

# The Role of Indigenous Rituals in Promoting Gender Equality among the Oromo People: The Case of *Engicha* Ritual

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## Abstract

Indigenous knowledge (IK) 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 IK, one is Indigenous ritual; which is conducted by indigenous peoples for very different reasons at different periods and also across the culture. Traditionally the IK 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, and informal conversations. There was also a questionnaire distributed to and filled by dwellers of the district. Secondary sources were gathered from the district offices and internet. The *Engicha* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is celebrated by girls. It is an indigenous ritual that was designed culturally for girls and it is only celebrated by girls. It is celebrated at the first day of the New Year according to the traditional Oromo calendar. It is the ritual that is celebrated by girls holding the grass called *Engicha*, which was collected on the eve of the ritual from nearby rivers or marshy areas and then chained it. On this day, the girls are rounding within the locals and distributing the chained *Engicha* as the gifts of the ritual and in return, they are given butter or money by each household as gift. The ritual has different purposes like commemorating the girls day, publicizing their right, facilitating a mate selection system, creating social relationships between girls, promoting the protections of having sexual intercourses before marriage, developing tourism for the district, etc. The political and religious (particularly) domination faced the people during the past regimes contributed a lot to the weakening of *Engicha* ritual.

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The *Engicha* ritual is an indigenous ritual that is colorfully celebrated by girls and thus it is the girl's ritual. 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 girl's right in particular.

There are a number of changes that have been observed on this ritual in the study area. The basic and fundamental factors to these changes were resulted from political and religious subjugations. In addition, the weakening of the households in their economic capacities, the conversion of the ritual places in to farm land, modernity and etc. are also the factors that are playing their own role in the weakening of this ritual.

**Keywords:** *Engicha* ritual; Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Rituals.

## **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 [1]. According to World Bank (1998), 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, a World Bank (1998) state as it is the basis for local decision-making in aspects 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 [2]. According to the author in [1], the IK is very important in providing the basic problem-solving strategies for local communities. Therefore, IK is the knowledge that is very important for different peoples of the world and it is variable cross-culturally.

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. Author in [3] 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, author in [4] 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.

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) 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” [4]. *Engicha* ritual is one of such localized rituals and celebrated at specific places and also by specific people. Thus, this research was targeted to study such localized indigenous rituals with their roles in promoting gender equality among the Oromo People who celebrate it. *Engicha* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is celebrated by indigenous peoples of the study area. It is the indigenous ritual that is undertaken during the summer season, especially at the beginning of August each year. It is the ritual celebrated by girls and the ritual ceremony of girls. The Oromo people have a tradition that gives priority for women in different indigenous rituals in general and also for girls in particular such as *Atete* and *Engicha* rituals (*Atete* ritual is the indigenous ritual which is celebrated by women).

Therefore, this study was targeted on the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo People with particular reference to the *Engicha* 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, author in [1] states “Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem-solving strategies for local communities. 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 for the local communities. But, the importance of this ritual in the study area is still little investigated.

According to author in [4], “rituals are a pattern of activity repeatedly done for different purposes”. However, the purpose of this indigenous ritual, *Engicha*, is still little studied by focusing on its purposes. Actually the people that are practicing it have their own insight why they are celebrating the ritual, but anthropologically it could not be analyzed.

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 *Engicha* ritual has also indigenous symbols which may not have been clearly described.

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 *Engicha* ritual, there is little research done on the role of gender participation, and why this ritual is confined to daughters.

So, this study was targeted to reveal the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo People and it was also tried to examine the social and cultural values of the *Engicha* ritual among the Oromo of the study area

Based on the above accounts, this study was answered the following basic research questions:

1. What is the logic behind the celebrations of this indigenous ritual?
2. Why do they celebrate the indigenous ritual?
3. What is the significance that is gained from celebrating such indigenous ritual in the study area?
4. What are the symbolic meanings of celebrating *Engicha* ritual?
5. If there are changes that faced the ritual, what are the factors for the changes?
6. What is /are the logic behind that this ritual is confined to only girls?

### **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 role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Engicha* ritual in Gindeberet district.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

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

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

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This study is assumed to be important to know and to understand the indigenous rituals among the Oromo people in general and the *Engicha* ritual in the study area in particular with the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people that are practicing it. There are a number of perceptions towards the indigenous ritual ceremonies. Thus, this research tried to investigate the symbolic meanings of the indigenous rituals, which is the main means of understanding clearly about it, and is also revealing its role in promoting gender equality. Therefore, the study of the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people of Gindeberet district is believed to be important from the following perspectives:

- The study would introduce this ritual to the rest of the world by revealing this still hidden indigenous ritual and it also serving in promoting such forgotten but very important ritual events.
- It provides information to any concerned body to consider indigenous knowledge and values related to the indigenous ritual and its significance for the Oromo people in general and of the study area in particular.
- It may contribute to the understanding of the characteristics of the indigenous ritual ceremonies with its indigenous symbolic meanings.
- It may help to show the consideration that was given to gender participation among the Oromo people in general and within this indigenous ritual ceremony in particular.
- It may also help to document such old indigenous ritual that may be important in rejuvenating and introducing to the other community with its significances in promoting gender equality.
- The study would be serving as a useful input for the researchers interested to carryout in-depth studies on the similar topics.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

Topically, this study was delimited to the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Engicha* 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 *Engicha* ritual performed colorfully at different areas 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, but it still little studied, though by assuming that this area is a fertile land for the researchers those who are plan to doing a research on the indigenous rituals.

### **1.6. Limitations of the study**

The study on the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Engicha* ritual was not free from some limitations. The main constraint of the study was shortages of reference materials that were written on the same topic. The researcher did not have the sufficient reference materials on the topic due lack of previous research on the *Engicha* ritual. Additionally, the time of the research or field work and the actual ritual time were not the same; i.e. the researcher have collected the research data basically from the interview and FGD's without having direct involvement within the ritual rather than previous personal experience of the ritual which might be hindering the accessibility of the current information of the ritual.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Study Design**

The research design applied to this research was mainly qualitative research and minor qualitative research

methods. Primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to investigate the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular.

## 2.2. Description of the Study Area

Oromiya is the region that is naturally endowed with fertile and rich land resources that are especially suitable for agriculture and it is the home to an exotic fauna and flora. The region is ecologically and agriculturally the richest region in Ethiopia [5]. The Oromiya regional state is divided into 18 administrative zones. Each zone is subdivided into a number of small administrative units called *Aanaa* (districts) whereas each district is further subdivided into the smallest administrative units called *Ganda* (the smallest administrative unit being the rural peasant association) [6].

West Shewa zone is one of the 18 administrative zones in Oromiya regional state. According to West Shewa zone Finance and Economic Development office (FEDO) (2001 E.C), the zone is found between  $8^{\circ}17''$  north to  $9^{\circ}60''$  North latitude and  $37^{\circ}17''$  east to  $38^{\circ}45''$  east longitude. It is located in the central part of Oromiya Regional state, though some part of its areas do inclined to the western part from the centre. The zone is surrounding the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa, in the east direction. It is also adjacent to Amhara Region in the north, East Wollega and Horo Guduru in the west and North West, Jimma zone in south west, South West Shewa zone in south east, North Shewa zone in the north and north east and Addis Ababa city administration in the east. The zone is 170kms long from north to south and 183kms wide from east to west.

