

**TAJOO ROOBAA:****Mustefa Deshu Ase***Arsi University, College of Social Science and Humanities***ABSTRACT**

*Oromo of Kush, largest communities in East Africa have experienced indigenous socio-economic and political life and livelihood aspects under the Gadaa system- the pioneer indigenous classical African Civilization system. Irressaa is –Thanks Giving to Waqaqa(Oromoos God). This Thanks given ceremony has practices twice a year (Irressaa Tullu and Irressaa Melka)- at the end of rainy season and the beginning of rainy Season). Irre(ch)ssaa is performed at different parts of Oromia, with varies colorful, rutual, spiritual and performance. Irressaa Hor-Sadee(Bushooftu) is well known and celebrated with colorful and mass participation.*

*The study was undertaken in Arsi Zone, Oromia national regional state, 2021/222 G.C. The study employed ethnographic qualitative methods in which the data were collected through participant observation, interview, and secondary sources. Open-ended/semi-structured questionnaires and indigenous documentation approaches were administered accordingly. The study area was limited to Utaa Wayuu of Arsi Oromo largely resides in Arsi Zone(Zuway Dugdaa, Munessa and Lemu Bilbilloo woredas) and East Shoa Zone(Adami Tullu Jido Kombolcha).*

*This study revealed that Arsi Oromo have celebrated Irressaa Melkaa (Denbal Lake), known as Tajoo Roobaa. Tajoo Roobaa largely known and practiced among Utaa Waayyuu of Arsi Oromo. Tajoo Roobaa is ritual cultural practices that performed in Hinikaa-Ayyaanaa Waqaqa- the first day, new year of Oromo calendar under the rule Shanoo Shanecha(Gadaa Council-representative five Gadaa class). In the Absence of Gadaa rule, there is no Tajoo Roobaa celebration (practices), because it is one element that passed through Gada system. Tajoo Roobaa – Irreessaa of Arsii is celebrated by clans leaders and members, all Arsii Gurrachaa(Oromo) in large under Gadaa administration.*

*Therefore, Tajoo roobaa festivity and celebration is very significant in Irreechaa terms of rituals, spirituals, performances and material cultures. It is Oromo indigenous universal philosophy of Thanks given and Praying for Their Waqaqa(Oromoos God). Tajoo ritual practices and performances give fundamental values for human and universal right- which is a pillar of Gada Values. Hence, it needs the concerning actors to focus and supports further studies to preserve and promote values, significances and socio-cultural values of Tajoo Roobaa for our generation and global communities in general.*

**Keywords:** Irrechaa, Utaa Wayyu, Arsii, Tajoo Roobaa, Rituals

**Introduction**

The Arsi Oromo is a large group of the Oromo Nation that inhabited a large fertile territory. The Arsi Oromo descended from their father Arsii and came to one of the main Oromo stocks separating itself from the rest and inhabited Arsiland (Kefyalew, 2004: 36). The Arsii Oromo are divided into two main branches, the Sikkoand Mando (yu) that inhabits the present Oromia zones of Arsii, West Arsi, Bale and East Shäwa. The Arsii Oromo has practiced Oromo

Indigenous Gadaa system at large until Ethiopia state regimes outlaw the Gadaa administration and, also its elements of rituals and spirituals performances.

Different scholars from different areas of the study defined Gadaa and Gadaa system as whole. The Gadaa system has the principles of checks and balances (through periodic succession of every eight years), and division of power (among executive, legislative, and judicial branches), balanced opposition (among five parties), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other principles of the system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and the respect for basic rights and liberties (Baissa,1993; Aseffa Jelata,2012)

Gadaa is an indigenous and democratic system of governance which has been used by the Oromo people, developed from knowledge gained by community experience over centuries. It regulates political, economic, social and religious activities of the community and serves as a mechanism for enforcing moral conduct, building social cohesion and expressing forms of community culture (Tadesse Berisso, 2018).

