

The Significance and Values of Indigenous Rituals among the Oromo People: The Case of *Uke* Ritual

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ABSTRACT: Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that indigenous peoples are leading their livelihood and also they learnt it from the actual practices during their day to day life. Among the different aspects of Indigenous knowledge, one is Indigenous ritual; which is conducted by indigenous peoples for very different reasons. Traditionally the Indigenous knowledge were considered as worthless and anybody have had criticizing it. But, currently the reality is promulgated by different scholars as the indigenous knowledge is very crucial in day to day life of indigenous peoples. The research methodology was mainly qualitative research method. The primary data were gathered through observation, FGDs, key informants' interviews, questionnaire and informal conversations. Secondary sources were gathered from the district offices and internet. The *Uke* ritual is the indigenous ritual celebrated by children's whose age are less than 16 years. It is the ritual celebrated with the bread anointed with butter and milk on July 5/12 E.C/July 12/19 in G.C. This ritual has a lot of purposes like commemorating the children's day, consolidating their relationship, training them about their future career, publicizing their right, etc. The political and religious (protestant) domination faced the people during the past regimes contributed much to the weakening of *Uke* ritual. Here, it is also possible to say that before the commencement of Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Oromo people have a culture that respects and give guarantee for human right in general and that of children's right in particular.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Ritual and *Uke* ritual.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Indigenous knowledge is the base for every society in different activities like health, agriculture, religion, and etc. among the indigenous communities of the world. Even if it is difficult to give a single definition for the concept Indigenous knowledge, different scholars gave a number of definitions (World Bank 1998: i). According to World Bank (1998: i), even if there is no single definition for the concept, there are "several traits that distinguish Indigenous knowledge (IK) broadly from other knowledge".

This indicates that the concept is very broad and all inclusive in nature. Different indigenous peoples of the world are leading their livelihood by the knowledge they have obtained from their culture and they have learnt it from the actual practices during their day to day life. In relation to this, World Bank (1998: i) states as it is the basis for local decision-making in agriculture, health, natural resource management and other activities across the indigenous peoples.

According to Flavier et al. (1995: 479), IK is "the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making". They also stated that as indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems (Flavier et al. 1995: 479). According to World Bank (1998: i), the IK is very important in providing the basic problem-solving strategies for local communities.

Among the different aspects of IK, one is Indigenous ritual; which is conducted by indigenous peoples for very different reasons at different periods and also across the culture. Like Indigenous knowledge, the term ritual has also a number of definitions which is emanated from its different purposes and also from its cultural variability. Rappaport (1999: 24) shortly defines the term ritual as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers”. On the other hand, Gruenwald (2003: 7) states that “rituals like ceremonies are repeatable events; people can do them for the same purposes, in the same orderly manner, and with the expectation of the same results.” Therefore, rituals are a pattern of activity repeatedly done for different purposes. Generally, ritual is a ceremonial activity or a set of actions which can exist cross-culturally in different communities, with different forms and purposes. Ritual action has, most of the time, its own significance, symbolic representation and value for the practitioners.

Indigenous ritual is thus one of the aspects of IK and it is the indigenous ceremonial activity that is undertaken by the indigenous people for different purposes at different parts of the world. Gruenwald (2003: 7) says that “some rituals have a more localized character, which means that they represent a specific function or identity. In these cases, the specific place and time chosen for the doing of the rituals indicates functional specificity” (Gruenwald 2003: 7). *Uke* ritual is one of such localized ritual and celebrated at specific places and also by specific people. Thus, this research was targeted to study of such localized indigenous ritual, the *Uke* ritual, with its purposes, significances and the values that it gives for the people who celebrate it. *Uke* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is celebrated by indigenous peoples of the Gindeberet District, West Shewa Zone, Oromiya Regional State.

Therefore, this study was targeted on the Significance and Values of Indigenous Rituals among the Oromo People with particular reference to the *Uke* Ritual in Gindeberet District, West Shewa Zone, Oromiya Regional State.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Traditionally, as it is known, the indigenous knowledge including indigenous rituals was considered as worthless and anybody had been criticizing it. But, currently the reality is promulgated by different scholars as the indigenous knowledge is very crucial in day to day life of indigenous people. In related to this, World Bank (1998: i) says states “Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem-solving strategies for local communities, especially the poor. It represents an important component of global knowledge on development issues.” Therefore, indigenous ritual is one aspect of indigenous knowledge that has its own significances and values for the local communities. But, the importance of these indigenous rituals in the study area is still little investigated. So, this study was targeted to reveal the basic significances of *Uke* ritual in different social aspects of the society in the study area and it was also tried to examine the social and cultural values of the *Uke* ritual among the Oromo of the study area.

According to Gruenwald (2003: 7), “rituals are a pattern of activity repeatedly done for different purposes”. However, the purpose of this indigenous ritual, *Uke*, is still little studied. Actually the people that are practicing it have their own insight why they are celebrating it, but anthropologically it could not be analyzed. Thus, this study was also targeted to explore the purposes of the *Uke* ritual in the study area.

