of his status. With the respondents responses to why a chief is not supposed to eat new yam before a ritual is performed, they all said that they still stick to it because of the health consideration attached to it.

The discussion about chieftaincy taboos in contemporary society in Akwamu shows that taboos related to chieftaincy have not been completely wiped out but some maintained, others modified, whilst others toned down to satisfy all and sundry in Akwamu society. This finding however dismisses a

claim that traditional values in recent times are being threatened by modernity and westernization [29]

#### 4.3.2. Totemic Taboos

We noticed the significant role that was played by the bush-pig in the lives of the Akwamus. Thus, the bush-pig saved and protected them against their enemies which safely brought them to their present settlement. It was for that reason that taboos associated with the bush-pig cannot be underestimated. In fact, whoever went against the taboos was dealt with severely by offering seven sheep and seven schnapps for purification rituals to appease the anger of the ancestors and the gods. Again, the bush-pig was treated with religious respect with the belief that it is connected with the gods. A respondent said that, *“the gods would stop protecting the people if they violated the taboo associated with the bush-pig which saved them from their enemies”*.

All the 40 respondents claimed that in this contemporary Akwamu society, people still believe in the taboos associated with the bush pig. The royals still do not eat bush-pig meat because they consider it as their saviour. The Christian-Muslim respondents also claimed that they have never attempted to eat bush-pig in the Akwamu community. One Christian said that if he wants to eat bush-pig, he goes far away as custom demands to eat it. However, all the 15 Muslims said that they stick to the bush-pig taboo. One of the traditional leaders said that in recent times the sanction put in place when one breaks a taboo associated with the bush-pig has been reduced from seven sheep and seven schnapps to two sheep and two schnapps. He gave a reason that due to ethnic pluralism, people from various tribes live together as compared to the olden days where people of one tribe used to live in one area. He said that this has made the traditional leaders assume that people must be pardoned with the severe punishment for breaking the bush-pig taboos because of ignorance. A Muslim respondent said that he supports the view that it is a taboo to eat bush-pig in Akwamu traditional society because Muslims in general do not eat pork which falls under the bush-pig family. In a related interview with the Benkumhene of Akwamu traditional area about taboos associated with dogs, the researchers were also told that dogs can be reared in Akwamu society in recent times having noticed the security role being played by dogs. The researchers were told that in the olden days, dogs were not reared for the simple reason that they would bring bush-pig bones into the community. The respondent however explained that due to deforestation in the area, bush-pigs have moved far away from the community and so people no longer get access to them in recent times.

It is therefore obvious from the foregoing discussion that

taboos have not been completely wiped out, but have been worthwhile in the face of modernity. The above analysis is therefore not in support with a claim that traditional beliefs have worn away as a result of Christianity which sees the practice rather inimical to growth, unity, peace and cohesion of communities [38].

#### 4.3.3. Deity Taboos

One of the taboos associated with the deity includes prohibition for carrying corpse in front of the deity. The researchers were told that whoever violates that law would experience continuous death in his or her family. The researchers were further told that seven sheep and seven schnapps were needed to offer sacrifice to the deity if one breached that taboo. They were once again told that bereaved families could negotiate with the traditional leaders to offer the required items which are always seven sheep and seven schnapps to pacify the deity if they want to take their corpse to pass in front the deity. The respondent explained that there is an alternate route in Akwamu where people can take their corpse to pass through, but due to expansion of Akwamu community, the easiest way people could use is in front of the deity which is situated in the middle part of the town. In view of that, poor bereaved families think that they are being discriminated by the rich because they could afford all the items needed for the purification rituals to appease the deity, whilst the poor cannot. In view of that the traditional leaders met and a consensus was reached that every bereaved family member who passes in front of the deity with a corpse will offer two sheep and two schnapps to offer sacrifice to pacify the deity.