Gindeberet district is one among the 18 districts of West Shewa zone. The district is located in the northern extreme part of the zone, at a distance of 147 km from Ambo town (zonal capital), and 193km from Addis Ababa. It has an area of 2,369 km<sup>2</sup> and one town, i.e., Kachisi town (district's capital). The district is bordered by Amhara National Regional State in the north, Horo Guduru zone in the west, North Shewa in the north east, Meta Robi district in the east, Jeldu and Ambo districts in the south and Cheliya district in the south west. The district had subdivided into 72 rural Farmers' Associations called *Ganda* (the smallest administrative units).

Physiographically, the district is characterized by plateaus, hills, mountains, plains and valleys. The district lies between 1000 and 2600m above sea level attitude. Gindeberet district is enriched with different natural resources such as rivers, animals, vegetations, different types of soils that have high potential to different agricultural cultivation, etc. The most widely cultivated crops are teff, sorghum, maize, barley, wheat, horse bean, lean seed, nug and field pea.

As projected from the 2007 Population and Housing Census, there were 104,595 (52,726 male and 51,869 females) of which 93,513 rural (46,083 males and 47,430 females) and 11,082 urban (6,643 males and 4,439 females) populations in the district. Populations aged 0-14, 15-64 and 65+ years accounted for 48.6%, 48.4% and 4.1% respectively [7]. Among the population of the district, the majority is following the Protestant Christian religion, which constitutes 58,531. In percent, the protestant Christianity constitutes around 55.9% of the total population. The second dominant religion next to Protestant in the district is orthodox Christian religion which constitutes 35,687 (34.1% of the total population), while other religions such as Catholics, Islam,

traditional beliefs and other religions which constitutes 104, 320, 9,599 and 354 respectively, have relatively very few numbers of adherents in the district [7].

**Table 1:** Religious distribution of Gindeberet District [7]

Religious organization	Total number of adherents	Male	Female	Percent
Orthodox	35,687	18,030	17,657	34.1
Protestant	58,531	29,591	28,940	55.9
Catholic	104	49	55	0.09
Islam	320	209	111	0.3
Traditional	9,599	4,663	4,936	9.1
Other	354	184	170	0.33

The dominant ethnic group in the district is the Oromo. The Amhara ethnic group is also dwell in the district for a long period of time with Oromo. There may be other ethnic groups in this district, but I have not got the evidence that shows their exact number [7].

### 2.2.1. Genealogy of Gindeberet Oromo (Gosa)

Formerly, this district, Gindeberet was mainly occupied by Macha Oromo, but latterly the Tulama Oromo came to the district and started to reside there equally with that of Macha. But currently, Tulama is more dominant than Macha. In addition to Tulama and Macha Oromo, even if there number is not that much, there are the Amhara peoples who came there during the feudal period from Amhara regional state and living with the Oromo (Shambal Neqatibeb and Obbo Lata Sori).

According to Shambal Neqatibeb when Macha and Tulama divided their land, Gindeberet was given to Macha. But latterly the Tulama Oromo came here start to reside and then their number became higher and higher and currently they, the Tulama, are on the way to take the dominancy.

Why Tulama migrated to Gindeberet by leaving their home land? The home land of Tulama tribe is mainly Shawa. According to [8], Tulama is the elder son of Rayya and he has settled on the holdings of his father; whereas the younger son, *Macha*, occupied a new land. This author also notes that *Tulama* and *Macha* settled in far off areas from each other due to the conflict between their mothers (co-wives of Rayya) known as *Sire* and *Akittu* respectively. As a result, the *Macha* moved to a place comfortable for his family known as *Oda Bisil* (Alemayehu Haile et al. 2006: 115), currently a place located in *Wallaga* and also the center for *Gada* assembly of *Macha* moiety [6]. Even if Gindeberet district is found in Shawa, initially it was given to Macha Oromo.

Concerning the home land of Tulama Oromo, authors in [8] states that:

“the Oromo of Tulama have settled in a vast area of central Ethiopia. This area of their settlement is bounded

by: Lake Dambal (Ziway) in the south, Wallo Administrative Zone in the north. *Karrayyu* tribes that settled in Arsi and Fantalle in the south east, end of the present day administrative zone of eastern Shawa in the west. The settlers of eastern Shawa zone are mainly the tribes of *Jille* and *Obo* while the tribes of *Bacho*, *Soddo*, *Liban* or *Waliso*, *Amayya* and *Kuttaye* settle western shawa as far as the settlement area of *Macha* tribes. “

According to Obbo Negesa Nagawo as quoted in [6], the boundary of the Tulama Oromo area in the South-East is Ziway, in the East - *Fantale*, in the north - *Debrebirhan* (Amhara region, North Shawa Zone), in the Northwest - *Gojjam* (Amhara), in the West *Ginchi* (Western Shawa Zone) up to *Waliso*. He also notes that around *Ginchi*, the Tulama and Macha tribes are living together and there is no clear territorial boundary up to Ambo and *Waliso*. On this, Bayissa (2013, 86) also notes that as there is a number of Tulama Oromo living side by side with Macha Oromo around Ambo, West Shawa. Therefore, Gindeberet district is one of the districts that are found in West Shawa zone and that the *Tulama* and *Macha* tribes are living together for a long periods of time.

The *Tulama* Oromo was faced great problems during the imperial period because of their ruler, Gobena Dachi. He made a political relation with other rulers of the time and killed and evacuated his own peoples to consolidate his power and to show his loyalty to Emperor Menelik. At that period, most of the *Tulama* Oromo was murdered and executed. The survived peoples were obliged to leave their homeland and migrated to west direction including Gindeberet district. This was the main reason that why *Tulama* Oromo was came to Gindeberet, the homeland of *Macha*.

According to one of the informant, Obbo Bayissa Ture, the dominant tribe that is living in Gindeberet district is *Tulama* Oromo. He also said that starting from the recent past, the *Macha* Oromo tribe that is living in this district is not that much when compared to that of *Tulama* Oromo. But currently, both *Tulama* and *Macha* tribes are intermixed through marriage, thus it is difficult to put a clear division between *Tulama* and *Macha* in Gindeberet. Formerly, these Oromo tribes were live separately and even they did not intermarried with each other, but now they become the same and mixed with one another.

According to obbo Bayissa Ture and other informants, among the sub-tribes of *Tulama* that are mainly found in this district are *Garasu*, *Bacho*, *Maaruu*, *Metta*, *Kuyyu*, *Abichu*, *Gumbichu*, *Warabi* and etc. where among the sub tribes of *Macha*: *Berbabo*, *Abiyyu*, *Bidaru*, *Hereri*, *Sankoori*, *Degali*, *Galan*, *Abuuunaa*, *Awaxo*, *Gindo*, *Abiyyuu*, *Buuko*, etc. According to Obbo Lata Sori, among the *Macha* sub tribes, the dominant one in this district is *Berbabo*.

In addition to *Tulama* and *Macha* tribes, there are also other sub tribes who were not originally Oromo and latterly converted to Oromo. According to Obbo Bakala Waya, Anadadi, Hinase'i and Chome Mana Erga are the sub tribes that are found in Gindeberet district and they are the sub tribes who came from Gojjam and originally who were Amhara and but latterly converted to Oromo through Oromonization process (they were Oromonized). This Oromonization process, in Oromo tradition, is performed for the adoption of non-Oromo individuals and groups and the process in which members of other ethnic groups were admitted and became Oromo [8]. Thus, the same is true for the Amaharas' that are living in this district. They are, by no means, not



Amhara more. In Oromo tradition, after the Oromonization process is conducted, the peoples who came from other ethnic group are converted to Oromo and they became real Oromo and then they started to count their genealogy as Oromo.