Another main problem that was intended to be revealed was that there is little research done to analyze and describe the symbolism of this indigenous ritual with its specific activities. As each practice has its own symbolic meaning and significance among the adherents, the *Uke* ritual has also indigenous symbols which may not have been clearly described. Therefore, this study described its symbolic meanings among the Oromo people, and tries to frame it in the context of theories of ritual and symbolic meaning in social anthropology.

Oromo culture allows the equality of gender in many activities. Some ritual activities might be done by both sexes or sometimes there are different ritual activities which might be confined to a single sex. But in the case of *Uke*, there is little research done on the role of gender participation. Therefore, it would also be needed to identify the gender roles in this ritual, whether or not the consideration is given to gender equality among this indigenous people.

In line to these, based on the above accounts, this study would answer the following basic research questions:

1. What is the logic behind the celebrations of this indigenous ritual, *Uke*?
2. What is the significance that is gained from celebrating such indigenous ritual in the study area?
3. What are the symbolic meanings of celebrating *Uke* ritual?
4. Are there any changes and continuities on this ritual celebration? If there are any changes that faced the ritual, what are the factors for the changes?
5. Are there any considerations that are given to gender participation in celebrating such ritual?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has both general and specific objectives:

1.3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of the study is to investigate and analyze the significance and values of the indigenous rituals among the Oromo people in general and *Uke* ritual in particular.

1.3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Based on the aforementioned general objective, the specific objectives of the study are the following:

- To investigate the nature, meanings and purposes of *Uke* ritual in the study area.
- To explore the symbolic meanings of *Uke* ritual.
- To investigate the significance of *Uke* ritual among the Oromo people in general and the Oromo of Gindeberet District in particular.
- To examine gender participation within this indigenous ritual.
- To identify the changes and continuities that faced this indigenous ritual practices in the study area.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Topically, this study was delimited to the significance and values of indigenous rituals among the Oromo people with particular emphasis to *Uke* ritual. Putting into consideration time and budget constraints, it is impossible to conduct a research among the whole Oromo people of the study area. As a result, this research was delimited to the *Uke* ritual performed colorfully in Gindeberet district. Among the district, three rural peasant associations such as *Mukadima*, *Mudi Ula Baro*, and *Haroo Berbaboo* and the district's town Kachisi were selected as research site. I selected this district purposely, because of the assumption that this indigenous ritual ceremony is still undertaken in this district, though by assuming that this area is a fertile land for the researchers those who are planned to doing a research on the indigenous rituals.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 STUDY DESIGN

The research design applied on this research was mainly qualitative research and minor qualitative research methods. Primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to investigate the significance and values of *Uke* ritual.

2.2 SITE SELECTION

This study has been conducted in Gindeberet district, West Shewa Zone, Oromiya Regional State. To make the data that has been gathered manageable, three rural peasant associations were selected, such as *Mukadima*, *Mudi Ula Baro*, and *Haroo Berbaboo* and additionally the district's town Kachisi was also selected as research site. One of the reasons for selecting these areas was that the prominent Oromo indigenous rituals are still observed. Another reason is that the first two rural peasant associations are inhabited mainly by Tulama Oromo whereas the third rural peasant association is mainly inhabited by Mecha Oromo and therefore by assuming that there may be different occasions in different ritual celebrations that it may serve as additional information to the research. And again, these rural peasant associations are not far away from the district town, Kachisi, so it eases the transportation problems. Finally for the sake of additional variable data that are currently found in the town, the district town, Kachisi, was selected.

2.3 INFORMANTS

The main informants for this research were knowledgeable individuals who are considered as the library and custodians of the Oromo culture in the study area. The total number of the informants that were included in the research was 38. Among these, twelve of them were served as key informants, which include local elders (men and women) in the study sites. Varying age, sex, and educational background have been considered in selecting the informants, in order to determine how

far the young and the elderly know about these indigenous rituals. To investigate the role of women in the indigenous rituals, the women who know, practice and participate in the indigenous rituals were incorporated in the informants.

2.4 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Primary and secondary sources were used to gather the necessary data for the research. The primary data were gathered in fieldwork through observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and informal conversations. To make the communication easier with the informants, and for the sake of the natives' worldview, the research was conducted in Afan Oromo and then it was translated to English by the researcher.

2.4.1 OBSERVATION

Observation is used from the very beginning of the data gathering to the end of the fieldwork. The main purpose of the field observation was to see the different environmental characteristics of the study area as well as observing the practices of the people that could be related to indigenous culture. During this period, the researcher also observed some materials that are used to celebrate indigenous rituals and took photographs of the materials.

2.4.2 INFORMAL CONVERSATION

This tool might be used randomly to obtain relevant information while the purpose of discussion may not be directly related to the data gathering activities. It was undertaken while the informants were engaged in some other activity or while walking, during which a conversation started and often directed the discussions towards the topics of the study. Activities like coffee ceremonies, and/or other events might be some of the occasions in which informal conversations were used as means of gathering information.

2.4.3 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Focus group discussions were used to learn about the collective perception, knowledge and practices of the people in the study area towards Oromo indigenous rituals in general and of the *Uke* in particular. It was also used to cross check and supplement the data gathered through observation and key informants' interviews. There were four focus group discussions that were held to discuss about *Uke* ritual. Among these, one was conducted with the workers of Culture and Tourism bureau of Gindeberet district. All focus group discussions were included both male and female, different religious followers and different age groups of the society. For each groups, there were about 5-8 members with varying age, sex, and religion. To guide the discussions, semi-structured questions were developed by the researcher, but were flexibly used.