The other renowned scholar, Asmerom (1973) defined *Gadaa* system as a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. According to *Gadaa* political philosophy and principle, elected individuals can serve only for a specific term eight years of *Gadaa* period and be substituted by newly elected officials. In the *Gadaa* system, one cannot be reelected as leader outside the prescribed period of service. Baxter (1996) defines Gadaa as “the ancient, enduring and complex system of age-grading that has also served as the basis of unique democratic political system. Besides to this, Asmerom (1973) also puts Gadaa as one of the most astonishing and instructive turns the progress of human society has taken. He labels Gadaa as the most intricate systems of social organizations ever created by the human mind.”

The *Gadaa system* was the constitution of the Oromo society through which the society administered, defended their territory, maintained and developed their economy. Even though the tradition was reduced to social aspect following the incorporation of the society into the Ethiopian state, the system influenced every aspect of Oromo society, from politics to religion

until recently. An individual entered the system at a specific age and passed through transition rites at intervals appropriate to the passage from childhood through full adulthood to senility. Recruitment in to the Gadaa system is based on the maintenance of one socially defined generation between father and son (Asmarom, 2000; Asafa, 2010).

To preserve and protect its land and country from Ethiopia Empire making kings, Arsii Oromoo largely resisted and fought divisive bloody battles at different historic periods. Their brave hero horsemen, warriors' clans, war strategists and leaders fought for their identity, culture, religion, rituals and political economy establishment. Though the empire weakened and eliminated ritual practices and sacred values, elders the keepers and protectors of Oromoo history, culture, ritual, religion, values and norms have been preserved and transferred it in their mind through mouth to their generation to generation.

The Arsi Oromoo never accepted this undemocratic rule alien to its culture in peace. Sections of the society in all walks of life have conducted bitter struggles against it in two broad ways. One, they relied on cultural resistance. This was a new cultural orientation among the Arsi Oromoo following their conquest by the Imperial Ethiopia and the subsequent imposition of *gäbbar* system. Such struggle also took the form of civil disobedience, non violent protests and mass conversion to Islam in the form of cultural resistance. The dominations of the local people by culture of the conquerors and the restriction on the indigenous culture have rejuvenated Islamic sentiments among the Muslims and forced the non-Muslim Arsi in Gadab and western Bale to embrace Islam as means of cultural resistance (Østebø, 2005b: 37)

The Oromo indigenous knowledge, practices and skills were marginalized by emperor rules and state administration in the past. Oromo was well known resistance of the Ethiopia state rules, because the emperor and rules were neglected and marginalized Oromo Gadaa system and confiscated Oromo land in general. Thus, under Ethiopia Empire rules Oromo had not allowed to follow and practices its rituals, spirituals and religious. Totally Oromo were considered as 2<sup>nd</sup> nation of the state.

Utaa Waayyuu of Arsii Oromo has practiced Irressaa of Tajoo Roobaa annually. The Utaa Waayyuu of Arsii resides in three zones (East Shoa, Arsii and West Arsi Zones). The study found that Tajoo Roobaa was Utaa Wayyuu Arsii Oromoo Irreessaa. Its spirituals, rituals,

performances and cultural materials are equally Irressaa Melka of central Oromia. *Tajoo* ritual belongs to all followers of indigenous Oromo religion.

Currently, Oromo scholars and Western Scholars are doing studies on Gadaa system, Irre(ch)ssaa in particular. Oromo Gadaa is one of Intangible Cultural Heritage registered on UNESCO. It is Human Civilization (heritages). Irreechaa is one pilar of ritual practices of Gadaa system. It is practiced in all parties of Oromia. In different parties of Oromia, Irreechaa would have name differently, but with the same and similarly concepts and meaning. Though, Irreechaa is well studied, some of its relevant practices and performances, known in others parts of Oromia, especially Arsi area is less studies.

**Methods:** The study employed ethnographic qualitative methods to describe the *Tajoo* roobaa ritual performance, practices and values among Utaa Waayyuu of Arsii Oromo. The data were collected through participant observation, interview, and secondary sources. Elders, Abba Gadaas, haadha Siinkees, Abbaa Karraa, Clans members and Yubas were participants of the study. Open ended Semi-structure questionnaires were administrated purposefully. Events, rituals and practices were documented systematically. Recorded and documented performances were analyzed systematically to crosscheck that validation and relevance of collected data through interpretation and descriptions of qualitative data accordingly.