### 2.2.2. Nomenclature of Gindeberet district

Before the district was getting the name Gindeberet, it was known by the name “*Kuttayee*” which was derived from the name of sub-tribes of *Macha* who was occupied the area. *Kuttayee* was the son of *Liban Macha* and the local elders witnessed that as he was the first person who settled in Gindeberet. Therefore, to refer the territorial holding of *Kuttayee*, the name of the area was known by the name *Kuttayee* until it was changed to Gindeberet. According to one of the informant Shambal Neqatibeb Begna, the name Gindeberet was coined by Nigus Teklahaymannot of Gojjam after he invaded and occupied the area and also started to rule the people by force. He tried two times but blocked by the people. But he invaded again and at third time he defeated and started to rule the people.

The district, Gindeberet, is surrounded by river in all directions. In the eastern bounded by Urgaha (currently this river serving as boundary of West Shewa and North Shewa Zone of Oromiya Regional state) and Mogor rivers, in the West bounded by Guder river (currently this river demarcate the district from Hurroo Guduru Wellega zone), in the north direction it is bounded by Abbay river (currently this river is serving as a boundary of Oromiya and Amhara Regional states in general and it demarcates Gindeberet from Eastern Gojjam zone in particular) and in the south direction it is bounded by *Tarantar* and *Qale* rivers.

Nigus Taklahaymanot (Adal Tesema) of Gojjam looked at its boundaries in all direction and the said the name of this district should be “*Endabarat*” (Amharic term meaning like kraal and then after the name of the district was changed from *Kuttaayee* to Gindeberet). From the term ‘*Endeberet*’ the local peoples termed it or pronounced it as Gindeberet. However, concerning the name Gindeberet, there are two assumptions concerning the meaning of the term ‘*Endeberet*’. the first assumption is that the term is derived from two Amharic terms ‘*enda*’ (ጎጎጎ) and *beret* (ጎጎጎ) meaning like kraal or it seems kraal and the other say that the term is derived from two Amharic terms ‘*enda*’ (ጎጎጎ) and *birat* (ጎጎጎ) meaning like iron. Among these assumptions, most elders of the area agreed with the first meaning like kraal based on geographical location of the district (it is surrounded by river in all directions and it seems kraal and also it has only one gate). It is has only one entrance and exit way. It is encircled by river in all directions why it is called Gindeberet.

### 2.3. 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 districts 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, *Haroo Berbaboo*, is mainly inhabited by *Macha* 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. Additionally, 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.

#### **2.4. 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. First I have consulted Gindeberet District Culture and Tourism office to get access to those prominent individuals. Then, I have also asked different peoples to get those individuals who are considered most knowledgeable of the traditional Oromo culture, especially on the indigenous ritual ceremonies such as *Engicha*, and then after, I have contacted them.

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 this indigenous ritual. To investigate more the role of women in the ritual, the women who knew, practiced and participated in the *Engicha* ritual were incorporated in the informants.

#### **2.5. Data Gathering Instruments**

The study has employed mainly qualitative research with the minor usage of quantitative research methods. 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. Field observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations were designed to find out the perception of informants (insiders' view or "emic" perspectives) about the Oromo indigenous ritual practices in general and *Engicha* ritual practices of the study area in particular as well as why, how and when they practice it.

To make the communication with the informants easier, and for the sake of the natives' worldview, the research would be conducted in Afan Oromo and then it was translated into English by the researcher.

##### **2.5.1. Observation**

Observation was used from the very beginning of the data gathering to the end of the fieldwork. During the first week of the field work, the researcher was observed some of the study sites that were very important to the study. 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 such as *Engicha* ritual.

During this period, the researcher was also observed some materials that are used to celebrate the *Engicha* ritual and took photographs of the materials. During field observation, field notes and pictures of different sites and of

some of the key informants were taken by the researcher.

### **2.5.2. Informal Conversation**

This tool might be used randomly to obtain relevant information while the purpose of discussion might not be directly related to the data gathering activities. It was undertaken while the informants were engaged in some other activities 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.

Some questions based on the activities of the informants would be developed with the hope that people would respond more freely when approached informally than during the formal interviews. To approach them, the knowledge of the local language, Afan Oromo, and the first field observations helped in the easily establishment of a smooth relationship with the people.

### **2.5.3. 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 *Engicha* in particular and also to learn more on the issue under study from their different ideas, that helped the researcher to understand their arguments. 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 *Engicha* ceremony. 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 such as Orthodox Christian and protestant, and different age groups of the society. The data that were obtained from different groups were compared and cross-checked with the data that were obtained through other instruments. 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 based on the information that the members of the discussion group raised.

### **2.5.4. In-depth Interview**

An in-depth interview was used in the gathering of detailed data from the selected key informants. The majority of the informants were selected from the local community and also some from the focus group discussants, 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) and women (two). One in-depth interview was conducted with more knowledgeable 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; that was 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.

#### **2.5.5. Survey Method**

The survey method was used in the gathering of information especially with relation to the attitudes of the people towards the purposes of the *Engicha* ritual and also to check their awareness towards the ritual. 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 within this town 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 Afan Oromo.

#### **2.5.6. Secondary Sources**

Secondary sources were gathered from different books, articles in journals and published and unpublished theses. The information from secondary sources was used to find out related works about indigenous rituals, defining concepts and to show the missing data related to the study topic. 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.

#### **2.6. Documentation**

The data that were collected using the above mentioned instruments were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated to English by the researcher. The data that were obtained through observations and informal discussions were documented in field notes. 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.

#### **2.7. 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. The qualitative data that were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions and observations were analyzed by coding, summarizing, and transcribing the data and finally the research findings was communicated through descriptive prose.

### **3. Engicha Ritual: the Indigenous Ritual of Girls**

#### **3.1. The nature and meanings of Engicha ritual**

Different group of people have their own indigenous rituals concerning different social and religious issues which are celebrated by the local community at different time and different places for different purposes. The *Engicha* ritual is one of such indigenous rituals celebrated colorfully in Gindeberet district.

*Engicha* ritual is one among the several indigenous rituals that are colorfully celebrated by the girls. It is the ritual that mainly celebrated by girls and thus it is the girls ritual. It is the holyday of girls; why the family prepares local beer and different types of food on this ritual day. The girls have tried a lot to beautify themselves on this day and also it is the ritual that is only celebrated by girls. The girls prepare their hair very well and buy new clothes for this ritual.

There are two types of *Engicha* ritual in Gindeberet district: *Engicha* Oromo and *Engicha* Amhara. The *Engicha* Oromo is the indigenous ritual that lies on July 26/27 in E.C. where *Engicha* Amhara is the ritual that is celebrated on the New Year (*Enkutatash*) of Ethiopian calendar. There are some similarities between the two *Engicha* rituals in the study area: one both rituals are celebrated due to the transformation of a year from old to New Year, another both rituals are mainly celebrated by girls by collecting the *Engicha* grass and distributing it to their locals. Despite these similarities, the rituals are in origin, in interpretation or why they celebrate the ritual, how, when and where is automatically different. Thus, the main concern of this research is the *Engicha* ritual which is originally considered as *Engicha* Oromo and it would be discussed in detail below.