2.4.4 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

The majority of the informants were selected from the local community, during which the researcher could identified the most knowledgeable individuals. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected key informants that were taken from elderly men (nine) women (two) and one with a person who is teaching in Gindeberet high school. The informants that were chosen for this purpose were those who were willing to give the detailed information about their indigenous culture. The in-depth interview questions were semi-structured questions to allow the flexibility in directing questions. Some guiding questions were prepared, whereas the other important questions were asked directly based on the given information.

2.4.5 SURVEY METHOD

Fifty people, as a sampling size, were selected to respond to the questionnaire prepared and distributed to them. The respondents were selected through a simple sample frame without posing some criteria of selection by the researcher. The prepared questionnaire were almost open ended questionnaire and it was distributed mainly to the dwellers of Kachisi town with the assumption that the dwellers are the representatives of the District and also some questionnaire were also distributed to the dwellers around this town. They were selected by giving the priority to those who can read and write Afan Oromo language as a result of the questionnaire had been prepared in Afaan Oromo.

2.4.6 SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources were gathered from different books, articles in journals and published and unpublished theses. Demographic, climatic and topographic data about the study area were obtained from the Gindeberet District administration and Culture and Tourism Offices and it was also browsed from the internet.

2.5 DOCUMENTATION

The data that were collected using the above mentioned instruments were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. The data that were obtained through observations and informal discussions were documented in field notes and it could be supplemented the recorded data. The data that were obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the main sources of the information and it was recorded by tape-recorder and also documented in field notes. Some photographs related to the study were taken to give the background information for the gathered data.

2.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data were analyzed through description immediately after its collection. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively and also quantitatively after the fieldwork.

3 UKE RITUAL: THE INDIGENOUS RITUAL OF CHILDREN

3.1 THE NATURE AND MEANINGS OF *UKE* RITUAL

There are different categories of rituals performed by various groups. Some social groups practice one or all different categories of rituals. These rituals have their own purposes that the meanings and interpretations are given to them by the practitioners. There are a number of indigenous rituals celebrated by the local community at different time and different places for different purposes. Among the indigenous rituals that are performed in Gindeberet district, one is the *Uke* ritual.

The *Uke* ritual is a ritual that is mainly celebrated by children. This ritual is named as *Uke* by Tulama Oromo of the area where it is known as "*Taaboree*" among Macha Oromo of the district. Its celebration system and purpose is similar in both cases.

The *Uke* ritual is the traditional children's ritual and it is the day that children come together and celebrate the ritual by constructing a hut at their vicinity. On the eve of *Uke* ritual, the children construct the hut with their neighbors' children within each locals or neighbors. The hut is built by the children themselves. On the ritual day, the prepared bread and milk have been taken to the area where the hut is built and there the children have celebrating it by having bread and milk and they are revolving/ rotating around their hut. When they revolve around their hut they sing songs. At the end of the rotation of the hut, the children get in to their hut and sit down on the ground by erecting their legs straight. Then their mothers' pour down the milk on the children's leg and bless them by saying "*guddadhaa*" meaning be grow. At the end, the bread which is anointed with butter is eaten with milk within that hut. The milk provided to children for the ritual did not returned back to home even if it is excess and left from the children. They have to drink it and it is their property.

When the children are encircling the hut, they are singing a song by saying:

*"Ukee yaa ukee
Ukee bara kaanii
Kan miilli dagaanii
Ukee bara quufaa
Hindaaqqoo dhudhuufaa"*

Its literal meaning is "oh *Uke*, in the years before a year which leg was very big, *Uke* of the prosperous year, it fart even the hen". This shows that it is difficult to know whether the hen is farting or not. If the year is a prosperous year, this prosperity not only for their children but it also prosperous for hen and the hen is farting during such prosperous years.

The term *Uke* is derived from the name of the object, milk container, especially during the ritual. The ritual is celebrated by children whose age is under 16 years. It is celebrated by the children who are ideally expected to be existed in the first two stages of *Gada* system.

On this ritual, each family has the responsibility to prepare bread for their children. The children eat the bread with milk. If there is a family who has not given the bread to the children on the *Uke* ritual, the children condemn them by saying that: “*tirba taaboree boree kan naaf kenneef tolee kan na dhowwatteef qodaan bukooshee onee*” literally meaning on the days of *Taaboree* (another name of *Uke* ritual) a person who gives me a bread be blessed and who doesn't give me not blessed and their dough container became empty.

