

Factors Threatening the Maintenance and Inter-generational Transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita

Meshesha Make*

Assistant Professor English Language and Indigenous Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Wolaita Sodo University, P.O.Box:138, Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia

Abraham Kebede

Lecturer of English, Wolaita Sodo University

Simon Emanie

Lecturer of Geography, Wolaita Sodo University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess factors that are threatening the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. The subjects used for the current study were 600 individuals of Wolaita who were selected by availability sampling from all walks of life to fill the questionnaire and 12 elders selected by purposive sampling (based on their deep knowledge of Wolaita language, culture, festivals and heritage) from six selected Woredas of Wolaita to respond the interview. With the inclusion of some of elders selected for interview, 60 individuals were purposively selected for FGD. The descriptive research design was used to conduct this study by using both the quantitative and qualitative data that were collected through aforementioned tools and analyzed using the mixed method of data analysis. The result indicated that Gifaataa celebration has been threatened by many different factors: the wrong-mixing-up of Gifaataa and Meskel celebrations, lack of awareness by younger generations of Wolaita, misconceived influence by some religious sects and lack of facilitative political environment. However, it is identified that Gifaataa has been celebrated with the display and marketing of various long-aged cultural heritages as identity markers of Wolaita people. Based on these findings, therefore, awareness enhancement training for younger generations of Wolaita, deep studies that promote the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of Gifaataa and promoting preservation of Gifaataa celebration through event marketing are forwarded as recommendations.

Keywords: Wolaita, identity, Gifaataa, celebration, maintenance

1. INTRODUCTION

For long-centuries, the people of Wolaita have preserved its indigenous culture, beliefs, traditions, rituals, civilization and social identities that define them and make them distinct from other people in Ethiopia (Haile Gabriel, 2007; Asella, 2012, Mohammed, 2014). Gifaataa is the most well-known festival among those rituals in Wolaita that has been celebrated annually in the month of September (Mohammed, 2014). There was no written document that tells when the celebration of Gifaataa was started, but according to oral witness by elders, it was started before many hundreds of years ago as a bridge between the accepting of New Year and sending-off the old one. It had been celebrated with the display and marketing of various long-aged cultural heritages as identity markers of Wolaita people.

However, according oral legends of elders, for almost the last one-hundred-twenty years (starting from the conquest of Independent Wolaita by Minellik (in 1887) to downfall of Dergue (in 1991), changes were seen on the celebration of Gifaataa festival. It was presumed due to some politico-religious factors that blurred the real picture of Gifaataa event in Wolaita. However, no empirical study was conducted and clearly indicated the specific factors that have been threatening the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. That is why the current study was proposed to assess factors that are threatening the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design of the Study

The descriptive research design was used for this study. The rationale is that the researchers selected it as a suitable design to assess and describe factors that are threatening the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. For the investigation of real factors of the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita from the relevant sample of informants, three tools of data collection were used. These are interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and questionnaire and the mixed method (eclectic approach) of data analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data collected.

2.2 Description of the Research setting

Wolaita is among 56 Nations and Nationalities in Southern Ethiopia (SNNPR) commonly known by its indigenous culture, beliefs, traditions, rituals, civilization and social identities that define them and make them distinct from other people in Ethiopia. These socio-political, economic and cultural realities of Wolaita people have been transferred from generation to generation solely through oral tradition (Haile Gabriel, 2007; Mohammed, 2014). Besides this, Wolaita is among highly populated areas in SNNPR having the population density of 385 per square kilometers (CSA, 2007). Wolaita has its zonal administrative structure having twelve Woredas and three city administrations. The major economic activities of Wolaita are mixed agriculture and trade. The Zonal city of Wolaita (Sodo) is located 330kms from Addis Ababa through Hossana and 160kms from the Regional capital (Hawassa) through Shashamane.

2.3 Participants of the Study

The population of this study is all Wolaita people, but for obtaining pertinent information for the current study, elders who have relevant knowledge of Wolaita language, culture, celebrations (festivals) and heritage were the targeted ones.

2.4 Sampling Technique

For this study the researchers used availability sampling for selecting any one of society members (except elders and FGD members) for filling the questionnaire. The elders were selected by using purposive sampling for interview and to be targeted respondents in focus group discussion (FGD) who were also selected by purposive sampling. For collecting data through questionnaire, 600 individuals were selected from six (6) Woredas of Wolaita Zone and for interview 12 elders having deep knowledge of Wolaita language; culture, festivals and heritage were selected from the same six Woredas. With the inclusion of two elders (selected for interview), ten individuals (from those selected for filling the questionnaire) were purposively selected in each Woreda (the total of 60) for collecting data through focused group discussion (FGD).

2.5 Tools of Data Collection

In order to achieve the intended research objectives by gathering valid, relevant and reliable data from the pertinent sample of the target population, the researchers used three tools of data collection: questionnaire, interview and focused group discussion (FGD).