The *Engicha* ritual lies on July 26 in Ethiopian calendar. On the eve of the ritual (i.e. July 25) there is a system called *Engicha Buqqifanna system* (it is the system that girls could collect the grass called *Engicha* from the river and other marshy areas). On the eve, the girls are chaining it with the help of their brothers. *Buqqifanna* system is the ritual that the girls going to the place where they can get *Engicha* in group in the morning and return to their home with *Engicha*. During their return from '*Buqqifanna* system, they came to their home with great pleasure and songs.

On the ritual day, on the early morning, the girls call each other and round within their neighbors to distribute that chained *Engicha* as a gift of the ritual. Instead of the *Engicha*, the families provide butter and different types of food to the girls. The girls continue to rotate in their vicinity and providing or sharing their *Engicha* and collecting the butter (recently they start to collect a coin instead of butter) until the midday. Then after, the girls of the vicinity and or the girls of the *ganda* (rural peasant association) come together and sing songs, play traditional playing and perform other activities with relation to the celebration.

The name of the ritual, *Engicha*, is derived from the name of the grass named as *Engicha* that the girls are used to celebrate the ritual. On the eve of the ritual, the girls collect this *Engicha*, sometimes known by the name *Allaanduu* (a type of grass mostly grown in and around river and in marshy areas) from the nearby rivers or other marshy areas and it is the basic material for this ritual celebration. There is also another name for the term *Engicha* grass which is called "*Qunni*".

On the *Engicha* ritual, the girls sing by saying "*iyoo iyoo ya daraaroo koo waggaa malee hin deebituu yaa abaaboo koo*" it is the girls song that show as the season/month is new year and period of flower and also it

merely comes again after a year. And they continue their singing by saying “*Talbaa malee marqaan waggaa malee hin argan yaa haadhoo koo*” which shows that as they only see each other once in a year and they also praise each other. It is the ritual that girls reflect about traditional culture, and also praising each other to show the love that they have to each other.

On the *Engicha* ritual, starting from the early morning, the girls round on each home in their vicinity, distribute the chained *Engicha* and collect butter to their ‘*Qabe*’ (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 [6]. This rounding system goes until the midday. At the midday, they completed their *Engicha* distribution and returned back home to take their lunch. After that they are directed towards the place where they congregated and celebrate the ritual in group and in a more crowdedness manner with their friends and also with the girls of their locals. At there, girls sing songs, play traditional playing and do what they wish with their friends freely. It is the day of their freedom. Before the children right was developed by UDHR in 1948, the Oromo have the children right, the women/girls right in their culture.

On the *Engicha* ritual, the girls continuous their songs by saying “*iyoo iyoo ya daraaroo koo fardeen garbuu dheeddee gadi dachaasaa tiksaa qarreen darbuu gessee faffacaasaa sirbaa*” literally meaning *qarree* is on the way to be pass, so sing deeply at your time. *Qarree* is the shaved part of the girl’s hair that is made at the middle of their back head. When they get married that *qarree* should be filled by hair and no more shaved hair for *qarree* at the middle of their back head. The *qarree* is the sign of virginity for girls and they are allowed to celebrate *Engicha* until they got married and until their *qarree* is lost. Traditionally, the girls are expected to get married at the period when they are come up with the ministration period. Therefore, the period when they got ministration is the period of ending *Engicha* ritual and got married. According to Obbo Lata Sori, currently the girls are attending the *Engicha* ritual until they got married despite their ministration period. But according to Obbo Bayissa Ture, the age of girls to participate on *Engicha* ritual is mostly until 15 years old. This may be related with the age of girls to be married.

*Engicha* ritual is the ritual that is celebrated by girls on the beginning of New Year in traditional Oromo calendar. Among the Oromo tradition, the women in general and girls in particular have special place in leading different indigenous rituals. Oromo believe that the women are lucky and even the God can respond immediately to their praying. Therefore, on the beginning of New Year in traditional Oromo calendar, they gave the responsibility to celebrate the New Year to girls and decided it as a day of girls in Oromo tradition.

In Oromo traditional calendar, the *Engicha* ritual lies in the first month of the year, which is August. The *Engicha* ritual is the ritual that is celebrated for the transformation of a year. The old year gone and the New Year welcomed on this ritual. According to the Oromo traditional calendar, the last month of the year is July whereas August is the first month of the year. Therefore, this *Engicha* ritual is celebrated at the end of old year (at the end of July) and at the beginning of New Year, on the first dates of New Year. But, currently, because of different reasons, this traditional calendar becomes worthless and as a result it is difficult to get the exact date for this ritual and also for other rituals. For example, even concerning the exact date of the ritual; there is no agreement among the informants. Some of them said that the ritual lies on July 27 in E.C, where in some areas it

lays on July 26. The variation of the date is a matter of two or three days. Even if there is no tangible evidence for the factors of this variation, different peoples give their speculations. The researcher also believe that the reason why this variation is occurred on the single ritual is that one because of the retardation of indigenous calendar of the Oromo and the peoples forgot it as they are stopping to use their indigenous calendar, and the second there might be the domination from other political forces or there might be external political influences by different autocratic government of the past.

For this ritual, the family who have a capability to do can prepare a local beer called “*farsoo*” or other traditional drinks called “*buqurii*” (it is a type of local beer but free from alcoholic content and most of the time preferred by children). Then the prepared local beer or *Buquri* can be afforded to the girls during their round for *Engicha* distribution called “*Engicha hidhu*” literally meaning fastening *Engicha* (Bokona Debelo, informant). Traditionally, it is forbidden to close the door on the *Engicha* rituals because of the girls are rounding within the neighbors. If one person closes his/her door on this day, it is believed that not good for the person, and therefore everybody is ready to receipt the girls at their home, especially on the morning.

The girls have to prepare the *Engicha* by considering the number of the household they have visiting. Rounding without having *Engicha* is shameful and they have to hold *Engicha* at their hand during their round for *Engicha hidhuu*. Traditionally, the number of the chained *Engicha* to be given to each family should be pair; providing a single *Engicha* is culturally not advisable. The *Engicha* that was distributed by girls to each family is stored safely until Meskel ritual. It is forbidden to through it out, but carefully stored and burned on Meskel ritual at the Meskel’s campfire.

Oromo believes that as the girls are lucky and if they pray to God, He can do what they need immediately. Therefore, on the *Engicha* ritual, some family asked the girls when they are round for *Engicha hidhuu* (for the distribution of *Engicha*) to pray to God and the families also vow, to pay to the next year if they will get what they want. Therefore, the girls have got special treatment and freedom for this ritual. The offered with special foods and drinks.

According to Obbo Abera Leta, on this rituals day, traditionally the Oromo also celebrates the ‘*Ateetee ritual*’ on the eve of *Engicha* ritual. *Ateetee ritual* is one among the indigenous ritual celebrated in the district and which is mainly celebrated by women and it is considered as women’s ritual. Both rituals, *Ateetee* and *Engicha*, are figured and also leaded by female. Therefore, it is possible to say among the Oromo people gender equality is not the question of justice and democratic equality rather it is a cultural issue that are designed to assure the existence of gender equality within the society.