The above discussion suggests that in spite of modernization, taboo rules in Akwamu traditional society have not been totally wiped out because of their preservation of life and well-being of the people and also to sustain the community's traditional values and customs. The researchers discovered during the data collection that the people still retain many of the customs of their indigenous religion. A Christian respondent made this remark, *“though I am a Christian convert, I abide by all the rules governing the deity in Akwamu just that I don't worship it because of my Christian belief that only God should be worshipped”*. Another Christian respondent made this statement, *“I am aware of some Christians who consult ‘Obosom Ayensu’ for help when they face misfortunes”*. This shows that the people have not abandoned their indigenous beliefs in lesser gods in spite of their conversion into a new faith. Also, this explains why in Akwamu traditional society, their belief in taboo still persists, despite the inroads of Christianity and Islam. The researchers discovered that the deity in Akwamu traditional area still receives cultic attention because one respondent told him that

it is always common to see people trouping into the shrine of the deity on sacred days to present their petition to redeem a vow taken before the deity.

#### 4.3.4. Taboo Days

According to the Akwamus, the institution of “taboo days” has a bearing on the management of natural resources. As a respondent explained to the researchers, “taboo days” are special days for performance of rituals to the ancestors and it is expected that any form of work is forbidden in Akwamu land. They believe that the ancestors would visit their wrath upon whoever violates this traditional law. According to a respondent, perpetrators are made to pay a fine in a form of sheep and a bottle of schnapp to purify the ancestors upon violating the law. This implies that, the institution of this taboo though for conservation purposes, it was to discipline people to attend social gathering such as festivals and also to have a day of rest. The researchers were also told that the whole period to observe festivals is considered as a taboo which is reserved for the fingerlings in the river and the infant animals in the forest to grow and multiply. One respondent had this say, “*Our elders instituted this taboo to preserve the environment and its inhabitants and to have a day of rest*”. According to the respondent, the Akwamus have a high sense of land preservation and that an important aspect of the people’s cultural heritage is the preservation of the environment for future generation. The respondent affirmed that, “*life would be robbed of parts of its essential meaning if people refuse to respect the environment around them*. This finding supports a study conducted on *West African Traditional Religion* that affirms “our traditional attitude to the environment is not only valid but actually essential for future of the world” [22]

Concerning the relevance of “taboo days” in contemporary Akwamu traditional society, the respondents explained that the Akwamus still stick to “taboo days” not to visit the farm and organizing funeral in the traditional area. However, the ban placed on travelling during these taboo days has been lifted. The traditional elders decided to lift the ban on travelling during taboo days because they saw it as an infringement on freedom of movement. One of the respondents therefore exclaimed, “*The laws are made for man and not man for the law, therefore we believe that laws that are inimical to human progress should be discarded*”.

From the foregoing discussions, it is observed that in Akwamu traditional society, taboos are not completely abolished but they are rather modified to meet the needs of the present generation as a way to ensure its continuous supplementary role in contemporary development efforts of the society. This makes one to conclude that though the influence of Christianity and Islam has described indigenous

values as superstitious and counter-productive in recent times, research carried out in some traditional societies such as Akwamu proves that the people, irrespective of their religious background strongly believe that indigenous ways of addressing their daily problems are still relevant and that their methods for doing so have not been completely lost in its rural communities as far as Akwamu traditional society is concerned. Although, it appears that taboo practice seems to be warning due to a greater percentage of the indigenous population in the area being converted to Christianity or Islam, the research findings of the researchers have shown that observation of taboo practices remain very active in the life of the people in Akwamu traditional society.

