Oromo Oral Literature for Environmental Conservation: A Study of Selected Folksongs in East and West Hararghe Zones

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Abstract: This paper presents the values, knowledge and beliefs of the environment that are inscribed in the Oromo folksongs with particular reference to Eastern and Western Hararghe zones of Oromia regional state. The paper discusses the various contributions of the Oromo folksongs in conserving the environment. The paper is based on the qualitative data produced through face-to-face interviews, non-participant observations and document analysis of both published and unpublished sources. The data used in this paper were collected from 24 individuals of the community leaders, elders and sheekaas by using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The analysis of the paper is employed in functional, contextual and ecocritical theoretical models. In order to arrive at the various ideas of folksongs connected to the environmental conservation, some selected folksongs were carefully designated. The paper attempts to address the contexts in which the folksongs reflect the viewpoints of environment. It also tries to explore the role of Oromo folksongs and their implications in the efforts of wide-reaching environmental views. The position of this paper is that indigenous knowledge (Oromo folksongs) is an effective vehicle in supplementing the existing efforts of conserving the environment through imagery, metaphoric, and symbolic description. Based on the analysis, this paper addresses the association that the Oromo people have strong reflections of environmental conservation through its folksongs. On the basis of the contextual analysis, we classified the folksongs that have environmental implication into four sub-divisions: (1) for utilitarian reason, (2) for visualization, (3) for aesthetic values and (4) for morality purpose.

Keywords: environmental conservation; folksong; Hararghe; Oromo

1. Introduction

The Oromo people are one of the largest Cushitic-speaking ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa who maintain their own culture, religion and history (Bokku 2011). According to Baxter et al. (1996) the Oromo live in a territory that extends from the Highlands of Ethiopia in the North, to the Ogaden and Somalia in the East, to the Sudan border in the West and across the Kenyan border to the Tana River in the South. The Oromo possess fertile land along with its natural resources and live in suitable weather conditions (Bokku 2011). The present Oromo are estimated to comprise 40–50 per cent of Ethiopia’s population of more than 50 million (Keller 1995). The Oromo people speak Afaan Oromo which is part of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family and is the most spoken language in Africa with no less than four dialects (Melbaa 1988). The Oromo people constitute one of the largest African nations who share a common culture, language and history. The people have a unique administrative system known as Gada, which they claim is a classic example of a traditional African form of democracy (Hassan 1990; Keller 1995). Although the Oromo have not developed written literature, their own history, customs, knowledge and beliefs have been maintained through their own oral literature (Bokku 2011).
Many societies in this world cannot be devoid of using oral literature even within the era of developed written literature. Especially, those whose written literatures are least developed heavily rely upon their oral literature to express their storehouse of indigenous knowledge, culture, history, value, etc. Anthropologists have stated a lot that most non-literate societies’ institutions, traditions, customs, beliefs, and crafts are transmitted through their oral literature (Bascom 1953). In this paper, we propose the commitment of Oromo cultural expressions to an understanding of saving nature. It is indicated by different scholars that indigenous societies have had a highly developed construction of the environment which were transmitted orally which can have significant role in the today’s society (Asante-Darko 2006). The dynamic between human and nature is embedded in oral pearls of wisdom, and as a result, one may say that interaction is one of the subjects in the indigenous artistic expression of this culture. Oral poetry/songs can generate and convey many more meanings than those intended for the gracing of the occasion for which they are performed if they are deconstructed (Monanti et al. 2013).