The *Uke* ritual lies on July 5 in Ethiopian calendar, but recently, it started to be celebrated on July 12 in E.C. by some areas of the Gindeberet district. According to some of the informants, the *Uke* ritual lies on July 12 in E.C. and where another informant informed to the researcher as it lies on July 5 in E.C. in other peasant associations. Some of the informants were tried to give a justification for the variation of the date when the ritual is to be celebrated by saying that among the Tulama Oromo the *Uke* ritual is celebrated on July 5, whereas it is celebrated on July 12 in E.C. by Macha Oromo of the study area. How and why this gap is created on a single ritual attended by a single community is the question of the researcher that still has not got a convenient answer. With related to this, one of the informants, Obbo Ejeta Gonfa said that the original date of *Uke* ritual is July 5 in E.C. However, latterly the Orthodox Christian religion dominated the local peoples due to its religious purpose and taken the ritual to July 12 in E.C. On the other hands, the ritual is again celebrated by the Oromo of the area on July 5 or 12 in E.C. whereas the Amhara people who are living in the district and also town dwellers are celebrating it on August 13 in E.C. In the district, the ritual which is celebrated on August 13 in E.C. is did not celebrated for indigenous purpose rather for the religious purpose of the Orthodox religion to commemorate the journey of Jesus Christ to mount Tabor, as it stated in the holy bible. For example, in the district town called Kachisi, the Orthodox religion ritual called '*Buhe*' is colorfully celebrated on August 13 in E.C

On the *Uke* celebration, after the completion of each process in the hut and after they eat bread and drink their milk; the children are going to the forests found not far away from their home and they hunt small animals. This may be the training part for their future career. Historically as the Oromo peoples of the area were pastoralist, the pastoralists face different challenges during their mobility with their cattle and even they may face with big animals.

On the same day, they also face a competition with other neighbor groups of children around the river that are found around their vicinity. They made a competition with antagonistic group and they fight with each other. On this competition, they hold a thorny stick known as “*qaqqawwwee*” (sometimes known by the name *Chirii*) and they are hitting each other. Most of the time, this competition by *Chirii/Qaqqawwee* is under taken in the afternoon. It is also training for their future career, being warrior. In Gada system, war is important and each male Oromo, traditionally have the responsibility to train war and participate in war at their adulthood. Therefore, these children's competition to be a winner on the *Uke* ritual is part of this training. If hard/serious injury occurred on this competition, there is no compensation and no one requires a judge for justice.

The children who are on celebrating the *Uke* ritual have the responsibility of training a war and becoming a winner in swimming, struggling with their age mates, etc. as they will pass through the 2nd stage of Gada and they are entering into the 3rd stage, which is called junior warrior. Their struggling and competition with other groups of other local Children on the *Uke* ritual is to check up whether they are trained well and capable to become a winner and it is an indication for their next stage of being a junior warrior.

According to Obbo Ejeta Gonfa, the *Uke* ritual is celebrated as the demarcation between the spring and summer seasons. It is celebrated at the beginning of dark summer season by assuming that the heavy rain is coming and for the good wish they have to pass safely through this dark season. It is also celebrated at the period when the people started very tedious agriculture works. So they are feeding their children well on this ritual by assuming that they become strong enough after the ritual to participate in any agricultural activities in a very well manner.

Traditionally, the children didn't drink a water or other drinks rather than milk. On this day, the milk as a whole is given to the children and they have full right on it. Milk is a nonalcoholic drunk and it is very important for children.

3.2 HUT BREAKING SYSTEM: GRADUATION FROM THE RITUAL (*SIRNA GODOO CABSUU*)

The *Uke* ritual is celebrated by the boys until their puberty stage (most of the time around the age of 16 year). After puberty stage, they suspend themselves from the ritual practices because of they are not children more, now they are on the stage of adult hood. Thus, to leave the ritual, there should be one system called hut breaking system.

This hut breaking system is part of the *Uke* ritual which is undertaken at the end of age limit of the boys. It is the conclusion ceremony that is conducted by the boys who want to leave the ritual for the last time. The person who performs

'*Sirna Godo Cabsu*', literally meaning hut breaking system, has prepared large bread on for the system and feeding his friends and then he breaks the hut. This is the end of *Uke* ritual for the person.

It is the special ceremony and occasion when a boy wants to terminate the ritual because of his age. The person who wants to terminate the ritual and conducts this special occasion, at the end of the system, he run away by breaking the hut. When he breaks the hut and run away, the children/ boys who are celebrating the ritual are waiting him by holding a stick and they are ready to block him and if they can, they can hit him as much as they can. If the person is strong enough, he have to run away to escape from them and unless otherwise the children have full right to bit him. The children are doing this to keep their system and to show the love they have to the ritual where as for the hut breaker, it is the stage/occasion at which he announces his strength by being younger and by running away and escaping from the biting by other children's.

This hut breaking system is only for boys not for girls. The girls are stopping their participation on *Uke* ritual one when they get married, the other when they came up with ministration period. Seeing ministration is the sign of puberty for the girls. No more *Uke* for girls after they got ministration whereas the boys continue until their puberty stage, probably around 16 years old.

3.3 BRINGING THE *UKE* BREAD SYSTEM (*SIRNA QITA UKEE GEESUU*)

With related to this *Uke* ritual, there is also another issue that should be raised with related to marriage process. On the *Uke* ritual the children have got bread from their family. Ideally the girls are expected to participate on the ritual until they got married (this perception is currently not applicable, because it was applicable during the period at which girls were got married before they were not matured enough, but currently, they are married at the age of more than 18 years old). In Oromo tradition, the fiancée is considered as a member of her husband's family starting from the date they got fiancée. Therefore, the family of a person has the responsibility of bringing the *Uke* bread to their son's fiancée on the ritual or at any time in the year to show their responsibility and the love they have to her. Therefore, this bread bringing to the son's future wife is known as "*Sirna Qita Ukee Geessuu*, meaning bringing the *Uke* bread's system.