### Related Literature Reviews

Different scholars conducted studies on Gadaa system of Irreechaa ritual practices. Few of them are focused on different elements and ritual practices in varies parties Oromia National Regional State. A few existing studies highlighted the southern, central and western ritual performances. The work of Legesse (1973) on the Borana *Gadaa* system, Bartels (1983) on Oromo religious rituals, Kelbessa (2001) on Oromo rituals in conserving environment, Gemechu, (2007) on ritual in blood price payment (*Guma*), Badhaasoo's (2000) and Qashu's (2009) researches on some wedding ceremonies are worth mentioning. Moreover, ateetee, *siinkee*, *qanafaa* and *rakoo* were studied by Deressa (2002), whereas, *siinkee* institution was studied by Kumsa (1997) and Jemila (2014), Bonsamo (2014) published his works on Ateetee of Oromo.

Though, Lenin and Dereje (2015) and Banti (2018) studied *Tajoo* roobaa ritual practices celebrated around Hara Danbal , Adami Tulu Jiddo Kombolcha woreda of East Shoa. Their study

limited to its content and areas of the study. Thus, this study will fill the stated gaps and inputs for existing related literature and pave the way for the further study for the scholars on the study areas.

### **Finding of the study**

Irressaa Tajoo roobaa ritual is performed annually in Arfaasaa (spring) as a New Year celebration by Utaa Waayyuu, Arsii Oromoo. Tajoo rooba is a ritual celebrated commonly by the whole community of Utaa-Waayyuu of Arsii Oromo on Hinikkaa (the first day of Oromo calendar). *Ayyaanlaakkooftuus* (Oromo time-reckoners) determines and sets the exact date of the ritual, which varies from year to year. The *Gadaa* leaders facilitate the ceremony by mobilizing the community to attend the ceremony. *Shanacha Gadaa* (*Gadaa* councils) are responsible for the celebration of Tajoo roobaa Ireessaa Melkaa. The rituals are in lined by sacrificial activities for Waaqaa(Oromoos God).

One of the prominent informants from Luba Birmaji elders claimed that their ancestors started Irressaa Tajoo Roobaa ritual practices and performances around 1811(early 19<sup>th</sup> century). The other elder also claimed their ancestors were practices Irressaa Tajoo Roobaa around 11 ancestors back. It is claimed that Utaa Wayyuu Moity of Arsii Oromoo had largely practices ritual performances of Tajoo roobaa for immemorial times in their areas. At performance of ritual practices praying to Waaqaa(Oromo God) for peace, fertility and prosperity. The ritual takes place yearly at *Malkaa* (ford) through sacrifice and libation in the hope that *Tajoo* brings about peace and harmony in the society as a whole. *Tajoo* rituals is associated with ayyaanaa. In this sense, the term *ayyaanaa* is determined by Oromo time reckonings, *ayyaana-laakkayuu*. The name of particular *ayyaanaa* or the day on which the *Tajoo* ritual is celebrated is known as *Hinikkaa*. *Hinikkaa* is known as *ayyaanaa Waaqaa*, *Tajoo Roobaa irreesaa ritual* performed on the day of *Hinikkaa* to celebrate *Waaqaa's* Day. Thus, *Tajoo* is - means the ritual performed on the day of God.

*The day of Tajoo roobaa celebration, there are practices not to be done by communities. Since Tajoo Roobaa ritual celebration day is considered as the marriage day of Waaqaa (God), when all humans should celebrate the wedding. All Arsii Oromoo must have to participate on the celebration. Thus, all Arsii Oromoo has to be participate on the ceremony. Any regular human*

activities are not allowed to do, on the Waaqaas Day. There are no wedding, market, and others socio-cultural and political aspects.

