

# Waqqa: Single God or Sky God; Conceptual Meaning, Attribute and Invocation among Tulama Oromo of Ethiopia

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## Review Article

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### ABSTRACT

Religion is among the elements of Universal culture that should consideration taken as the diversity issue should be protected as the whole with classification building based on worldly concept of religious additive interpretation as alien concept giving that usually lead to hampering the diversity issue. With this regard, there is no known society without religion. For many centuries, the Oromo people of Ethiopia have adhered to their own indigenous religion called Wakefana (Waqqeffanna). The issues of this indigenous religion are seldom handled in the literature of the Oromo especially in line with the consideration of various dynamism processes among different Oromo groups and localities. This study aims at addressing this missing gap. It explores about the concept, attribute and invocation of Waqqa in Oromo religion among Tulama. The research is essentially based on qualitative data consisting primary and secondary sources. As to the study inappropriate giving ill conceptual having meaning for inappropriate competence with regard to the worldly or otherworldly view point of Waqqa as the sky god or Waqqa as the single God based supreme being of the Wakefana religion tried to disclose for the consideration and reconsideration of the study theme of the religious point of view appropriately with value neutrality taking into consideration and having judgment free from bias as global heritage all should consideration taken according to the currently developed diversity democracy and related theories of identity and perspectives in the area of cultural relativism. Thus, the study came up with exhaustive and original investigations that can fill the existing gap.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion is a universal culture. However, it is difficult to have a single precise definition of religion because of the wide feature it has. All scholars in the field of religion study attempted to define and explain the nature as well as origin of religion. These definitions though varied in form, are similar in content and essence. All have a common agreement or idea that religion is universal. It is a fundamental feature of all society. It has a pivotal place in the lives of all human beings and experiences. This concept is religion's basic and most important feature, which gives it its unique identity.

Even though, cultural history in general and religious history in particular has been the overlooked dimension for long in Ethiopian historiography, religious practices in country have passed through significant changes and continuity due to internal and external factors since ancient time.

Likewise, the Oromo religion, Waqqeffanna, has been practiced by Oromos since mythical time. It is the indigenous Oromo religion, which is practiced for many centuries. Even though, its existence went through various dynamism processes, most of the practices of Waqqeffannaa religion have been retained and are still being practiced by Tulama Oromo [1]. The adherents of Oromo religion have recognized Waqa as the Supreme entity. However, as the religion has passed through various dynamism processes, the attributes and manifestations that attached to Waqa could be vary among different Oromo divisions, subdivisions and localities.

In different Oromo literatures, the general overview of Oromo religion was examined. Among few studies, Knutsson the general study on the Qallu institution among Matcha Oromo of Western Oromia; Bartles the general study on the myths and rites of the Oromo religion; Morton on mystical advocates of Ayana Sprits among Ada'a Oromo; Joseph Van de Loo on religious capabilities among Guji Oromo of Southern Oromia; Meskerem Assaguad, Gulluma Ejjeta, and Dirrib Demissie on irrecha ceremony at the bank of the lake Hora Arsadie, but none of them exhaustively examine the issue under study among the study area. However, the only work that tried to examine about the concept and attribute of Waqa is Daniel Ayyana's MA Thesis in its introduction part, but it is limited only to Wollega Oromo. Among the Tulama Oromo, waqqeffanna in general and Waqa in particular is not holistically studied and well documented with due consideration to its attribute, significance and manifestation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the already existing sources, Tulama are the branch of the Tulama-Matcha division of the Borana Moiety of the Oromo [2]. Tulama are also farther sub-divided into three branches such as Dachi, Bacho and Jille. Each sub-branches are also further sub-divided into smaller unites known as Mana and Balbala in Afana Oromo literary means clans and subclans.

They inhabit in the vast area of central Ethiopia, which is geographically bounded by Lake Danbal (Ziway) to the south, Karrayu and Arsi Oromo to to the East and South East, Amhara regional state to the North, Matcha Oromo to the West.

