

The Social Implications of Some Wolaita Proverbs on Children

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Abstract

This article is intended to depict the social implications of some of Wolaita proverbs on children. To conduct this study, the researcher used qualitative research design. Using two tools of data collection: interview and direct observation 33 theme related proverbs and sayings were collected. For the interview, 10 elders from various social groups in Wolaita were systematically selected. The result showed that, Wolaita's oral tradition includes proverbs and saying that threaten small children. These proverbs and sayings represent children as source of problems, unsuccessful, incapable, thoughtless, unimportant, and uneducable and so on. This affects the children's development in various ways. There are also proverbs and sayings that encourage the children's holistic development. The study recommends that Wolaita Proverbs and sayings that encourage or praise children's physical, moral and cognitive development should be promoted. On the contrary, others that do have negative implications against children should be demoted. Wolaitas should understand that the outdated abuses and biases held by Wolaita elders or forefathers towards small children since early times should be changed. Wolaitas should know that carelessly using sayings that threaten small children is a breach of children's right.

Keywords: children, Wolaita, proverbs and sayings, threaten small children, oral tradition, encourage

1. Introduction

Proverbs are assets of a society in which they express their thoughts. As part of oral literature, proverbs and sayings are the means to articulate the beliefs and culture of a society. Proverbs are thoughts or sayings in which a society agreed up on to address a situation, a person or a thing. According to Finnegan, R. (1970), proverbs are very brief sayings with extremely compact messages shared by a large number of people and they 'tersely' communicate social truths. They give power and brief explanation to what one wanted to speak. Proverbs have been being used hundreds of years ago in different cultures in the world. In the same way, Wolaitas use different proverbs in different situations they face in their day to day life. Wolaitas - especially the elders always open their speech using proverbs and sayings which are related to their opinions. When the elders prioritize the proverbs and sayings, the listeners can easily guess what is intended by the speaker.

Wolaita people from their forefathers down to the present expressed their pleasure or displeasure, good or bad, noble or base by the use of various proverbs and oral sayings. Among these, proverbs and sayings are the salient ones. Proverbs are used either to clarify meanings of speech or to discourage or encourage different circumstances that they face in their day to day life. As Buchanan, D. (1965: xv) states in (Sena 2008:18), "The wisdom of nations lies in their proverbs, which are brief and pithy." In line with this, looking at the proverbs and sayings used in the society, one can identify that what is accepted and what is not in a society. The brief words in the proverbs do have immense capability to explain a circumstance. Wolaitas do have different outlooks for different things or situations in the society. Femininity, childhood, old agedness, Success or failure etc is viewed from different angles in the society. These views are expressed through proverbs and sayings in a society.

Wolaitas are very rich in oral tradition. In support of this Meshesha (2016:2) states that Wolaita is commonly known by its oral tradition, indigenous wisdom, and folklore. Again, Meshesha, Abraham, and Fikre (2014), state that Wolaita has rich cultural traditions, rituals, civilization, and beliefs that are reflected through different genres of oral traditions and ecological wisdom. Never the less, no study has been conducted on Wolaita's proverbs and sayings that are used on small children. These proverbs pass different views on children. These proverbs can express encouragement, discouragement, guidance, control, criticisms etc.

In any culture in the world, there may be proverbs and sayings that positively or negatively treat small children. In Wolaita, there are different proverbs and sayings that are used on children. In this study the researcher wanted to collect and investigate the social implications of some Woliata proverbs on children. It is obvious that positive sayings/proverbs treat children's development positively. On the other hand, proverbs or sayings that negatively address children leave negative feelings up on their physical, emotional and cognitive development.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this research is to collect and study some commonly used Wolaita proverbs and sayings that carry loaded meanings and discourage the holistic development of children and to look at proverbs and sayings that encourage the children and to promote the widespread of unloaded proverbs and sayings that faster the development of good character in children. It also tries to make aware the effects of these proverbs and

sayings on children.

3. Methodology of the Study

To narrate the sample of 33 selected theme related proverbs, the researcher used the descriptive research design for this study. This design is used for its convenience to describe the situations or settings these proverbs are used in Wolaita which is found in Southern Nations and Nationalities of Ethiopia.