3.4 PURPOSES OF *UKE* RITUAL

Traditionally, it is the day of children and they celebrate one to show their happiness and to commemorate the children day. Starting from the ancient time, the Oromo people have a culture that respects the children's right. The main indicators for the existence of child rights in Oromo culture is the existence of *Uke* and *Engicha* rituals (*Engicha* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is celebrated by girls). Before the commencement of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the Oromo people have a culture that respects and give guarantee for its people. Thus, it is the ritual that confirms the existence of the children's right in the Oromo culture.

The *Uke* ritual has no religious concern rather than traditions. On this day, the children have to wear well; if possible they celebrate their *Uke* with new clothes. This ritual shows the traditional consideration that is given to children. On this day, even if the children commit a mistake, the family hasn't talk to them hardly with the assumption that it is the day of their freedom.

The boys built a hut by themselves within their vicinity and there the children of their neighbor come together for the celebration of the ritual. Building a hut by the boys shows that as they are practicing their future home construction. Hut is the first home among the Oromo of the area.

3.5 SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION OF *UKE* RITUAL

There are a number of symbolic interpretations behind the celebration of the *Uke* ritual. Some of the symbolic interpretations of the *Uke* ritual are the following.

First and the most reason why *Uke* ritual is celebrated within the hut that is made up of wet tree is that wet thing have great meaning in Oromo culture. Even different traditional meetings are held under big trees which have done purposely by the Oromo elders to show their hope to live within wet and green environments and the other for their willingness towards prosperity in all directions. Similarly, the children's ritual called *Uke* is celebrated within a hut built from wet tree branches to show the children's future life. Wet tree have green color, green color shows development and good vision. So, to show their hope on their children's, the Oromo of the area celebrate the *Uke* ritual within hut made from wet tree branches. Wet tree is the tree that is on growing, this ritual is similarly to show as children are on growing.

Another reason why the ritual is celebrated within the hut is that the ritual is celebrated during rainy (summer) season. If the rain comes, the hut that is made up of wet tree branches has good protection capacity for only that day. The hut is made from the tree branches that have leaf and by the thought that it is better to protect the rain from the children until they have finished their celebration. The ritual is held only for one day, because the hut is served just for one day, (i.e. it is temporary children's home), and not that much necessary to do more than that.

Among the Oromo people, wetness is blessing, peace and reconciliation. To wish to bless their children and for their hope to live in peace, they built the temporary home for the *Uke* ritual from wet tree branches. When Oromo want to pray to *Waaqa*, they hold green grass with the assumption that *Waaqa* responded to their praying immediately if they hold a green grass. Wetness is the symptom of life and it is very essential for human life.

The bread that is prepared to children on the *Uke* ritual is somewhat different in shape; it shapes tinny and elongated bread; this shape of the bread shows that as the children are growing.

The revolving of children around the hut shows that as the *Uke* ritual comes again after a year, it is endless ritual, and it returns again and again after a year. And also revolving to the hut, shows that as Gada system is cycling based on generation.

Most of the time, the children whose age is under 16 years is considered as cattle keepers (shepherd). Keeping cattle and calves is their main responsibility in the society. Therefore, for the *Uke* ritual, they are entitled to celebrate it with cattle products like milk and butter.

3.6 WHY *UKE* RITUAL IS CELEBRATED ONLY IN THE SUMMER/RAINY SEASON?

In the case of *Uke*, during the summer season there is excess milk and butter, but in the winter it is difficult to get enough milk and butter that is needed to the ritual, because of the existence of sufficient grass for their cattle.

During the summer season, the land is covered by green grass which is very attractive among the Oromo people. There is also excess water for their cattle and also for their cultivation; the environment is covered by green color. Therefore, being green by itself has its own justification among the Oromo of the area. Green is prosperity, peace and also it shows blessing. This is another main reason why such ritual is celebrated in the summer season.

Another reason is that there is great hope among the community that they are waiting for bright season after the summer season. In Oromo calendar, this ritual, *Uke*, has celebrated at the end of the year and also it is the indication for coming of the bright autumn season. During the summer season, especially when this ritual is undertaken, different types of cereals are seeded and it is on the way to grown up and it is the time of hope for the agrarian community of the area. The community expects their cultivation hopefully like their children, why such children ritual is held at this season.

On this ritual, the children's are expected to be play as they want. Thus, during their playing, if the children fail down, they haven't affected that much, because the land is soft during this rainy summer season.

3.7 GENDER PARTICIPATION ON *UKE* RITUAL

Concerning the gender participation on the *Uke* ritual, there are two different arguments: the first arguments says that the *Uke* ritual is only celebrated by boys, and therefore girls have no participation within it while the second argument says that since the *Uke* ritual is a children's ritual, it incorporates both sexes of children. One of the informants, Adde Gete Bulbula, stated her arguments with the support of the first idea that traditionally the girls did not want to the *Uke* ritual celebration place or they did not attend the ritual. She said that the *Uke* ritual is only for boys. However, she also agreed with the second arguments by saying that recently, the girls have started to participate in the *Uke* ritual.