This research is essentially based on qualitative data consisting primary and secondary sources. Interviewing key informants is the basic research method used in data collection process. Observation, informal discussions, etc were used to ascertain the data collected through the interviews. Individual informants of different status, sex, and age were purposively selected from the study area. The selection was made on the basis of their expertise knowledge, past experience, degree of participation in Gada and ritual practices. During the interview, the informants were asked, among others, about change and continuity of ritual practices of Oromo religion among the study population, concept, attribute and invocation of Waqa. Participant observation is one of the best research method used in cultural study. For the purpose of this study observation at irrecha ceremony at different ritual places were used. Besides, secondary information was also collected from different published and unpublished sources of information

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### An overview on goodwill stating alongside with name giving

Most of the adherents of traditional religion acknowledge the existence of Supreme entity and a number of intermediary spiritual connections between them and the supreme entity. Similarly, there is the existence of one Supreme entity and numerous intermediary spirits in the Oromo religion. In this regard, the name Waqa has occupied a central place as a Supreme divine entity in the religion of the Oromo. However, literarily in Afaan Oromo (Oromo language) the concept of Waqa can be explained differently with different concepts. The name Waqa has three different meanings. The concept of Waqa has a threefold meanings. Waqa could mean the expanse of the sky as seen from the earth. It could also be to mean a supreme being. The third meaning is subtle and closely related to the first, but different from it; as it connotes an abode of the above mentioned Supreme Being Informants confirm that the three concepts are not limited only to the Matcha Oromo, literary the Tulama use the word Waqa to identify three different things.

The first thing that is named Waqa among Tulama is the wide sky that includes a large number of different stars. The second concept of Waqa is heaven, the place where the adherents of the Waqqeffanna religion considered as residence of Waqa. For the Oromo, various ritual objects and any other sacred things were believed to be thrown on earth from heaven by Waqa. The adherents have believed that he has lived in the sky (heaven) and sent rain to the earth so that grass can grow, and water can be available for the animals and human beings to drink. The third concept is the divine covenant, the Supreme entity. This concept of Waqa has a central place in the religion of the Oromo. In this sense, the Tulama believe in a Supreme entity, Waqa and they named him as Waqa, Waqqayyoo, Gooftaa, Rabbi and etc.

As has been indicated above conceptual misquoting and mentioning those three names as single one and waqa means in such a way that with single misquoted interpretation as waqa mean the sky-god terminology and wrong meaning giving likely exist among non-adherents of the religion as if lack appropriate knowledge about the conceptual issue among the Oromo of the adherents of the indigenous religion of Waqqeffanna (Wakefana) as if common in Ethiopia and beyond. In this regard, the three concepts are directly merged among the non-adherents as if giving the stated single meaning of wrong interpretation attached to the supreme being Waqa as if common and giving and attaching such wrong meaning as an attribute that doesn't exist in the Oromo indigenous religious view as if among the factors that consideration taken such indigenous religion as only locally and indigenously exist among the Oromo as if its contribution as a social and spiritual entity as if overlooked even among scholars specially not only with in the country but also among the expatriate as if sources of information might guide them in such a way as the sources lacks value neutrality and deviated to the competition exist among the religious institutions in Ethiopia as if such issue usually related to the political regime handling power for long at least since the formation of modern Ethiopia with current boundary demarcation as if issue of such political rigidity based structure of the government handling power specially during the lordship feudal land holding privately by alienating the Oromo of Ethiopia and the rest from the utilization of natural resources as most of the sources livelihood leading still today in Ethiopia appropriately on land as the population totally still agrarian as if land appropriation and fraud usually common and the regime totally alienate the total population and giving the whole as the private property to only few members of the regime holding groups and soldiers protecting their privacy as if additional for the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. As among Oromo of the adherents of the religion Waqa is the creator of all the universe including all human beings as if the former misquote meaning giving simply related to the derogative naming as well as derogative attribute attaching by those considered themselves as alien to the Oromo religious view and beyond.

In relation to this, Waqa is called uma to emphasis the belief that he was/is the creator and governor of everything in the universe (animals, plants, earth, sky, light, dark and all needs of man) which is attributed to Waqa. He is believed to be the source of life, nature, truth and justice. Besides, he has the ultimate power in the universe beyond which no other power exists. He was/is beyond depiction, and was first principle and explanation of everything.