3.1. Subject of the Study

The subjects of this study are all different Wolaita proverbs commonly used on children in the society. Among them, for thematic relevance, sample of 33 proverbs were selected. In order to collect the proverbs, the researcher used interview and direct observation. The interviewees were 10 elders from various social groups who were thought to have deep understanding of Wolaita Language and Culture.

3.2. Data Analysis

Qualitative method of data analysis was employed for this study. The sample proverbs and sayings collected were analyzed carefully in a narrative approach by interpreting from Wolaitato (Wolaita Language) into English. Subsequently, the researcher carefully presented the results from the recorded material.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Wolaita's proverbs that encourage children's Physical, emotional and cognitive development

Na'inne xam"i aadhho. The Meaning of this proverb is "*Let children and staff advance.*" According to face-to-face interview, the interview, Wolaita people want their children to be first and best in the work they are engaged. They want their children to become productive; they never want them to grow weak. In Wolaita, it is normal to provide relatively better care for their children than themselves. As their children grow, they wish their children become successful in their later life. Thus, this proverb explains cherished wishes of Wolaita parents for their children.

Keettay naatuura; shooqay carshshaara. This means that "*Children are vital for a village to be vivid; sown seeds are essential for farms to be farms.*" The interpretation of this proverb is to mean, if one part of life is missing, there will not be tasteful life. In Wolaita tradition, a person who owns impressive wealth but lacks a single child is regarded as poor. This implies life becomes normal when someone has children. In Wolaita, wealth without children is not a source of social prestige. Likewise, to what extent the land is fertile, if the farmer does not plough and plant, crop cannot grow. In unfarmed land thorn and prickly grow. If the community does not see children playing in and around a house, the community dislikes calm and aloof houses in the village. This is the reason for the community in their simile compare playing of children in a village to planting seeds in a farm.

Na'inne puutee naaguwa koyees. The meaning of this proverb is "*Offspring and seedlings require care.*" This proverb indicates that Wolaitas belief about their children and seedlings. It expresses that offspring and seedling require special care or nursing to grow up. Children should be furnished with nourishment to realize parents' valued hope. Otherwise neglecting children affects their development and leads them to develop various tempers. They also become unruly or unmanageable in their latter age and will be difficult to straighten later on. To avoid this difficulty, Wolaitas properly nurture children in their childhood. If seedlings do not get necessary nutrients, they will dry and die out. Likewise, children that are not properly nurtured face difficulties in mental and physical development.

Naatussi maattaa; xiqimtaa goshshaa. The meaning is "*Breast-fed children confront any challenge; seedlings sown in October grow firmly.*" Wolaitas use this saying to indicate what babies need and to illustrate the irreparability of breast by any type of meal to babies. Children grown up without suckling their mother's breast grow weak. Their bodies lack resistance against diseases. This saying marks traditional medicinal knowledge of Wolaita people, too.

Since their forefathers, Wolaitas have known the importance of breast feeding to the growth of babies, as good farmers seriously identify the season for planting seeds to obtain good harvest in the end, so do women know the value of breast feeding to the health, strength and development of their children. To substantiate it, Wolaita's women use the above mentioned proverb.

Eessaa bayzidi ay maanee, Na'a ixixidi oona dosanee. The meaning is "*If one sells honey that is delicious and sweet to eat what he/she will eat, if one dislikes children, what will he/she love?*" As mothers bear children who insure the continuity of generation, they enjoy prestige. For Wolaitas, children are invaluable. In Wolaita's tradition, children are physically the loveliest. Owing to his reason the above proverb is claimed. Wolaitas eat various types of foods, among all kinds of food; honey is the most delicious and sweetest. Likewise, in Wolaita, when one is invited to have honey, he/she never rejects the invitation. For this reason, Wolaitas compare eating honey with the love of children.

Na'i hayqo xale. This is to mean "*A child is a cure for death*". The interpretation is that a child is a replacement of an individual even if he/she dies. Wolaitas believe that if a mother/father dies without giving birth for a child, he/she has really died and has no memorial; thus, his/her death is real. If one is told that a parent is died, he will be asked-does he/she have a child? If one dies having a child, people of Wolaita think that he/she did not die. This shows that the sorrow when one dies without having a child and often having a child varies.