The last session to attend the ritual for girls is traditionally specified as it is at the first year they got married. At the eve of the *Engicha* ritual, the “*Baranee*” meaning newly married bride, come to her family for this ritual for the last time to attend the ritual. Girls of the married friends, relatives and neighbors meeting at the family’s home of the bride in the morning and they praise her by traditional songs. This ritual is the last for her and no more *Engicha* ritual her (married). For her this occasion is the day of well go from the ritual.

Generally, the *Engicha* ritual is a ritual which has three basic stages with different systems; the first stage is *Sirna Engicha Buqiffannaa* (*Engicha Buqiffanna* system), the second stage is *Sirna Engicha Hidhuu* (*Engicha* distribution or fastening system) and the third and the last stage is *Engicha* festival (the rituals that held at the place where *Engicha* ritual is celebrated).

The first stage of the *Engicha* ritual which is called *Engicha Buqiffanna* system is a system which is held on the eve of the ritual and the system which undertakes when girls are going to the closest river or other places where they got the grass called *Engicha* and to collect or to unplant it. After the collection of the grass called *Engicha*, they return back with different songs of the ritual and then at home they make themselves very busy about thinking the ritual and also chaining the collected *Engicha*.

The second stage of the *Engicha* ritual which is called *Sirna Engicha Hidhuu* (*Engicha* distribution or fastening system) is a system which is held on the morning of the ritual when the girls are rounding within their vicinity to distribute the *Engicha* to their relatives and to their neighbors. During *Engicha* distribution system the girls are also collecting butter or a coin/money instead of their *Engicha* until the midday, i.e. probably up to six o'clock in local time.

The last stage is held at the place where the *Engicha* ritual is undertaken and it is the actual *Engicha* festival. Starting from the midday, the girls come together at the place where is comfortable to play as they want. There they sing songs; they dance traditional dancing and play traditional girls playing with their friends publically to show their freedom they have been given by their culture. The girls stay there until the sunset. At the end of the day, when they are going to their home, they are crying to each other for their separation and they never officially join like this day until the day comes again in the next year. This ritual is the ritual that girls have shown their love to each other.

When they came out of their home for the actual *Engicha* festival, as much as possible, the girls will try to look pretty and very attractive, because indirectly it is the day of mate selection. It might be the ritual that they have got their mate and their future husband. On this day, the girls are worried a lot to be attractive and also to be selected for mate.

### **3.1.1. The place where *Engicha* ritual is celebrated (*Bakke Engicha*)**

On the *Engicha* ritual, the girls come together at the place where it is free, not ploughed, haven't water and where comfortable to play as they want. Traditionally, such places were preserved for this purpose within each local, but currently it is difficult to get such preserved places for *Engicha* ritual. The place where *Engicha* ritual is celebrated is the place where the local girls show and consolidate their unity and also it is the place where they show their freedom to the public. The ritual is undertaken at the place where is comfortable for the gathering of mass girls within in their locals. It is celebrated in each local at free space.

When the girls have going to the *Engicha* festival places, they come up with the chained and left *Engicha* on their hands. At the end of the *Engicha* festival, the girls run to the river or the closest hill direction and through the left *Engicha* and it is the conclusion of the ritual. This is done with the believe that they have thrown the bad



fortunes and also by assuming that they are thrown away bad fortunes from their locals and the river take it away from them and they return to their home with good will and happiness.

At the place where *Engicha* ritual is celebrated, the youngsters are watching the ritual or girls festival by standing some distant away from the girls. Here, the youngsters might have two purposes: one is simply to look at the singing and dancing of girls for the purpose of entertainment and the other is to recruit his future life partner (i.e. it is also a system of mate selection). By looking at girls, the youngsters choose their preference from girls that are participating on the ritual and then informed to his family as who he want to marry.

Traditionally it is forbidden to harm or do other things on the girls in general and when they are going to and return from *Engicha* ritual in particular. But latterly, on this day, some individuals were committing a rape or abduction on girls when they come out of their home for the celebration of *Engicha* ritual. This is culturally forbidden and it is committed by careless and selfish individuals. But, currently there is no such odd incidence on girls at any time when they are going everywhere.

### **3.1.2. Why girls go outside the home for the ritual?**

The main reason that why girls go outside the home for the celebration is that the ritual, *Engicha*, is celebrated by a large amount of girls, there is over crowdedness of girls on that day. It is difficult for them if it is at a narrow place to play freely with their friends. Thus on this day, the girls are going to a wide and comfortable free place to celebrate the ritual and jump here and there during their traditional girls playing.

Another main reason that why girls go outside the home for *Engicha* ritual, in the Oromo tradition most of the time, the girls' in particular and women in general, confined to domestic works. They haven't that much chance to come out of the door. For this reason, on the *Engicha* ritual day, the girls came out of the home and they celebrate the ritual publically at the place where different peoples can watch them. Therefore, this ritual deconstructs the assumption that says the girls are only treated at home and also the ritual is designed purposely for girls to show the respect they have and the consideration that is given to them by the Oromo culture. Additionally, to show the role of this indigenous ritual have in promoting the gender equality that is exist among the Oromo people.

The *Engicha* ritual is also the ritual of mate selection. It is the day that girls freely came together at the place where it is comfortable for them. This creates the best opportunity for youngster to look at and nominate his future life partner. Therefore, the *Engicha* ritual is also not a simple ritual for the girls and also for the youngsters who are on the stage to select his future wife; it is the ritual that the future life partners nominate each other. This is the main reason that why the girls are worried a lot to look pretty and buy different new clothes for this ritual with the assumption that the most beautiful girl have attract a lot of guys and they develop their chance of to be nominated for marriage.

### **3.1.3. Baranee (bride hood)**

The term *Baranee* (which is derived from Afan Oromo), refers the woman who was got married recently and

have one chance to participate on *Engicha* ritual for the last time. It is the term that refers the newly married woman. It is a bride that was got married with in that year or the bride who was not more than one year after she got married.

On the eve of the *Engicha* ritual, the *Baranee* return back to her family to celebrate the *Engicha* ritual with her friends for the last time. On the *Engicha* ritual celebration day, the local girls are come together at *Baranee* (bride hood) family and they praise her and take her to the place where they celebrate officially the ritual. She, the *Baranee*, is participating in the ritual that are undertaking at the place where the *Engicha* ritual is celebrated only. She does not want for *Engicha Buqiffanna* and also she does not round to distribute *Engicha*. This is the last chance for the *Baranee* to participate in this ritual. This is to show as she is no more girls rather she developed to women. In the future, the *Barane* have no right to participate in the ritual, rather other women's ritual like Ateetee.

#### **3.1.4. Why *Engicha* ritual only celebrated in the summer/rainy season?**

In the case of *Engicha* ritual, the grass called *Engicha* is abundantly grown only in the summer season when heavy rain exists. Thus, to get the *Engicha* as they want, the summer season is the only option. The grass called *Engicha/Qunnii* is preferred because of most of the time it is grown in the river or where sufficient water source is available. It is also longer, and more comfortable to chain than the other grasses. Something that is related to water (like *Engicha*) among the Oromo culture is acceptable. They love wetness more than nothing.

During the summer season, the land is covered by green grass which is very attractive among the Oromo people, there is excess water for their cattle and also for their cultivation, and their 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 the main reason why such ritual, *Engicha*, is celebrated in the summer season.

There is great hope among the community that they are waiting for bright season after the summer season. In Oromo calendar, the ritual, *Engicha*, is celebrated at the end of the year and also it is the indication for the coming of bright season. During the summer season, different types of cereals are seeded and it is on the way to be grown 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 (girls)is held at his time.

#### **3.2. Symbolic Interpretation of the *Engicha* Ritual**

It is obvious that as there are a number of symbolic interpretations behind the celebration of different indigenous rituals including the *Engicha* ritual. Some of the symbolic interpretations of the ritual are the following:

The grass called *Engicha* is wet and green. This is to show as the girls are on growing. *Engicha* is a type of grass always grown around water sources and it never grown on the dry land. It is a very straight and grows fast than other grasses. Thus, the Oromo people purposely selected this grass for the ritual called *Engicha*, because of its wetness, being straight and fast in growing that to show their willing in their girls growing safely and fast than

other. For this ritual the only permitted *Engicha* is the chained one from wet *Engicha* grass. It is forbidden to hold the dry one for this ritual.

The butter that is collected by girls on the *Engicha* ritual is only for the purpose of anointing it on their head only. It is forbidden to eat it and to sell it. Culturally the girls are entitled to the butter they have been collected on the *Engicha* ritual day and they have full right to use individually as they want. But, their right is limited to anoint it only.

During the *Engicha* distribution or fastening system, the girls only give double *Engicha*; culturally giving a single *Engicha* on this ritual is unethical and culturally it has its own interpretation. The Oromo people didn't like one or odd number and sometimes they are also not comfortable with single thing; one is odd number and it is single, though they prefer to give two/double *Engicha* during their round and distribution of *Engicha*.

The *Engicha* that was distributed by girls to each family is fastened to the pillar of the home until the Meskel ritual. This is to show they are the pillars of the family in different aspects throughout their life. Thus, this ritual was designed to them to show their position in the community and also to reflect as they are the pillars of the family. On the Meskel ritual, the *Engicha* was taken out of the home and burnt within the Meskel's campfire.

### **3.3. Purposes of *Engicha* ritual**

When one group of people or ethnic group celebrates specific indigenous ritual, they have their own logic and justification towards their ritual. Similarly, the *Engicha* ritual among the Oromo of the study area has its own justification concerning its purposes. Even if there are different reasons that exist behind the ritual, some of them are listed below.

The first main purpose of the *Engicha* ritual is to commemorate the girls' day in the Oromo culture and also to show as the Oromo culture has given a due consideration to the whole of its members including girls. In addition, it is also the ritual that shows as the girl's right is respected.

Another purpose of the *Engicha* ritual is to show clearly that the difference that exists between girls and women or married and unmarried girls in status. It is the ritual that officially or publically announces as they are not married and also as they are virgin. Traditionally, being virgin is the basic criteria to participate on the *Engicha* ritual. Therefore, this ritual clearly shows the status difference that exists between women and girls.

The *Engicha* ritual is also having the purpose of arranging the suitable situation for the girls and youngsters to select their mate officially and sometimes the ritual is known as the ritual of mate selection.

This ritual is also playing the key role in promoting the gender equality that existed in the society. As the community is structured based on gender based social stratifications, such gender based rituals are also very important to clarify the existence of gender equality in the community.

### **3.4. The Significances of *Engicha* Ritual**

There are different benefits obtained from celebrating the *Engicha* ritual for the local people in particular and for the whole Oromo community in general.

The first significance of the *Engicha* ritual is to visit each other. It is the ritual that facilitates the situation for girls to see each other. It consolidates the relationship between the girls that dwell far away from each other. It also the ritual that help to entertain the girls.

The *Engicha* ritual is also useful to commemorate the girls day in the Oromo culture and also to show as the Oromo culture have given a due consideration to the whole of its members including girls. In addition, it is also the ritual that shows as the girl's right is respected and also as it have its own role in promoting gender equality.

Another main significance that might be obtained from the *Engicha* ritual is that it might be a source of 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. Therefore, the ritual might be a source of income in the future if it is promoted well by being source of tourist attraction.

The *Engicha* ritual serves as cultural promotion day. Each activity undertaken on the ritual shows the Oromo culture, especially with related to girls. 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 indigenous rituals in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular, especially it helps to preserve the traditional material objects like '*Qabe*' and others which is used for the celebration of the *Engicha* ritual.

The *Engicha* ritual is the ritual that help to teach the girls about their culture and it plays a great role to transfer the existing culture in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular to the next generations.

The *Engicha* ritual is the ritual that girls are creating a cooperative life and sharing experiences that they have. On this day when they meet each other, they are not merely playing with other but also they share different life skills. It also creates a social cohesion among girls that are playing with each other and they share their happiness on this ritual day. It lied down the base for their future social life and relationship.

This ritual is very useful in mate selection. It is the day that girls freely came together at the place where it is comfortable to them. Traditionally, the girls were not allowed to go far away from their home due some activities that they might be encountering like rape and abduction. However, on *Engicha* ritual, they have full freedom to go away with their friends to celebrate the ritual and the ritual itself celebrated publically at the place where large numbers of people come together to look at them. Thus, the youngsters have got great opportunity to look at girls and decide their future life partner.

The close relatives living faraway from each other is looking each other on such ritual. It has great power in creating a harmonious relationship between the neighbors and the families asking each other on this day.

Traditionally, the girls who have virginity have an absolute right to participate on the *Engicha* ritual. If they lost

their virginity, they are not permitted to attend/participate on the ritual. Therefore, by considering this, culturally the girls have refrain themselves from having sexual intercourse before marriage. Indirectly or directly this helps them to protect themselves from illegal pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. But, currently, this culture is not considered and therefore any girls who have not married are participating on the ritual.

The *Engicha* ritual is also help as a physical fitness for the girls on that day. When they play, they are playing a traditional girls' playing called '*Hursuphee*' (it is the traditional playing played by two girls by holding their hands and rotating fast in a circular dimension), to check who is stronger than other. After a long rotation they detach their hands and then the weaker person fall down where the stronger one doesn't. Though to be strong enough, they have been practice it throughout the year and it is checked once a year on this ritual. Therefore, this ritual is also help as physical fitness for girls.

The *Engicha* ritual by itself becomes a source of income for girls. During their round to fasten the *Engicha*, in addition to a butter they have been given, currently they have started to get money. This is resulted from the person who has not butter to afford to the girls. On the *Engicha* ritual, each family expected to give them butter, but if they have no butter because of they have no cow, then they are expected to pay them a coin as a gift of the ritual. Therefore, starting from the recent past, the *Engicha* ritual creates the opportunity for girls by being a source of income even if the amount of money they earn is low.

The *Engicha* ritual also serves as the commemoration of the new coming year and to officialize the welcoming of New Year by girls festival.

This ritual helps to introduce children of different locals to each other, especially on *Engicha* ritual, the girl of different locals came together and they celebrate the ritual with each other. Thus, this ritual is serving as a medium of introducing or knowing each other for girls.

### ***3.5. Responsibilities of the family in Engicha ritual***

The families have their own responsibility on the *Engicha* ritual. The first and main responsibility of the family is that providing the necessary equipment and objects like buying new clothes for the children. Based on the economic capacity of the family, each family has tried their best to buy a cloth for their daughters. If they couldn't able to buy new clothes, they use the clothes that the children have before. The mothers have a great role in making her girls pretty and beautifying their hair. Providing butter instead of the *Engicha* they received from girls as reciprocity is also another responsibility of the family.

### ***3.6. The required materials for Engicha ritual***

During the celebration of *Engicha* ritual, the girls are expected to hold the following traditional materials;

- ***Faagaa***: traditional musical instrument made up of bamboo tree and that the girls used to make their music more attractive. This instrument is the traditional girl's musical instrument and it is an object or instrument of a wind like flute.

- **Dibbee:** is also another traditional musical instrument of girls that made up of a curved tree covered by cattle skin and used on different occasion including *Engicha* ritual to help them as musical instrument.
- **Qabee:** is the traditional butter container that is always held by girls. It 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. Sometimes it is also known by the name *dibduu*: - meaning a traditional object held by girls only to save butter within it, especially on the *Engicha* and it is the butter container for girls.



**Figure 1:** *Qabee*, which is held by girls

❖ **Engicha:** is a type of grass that are grown around river and in marshy areas and which helps to celebrate the *Engicha* ritual with it. The girls collect it at the eve of the ritual and they chain it and hold it on the day of ritual and round/rotate in their vicinity and they distribute or fasten it. This is the main material for this ritual celebration.

#### **4. The Changes and Continuities of *Uke* and *Engicha* Ritual**

There are a number of changes that have been observed on *Engicha* 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 due to different factors. Even if there are different factors for these changes, 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 on the local Oromo's, they were also agitated to exercise their own culture by condemning the local culture. 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 to the local people by condemning the traditional culture of the area. According to Obbo Leta Sori, the Amhara treated each traditional culture including *Engicha* ritual as

backward and worthless. Since that period, the local people started to weaken its rituals. Thus, the local culture in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular became under risk at different periods in Oromo history.

In the case of religion, as different religions introduced to the Oromo in general and introduced to Gindeberet in particular, they have also their own impacts on the local cultures in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular. The dominant religion in the study area is Protestant Christianity which consists 55.9% of the total population. This religion was introduced to the area very recently through different mechanisms. Thus, since its introduction, it has continued to influence on the indigenous ritual practices including the *Engicha* 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 the weakening of different rituals. This religion is undermining the indigenous rituals in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular, as they are religious ritual system and the adherents of protestant religious haven't allowed to celebrating it. Formerly, the Orthodox Christian was intermingled with the local culture and there was no that much visible domination on the ritual. But recently after they have started a competition with protestant and advancement of bible education in the Orthodox Church, it has also started to close its door for *Engicha* ritual. Orthodox have deep route with the local cultures, even if it has its own impact, the local communities were adopted and started to exercise this religion side by side with their culture for a long period of time. However, after the introduction of protestant religion, each traditional culture was enforced to be stopped because this religious doctrine is targeted to eradicate the traditional rituals and substituting it with Bible culture. Currently, this is the serious problems and each individual who is converted his/her religion to protestant is obliged to refrain his/herself from practicing such indigenous rituals. The introduction of alien religions, specifically 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 *Engicha* ritual in particular. Now a day's very few homesteads, locals and villagers are exercising it.

Traditionally this ritual was celebrated in a very attractive and decorative way; it was the more celebrated indigenous ritual even with different food and drink festivities. But recently, one the girls themselves started to look it as backward and the other the family also haven't give the former consideration to it. After girls started to attend school largely, conversely, the consideration given to *Engicha* even by girls themselves is become lower and lower. This may be due to one religious conversion (specifically to protestant) and the other low awareness towards this culture; they started to be perceived it as backward and only celebrated by uneducated people (impact of modern education).

Formerly, the ritual has a specific date for its celebration throughout the Gindeberet district without any diversification of the dates. But currently, the celebration dates for the ritual is diversified. For instance, in some peasant association called *Ganda*, the *Engicha* ritual celebration is complicated. In some areas it is celebrated on July 27 E.C, whereas it also celebrated on July 23 in other. Currently, by only taking this average, the *Engicha* ritual is celebrated starting from July 23 up to July 27 in E.C. in Gindeberet district. This diversification and complication of the 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 forgotten and complicated too much and the people also obliged to leave the original celebration date and they are celebrating it as they are remembering it.

Another factor that contributed for the changing of the *Engicha* ritual is lack of awareness towards their culture in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular. Some of the peoples are undermining the significances of such ritual as worthless and though they are not interested to do. 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. In some cases, wrongly this ritual is started to be grouped with harmful traditional practices. In reality there is no harmful things gained from the 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 *Engicha* ritual in particular. Different households stopped to celebrate this ritual by assuming the ritual as symbols of backwardness. For instance, traditionally the girls have been collecting butter when they distribute the *Engicha*, but now in most cases the gift that is given to girls instead of *Engicha* is coin, largely not butter. This is resulted from the impact of modernity.

Formerly the girls are only expecting a butter as gift during their round within the neighbor for '*Engicha Hidhu*' (*Engicha* distributing or fastening system), but currently, the gift of butter is largely changed to coin. This may be due to one the shortage or absence of butter and the other due to modernity (i.e. currently girls are more interested to coin than butter).

The most surprising issue in this district with relation to the changes of the rituals is that in some areas, the protestant followers have recently started to arrange a special program at their church and then they call the girls to the church instead of *Engicha* festival places and instead of the traditional ritual they have going to their church to hide themselves from the ritual. Now, the Orthodox Church is also on the same way towards the *Engicha* ritual by taking the experience from Protestant church.

Recently the place where girls celebrate *Engicha* ritual is converted to farm land and it didn't much comfortable for the ritual like that of the previous one. After each pieces of land is privatized, it becomes difficult to girls to collect the *Engicha* grass. Because of the unwillingness of the landholder, there are no free and public places that have enough *Engicha* for the ritual. This is also another factor that currently hindering the ritual.

Nowadays, the girls themselves haven't interested to the ritual because of the technological advancement. They are more interesting to modernity and modern technological products rather than any traditional cultures including *Engicha* ritual. For them attending such traditional ritual is a symbol of backwardness in attitude. But, the reality is 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 *Engicha* ritual is the best solution for the future generation, because of it is saving us from identity crisis.



## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study tried to investigate the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Engicha* ritual. The study revealed that every indigenous rituals performed by the Oromo people has its own symbolic representation and significance within the framework of Oromo culture. This Oromo indigenous ritual, *Engicha*, has great role in promoting the gender equality for the local community.

The study investigated that the *Engicha* ritual is the indigenous ritual that is colorfully celebrated by girls in the district. The ritual is mainly celebrated by girls and thus it is the girl's ritual. Among the study area, this ritual is considered as the girl's holyday. On this ritual day, the girls have tried a lot to beautify themselves and also it is the ritual that is only celebrated by girls. Therefore, this ritual, *Engicha*, is traditionally designed to girls to assure the right that the tradition given girls and also to show the gender equality that existed in the community.

The *Engicha* ritual got its name from the name of the grass named as *Engicha* that the girls are mainly used to celebrate the ritual. On the eve, the girls are collecting the *Engicha* from the nearby rivers or other marshy areas and it is the basic material for the ritual celebration.

The study depicts that the *Engicha* ritual is the ritual that is celebrated on the beginning of New Year in traditional Oromo calendar and due to the Oromo tradition have given due consideration for the women in general and girls in particular, especially in leading different indigenous rituals, they gave the responsibility of celebrating the New Year to girls and decided it as a day of girl's in Oromo tradition.