The evidences do not help in tracing the origin of Waqa in time depth. However, informants unanimously agree of its regional prevalence. In other words, the belief in Waqa is not alien issue. However, they do not have clear information in tracing its time depth. Hence, he is their creator, not only them but also the universe and they no created him, he had existed before them. Furthermore, it is claimed that he is equivalent to the God of Christians and the Allah of Muslims but not the same. The belief in such a powerful creator is called 'Waaqqeffannaa' which

sprung out of the concept of Waqa. In the indigenous religion of the Oromo, Waqa was/is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, sacred.

Waqa is believed to be omnipotent. The name Waqa is usually followed by guddicha (greatest) to show his supremacy. He is believed to have absolute power [3]. He has complete power over all people and their activities. Beside, Waqa's absolute power is not only over people and their activities but also over all things in the universe. He is believed to be the only supreme, has a complete power to accomplish everything, in charge to safeguard and look after living things, can do and undo anything, either avert or cause any misfortune.

With respect to protection when the Tulama Oromo have needed to get rain or to get security from fatal epidemic disease or other problems, they gathered at a usual main ritual sites located at the top of nearby Mountain, at the bank of nearby River, lake, Spring and under the big tree of 'Oda' and then repented of their sins begging Waqa forgiveness. This ritual activity is regarded as reconciliation between Waqa and man or people. They have also performed this at family level. All have to be reconciled. Everybody has to hold green grass and call out 'nudhagayi yaWaqa', (hear us the Waqa); which is the base of making peace between man and Waqa. In relation to supremacy, the followers of the religion of the Oromo have preached that there is no other power to challenge Waqa's supreme power. Hence, there is no other power that could contend Waqa's infinite power, wisdom, and supreme authority. Waqa is not only used by the Oromo as the Supreme with unlimited authority but also an eternal being or transcendental spiritual entity.

Everything is in the hand of Waqa. No power is above him and he can do or undo everything. It is also regarded that Waqa is omniscient. This attribution shows that he knows, sees and hears whatever his creatures said or did all the time. He is regarded as knowing every secret of his creatures' activities. Nothing happens in the universe without the consent of Waqa. This shows Waqa sets man to accomplish his /her plans or dreams. Because of this fact his creatures directly pray to Waqa.

When one needed to accomplish something new in the future he/she would say 'Waqni yoo jedhe' (if Waqa allows), Waqatu beeka (Waqa knows). This indicates that man's aspirations realized if and only if Waqa wanted it to realize. He is greatly feared, respected and his name was not invoked for minor and simple matters but for taking oath, attesting truth, blessing and cursing. Thus, the society respects Waqa in all matters of their lives. The Tulama are very careful to appease Waqa. Whether the adherents confront problems or pursue happiness, it is only Waqa who is to be praised or to whom either displeasure or resentment is to be expressed. The Oromos have had direct relationship with Waqa, in time of happiness or moments of problem. On the other hand, they prayed and appealed to him for recover easily from unpleasant events when they believe that they might have committed cubbu(sin) that could cause Waqa's withdrawal.

The other attribute attached to Waqa is omnipresent. The adherents have believed that Waqa presents and exists everywhere. As a result, as informants claim no one can clearly state the specific seat of Waqa. They visualize that Waqa exists everywhere and whenever with in the universe. No one can see Waqa but can see only his miracle deeds.

The above saying states that Waqa is great and pure. Gurracha is another important concept that attached to the attribute of Waqa. Gurracha means black in its broadest sense of the term, which indicates not only the color but also the purity, and tolerance of Waqa. Likewise, the word taliila also states the goodness of Waqa for his creatures.

The explanation of the above attributes show that Waqa is always present everywhere, is pure, tolerant, impossible to understand can do and undo anything; do not accept injustice, crime, sin and falsehood. Because of this abstract nature, his manifestation on the earth could only be particularized through his miracle deeds that include his ability to create and giving of life. The adherents believe that all living things are given their state of being alive by Waqa just be considered as his work alone. Besides, all living things depend on Waqa for living. There are proverbs and sayings that indicate the dependence of man and other living things on Waqa.