Aaway diishin na'ay daannatees. The meaning of this proverb is "*A child becomes a judge prior to his father.*" Wolaitas accept that children reach to the higher position where his/her father does not. This gives the children inspiration that they would be in completely different or higher position from whatever poor, rural parents they are from. It is observable that for instance the current Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Haile Mariam Dessalegn is a Prime Minister while his parents do not have any minimum government responsibility.

Aayyiya diishin na'iya gimawusu. This proverb is meant that "*A daughter gets wealth prior to her mother.*" In Wolaita, there is cattle counting ceremony when someone owns a hundred oxen and/or cows. This is the sign of richness in the society. Thus, this proverb explains the strength of a daughter that she can own these hundred cattle earlier to her mother.

Aaway diishin na'ay duretees. The meaning of this proverb is "*A child becomes rich while his father is still not.*" Like the above two examples, this proverb expresses that a child has a potential to infiltrate different challenges, work hard and become rich while his father is not.

Na'yo aayyiya yikkima zore. The meaning of this proverb is "*A mother is an ideal advisor of her daughter.*" Wolaitas believe that small children especially daughters need their mothers' vivid advice or guidance to keep themselves from different challenges they may face during their childhood and even beyond that. Wolaitas mothers share their rich experiences to their daughters so that they may be successful in their future life.

Na'a giishin naa"anttees. The meaning of this proverb is "*While she/he is a child, he does great things.*" Wolaitas use this proverb when small children act/perform beyond their status. Sometimes children's wise behavior or action, the language they use, they way they speak, their performance can astonish us. Sometimes they act as if they were adults; they wisely think or comment on something which one does not expect. At this time people use this saying to express that they are amazed by the child.

Na'i era laatto. The meaning of this saying is equivalent to "*May a child inherit wisdom/skill*". The interpretation is that from the very past, Wolaitas have known that having skill or knowledge of something is quintessential. They use this saying to wish their children grow in intellectual wisdom. Thus, when Wolaitas consider that a child does not have expected knowledge or skills of something, they use this saying.

Otoy tuchchaara giigiyogaadan, duussay naatuura giigees. The meaning is "*As a jar is unsuitable without its cover, life is unsuitable without children.*" Wolaitas use this saying to denote that life without children is not motivating. One of the interviewee said that children are hope for their parents. Even if parents are poor, when they do have children, they think that they are rich, and they enjoy their life.

Dichchin dichchiyay na'a. This is to mean that "*If you raise a child, he/she will raise you.*" This proverb expresses that if parents raise a child, that child grows and reaches at a great position and helps back his/her parents especially at their old age. Children do this not because they are forced, but because they think that their parents took care of them until their time of maturity and the greater level they reached recently.

lita ginkka na'i keha; mokkena ginkka biitti. The interpretation of this proverb is "*Whatever bad, a child is good; like whatsoever unfertile a land precious.*" According to the interview, Wolaitas believe that children are so valuable that nothing can be compared and equated to them. One of the interviewee said that "*Baawa giyogaappe gooyyiya na'i keha.*" This is to mean "*child is good even if mad.*" This proverb also denotes that how much Wolaitas love their children. Another elder who is 75 years old explained saying "It is Wolaitas love of their children and family that resulted in defeat by the former ruler Minilik; During the war between Wolaita and the then Abyssinia, Minilik's army was repeatedly, defeated seriously by Wolaita's then King Tona's military. Minilik couldn't resist Tona's military for the whole seven years. Eventually, Emperor Minilik asked the captured Wolaitas and asked what Wolaitas like most. Then, he heard that Wolaitas love their children and wives. Finally, when Minilik started to fire houses, Tona's military was weakened. Minilik controlled Wolaita. Wolaitas love is extreme especially for their children."

Na'inne woray aakko. The meaning of this proverb is the same as "*May the number of children and the quantity of woodland increase.*" Wolaitas like to have greater number of children. This is because it is a prestige, and it is thought that they will help their parents especially at old age. In the society, it is also considered as a blessing to have many children. Similarly, the society believes that forest is very important for their lives. Wolaitas use forest wood for making their traditional houses, for firewood, for furniture and etc. Thus, they want forest to be expanded due to its importance. Therefore, Wolaitas wish to have the greater number of children and woodland to increase in quantity.