Another informant, Obbo Bokona Debelo, initially supported the first idea by saying that the *Uke* ritual is mainly attended by boys and he also noted that as in some areas, the *Uke* ritual is only attended by boys whereas in another area it is also attended by both boys and girls. Additionally he also said that even if this ritual is attended by both boys and girls, but most of its activities, starting from hut building to fighting and swimming, are dominated by boys. In line with this idea, I have also the information as this ritual is celebrated by both boys and girls.

When I was a child, I was celebrated this ritual with my sisters and in my locals, the ritual is, still today, celebrated by both sexes. I think that this variation in gender participation within a single ritual among the people of the study area may be resulted from the difference in clan, Tulama and Mecha. From this point of view among Mecha Oromo, the *Uke* ritual is merely celebrated by boys whereas among the Tulama, this ritual is celebrated by both boys and girls. Even if the ritual is celebrated by both boys and girls among the Tulama Oromo, the boys take the dominancy in the ritual. For instance, when

the boys want to cease this ritual celebration because of their age, they perform hut breaking system (*sirna gudoo cabsuu*), where this system is not applicable for girls; the girls are stopping it simply without performing any ritual system.

3.8 IMPORTANCE OF *UKE* RITUAL

There are different benefits obtained from celebrating the *Uke* ritual for the local people in particular and for the whole Oromo community in general. Among the distributed open ended questionnaire concerning the significance of this ritual, *Uke*, 98% of the respondents were agreed as it has great contribution for the local people. Some of the significances are the following:

- The main significance that might be obtained from the *Uke* ritual is its tourism attraction. With relation to its tourism attraction, there is nothing done to promote the ritual in government side and it is not promoted by any organizations. If it is promoted well, specially, by public media, it attracts a number of tourists to the area and it generates great income to the district.
- The *Uke* ritual also serves as cultural promotion day. Each activity undertaken on the ritual shows the Oromo culture. It is also a good chance to recall the disappearing culture during the past autocratic regime and to revive the culture. Therefore, this ritual is help to revive and to preserve the culture of the society
- The *Uke* ritual is providing a great contribution to environmental protection. The *Uke* ritual is celebrated in the hut made up of wet tree branches. To get that tree at their locality, each family and also each individual give care for the tree found around their homestead. Therefore, this preservation of the tree due to the ritual makes the ritual as it has its own contribution in environmental protection. Not only the *Uke* ritual that contributes to environmental conservation in Oromo tradition, but each has great respect for the surrounding nature, particularly large trees that serve for shade have been conserved since centuries, but recently, this environmental protection culture is jeopardized due to different reasons.
- Help to show the children as they are in childhood stage of their life. As they terminate or stop the ritual, anybody knows as they become adulthood. It is the first and second stage in Gada stages. Though to practice and experience freely about their future carrier like house construction, being warier, etc. this ritual creates the best opportunity.
- To strength the relationship between the children or it consolidates the relationship between the children's that dwell within the same vicinity. On the ritual day, they came together to celebrate the ritual which directly or indirectly promotes their relationship and it is lays down the base for their future social life and also for the future social cooperation. Therefore, the ritual creates a social cohesion among children who are playing with each other and they share their happiness.
- The *Uke* ritual is the day at which the children's' are checking officially what they were trained during cattle keeping in swimming, struggling with each other, etc. with other groups.
- It helps to entertain (to make happy) the children and it is the ritual celebrated for the children's right and the children's day officially.
- Help to develop the confidence of the children.
- Helps the children to get new clothes
- Help to transfer the existing culture from current generation to the next generation.
- It is the day that children have got relief from different works. On this day, it is forbidden to children to participate in any activities, they are officially free for this ritual.
- The *Uke* ritual help to preserve the traditional material objects like "*Qabee*". (*Qabee* is small traditional milk container and also serves as butter holder for daughters and sometimes serves as container for the delicious traditional meals that are prepared on special occasions.).

3.9 FAMILIES RESPONSIBILITIES ON THE *UKE* RITUAL

The families have their own responsibility on the *Uke* ritual day. The first and main responsibility of the family is that providing the necessary equipment and objects like buying new clothes for the children. The families have to prepare the necessary meals and drinks like bread, butter, milk and others for the children. If they have, it is also the families' responsibility to buy clothes to their children.

Another main responsibility of the family is that freeing the children on the ritual and helping their children in all aspects for the success of the ritual. As we discussed above, on the *Uke* ritual, the children have full freedom and they haven't done anything, on behalf of the children, the family covers every activity of the children.

4 THE CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES OF *Uke* RITUAL

There are a number of changes that have been observed on *Uke* ritual in the study area. Among the distributed open ended questionnaire concerning the changes and continuities of this indigenous ritual, 98% of the respondents were agreed on the existence of the changes on this ritual due to different factors. The basic and fundamental changes were resulted from political and religious dominations.