The adherents continuously looking for Waqa's help in all aspects of their lives and believe that everything is happened on the will of Waqa. At the time when the original religion was the faith of the whole people of Tulama, Waqa was the only invoked being or Supreme. Below him there was the recognition of the existence of much spiritual connection regarded as intermediary and pass message between Waqa and man and vice versa. One of these intermediary spirits is called Ayana which is considered as the way in which Waqa can appear on the individual. It was/is believed that every creature, people, animal and plant have their own Ayyana. It could be

claimed that every individual has his/her own Ayyana which stand near him/her in order to direct, protect, give him/her help.

In relation to this, it has believed that every individual has his/ her own Ayyana, its number is approximate to the number of individuals (people). So that Ayyana sprits are different and exist in large number. Besides, this kind of Ayyana is believed to be live on the individual. It is recognized and distinguished with people. Moreover, it is also intended to be responsible for individual's action and plays role for the way that the individual behaves. Similarly, it is responsible in shaping one's behavior and personality as well as determining everything that happens to the individual during his/her life, including what will happen to him in the future. For instance, as to the Oromo if they do not give birth to the son/ daughter, they say my Ayyana did not give me a son/daughter. If a woman is totally unable to be pregnant to have babies, people consider it is happened by her Ayyana. After marriage negotiations between two families are successfully completed the go-between elders express the success by saying, the Ayyanas of both the bride and groom standing them together. If an individual has a lot of children, cattle, good harvest, a potential of peace making and respected behavior in a society, the Oromos also say an individual has good Ayyana.

Waqqa exists in distance place from human beings, it is believed that Ayyana is one of the ways in which Waqqa can appear on the individual. Because people need it to direct them the right way by avoiding wrong doings, help them to live, behave in a way that is considered to be acceptable and not rude, help them to respect the law that Waqqa has given them, enable people to remember and undertake their duties to Waqqa and to each other. Generally speaking, to help, guide, direct and attend man's actions Waqqa bestowed Ayyana upon them. The Ayyanas are believed to be below and subordinate to Waqqa, but probably above human beings.

The Tulama elders claim that the source of the origin of the Oromo traces to Waqqa. He is considered as the supreme medium over the masses of the Oromo. Every Oromo had attachment with the Supreme entity, Waqqa, without any difference. As mentioned earlier, according to this religion Waqqa through spiritual intermediary connections passes orders or messages to the adherents that they should not be maltreated and all his orders should be practiced properly. The responsibility includes adhering to the moral-values that the adherents considered as the law of Waqqa. Respecting and adhering to the law of Waqqa is believed to be walking on the right way; on the avenue of peace (karaa nagaa).

In other words, in order to lead a successful life (without any problem) one should be adhered to the legitimacy of social taboos. Morals and values are considered as the wish of Waqqa that make the whole community members agree to lead peaceful communal life. To ensure the member's peace, stability and unity there are various well recognized moral-values that every member of the community should be either adhere to or expected to abstain from. Individuals having a behavior of selfish, cheeky person of sneaky, socially inconsiderate, and deceptive are understood as existing against the law of Waqqa [4]. This kind of behavior is considered as violation of moral-values which leads to punishment. In order to punish the wrong doer it was believed that Waqqa caused any misfortunes on him, his family, his property and any other that belongs to him.

With respect to punishment, the followers of the religion of the Oromo did not believe in unpleasant happening after death if one did something wrong and sin, however; the wrong doer is believed to be punished and suffered before death or while he/she was alive. From the explanation it seems that the religion did not preach the believe in the existence of hell and heaven. Preaching about preparedness for the best life after death reached Tulama land latter after the advent of Christianity. This set of belief, which nowadays strongly influence the ways of life of the Oromo did not exist in former times. There was no preaching and teaching about the beauty life after death. Furthermore, there was no log fasting like both Christianity and Islamic religion that requires abstain from nutritions.