#### 4.3.5. Suicide Taboos

It was discovered that from time immemorial, suicide is taken seriously by the Akwamus because of the repercussions associated with it. It is for this reason that unlike the normal death which is handled by following elaborate ritual observances, death through suicide does not receive any elaborate ritual rites. Thus no befitting burial is honored for the deceased. In most cases, the person who commits suicide is not accorded the dignity of a casket burial and is simply hurriedly put in an old ragged cloth and buried directly into the ground. The Akwamus have the belief that death through suicide is considered as contagious, therefore the deceased person is taken through the back street of the town which the Akwamus call it “mfikyiri kwan” to the cemetery in order not to draw people’s attention to the death. At the cemetery, before the burial, libation is poured and prayer offered. In the libation prayer, the spirit of the deceased is implored to go to sleep quickly, and not to return to the community to torment the living or to disturb the peace in the community, alluded by respondent. Concerning whether funeral rites are organized in honour of the suicide, the respondents responded in negative claiming that “*funeral rites are not performed for one who dies through suicide*”. Also there is no wake-keeping ceremony and again, the period of grieving or bereavement is deliberately shortened. As noted earlier on, no drumming and dancing is entertained. The researchers were told that there is no time set aside for people to pay tribute to the deceased and there is no post burial thanksgiving service. A respondent remarked, “*funeral*” means ‘ayeyie’, meaning ‘glorifying’ which goes for remembering a deceased who lived a decorous life, but because suicide death is not a proper death, it is a taboo to glorify it”. According to the respondents, death through suicide is regarded as an abomination against the living, the departed ancestors as well as the gods of the land therefore when death occurs, a propitiatory ritual is performed to forestall any catastrophic diseases, accidents and natural disasters on the relatives.

During the researchers' interview, the respondents raised five things as taboos associated with death through suicide. These include the casket-used for burial, messages contained in the libation being poured at the grave yard, funeral rites, wake-keeping and paying of tribute to the deceased. The researchers asked the respondents' view on those taboos and their relevance in contemporary Akwamu society. The researchers were motivated by this development because in recent times, it is realized that Akan societies are undergoing changes and these changes are reflected in mortuary rites. Thus the status of the deceased or the deceased family plays a major role in what happens to the corpse of the deceased regardless of the manner of death. On the issues of casket used to bury the death, the respondents said that formerly an inexpensive casket was hurriedly assembled by a local carpenter and the dead was placed in and then dispatched to the cemetery. Sometimes too, the deceased was not accorded the dignity of a casket burial, but was wrapped in a ragged cloth and buried directly into the ground. The respondents however admitted that the method has changed in recent times, where the socio-economic status of the deceased family determines the kind of casket to use. One respondent said that *"there are many already made caskets on the market now which can be easily mobilized to bury the corpse than to rely on the carpenter who may take several hours to finish a casket"*.

On the respondents' take on whether the corpse is taken to the house, they admitted that at first, the corpse was taken directly to the cemetery for burial but with a new directive from the government, a postmortem test has to be conducted to ascertain the cause of the death before it is buried therefore the corpse is taken to the hospital. Another respondent explained that in recent times, a place called "Kristo mu", meaning "the Christian site" has been created for Christians whose corpses are taken to that place for burial services to be performed before the corpse is taken to the cemetery. As to whether funeral rites are performed in honour of the deceased, the respondents said that for the Christians, they are allowed to organize funerals, except that music is not allowed to be played at the funeral ground. Also, donations are not supposed to be made public. Only food and drinks are served and such a gathering should not take more than three hours after burial. The reason why elaborative funeral rite is not performed for suicide is to prevent the ancestors from incurring their wrath on either the family members of the deceased or the community as a whole.

Concerning wake-keeping, all the respondents affirmed that there is no wake-keeping ceremony for the person who died through suicide. The respondents said that in general, wake keeping has been abolished therefore if a person dies through suicide, no wake-keeping ceremony is organized for him or

her. From the foregoing, it is realized that the treatment given to the suicide's mortal remains stems from fear of being punished by the deities and other spirits who may be offended by the defilement. A respondent admitted that, in Akwamu traditional society in recent times, if a bereaved family wants to organize a funeral for death through suicide, an amount of two thousand Ghana Cedis together with one sheep and five schnapps is fined for ritual cleansing called "adwira" to appease the gods also to cleans the community. The rationale for allowing people to pay such a huge fine before a funeral is organised for the bereaved is to discourage people from organising funeral for people who die through suicide. The analysis shows that taboos associated with suicide are still observed in Akwamu with little modification with strict guidelines as is being witnessed by Christians' mortuary rites for death through suicide.