Several studies indicate that the Oromo society is close to nature and lived for long time guided by indigenous tradition addressing the dynamic human nature interaction (Kelbessa 2001). The Oromo recognize their cultural relations to nature and are conscious of the power that regulates them to nature (Debelo 2012). According to Debelo, their wisdom of interaction between human and non-human nature is guided by their customary knowledge. Furthermore, according to (Bartels 1983), this shows prevalence of practical manifestation of the relationship between the culture of the Oromo society and environmental sustainability. Therefore, studying Oromo oral traditions has a paramount importance according to Boswell (1962, p. 11). On top of their aesthetic qualities and recreational functions, different oral literary genres contribute a lot in shaping societies and their environments from cultural, historical and sociological point of views. Okpewho (1992, p. 115) states that oral traditions play a great role for citizens of a society to acquire knowledge on individual or collective bases to know who they are, to strengthen their social bondage, to identify their peculiar ways of living, and to continue their cultural practices. Hence, we believe this study can contribute to the discussion of preserving and identifying Oromo oral literature with environmental values as the preservation of the environment through their folksongs.

Studying the oral traditions of a society, more specifically, oral literature helps to impart the knowledge that the society used to express themselves through time and space, and to judge knowledge of the society as a whole. Studying ones society’s past experiences and cultural values enable their members to put their contemporary knowledge and sense of identities into action. This means their traditional performances like creative works and verbal arts which are presented through different folkloric genres can contribute a great deal of knowledge to the society’s contemporary life. Thus, this study helps to understand how the Oromo people interact with nature through oral poetry (folksongs) because “the folklore of a people can be fully understood only through a thorough knowledge of their culture” (Bascom 1954, p. 338). The contents and themes of the different forms and genres of these oral literatures are very important in the day to day life of the society to give us their clear picture. In view of that, it is pivotal to conduct a study on the: collection, classification and critical analysis of Oromo folksongs in order to examine the rich culture of oral tradition; the relationship of folksongs to environment and their elements of performance in various social settings.

On the other hand, environmental issues are very crucial in Oromo society for aesthetic values of nature. As (de Salviac 2005, p. 21) notes;

*The greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape richness and a variety which make it like a garden without boundary. Healthful climate, uniform and temperate, fertility of the soil, beauty of the inhabitants, the security in which their house seem to be situated, makes one dream of remaining in such a beautiful country.*

Thus, the society uses its various oral traditions in dealing with environment for diverse purposes. However, scholars in the field argue that African oral literature of all genres, including that of the Oromo, remained untouched as they are exclusively studied by anthropologists and art historians until
recently. Okpewho (1979) shows that the attempts of these scholars are rather inadequate to realize the communities life and thought from the nature and content of its arts. As part of African oral literature, Oromo oral literature in the past was also highly influenced by this view. Some studies have been conducted by a number of Oromo scholars such as Tefera (2004), focused on the sociology of Oromo Literature in particular the Jarso Waqoo’s Poetry; Dibaba (2015), Ethnography of Resistance Poetics in Salale Oromo Folklore and Resistance Culture. Sumner (1996b) discussed Oromo wisdom literature in different volumes. Legesse (1973) assessed the Oromo Gadaa System. Bitima (2004) considered Oromo oral poetry in general ways. Adugna (2014) saw the views of environmental conservation through proverbs. However, none of these studies have investigated environmental ideas that emanated from folksongs. As a result, there has been not much scrutinized study conducted on issues of Oromo oral literature for environmental conservation in Ethiopia which in turn has resulted in less documentation and transmission of knowledge to generations to the expected level. Therefore, it is demanding to carry out scientific studies in the field to examine how the society uses its folksongs in shaping and developing environmental values and imparting their store house of indigenous knowledge in line with the cultures, norms, identities and traditions.

In Oromo oral tradition, environmental ideas are clearly viewed. For example, the Oromo land according to (de Salviac 2005, pp. 21–22) is “an oasis luxuriant with large trees and known for its opulent and dark greenery used to shoot up from the soil”. As the day to day lives of the people chiefly depend on their environment, they share lots of experiences to members of community through different genres of oral literature, particularly folksongs. Thus, the members are included in the societal system and exercise duties and responsibilities. The society also considers the environment as a blessing and boon from Almighty. As a result, they give special attention to their use and management. In this regard, there are lots of literary genres in the society which deal with the environment and alert the people to make them keen observers, enthusiastic, skillful and active participants in wise usage and conservation. Like other societies in Africa and the world, the Oromo have various kinds of oral literature which they use to communicate their culture, history, tradition, norm, way of life, etc. The forms of Oromo oral literature vary from region to region on the basis of their style, performance, philosophical thought, world view, religion, etc.