Eray guutuwaana; eeyyay bo'aana. This is to mean that "*knowledge is in the head of children; foolishness is in the old aged.*" According to the interviewees, this proverb is used to express that first; to indicate that there are times children know better than elders, and second, it is a metaphoric expression that children will grow to

have a better knowledge than their seniors.

Singgidoban loomee sawii? Shitoy sawii giini, na'i sawees gawusu aayyiya. This saying means that *"Among perfumes that I smell, there is none like child's fragrance says a mother when she is asked whether perfume or lemon smells best."* The interview result showed that this saying has an implied meaning. It explains that children are more supportive than anything else, and they are incomparable with materials. Others are all things can be spent. Therefore, this proverb is used in order to depict that children are precious and beyond value.

4.2 Wolaita's proverbs that discourage children's physical moral and cognitive development

These proverbs and sayings are oral traditions of the people that discourage and negatively treat small children in the society. They convey as if a child is incapable, thoughtless, unimportant uneducable and so on. The following are some of them:

Na'i kattin kaho ayissenna. The meaning of this proverb is that *"The meal cooked by a child is not enough for supper."* The interpretation is to say what a child does is not sufficient and not satisfying. Wolaitas do not make child labor abuse against children, but when children want to do something which is of their interest and has no harm for them, Wolaitas parents allow the children to do it. However, if the task that a child is doing is not as expected, they use this proverb to indicate that something is not satisfying.

Na'i xarzzi erenna. In Wolaita people use this proverb to mean *"A child never thinks to leave a leftover meal."* In Wolaita's culture, after parents have food; they always leave a leftover in their traditional dish called masoofiya thinking that children/hungry family member may need to have that food. This proverb means that a child never leaves that little food. The interpretation is to mean a child will never worry for the future.

Na'i ma geenna; oli woxxa geenna. This means that *"A child never thinks to care for others."* As a child is in his/her youngest age, he/she doesn't know to care for others (parents) because of the immature cognitive development. Because of this, a child may think to own everything that he/she sees. Some people in this nation think that this is thoughtlessness, and they use the saying.

Naatubaappe baggay qayye; baggay ka'a. The interpretation of this proverb is that *"From whatsoever a child does, half is right and half is wrong."* This proverb is used when a child does not accomplish a task perfectly. Adults know that perfection is an unfinished novel in humans' work. It is also used among some Wolaitas to indicate that when a child makes mistakes. Is whatsoever done by adults always right? There are things that are done by adults and still remain wrong. No one is perfect.

Naati kunddin aayyiya dagammiyogaa, aayyiya hayqqin naati dagammenna. This is the same as saying *"Mother's panic when her child falls is greater than her child's when she dies."* This proverb tries to show as if child's love is lesser than Mother's love. It is true that every mother loves her child, but this doesn't mean a child has no love to her/his mother. As a small child, one may not be in a deep sorry when even his/her mother dies. This doesn't mean that a child has no love to his mother, but a child may not know what death means as he/she is at a very young age to comprehend. On contrary, when a child falls, dread very much.

Laafa na'ay laata naagees. In the literal meaning, this proverb means that *"A feeble child will wait for inheritance."* When we look at the interpretation, this proverb is rooted in Wolaita's belief that a child should be a strong. It discourages a child who doesn't work for himself but waits simply to inherit his/her parents' wealth/properties. He/she should not learn to depend on others while he/she can work independently. On the other hand, this proverb encourages children who are willing to work in different aspects and try to be successful in their future.

Na'i giigissiyogaappe, aawi mooriyogee keha. The meaning of this saying is *"Whatsoever parents disarrange is better than whatsoever children arrange."* It is obvious that children are not born with experiences. They need time to develop their knowledge and skills. They learn through repetitive practice from their parents or care givers. It is in this way that every one of us has been brought up. Even the comparison of works done by children and adults is unfair and unwise. It should be clear that every learning process is gradual. However, some Wolaitas discourage the small children's moral using this kind of sayings.