In the case of politics, as Amhara rulers were penetrated to the area and exercise their authority of ruling the local Oromo's, they were also agitated to exercise their own culture by condemning the Oromo's culture as it is backward and worthless. For instance, Nigus Teklahymanot, Menelik II and etc. were among the feudal rulers who were exercised their power on the culture of the area. Since the introduction of Nigus Teklahymanot to the area, he and his followers were exerted their effort to upload their culture on the local people. According to Obbo Leta Sori, the Amhara treated each traditional culture including *Uke* ritual as backward and worthless. That period onwards the local people started to weaken this ritual. Thus, the local culture in general and *Uke* ritual in particular became under risk at different periods in Oromo history.

As different religions introduced to the Oromo in general and to Gindeberet in particular, they have also their own impacts on the local cultures in general and *Uke* ritual in particular. The dominant religion here is Protestant Christianity, which consists 55.9% of the total population. This religion was introduced to the area very recently. Thus, since its introduction, it has continued to influence on the indigenous ritual practices including the *Uke* ritual, based on its doctrine that discourages any ritual practices and belief systems those have been held out of the church. This is the dominant factor that is taking the lion share role in weakening of this ritual, specially starting from recent past. This religion is undermining the indigenous rituals in general and *Uke* ritual in particular, as they are religious rituals and the adherents of protestant religious haven't allowed to celebrating this ritual. Formerly, the Orthodox Christian was intermingled with the local culture and there was no that much visible domination on the *Uke* ritual. Currently, the serious problem is that when an individual converted his/her religion to protestant is obliged to refrain himself/herself from practicing any indigenous rituals including *Uke*. The protestant Christian is condemning it as it is the act of believing in devil. Therefore, the people are ashamed of practicing it due to the protest religion. It is the rule for protestant religion, but it is culture imperialism for Oromo culture of the area by departing the society from their culture in general and *Uke* ritual in particular.

When the informants compare the extent at which this indigenous ritual is celebrated in the area, now a day's very few homesteads, locals and villagers are exercising it. Even the existing one is also not the original one; one it is blended with strange cultures of other community like Amhara and the other it is the replica of or intermingled with Christian religions. Therefore, the existing cultures in general and the existing *Uke* ritual in particular, are only the vestiges of indigenous *Uke* ritual.

Another change that is seen on such ritual is related with age limit of the ritual. Formerly, even if the culturally specified age for *Uke* ritual participation was around 15/16 years, it was celebrated and participated even by youngsters of more than that age, up to 20 years. This is due to the love they have to the ritual and even they continue to celebrate it with children until they get married. But recently, the participants started to be confined to the provided age only and even children started to stop the celebration before the age limit. This is resulted from the perception of the society that they are on the way of undermining the ritual as it is only of children and also started to be conceived as worthless act.

Formerly, this ritual has a specific date for its celebration throughout the district without any diversification of the dates. But currently, the celebration date for *Uke* ritual is diversified. For instance, in some peasant association (*Ganda*), the *Uke* ritual is celebrated on July 5 in E.C while it is celebrated on July 12 in E.C in another *Ganda* within the same district. Some of my informants believed that the original and traditional date of *Uke* ritual was July 5 in E.C, but due to the influence of Orthodox religion it was taken to July 12 in E.C in some areas. This diversification and complication of this ritual celebration date might be resulted from the factors that were discussed above. Traditionally, the Oromo people have their own calendar; which was the base for each indigenous ritual. As this indigenous calendar was weakening, each ritual celebration date was also forgotten and complicated too much and the people also obliged to leave the original celebration date and they are started celebrating it as they are remembering it.

Another factor that contributed for the changing of this ritual is lack of awareness towards their culture in general and *Uke* ritual in particular. Some of the peoples are undermining the significances of such ritual as worthless and though they are not interested to celebrate it. Currently, most peoples are stopped to celebrate it mainly due to protestant religion and also due to their attitude towards the ritual; basically the negative attitude that they have towards the ritual is emanated formerly from political pressure they faced and but currently from religious domination. For example, in the case of *Uke* ritual, some are only celebrated within a home by eating bread as memorandum of the ritual without building the hut. All

these changes of attitude about such ritual are resulted from the wrong perception towards their culture: perceiving it as worthless culture. In some cases, wrongly these rituals are started to be grouped with harmful traditional practices. In reality there is no harmful things gained from such ritual; but due to lack of awareness, it is abandoned.

Modernity by itself has also its own factor in undermining the indigenous rituals in general and *Uke* ritual in particular. Different households stopped to celebrate the ritual by assuming such ritual as symbols of backwardness. For instance, as the children started to attend the school, they start to undermine the ritual and also started to show low interest towards the ritual. The children themselves haven't interested to such ritual because of the technological advancement. They are more interesting to modernity and modern technological products rather than any traditional cultures including *Uke* ritual. For them, attending such traditional ritual is a symbol of backwardness in attitude. But, the reality is different from this; attending your traditional culture is a symbol of modernity and it is the question of being yourself. If you are undermining yourself by yourself, it may result great crisis, especially it result identity and cultural crisis. Therefore, being yourself and attending your traditional culture including *Uke* ritual is the best solution for the future generation, because of it is saving us from identity crisis.

The economic capacities of the families have also contributing for the changing and weakening of the *Uke* ritual. Traditionally, the family can prepare several couples of bread for their children for *Uke* ritual; but now, some family didn't able to afford several couples of bread, even it becomes difficult to the family to provide the extra bread for the ritual.