The term environment refers to human beings and their surroundings which include air, water, land, animals and the entire ecosystem (Osuntokun 2001) cited in (Awuah-nyamekye 2013). According to Nwosu (2010), African cosmology conceives that the existence of human beings is being tied up with their environment. Conservation discourses in Africa exhibit a series of competing perspectives between the state, local communities and conservationist organizations (Debelo 2012). Rather, they believe that the human, non-human and supernatural power constitute inseparable constituents of nature and mutually coexist (Baxter 1991).

According to Okpewho (1992), oral literature may be defined as those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree that artistic characteristic of accurate observation, vivid imagination and indigenous expression of human product. Oral literature as a human product must serve the interest of the people who produced it. Its effective function makes it possible for them to come to terms with the new direction of the world in which they find themselves. The solidarity song of the Oromo is obviously intended to make the daily activities more entertaining and delightful. If a society is to exist as a unity, its members must share values, which define the distinctive feature of that society. The Oromo emphasize the importance of collective work; because, it is believed to enhance a deep sense of friendship, social solidarity and common purpose.

Furthermore, indigenous societies have wisdoms long held in their culture about the human, and their relation to the physical environment they occupy. Their oral literatures also embody repositories of thoughts about the non-human part of nature. These wisdoms reveal the societies’ values and beliefs about the place of humans, and their responsibility towards the environment. As a result, cultures of indigenous society deserve attention in contemporary discourses surrounding the health and wealth.
of environment. So, this paper pays due attention to the Oromo oral literature more specifically to folksong and aids in raising consciousness through indigenous ways in shaping minds through the values entrenched in them (Adugna 2014). It is indicated by different scholars that indigenous societies have had highly developed constructions of the environment which were transmitted orally (Kelbessa 2001). The dynamic interaction of humans with nature is embedded in these oral wisdoms, and as a result, we may say that interaction is one of the subjects of the indigenous artistic expression of these cultures (Kelbessa 2001).

Oromo folksongs such as heellee, mirriysaa, shaggooyyee, guuzaa/daboo, tapha ijoollee, and other ritual songs are the most popular genres of Oromo Oral poetry through which the Oromo express their beliefs, attitudes, feelings and other communal activities. Thus, the way the people define themselves in relation to the non-human part of their world can be understood from the folk ideas encoded in their wisdoms (Adugna 2014). The beliefs, values, knowledge held in the folksongs have their own specific purpose. From the different purposes, this paper specifically investigates the environmental ideas inscribed in folksongs.

2. Theoretical Concepts

Different theories exist in the literature regarding oral literature. In the data analysis of this paper, ecocriticism, functionalism and contextualism theoretical models are used. The ecocriticism theoretical framework according to Gomides (2006) and Buell (2005) is the field of investigation that analyzes and promotes the works of art which raise moral and ethical questions between nature and human beings. To Cohen (2004), ecocriticism focuses on literary expression of the human experience in both the natural and cultural world but Estok (2001) sees ecocriticism as the ethical stand it takes and its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study. Hence, the ecocriticism simply started as the study of nature in literature by broadening out to an identification and examination of appropriate representations of nature in all kinds of literature because it is committed to effecting positive change in people’s attitudes to the environment, and it serves functional, aesthetic and ethical ends (Sone 2014).