*Tajoo roobaa* is the ritual, which brings the people together. It is considered ceremony of peace and rain that is celebrated for herd and community alike. It is celebrated at the beginning of the spring season- the session in which the rain hopefully begins. This is known as *Tajoo rooba*, thanks giving for the past and pray for the coming of rain and others related with coming of the rain like peace, unity, power, prosperity and good Gadaa ruling season.

The women praised the day, by saying;

*”Amajjii Garaa Laafiyyo*

*Madhatee galee Waatiyyon”*

This song depicts which have the concept of the cattles have sufficient grasses and have good sound presence of rains in general. *Tajoo Roobaa ritual* ceremony includes *dhibaayyuu* or *muudaa performance for anointment*. It is considered to be a prayer period for the Arsi, Arsiland, Oromo and Universe in general. It represents the idea of loyalty to the ideals of religion, sustainable socialization and human harmony. According to Utaa waayyuu elders believe, *Tajoo roobaa* belongs to the whole of *Black' Arsii* (Oromo).

### ***Performance and Practices***

Irreessa *Tajoo Roobaa* ritual performance leads by Gadaa councils. Clans and clan members are actively engaging in celebration. All classes of society are eligible to participate in *Tajoo* ritual festivals. *Tajoo* ceremony has ritual and spiritual practices by Gadaa elders, clan leaders and *Abba Melkaa*. All major actors of ritual performance have role and responsibility. The entire *Arsii Oromo* can participate in it. Oromo cultural materials are valuable on ritual practices.

Women attend and come to the ritual sacred *Melkaa* with *Ciicoo* (milk container), other feasts as well *siinjee* (ritual stick). Animals for the ritual scarification come by clan leaders. For example, *Tajoo roobaa* ritual to be celebrated at *Awwaroftu* of *Zuway Dugda Woreda*, four clans are responsible to undertake *Tajoo roobaa* ceremony. These clans are *Allaa, Daalle, Habalossa* and *Abayyi* of *Arsi Oromo*. Elders with *Gadaa* leader facilitate the ritual ceremony in general. There are ritual practices producers and elements to be performed during *Tajoo roobaa* ceremony

day. The major steps to be followed for Tajoo roobaa Irressaa celebration are *qixxee, tolfannoo, dullacha golgaa, cirri eedduu, malkaa booreessuu, xiribbaa dhaabuu and seera tumuu*.

***Qixxee:*** *Qixxee* is the elders' assembly held at different levels for different purposes accordingly. For Qixxee of *Tajoo* ritual, The Shanoo (*Gadaa* councils) organizes *qixxee* (meeting) to discuss how the ritual would be conducted. All representatives of *Waayyuu* clans( in the case of this study) sactivley engaged on the Qixxee to discuss the process and procedural accomplishment of *Tajoo Roobaa* ritual practices and performance as a whole. The *Gadaa* councils on *qixxee majorly focused* to hear the responsibility of their respective clans in *Tajoo roobaa ritual*. *Ayyaantuu*(*Ayyaanaa Lakkoftuu*) the time reckoners in *qixxee* to inform the exact date of the *Tajoo* ritual. At Qixxee day on the assembly, the *Gadaa* councils heralded the date of the *Tajoo roobaa* ritual publically.

***Tolfannoo:*** *Tolfannoo* is the other pre-performances preparation for the *Tajoo roobaa* festivity. It is considered as symbolizes driving out enemies and evils from the areas. It is performed on the *jalabultii* (eve) of *Tajoo Roobaa*.

***Dullacha Golgaa:*** For the *Arsii Oromo*, sacrificing an old cow is believed to clear all wrong actions and pacifies the society. Therefore, in the morning of *Tajoo* ritual (before going to *malkaa* (ford) for the ritual) people sacrifice *dullacha golgaa*, an old cow to clear the road to *Tajoo* ritual.

***Suunsuma performance (Wel coming participants by Chanting):*** On the *Tajoo Roobaa* ritual celebration, as soon as the group of clans reaches *Melkaa* of *Tajoo rooba*, *Abbaa Melkaa* performs *Suunsummuu* with them. They praise the day, *Gadaa* elders, elders, clans and *Oromo* in general.