Na'i woxxeesippe attin kasetenna. This is the same as saying *"Small children often try but never succeed."* This saying is very negative to children; it seriously discourages the children. Above all, it seriously violates children's right to education. In other words, adults here often forgot how they progressively developed their skills in their whole life time. This saying can make children lose heart in their attempt or effort and develop dejection which causes failure.

Na'anne sinttanne meeggenna. This means that *"Face and children never feel chilliness."* This proverb considers small children dull in their sense. Small children do not lack keenness in their feelings. Usually our face is exposed to freeze but due to its frequent exposure, the face becomes inert. Children are never like this; if they are left to freeze in chilly, they easily become susceptible for serious health problem.

Asa na'a bolli miicca; ne na'assi qoppa. The meaning of this saying is *"Ridicule at somebody child's fault but honor your child's mistake."* This proverb shows partiality between children. It indicates favoring own child and disregarding other's children. Partiality or discrimination affects children both physically and mentally.

Kallo yelettaagawu itee ay guuxxidee. The meaning of this saying is “*For a person born nude, leather is a sufficient clothe.*” This proverb expresses that parents who fail to fulfill children’s demands try to justify their failure by giving excuses. Adults usually forget that they were also born bare as infants and their parents once helped them by provision of clothes to reach humans.

Na’i sawees; sawa. This means “*As a child, have a good smell*”. This saying is used among Wolaitas to control a child when he/she misbehaves. For instance, if a child is found doing something not allowed or act in a rude manner people use this proverb. The other situation in which some Wolaitas use this proverb is when small children sit with elderly people and try to speak and comment, so the above proverb is used to control children not to interfere the elderly people unnecessarily.

Na’inne qaaree haatta uyees. This means “*An ape and a child have to drink water.*” When Wolaitas parents raise their children, they provide fresh and charmed milk. They also give their children different kinds of diets. The choice of water as the choosiest diet indicates how much parents do not care and disrespect the small children. In this saying, the comparison of a child against an ape shows disrespect to a priceless child.

Na’i yoho ehees; kani meqetta ehees. The meaning of this famous proverb in Wolaita is to say “*A child brings disputes as a dog collects bones.*” This proverb is used to say a child as source of problems. When small children play with their equals, quarrel against each other. Or a child can hurt other’s child when playing together, and as a result parents of the child who is hurt will go to the parents of the child who cause the problem to complain. This proverb is used in this kind of situation.

Aawi bayinna na’ay, koree bayinna ifittay. This means “*A fatherless child and a bottless gate are alike.*” The interpretation of this proverb is to mean that if a family does not have father, children will grow ill-mannered. If small children lack support and advice, they grow up in indecency. When children grow immorally, Wolaita people do not see idly. They understand that abused children become ever more unmanageable, so somebody has to advice children to act wisely.

As a bottless door allows the entrance of any one, fatherless children allow whatever good or bad to his mind. They do not have father to give advice. Thus, they grow worse and worse. Later on these immorally grown children turn out to be villains engaged in any indecent jobs and also become burden to the society. To strengthen this truth, Wolaita people use the above mentioned proverbs in a smile form.

5. Conclusion

There are different proverbs and sayings that are used on children among Wolaitas. Some encourage children’s holistic development and others do have loaded meanings. The proverbs and sayings that praise or encourage the children do have positive results on students’ development. On the other hand, proverbs and sayings that carry negative implications affect their development in different aspects. Most of Wolaita’s proverbs denote that children are blessings and beyond value so that they cannot be compared with anything else on earth.

6. Recommendations

- Wolaita Proverbs and sayings that encourage or praise children’s physical, moral and cognitive development should be promoted. On the contrary, others that do have negative implications against children should be demoted.
- Wolaita Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau should provide support and direction for scholars who work further on oral traditions that encourage and or discourage small children’s psychology.
- Wolaita Language curriculum designers and book writers should be aware of sayings that threaten small children, and should include only sayings and proverbs that encourage small children in their curriculum and books.
- Wolaitas should understand that the outdated abuses and biases held by Wolaita elders or forefathers towards small children since early times should be changed.
- Wolaitas should know that carelessly using sayings that threaten small children is a breach of children’s right.

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