#### 4.3.6. Taboos Associated with Sacred Grove

During the researchers' field work, they realized that the fear of repercussions or punishment for violating taboos associated with the sacred grove in Akwamu make people act in such a way that would not cause anger of the gods. According to one of the respondents, that belief still persists among the Akwamus. Regarding which of the taboos associated with the sacred grove are still observed, one of respondents stated that, *"it is still a taboo for non-royal members to enter the sacred grove, and that if a non-royal member enters that sacred grove, he or she faces serious punishment such as offering seven sheep and seven schnapps"*. The respondent said that the high fine placed on offenders make people respect taboos associated with the sacred grove.

Again, shooting of gun in the sacred grove has not been abolished, just that it has been modified. A respondent explained that in the past, one could not kill any animal in and around some parameters of the grove. The rationale was that some of the animals moved to certain parameters around the grove and such animals are not expected to be killed. He said that the law has been modified and as such people can only kill animals which are found around the grove. Also, the respondent said that *"in the past, no one could harvest snails from the grove and whoever violated the law would get missing for three days walking in the grove"*. It is believed that since the sacred grove is reserved for only the royals, non-royals are still not permitted to enter there to harvest snails, but those that move along the street and in front of the grove can be harvested. The researcher asked some of the Christians and Muslims whether they believed in the taboos related to the sacred grove and they said that *"even though they don't believe in them, they have been told about the history of the sacred grove and what happened to people who*

violated the taboos so they fear to challenge the law". One of the respondents who is related to the royal family of Akwamu confirmed what the Christian and the Muslim respondents said and added that though he has never seen that someone has got missing for three days for harvesting snails from the grove, but because the laws are believed to have come from the gods, no one wants to experiment it. This shows that since violation of taboos is thought to invoke the anger of the gods, no one is prepared to act in such a manner that repercussion befalls in him or her.

On the issue of people being killed when they enter the sacred grove, the respondents explained that in the past, non-royal members who entered the sacred grove were instantly killed by the executioners. However, that tradition has been abolished and has been replaced by seven sheep and seven schnapps to perform rituals to pacify the gods and ancestors who are believed to have been defiled. The respondents said that in the olden days' human blood was needed to appease the gods when they were offended, but in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, a stop has been put on the practice of human sacrifices as a result of civilization. Findings from the above analysis show that the Akwamus still strictly adhere to the taboos associated with the sacred grove, but those that are inimical to human development have been wiped out.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendation

The findings of the study revealed that taboos which were instituted by traditional leaders to direct the political directions of chiefs in the past are still relevant in contemporary times because of its divine power. A cursory examination of roles of taboos among the people of Akwamu in the past and present makes one conclude that though some of the taboos have been modified whilst others toned down, the future of taboos in Akwamu traditional society prove sustainable because they have been embedded in their culture and since culture is dynamic, it is no surprise to see that among the Akwamus, some of the taboos are toned down, others transformed and the outmoded ones which retard human progress are discarded. In view of the foregoing, a conscious effort is needed by both traditional leaders and non-traditionalists in Akwamu traditional society to respect taboo laws to ensure harmonious living and also to maintain their cultural identity.

Beliefs and practices of taboos promote unity and corporation among the people of Akwamu. It is therefore recommended that financial assistance must be given to the chieftaincy institution to organize training workshops and durbars to increase people's awareness about the importance of taboos to the Akwamu society.

Taboos serves as a guiding principle of moral conduct towards the exploitation of natural resources in Akwamu society. It is therefore recommended that the district assembly in collaboration with the traditional council of Akwamu traditional area integrate the cultural values into policies and programmes by coming out with by-laws to guide the citizens towards proper management of the natural resources in the area with the aim of sustaining the environment for human survival.

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