Picture (1): Photo taken by researcher (2013) Suusumaa performance by participant clan members and welcoming by Abba Malkaas clan members at (Zuway Dugda Woreda), Awaroftu Keble ) (Captured by Research Team)

**Kottaa Dhufee (Abbaa Gadaas Assembly Open Meeting):** Short period Assembly of Abba Gadaas take place to discuss about the performance of the rituals. Kotta dhufee discuss what is prepared and what is missed. After all needed elements prepared by responsible clans and checked by Shanaan Shanoo (Gadaa Council), the Ledaers of Gadaa perform all ritual practices one by one. Any personal and group conflict among the community is asked and if there is any disagreement and conflict the elders solved and peace come to put among them before ritual practices perform begin.



Picture(2): Photo taken by researcher(2013) Kottaa dhufee among Abba Gadaa leaders to checking important needed ritual material cultures by clan members at Melkaa Tajoo(Zuway Dugda woreda)(Captured by Research Team).

**Golgeefachuu/Golgaa Magarfachuu:** The clan's leaders and elders followed by Gadaa leaders performed putting plants or plants leaves on the ground. Then the womens take rest in the Golgaa. All needed materials come by women put there in front of the scene.



**Picture (3)Photo taken by Researchers,2013(Melkaa Tajoo,Zuway Dugda woreda)**  
(Captured by Research Team)

**Ciicco Tarrefachu:** All presented Ciicco-Milk container by women taken from them elders by the will of them put in/on water surface (Haroo Dambal). The eelders with Abba Gadaa leaders request the willingness of women (by saying Dhiltee Dhinna) to give the Ciicco for ritual performance. The Cicco lined on one line and stay until its ritual practice perfume accordingly.



**Picture(4): Photo taken by researcher,2013: Ciicoo Tarree at Melkaa tajoo,Zuway Dugda woreda/ Captured by Research Team)**

Cirri Eedduu: Cirrii in Oromo refers to oxpecker and eedduu means keepers. Ciirrii eegduu: Cirrii eegdu is well known person who selected and assigned to protect Ciicco put on water surface from any damage. The preferable Cirrii eegduu is a person who has name like Badhaso, Waqoo, Roobaa, Galatoo and the like; believing that such names are indicators goodness, prosperity, health and wellness in general. Cultural foods and drinks prepare for ritual practices are micciiraa (prepared from mixture of butter and flour of barley), caccabsaa (prepared from mixture of butter, pepper, honey and flour of wheat), marmaaree (prepared from mixture of butter, honey and flour of wheat), milk and honey mead.



**Picture(5):Photo taken by researcher,2013: Ciirrii Eegduu at Melkaa tajoo,Zuway Dugda woreda/ Captured by Research Team)**

#### ***Malkaa Booreessuu/ Kormaa cuuphuu***

*Malkaa booreessuu also known as Kormaa cuuphuu* is performed by moving sacrificial animals into the river and turn round them in the river to make the river turbid. The act is the symbol of rainfall, which floods and gets the soil water soaked, thereby ensuring peace and fertility for the society. Koormaa cuuphuu: The elders and Abaa Gadaas with participants take the animals to be sacrificed to Melkaa. The Youth put these animals into lake/water with leaders of Abba Gadaas.

They clean the body of this animals, believing that the animals with dusty body has not allowed to be sacrificed for ritual purposes.



**Picture(6): Photo taken by researcher (2013) Kormaa cuuphaa practice at Melkaa Tajoo(Zuway Dugda woreda)/Captured by Research Team).**

The sacrifices begin by leaders of Gadaa(Shanoo Shanaan) that owners of the animals have the head of the animal whereas the brothers of the person have Qorii/Ciiccoo on hand. Then Ariirtii practices perform by putting butters on the body of animals ready for scarification. Then elders pray for rain, good leadership and leaders.