Due to inflation of the market and reduction of the number of cattle that the local people have at their hands, nowadays, make it difficult to celebrate the *Uke* ritual. For example, it is difficult to get butter and milk for such ritual for those who haven't milking cattle.

5 CONCLUSION

This study tried to investigate the significance and value of indigenous rituals among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Uke* ritual. The study revealed that every indigenous rituals performed by the Oromo community has its own significance and symbolic representation within the framework of Oromo culture. The *Uke* ritual, as Oromo indigenous ritual, has both manifest and latent functions for the local community. The *Uke* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is celebrated by children and it is a children's ritual. It is the ritual that is celebrated by children within a hut. This ritual is celebrated by children whose age is under 16 years and they are those who are ideally expected to be existed in the first two stages of *Gada* system; *Ittimakoo* and *Daballee*. The name of this ritual is derived from the name of the traditional objective called *Uke* that served as milk container.

On the eve of this ritual ceremony, the children of the vicinity came together and built a hut. Within the hut the children's are celebrating the *Uke* ritual. During the celebration, the children are expected to have bread that is anointed with butter and milk and they are revolving/ rotating around their hut. At the end of the rotation, they have eaten the bread with milk.

The study shows that on this ritual, the children are training fighting with each other to show their future career being a warrior as they will pass through the 2nd stage of *Gada* and they are entering into the 3rd stage, which is called junior warrior.

The *Uke* ritual is the ritual that is celebrated by both boys and girls among some areas of the study area and also celebrated by boys in another area. Therefore, this ritual assures the gender equality in the participation of indigenous rituals including the *Uke* ritual in the study area.

The study also shows that there is a symbolic representation of the *Uke* ritual. The hut is built from wet tree branches to show that the children are wet and they are on growing. Traditionally, this ritual is the ritual that is celebrated to show the happiness of the children and also to commemorate the children day. Therefore, this ritual assures the right that are traditionally given to the children among the Oromo people in general and Oromo of the study area in particular. Here it is also possible to say that before the commencement of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the Oromo people have a culture that respects and give guarantee for human right in general and that of children's right in particular.

Among the main contributions of the *Uke* ritual, one is that the ritual might be a source of income in the future if it is promoted well by being source of tourist attraction. The ritual is also useful by being a cultural promotion day and it is also a good chance to recall the endangered culture during the past autocratic regime and to revive the culture.

The *Uke* ritual is again significant in providing great contribution to the environmental protection by preserving the tree. The ritual is helpful in distinguishing the children from adults as they are celebrating it until they are in childhood and as they terminate the ritual, it is an indication as they become adulthood.

The study revealed that The *Uke* ritual is useful in strengthening the relationship between the children and it creates a social cohesion among children who are playing with each other and they share their happiness on this day. It helps to make the children happy, develop the confidence of the children, transfer the existing culture from current generation to the next generation, preserve the traditional material objects, etc.

The study also shows that there are different problems that are created due to the existence of different changes on these indigenous rituals. There are a number of changes that have seen/observed on *Uke* ritual in the study area. The basic and fundamental factors to these changes were resulted from political and religious subjugations. During the past regimes, different rulers of the Amhara were politically and also culturally undermined the local peoples for a long period of time which resulted with the later complications of indigenous rituals including *Uke* ritual. As different religious organizations were introduced to the area, they have putted their own marks of complications on the local cultures in general and *Uke* ritual in particular, especially in the recent past the protestant religion is conducting cultural imperialism among the Oromo of the study area and it restricts the majority of the peoples from participating and practicing any indigenous rituals. As a result, the existing cultures in general and *Uke* ritual in particular, are only the vestiges of indigenous rituals, currently this rituals are lost their main traditional components and it is also celebrated by few households.

As the study shows that another change that is observed on such rituals is related to age limit of the *Uke* ritual. Traditionally, even if the culturally specified age for *Uke* ritual was around 15/16 years, it was celebrated and participated even by youngsters of more than that age, up to 20 years. But recently, the participants started to be confined to the provided age only or under the provided age which was resulted from the perception of the society that they are on the way of undermining the ritual as it is only of children and also started to be conceived as worthless act.

Another problem that faced this indigenous ritual is that traditionally there was a clear date for the celebration of such ritual, but currently, the celebration dates for the ritual is diversified due to the weakening of the Oromo traditional calendaring system and also due to the interference of religious organizations. Lack of awareness towards their culture in general and *Uke* ritual in particular is also another factor that is contributing for the changing of this ritual. Modernity has also its own factor in undermining the indigenous rituals in general and *Uke* ritual in particular.

The weakening of the households in their economic capacities has also contributing for the changing and weakening of *Uke* ritual. Among the main important things for the celebration of *Uke* ritual is that milk and butter and thus as the families are losing their milking cows due to different factors, they are minimizing the celebration practice step by step. This may be resulted from inflation of the market and reduction of the number of cattle that the local people have at their hands; nowadays it becomes difficult to celebrate the *Uke* ritual as it was celebrated formerly.

Nowadays, the technological advancement also minimizes the interests of the children from the celebration of such ritual and their interest is greater to modernity and modern technological products rather than any traditional cultures including *Uke* ritual.

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