

## **Chakwela makumbi rainmaking ceremony of the Soli: A faith event**

The literal translation of chakwela makumbi is pulling down of the clouds. This time the earth is dry parched, people are thirsty and therefore hankering for rain. In some places animal have begun to die. It is in this event that Chieftaness Nkomeshya intercedes through the ancestors to God for a good rainfall. The seeds of sorghum, maize and others are brought to her. While at prayer she shells, maize, pumpkin seeds and squeezes sorghum into the gourd and mixes them. She raises eyes to heaven and cries to God.



I heard her pray that; *“God of my ancestors, of heaven and earth open your heavens and pour down rain to us. To whom can we go except to you our Father? I am your creature and you created me and you can take my life if you want”*. After a lengthy prayer and while kneeling she begins to sob and threw herself prostrate to the ground. This is reminiscent of prayer of the psalmist; that in my distress I sought the Lord. *“I cry aloud, I cry aloud to God that he may hear me”*, Psalm 77, 142. Women worshippers began to wipe away her tears. This was a moving prayer and I felt tears forming in my eyes at that moment. I then saw some dark clouds forming in the sky. I could not help but think God definitely listens to such powerful and serious prayers. This is in sharp contrast to what we see in our Sunday morning prayers where people look about here and there and to see who is dressed nicely and the most beautiful. At this event I sensed real presence and concentration on the side of the people as they implored God. I also could not help but notice the humility of people as they clapped to God as they prayed. Also prominent among the people were a group of women worshippers (whom some people may call *babinde*) dressed in black which is symbolic of the dark rain clouds. I was told that in former times the people chosen to go and pray for rain used to go to the forest and erect some shelters. These were special people like diviner rain makers or cousin clan members (*abena mfula na bena bowa*). While they were in the forest they would pray for rain and it would immediately pour down. So far from this. During yesterday’s prayers I could see also some herbs and a black chicken placed on the black cloth within the same area of prayer. In the background there

was a chanting invocation song. *“Twakabomba kuli mwami, mukamambo, katiye tulumbe”*. Meaning we are saying thank you to the chieftainess of Mukamambo. Let us go and say thank you. A woman worshipper dressed in black came and snatched away the black chicken and swung it and threw it at the other women seated nearby the arena. This act was symbolic gesture that our ancestor when approaching God did not go empty handed. They would offer sacrifices to God in their supplication. As Clifford Geertz said the power of symbols lie in their ability to transform experience by constructing a sacred reality upon which the realities of everyday experiences of life are grounded. The symbolic gestures of people reflect unconscious wishes, longings desires and even desperations. When people communicate through their ancestors and symbols their prayers are not just here and now but they communicate with God, they are addressing God, they are speaking to God and not to the mountain, big tree or waterfalls.

These are just spiritual symbols to solicit God's power and benevolence.



The second part of Chakwela Makumbi ceremony was the planting of seeds by the Chieftainess. During this time she lights the fire within the cleared bush and burns a heap of stalks of maize. She then plants sorghum, maize, pumpkin seeds etc. while people were again imploring God in a solemn song; *“ilaloko, ilaloko kuli babinde, twebene mandondo, twebene imfula ilaloko ilaloko katuna tubyala.* The language of this song is quite ancient. But the literal translation could mean it has rained, the raindrops are there, the rainmakers are praying,

the owners, before the planting season. This songs implies that it would even rain at time before the planting season. But it could also mean that before the chief plants crops no one is supposed to do that. Kings, Chief and chieftainesses possess sacred powers over the land and there are the ones to sanction the planting season. This also corresponds to the sanctioning of gathering caterpillars among the Bemba people of Northern Province. Before the Paramount chief of the Bemba offers sacrifice to God, no one is allowed to gather caterpillars or else something worse will befall him or her. If this order is ignored these are times when we hear that someone has been swallowed up by a python.

Chieftainess Nkomeshya herself is a Catholic Christian and that is why this ceremony begins with a solemn Mass and it is probably inculturated or christianised. People say that she goes to sweep and clean the church as if she is not a chieftainess. When people try to stop her that you are chieftainess and you cannot be sweeping and taking away weeds around the church, she answers them that in heaven there are no kings of chiefs we are all the same.

By patrick mumbi (Fenza)