2.6 Data Analysis

For this study, the researchers used mixed (both quantitative and qualitative) method of data analysis. The data collected through the close-ended parts of the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative method of data analysis using frequency and percentage those by the interview, open-ended parts of the questionnaire and focused group discussion were analyzed using narration; in a qualitative approach. Then, the result is presented in a systematic approach by describing, analyzing and interpreting the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Table 1. Questionnaire responses of the respondents on the factors threatening the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration

No	Items	Yes f %	No f %	LAYG f %	MIRS f %	LFPE f %
1	Dou you believe that Gifaataa celebration has been celebrated with its original color and warmth in most recent times?	24 4	576 96			
2	Do you believe that 'Meskel' and Gifaataa celebrations have any effect on each other?	482 80.3	118 19.7			
3	Does the imported foreign culture have any effect on Gifaataa celebration of Wolaita?	500 83.3	100 16.7			
4	What do you think are factors that threaten the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Giffattaa celebration?			496 82.6	564 94	6 1

*In the above table (Table 1) f=frequency %=percentage LAP=lack of awareness by younger generations MDRS=misconceived influence by some religious sects LFPE=lack of facilitative political environment

As can be seen from the above table (Table 1, item 1), 96% of the questionnaire respondents replied

that Gifaataa is not celebrated with its original color and warmth in most recent times. In the open-ended parts of the questionnaire, many of them share the idea that the blurred appearance of Gifaataa celebration in most recent times is due to different factors: the misconceived mixing-up of Gifaataa and Meskel celebrations (80.3% of the questionnaire respondents provided similar report), the wrong ideological influence of Gifaataa by protestant religious sects, lack of facilitative political environment and the imported wrong name of Gifaataa that debilitated Wolaita youths' awareness about Gifaataa celebration.

One of the interviewed elders recognizes four of the aforementioned factors as impediments to the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration, but he gives lion's share to the misconceived-wrong-mixing-up of Gifaataa and Meskel celebrations. The same elder added saying, "These two celebrations have no ideological and/or structural relations at all. Gifaataa is celebrated for receiving of New Year and sending off the old one whereas Meskel is celebrated for the finding of True Cross of Jesus Christ. However, the wrong political ideology of Menelik, Haileselassie and Dergue wrongly mixed them up and cultivated Meskel celebration with the expense of Gifaataa. That is why Gifaataa lost its originality and color in most recent times".

Another interviewed elder worries a lot by the threatened appearance of Gifaataa celebration in most recent times. The elder underlines the misconceived-wrong-influence of protestant religious sects on Gifaataa as a major challenge. Similar argument is presented by the questionnaire respondents. i.e., 94% of the questionnaire respondents reported that the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration has been threatened by misconceived-wrong-influence of Gifaataa by protestant religious sects. After their discussion, the FGD members also agreed that protestant religious sects are running blind ideology that Gifaataa has been celebrated for traditional belief of presenting animals' blood to evil spirits. "This is totally wrong and out of the actual reality," reported one of the interviewed elders.

According to the focused group discussion (FGD) result, the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration has also been threatened by lack of facilitative political environment. The political environment of Ethiopia in general had ignored indigenous celebrations including Gifaataa for more than one-hundred-years (starting from the regime of emperor Menelik (in 1887) to downfall of Dergue (in 1991)). "The then three successive regimes of Ethiopia highly marginalized the indigenous celebrations of all nations and nationalities of Ethiopia" said the same elder. The elder stated the reason saying "... the aforementioned three successive regimes used such the mechanism as a strategy of immersion for their backward political agenda of promoting Abyssinian culture to all Ethiopians."

Another interviewed elder indicated that such the worse situation threatening the indigenous celebrations of nations and nationalities was uprooted by the EPRDF government in 1991. As to the elder, the time 1991 was a paradigm shift for indigenous celebrations of Ethiopia including Gifaataa. "Since 1991, there has been the revival of Gifaataa celebration in Wolaita" said the elder. After the deep discussion, the FGD members agreed and reported that it is very recent time that Wolaitas started celebration of their Gifaataa celebration in separation from Meskel celebration. Supporting this idea, one of the interviewed elders replied that Gifaataa celebration needs a lot of cultivation for making it replanted and deep-rooted in its original social environment of Wolaita society.

As reported by one of the interviewed elders, another factor that has been threatening the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration is the imported wrong name of Gifaataa that debilitated Wolaita youths' awareness about the celebration. The elder explained saying, "Youths of Wolaita do not have clear information about the historical facts of Gifaataa celebration. They know Gifaataa by the name Meskel due to the highly promoted picture of Meskel for more than one-hundred-years by the Abyssinian administrators." Another interviewed elder supports this idea and reported that the main source of youths' attitudinal problem streams from lack of awareness. "Some ten-to-twenty years back, if you ask Wolaita youth to provide you the exact meaning Gifaataa, he/she could not give you the right answer as he/she knows Gifaataa by the name Meskel".

From the above discussion, we can deduce the conclusion that the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration has been threatened by four major factors: the misconceived-mixing-up of Gifaataa and Meskel celebrations, the wrong ideological influence of Gifaataa by protestant religious sects, the imported wrong name of Gifaataa that debilitated youths' awareness of Gifaataa celebration.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

Based on the analysis and discussions presented above, the following conclusions have been reached:

- There is a clear gap of awareness about Gifaataa celebration by the younger generations of Wolaita. When compared to the younger generation, the older people of Wolaita have better information about Gifaataa celebration.
- It is concluded that the wrong-mixing-up of Gifaataa and Meskel celebrations highly threatened the

maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa.

- The findings indicated that there is misconceived and wrong influence of Gifaataa by protestant religious sects that challenges its maintenance and inter-generational transfer.
- It is realized that there had been lack of facilitative political environment for the maintenance and inter-generational transfer of Gifaataa celebration at the time of Menelik, HaileSELLASSIE and Dergue.
- It is identified that Wolaitas started celebration of Gifaataa with the display and marketing of various long-aged cultural heritages as identity markers in most recent times as a way of revitalization.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the discussions and conclusions made above, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- Awareness enhancement training should be given for the younger generations of Wolaita and followers of protestant sects of religion on overall aspects of Gifaataa celebration.
- There should be deep studies that promote the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of Gifaataa celebration.
- Wolaita Zonal Administration should take appropriate measures on those individuals or groups who blindly challenge the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of Gifaataa celebration.
- Wolaitas should continue promoting preservation of Gifaataa celebration through event marketing.

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