The functional and contextual theoretical frameworks which were identified by Dorson (1972) in the 1960s were also assumed. Dorson (1972) states the importance of using two or more theoretical framework for studies as “theories do exist and compete with each other vigorously”, which means that there are various theoretical frameworks important for a research at a time. Accordingly, a functional model which is common for anthropologists to study the traditions of indigenous societies was employed for this paper. According to Hicks and Hicks and Gwynne (1996), the functionalism model is helpful to know the various social functions of folksongs, their importance and their immediate need in the society. One of the four functions of folklore according to Bascom (1954) is that it plays in validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them. “The functional significance of a folksong should be revealed through its interrelationship with other aspects of the social-cultural system within which it finds expression” (Freeman 1957). The other theoretical framework used in this study is, the contextual model. The contextual model helps to understand the aesthetic values of folksongs (Gameda 2008). Also, the anthropological theory applies content, function, and style to the analytical processes of folksongs. ‘The functional dimension of a folk song is related to the song’s context; that is, to all it characteristics beyond the song’s structure’ (Kaučič 2005).

In this paper, the recurring terms such as interpretation, evaluation, reconstruction, deconstruction and adaptation remind us of the fact that the value and contextual meanings of oral tradition are the outcome of the creative process, and that process occurs within a specific socio-cultural and political setting.

3. Materials and Methods

This paper is based on qualitative ethnographic research approach. Qualitative research is usually described as allowing a detailed exploration and explanation of topic of interest in which information
is collected by a researcher through case studies, ethnographic work, interviews, observation and so on (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The qualitative research design was employed to discover the reality of the environmental views of the Oromo through folksongs and its prevalence. Hence, to understand the Oromo society’s environmental views, ethnographic study is preferred to deal with the culture and their environment through the critical lens of folksongs. This approach is generally preferred to study oral literature particularly folksongs. So, this paper deals with environmental views of the Oromo societies’ holistic traditions of the socio-economic, political and cultural life and explains its current occurrences. According to (Edson 1988), several arguments have been presented to support the claim that ethnography is more appropriate to the study of the social values, norms and cultures. For example, Franchetto (2006) describes that ethnographic research recognizes speech genres and registers its contexts of events to identify significant terms and expressions. To Bhattacherjee (2012), engagement, observation and recording the daily life of the studied culture and its social participants within their natural setting is the central focus of ethnographic research method. Thus, ethnographic research is preferable for the collection, documentation, classification and critical analysis of verbal arts including folksongs.

Data for this study is said to come from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained from field works, conducted to collect folksongs. This helped the researchers to acquire the society’s explanations about the nature through interview and non-participant observation data collection. We obtained secondary data from the analysis of both published and unpublished sources. We specifically focused on the collection of folksongs that are related to the human–nature relationship from the secondary sources. These include songs from books, collected documents of Culture and Tourism Offices, manuscripts and thesis that related with Oromo folksongs. Such texts are useful for the type of data difficult to obtain through the interview technique but are still invaluable. The source of data in the field work came from four districts of East and West Hararghe zones of Oromia regional state. The interview guidelines and non-participant observation were set in the data collection process. To do so, both audio and video materials were used to collect salient aspect of folksongs. Accordingly, 24 individuals from Oromo elders, Sheekaas, leaders, performers of folksongs of the society, peoples that the community assumed as orators, volunteers to act out folksongs, Culture and Tourism Offices of the zones for interview were reached through the snowball sampling technique with the help of local guiders and cultural experts of the zones. The interview was intended to get the general feeling of the people towards folksongs, the context in which they occur and their functions. In addition, two frequent non-participant observation sessions at each district were considered as another source of data. The non-participant observation assisted the researchers to closely perceive the actual performances, styles, procedures and the existing norms during narration of folksongs in the areas. Each session was accompanied by orientation, guidance as well as field note and the nature of interaction and communicative events were captured on their natural setting using both digital audio and video recordings. To that end, firsthand and genuine data were produced as carefully as possible. Finally, the researchers make plain folksongs that directly reflect environmental ideas for analysis. During the data analysis, maximum effort was made to avoid personal biases during the interpretation of the data.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the materials and methods employed, different classifications, critical analysis and arguments were made in the collected Oromo folksongs. