



AN ASSESSMENT OF BALE OROMO INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND PRACTICE: CASE OF HARENA BULUK AND DINSHO WOREDA, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT :

Due to the adverse effects induced by global ecological crisis, the issue of indigenous environmental ethics has got the attention of philosophers and scientists. As it has been highlighted in this article, different ethnic groups in Africa have insightful wisdom towards the natural resources. Despite the negative views of some scholars about African indigenous environmental ethics, the study finds out that various cultural groups in Africa have profound and systematic worldviews which designate a friendly relation between humans and non-human entities. The ever-increasing trend of globalization, which promotes homogenization of cultures and worldviews, has posed a serious challenge to indigenous African environmental worldviews by destroying the specific cultural traits under the guise of economic development and the interference of foreign values and beliefs. Thus the main objective of this research is to assess the Indigenous Environmental Ethics status at Harana Buluk and Dinsho woreda. To realize this purpose, qualitative method is implemented. Relevant information has been gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The study reveals that Indigenous Environmental Ethics is the set of values and beliefs of individuals or group relating to environment.

KEYWORDS : *Indigenous, Environmental Ethics, Bale Oromo.*

INTRODUCTION

The force of globalization, which has turned the world into a small interconnected web of village in terms of its various manifestations, has caused a strain towards indigenous people to undermine their local knowledge and wisdom in favor of the dominant western paradigm. The tendency to unify and overwhelm diverse value systems in a single universal value has rendered a narrow-minded sense of seeking remedy towards the ecological crisis (Yohannes, 2016).

Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa as similar to other indigenous societies around the world are traditionally applied in harmony with the natural and spiritual world. These traditional or cultural practices are resourcefully designed to address local ecological limitations by maintaining a sustainable utilization and protection of commonly shared natural resources. It is, therefore, quite important to uncover the values and worldviews of different cultural groups that have depicted a friendly relation between human beings and non-human nature.

Community's Indigenous Approach on the Utilization and Protection of Natural Resources mechanism promotes and protects the privacy of aggrieved parties, creates calm and friendly atmosphere for parties to discuss, agree and disagree before reaching amicable and endorsable

agreement. Today, the application of Indigenous Approach to utilize and protect natural resources are becoming more and more preferred than litigation in various fields and works of life. A single individual's actions with regard to the environment may have an impact on all human beings. In Bale Oromo Community Indigenous environmental ethics is commonly employed to protect natural resources among communities, families, people or groups. Hence, this study revealed that indigenous environmental ethics practice status, of Bale Oromo in providing valuable insight into and wisdom about environmental stewardship and a holistic conception of nature.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For much of human history, indigenous environmental knowledge has been degraded as backward and antithetical for science and progressive ideas. Until recently, Indigenous approach's role of environment protection and indigenous knowledge of utilizing the environment have not been given sufficient attention among scholars, policy makers and other government agencies. Indigenous practice has been challenged by modernization, the market economy, transnational corporations, foreign religions, the government's acculturation and assimilation policies. Being influenced by these new values, people now use natural resources as objects for exploitation and profit making. Ethical dialogue is a necessary condition for authentic development among indigenous, poor, or other marginalized groups. Yet indigenous ethical dialogue has not practically assessed to change structures of global power.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Various indigenous knowledge systems can be taken as raw materials for the development of modern environmental perspectives. By studying and examining the local knowledge systems of various cultural groups, environmental philosophers would produce modern environmental perspectives. Thus, indigenous knowledge systems and ethics, like the Oromo worldviews, can be taken as important inputs for the works of modern environmental ethicists. Given the increasing concern for the environment and the impact that our actions have upon it, it is clear that the field of environmental ethics is here to stay. However, it is less clear in what way the discipline will move forward and its status of practice. This study attempts to fill these gaps.

METHODS

Both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed. Primary data were obtained through interview, focus group discussion while the secondary data were gathered through books, journals, articles, internet and other published materials. The population study was chosen to be highly experienced elders, women any youth about ethics/safuu.

STATUSES OF BALE OROMO INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The younger generation in Oromo society can acquire the Oromo environmental ethic from their families, elders, *Gadaa* leaders and from other members of their community and from their own experience and observation. Children are advised to accept blessings from their parents so as to develop positive values towards the environment, to respect their parents and their culture, to avoid immoral acts. Oromo people have preserved an indigenous environmental ethic even without a written record. This does not rule out the value of written sources. Oral and written forms are not mutually exclusive. Both need each other.

Focus group discussion researchers' conduct with culture and tourism office of Harena Buluk indicated that, still now Bale Oromo people are rich with indigenous environmental ethics. But as they said those indigenous environmental ethics are accumulated in the mind of old age elder therefore, favorable environment should be made for elders to path these ethic to new/current generation. Indigenous practice has been challenged by modernization, the market economy, transnational corporations, foreign religions, the government's acculturation and assimilation policies (Workineh, 2005). Being influenced by these new values, people now use natural resources as objects for

exploitation and profit making. Ethical dialogue is a necessary condition for authentic development among indigenous environmental ethics.

The researchers realize that, In Bale Oromo community particularly in the study area; People violate the practice of Indigenous Environmental Ethics because of the increment of coffee plantation interest. It has been believed by women focus group discussion that indigenous institutions, oral traditions, cultural practices and religious institutions preach the moral obligations of man towards nature. According to Holmes Rolston, environmental ethics considers the ethical relationships between people and the natural world and the kind of decisions people have to make about the environment (Holmes Rolston, 2003).