Starting from the eve up to its completion, the *Engicha* ritual has three basic stages: the first phase is the *Engicha Buqiffanna* system, it is a system which is held on the eve of the ritual and the system which undertakes when girls are going to the closest river or other places where they got the grass called *Engicha* and to collect or to unplant it. The second phase is the *Engicha* distribution or fastening system, it a system which is held on the morning of the ritual when the girls are rounding within their vicinity to distribute the *Engicha* to their relatives and to their neighbors. The third and the last stage is *Engicha* festival, which is held at the place where the girls come together publically celebrate the *Engicha* ritual and it is the actual *Engicha* festival.

The *Engicha* ritual is celebrated by girls publically at the place where it is free, not ploughed, haven't water and comfortable to play as they want. The main reason why girls go outside the home for this ritual is that one the ritual is celebrated by a large amount of girls, thus to get a wide and comfortable free place for traditional playing and songs, another is that in the Oromo tradition, the girls in particular and women in general, most of the time restricted to domestic works and as a result they haven't that much chance to come out of the door; thus this ritual celebrated publically to deconstructs the assumption that says the girls are only treated at home and also the ritual is designed purposely for girls to show the respect they have and the consideration that is given to them by the Oromo culture regarding the gender equality. This is celebrated not only celebrated to show gender equality, but also it is more than that; i.e. the independent ritual which is celebrated merely by single gender is Ateetee and *Engicha* rituals. In comparison, there is no such figurative ritual that is merely celebrated by male.

This makes the women and girls more powerful and more respected than males in the community.

The study shows that the *Engicha* ritual has different purposes. Among the main purposes of the ritual, one is to commemorate the girls day in the Oromo culture and also to show as the Oromo culture have given a due consideration to the whole of its members including girls and it is also the ritual that shows the girl's right in the culture. Another purpose of the *Engicha* ritual is that it is the ritual that officially or publically announces as the participants are not married and also as they are virgin and this ritual shows the status difference that exists between women and girls.

Among the benefits obtained from the *Engicha* ritual, the first is that it is the ritual that facilitates the situation for girls to see each other and it also consolidates the relationship between the girls that dwell far away from each other. Another contribution of the ritual is that it is useful in commemorating the girls day in the Oromo culture and also it is helpful in entertaining the girls. This *Engicha* ritual is also essential by being a source of tourism in the study area and serves as cultural promotion day because of each of the activities that are undertaken on the ritual shows the Oromo culture. The ritual is also helps to transfer the existing culture in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular to the next generations. This ritual is very essential in creating a cooperative life and sharing experiences among the girls and it lied down the base for their future social life and relationship.

Traditionally, the *Engicha* ritual is also the main mechanism of mate selection because of this ritual is publically celebrated at the place where everybody come together to watch them when they are celebrating their ritual, *Engicha*, including the youngsters who have got great opportunity to look at girls and decide their future life partner. The *Engicha* ritual is very important in promoting prohibition of sexual intercourses before marriage through its traditional rule that only virgin girls have full right to participate and which ideally restricts the girls from having sexual intercourse before marriage. Indirectly or directly this helps them to protect themselves from illegal pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, however, currently, this culture is not considered and therefore any girls who have not married are participating. Nowadays, the *Engicha* ritual becomes a source of income for the girls that they are gaining a money (even if the amount of money they earn is low) instead of butter.

The study also shows that there are different problems that are created due to the existence of different changes on this indigenous ritual. 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 *Engicha* ritual. As different religious organizations were introduced to the area, they have putted their own black marks on the local cultures in general and *Engicha* 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 including the *Engicha*. As a result, the existing cultures in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular, are only the vestiges of indigenous ritual, currently this ritual is lost their main traditional components and it is also celebrated by few households.

Another problem that faced the ritual is that traditionally there was a clear date for the celebration of such ritual, but currently, the celebration dates for this 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 *Engicha* ritual in particular is also another factor that is contributing for the changing of the ritual. Modernity has also its own factor in undermining the indigenous rituals in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular.

Another problem that is hindering the ritual is the conversion of the ritual places in to farm land in different locals. Nowadays, the technological advancement also minimizes the interests of the girls from the celebration of such ritual and their interest is greater to modernity and modern technological products rather than any traditional cultures including *Engicha* ritual.

## 5.2. Recommendations

The study on the role of indigenous rituals in promoting gender equality among the Oromo people with particular reference to *Engicha* ritual have encountered and also encountering different problems due to the existence of different factors. Therefore, to eliminate the problems that are facing the ritual the following recommendations/suggestions have been given by the researcher.

- The indigenous rituals that have been demised due to past political and also religious dominations should be rejuvenated by the government because of those rituals are very important in the livelihood of the local community.
- Each religious organizations, especially Protestant, should have to restrict itself from invading such indigenous rituals on behalf of the bible and should only preach it's doctrine without touching the indigenous cultures in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular.
- The government should be expected to conserve such rituals as tourism sources and also promote it for the sake of tourism development in the area. One mechanism of its promotion may be giving media coverage during the actual ritual celebration. Still now, there is no media coverage that is given to such rituals. Thus, the local and international mass media should give the due attention for such very important and gender equality promoting indigenous ritual.
- As much as possible, any concerned body are expected to promote and also teach the values and significance of the *Engicha* ritual especially teaching the young group are very important to conserve the ritual for the future generations.
- Formerly, the ritual has a specific date for its celebration throughout the district without any diversification of the dates. But currently, the celebration dates for the ritual is diversified. Therefore, the detail research will be needed by professionals particularly in investigating the lost indigenous calendaring system of the society to regain the exact date for the ritual celebration.
- The young generation should be aware of their culture in general and *Engicha* ritual in particular and then they are expected to practice it parallel with any modern activities.
- Recently the place where girls celebrate *Engicha* ritual is converted to farm land and it didn't much comfortable for the ritual like that of the previous one. Thus, the government should facilitate or make free

place for the ritual celebration. And the local peoples are also expected to free the lost *Engicha* celebration place.

### Acknowledgments

The first heart-felt thanks go to the Almighty God, who helped me throughout my life and who will help me in my life and it is impossible to do anything without His help and inspiration.

Secondly, my gratitude goes to Bule Hora University for granting me financial support for conducting the study, and the office of Research and Publication for the support I obtained during the progress of this study until its completion.

The third heartfelt thanks goes to my wife W/ro Azeb Lemlem, who provided me the necessary material and psychological support from the beginning of the study until its completion, besides her presence in times of need and for her great contribution in typing this research.

Fourthly my thanks goes to my brother, Tesfaye Bulto, who was with me during the field work for data gathering and for his psychological support during my study and also to my friend Mr Lemma W/Michael, who was helped by editing and giving very important comments for the improvement of this research paper.

Finally my heart-felt thanks goes to all my informants from whom I learnt a lot about the Oromo culture in general and the *Uke* and *Engicha* ritual in particular, and to all my fieldwork facilitators, in addition to their roles as informants in the study. I also want to express my special gratitude to Girma Chala and Dabala Didha who helped me in distributing and collecting the questionnaires during the fieldwork.

Lastly, but not least, I want to thank my friend, Tibebe Aragie, who facilitated the publication payment of this paper, without this paper was not published. He did great job for me.

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