By and large from the above facts the adherents look up to Waqqa in all condition of their existence. Waqqa was/is the only frequently invoked in the daily life of every Oromo.

In morning and evening the adherents have prayed looking for or seeking peace, health, wealth, protection to one's cattle and children, to leads them 'karaa nagaa' on the avenue of peace, etc. However, this does not necessarily mean that those who invoked in every morning and evening were all on the avenue of peace and right way. There could be individuals who might have gone far from the right way and committed themselves to a falsehood and false oath and invocation. The oath and invocation is believed to be held at the right time for the right reason at the right place.

On the other hand, it is often said that false oath and falsehood invocation is believed to be a sign of calling misfortune up on one's own fortune. It is considered as showing disrespect for Waqa and to the society as a whole. This is regarded as a very obvious way of rejection to walk on the right way; on the avenue of peace, violation of the law of Waqa and a defection from being a faithful individual in a community. Such a behavior has been regarded to be extremely bad and results misfortunes.

Though there is no well-known written story to depend on which was made up in the past to explain and justify events of this religious belief and its social custom like Christian Bible or Islamic Koran, the Tulama have officially recognized the existence of Waqa as a Supreme divine since time immemorial. They believed that Waqa was/is uuma (creator). Every Oromo prayed to Waqa for help or forgiveness and giving thanks in his/her daily life. Every morning and evening, they have prayed to get Waqa's favor and protection. The religion acknowledges that human, spiritual and physical worlds are interconnected with each other. Their presence and function are governed and guided by Waqa. The organizational and interconnection of human, spiritual and physical world is justified and explained through saffu, uuma and Ayyana [5]. Saffu is morale and ethical code that the Oromo used to differentiate or identify evil (bad) from good and wrong from right. Uuma includes everything that is created by Waqa including Ayyana. Ayyana is a spiritual intermediary connection that is believed to be created by Waqa and passes message between Waqa and man. It is through each person's Ayyana that Waqa plays a role on the person's life and actions.

In spite of the fact that the Tulama are actually claiming to be Christians, most of them have been performing the practices of the indigenous religion till today. They have succeeded in maintaining and continuing Waqqeffanna religion and its elements. For instance, till to these days when the Tulama Oromo are asked about their religion, they say "we are Christians" (usually Orthodox Christianity). They never officially mentioned the indigenous religion and its elements. However, if someone asks them about the Waqa, they answered as 'uumma keenya' meaning "our creator." When they were and still are asked to make oath in the name of Waqa and other traditionally sacred phenomenon and elements, they were /are very serious and stick to the oath. However, the followers of the newly introduced religions have also exclusively used the name Waqa to refer to the God of the newly introduced Christian religion without considering the attribute of Oromo's Waqa.

## CONCLUSION

Despite theoretical controversy, scholars in the field of religious study agree that religion is universal culture and there is no known society without religion. Most the followers of traditional religion recognized, one supreme divine entity and various intermediary sprites between the Supreme Being and the adherents of the religion. With this regard, the Oromo people have practiced their own indigenous religion for many centuries. In the case of Oromo in general and Tulama in particular, Waqa is considered as the supreme entity and Ayyana (multiple in number) is considered as the intermediary sprits that communicates Waqa with human beings. This study addresses the concept, attributes, and invocations of Waqa among Tulama Oromo, which are settled in the central Ethiopia. For Tulama Oromo, Waqa is the divine entity with attribution such as omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, sacred (pure) and tolerant for the deeds of his creatures. The Tulama elders state that the people continuously looking for Waqa's help in all aspects of their lives and believe that everything is happened on the will of Waqa. Likewise, in order to lead a successful life one should be adhered to the legitimacy Moral-values. Morals and values are considered as the wish of Waqa, the laws of Waqa, that make the whole community members agree to lead peaceful communal life. From this information, the attribute that attached to Waqa prohibits every member of the community from doing what a community considers as wrong, sin, bad, evil, crime, injustice, partition, e.t.c. This brings together each member of a community for common interest and peaceful co-existence. However, in modern time, the followers of other religion use the name Waqa to refer to the name of their religious God.

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