The Oromo believe that the present generation has responsibility to pass on natural resources in good order to a future generation. That is why the Oromo are concerned with the health and peace of the environment and its inhabitants. They are aware that the environment in which they live affects their health. They depend on environmental resources to heal themselves. Some places are considered to be salubrious and sacred. The Oromo always try to maintain a peaceful and healthy environment, and avoid evil things.

"If nature has "intrinsic value," if it is a "sacred object . . . it should not be treated in a cost-benefit analysis," even if we justly consider the costs and benefits from the point of view of all human parties affected, poorer people as well as richer, and future human generations too."

In Oromo culture, some green grasses and trees are given special value. The green environment is the symbol and presage of fertility and all good things. It is the source of life. Researchers have been observed Bale Oromo people have an excellent knowledge of their environment. This afforded them the wisdom of not attempting to over exploit its wide range of resources. Nature is an integral part of their day-to-day existence. The Oromo believe that all things are united and have different roles and places in the universe. Human beings are not above other creatures and cannot despoil them as they wish. They are part of the natural world that is given a special place in the diversity of the cosmos; they are endowed with the intelligence that enables them to understand cosmic events.

PRACTICES OF BALE OROMO INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Indigenous environmental ethics and practices reflect both an attachment to environment and a responsibility for preserving environment for use by future generations. This implies that the meaning of indigenous environmental ethics is understandable in the oral tradition of the people even if it is not supported by literature. According to women and youth informants the values, beliefs, and practices of the Bale Oromo drive humans to live in harmony with nature. Life in Bale Oromo is mutually dependent between human beings and the environment. Thus, the environment is an integral part of their day to day existence. Moreover, the researchers have noticed that most hilly areas of the Bale are not eradicated; erosion is low because of the utmost forest coverage and high soil fertility management practices. So, keeping the ecological balance between the present and future generation is the traditional practice for the people. This implies that the indigenous ecological knowledge of the Bale Oromo is the base for human-environment relations. Therefore, Bale Oromo's indigenous environmental ethics is implicit, unwritten and found in their cultural practices, social institutions, religious symbols, history and oral traditions.

In-depth local environmental knowledge and trends over time for a given site are important for environmental assessment. Traditional knowledge is essential for development, especially for "bottom-up" (as opposed to top-down) development planning with people. Belief systems of many indigenous groups incorporate the idea that humans are part of the natural environment, and their relationship with nature may be characterized as peaceful coexistence.

Indigenous environmental ethics are much more practiced, habitual and powerful than the modern one. Enforcing modern environmental ethics in the local community without due consideration for their indigenous norms and values should be avoided on the side of the state. Our understanding of the need to appreciate Indigenous Environmental ethics and the important role it could play in the search

for a synergistic approach to the current global ecological crisis when it is integrated with other ethics that relate to ecological sustainability is necessary.

The Oromo world view has fostered a responsible attitude towards nature. The essence of this view is to live in partnership with the natural environment. The Oromo consider the cycles of nature, the coming of the rainy season, the movement of the stars, solar cycles, the movement and the cries of birds, the nature of entrails, the behavior of domestic and wild animals and the condition of trees in order to grapple with practical problems of everyday life and future problems. From their practical experience, they know the growing characteristics of each crop and tree, suitable environments, the number of months of rain required, planting and harvesting times, crop care and crop labor requirements.

To sum up, the Oromo people believe that the present generation is under a moral obligation to preserve the land and hand it over to future generations. One of the bases of this obligation is the belief that a person should not endanger the prospects of future generations by destroying the land. One has to make sure that his or her lineage will continue to flourish in the future. The society condemns those who deprive their children and their children's children.

CONCLUSION

An indigenous environmental ethic is the set of values and beliefs of an individual or group of people relating to the environment. Institutionally, the indigenous institution of the Oromo Gadaa system teaches the moral obligation of man towards the environment. Culturally, the present generation is responsible to preserve and maintain natural resources in a good manner to the next generation. Historically, the oral tradition of the Bale and their struggle for Oromo freedom shows human-environment relations and the moral duty of man towards the forest protection.

Indigenous Environmental ethics have socio-economic roles for the Bale people. Socially, the Gadaa system has shaped the Indigenous environmental ethics of the Bale people. Therefore, the indigenous environmental ethics of the Bale people is essentially having a holistic ethics which encompasses both intrinsic and instrumental values. Their indigenous environmental ethics is found in their cultural practices, institutions, histories and practices.

The deserialization of nature has left man free to exploit it without any restriction. Another important difference between the Oromo and the West is that the Oromo value green trees, mountains and springs. Unlike some environmental ethicists, the Oromo do not treat forests as mere resources to be used for human consumption. Indigenous Environmental ethics should be appreciated as integral components of other living and dynamic societies and cultures rather than as sets of practices. The main drawback of indigenous environmental ethics is thus that when it becomes more integrated into scientific knowledge, in the long run, it may disappear with the appropriation of its basic elements by science and with changes in land use. Its underlying reasons may be lost for good. Thus, necessary measures should be taken to prevent this from happening.

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