The elders blesses the persons who give the animals for ritual purpose by saying:

*Mataa kennattee---- Mataan Bulii*

*Hoo Ija----- Ijaan Argii*

*Hoo gaafa---- Gaafa hamaa Ooli*

*Hoo Gurraa---- -- Gurraan Aaga dhagahii*

Scarification of animals for ritual purpose is performed accordingly.

Then Mooraa Dubbissu by Mooraa dubbiftuu performed then the finding would be publicized for the participants by Abbaa Gadaa leaders.



**Picture (7): Photo taken by researcher 2013.Mooraa Dubbisuu practices knowledgeable elders (Zuway Dugda woreda) /Captured by Research Team).**

Xiribbaa Dhaabuu (Errecting Small wooden Peg) : Xiribbaa is a small wooden peg made from mi'eessaa, xaaxeessaa (Premna resinosa) and ejersaa (Olea europaea) trees for different purpose in Arsii Oromo. The Arsii stake into ground this small peg for different purposes in different rituals. Xiribbaa dhayuu is the prominent scared rital practices lead by clan elders and Gadaas leaders following restric values and norms. The xirriba is made by strong trees localy known as Ejeerssaa. Ejerssaa is strong tree, the symbol of strongness. Eight xirriba will be erected to show Terms of one Gadaa rule. This practice is very significant that the Arsii Oromo believed that performing it values, they pray goodness, health and prosperities for Oromo and human being in general. And pray for resources to be belongs of them and good productivites the community in the areas. Also they pray for goodness for leaders, Gadaa, Clans,

All *Gadaa* classes should be present on time to erect *xiribbaa*. *Xiribbaa* hammered first by *Gadaa* leader in power. Erecting *xiribbaa* is to symbolize to safeguard against any eviction from community's land, migration and calamities like earthquake, endemic disease and drought.



**Picture (8): Photo taken by researcher 2013. Xiirribbaa Dhahamee (Zuway Dugda woreda)/Captured by Research Team)**

#### **Seeraa tuma (Herald the rule of Law)**

At the end of *Tajoo* ritual, *Gadaa* leader orders the *murtii biyyaas* (lawyers) to declare the law of *Tajoo* ritual as well as other laws. *Waayyuu* ratified *Tajoo* laws on *Tajoo* ritual every year. They amend some laws because of global, national as well as local political, economic and social factors. The Abbaa Gadaa on power heralded the rule of all human and animals under the terms of the coming ritual celebration. The rules and regulation described by Abbaa Gadaa to be administered by the elders and clan elders for its applicability. All life and livelihood of Arsii Oromoo governed by this rule and regulation.

### Changes and continuities of Ritual performance

Since the formation Ethiopia state by force and appeasement, the regimes were outlawed the ritual practices all over five Melkaas of Tajoo Roobaa of Uttaa Wayyuu, Arsi Oromo. The centers of Tajoo roobaa changed time to time for the sake of Freeland to practices it either by families or clans level to preserve their indigenous ritual practices Gadaa system. The study revealed that Tajoo *roobaa* ritual has various roles politically, socially and economically for the society.

Currently the elders and clans leaders practicing to revitalize Irreechaa Tajoo Roobaa in Zuway Dugda and Adami Tullu Jiddo Kombolchaa Woredas. The culture and Tourism of the two woreda has willingness and commitment despite some challenges. Less focus towards its importance, lack of real knowledge and practices of ritual performances among key actors festivals. The so called modern religion followers are putting Tajoo ritual practices as don't supported by their teaching of holy books. They consider this ritual as act of anti –God, but don't they have no knowhow that it is Thanks Giving and Praying of Oromo Waaqaa Gurraacha (theirs God).

Lastly, but not the least, scare of resources, weak practice of Gadaa system and few knowledgeable clans members about ritual performance practices would be challenges of Tajoo roobaa ceremony. Thus, all stakeholders and concerning bodies have to focus on preservation and revitalization of irrechaa Tajoo roobaa of Arsii Oromoo in particular. This would be enrich ritual and material cultural values of diverse elements of Irressaa –the pillars Gadaa system.

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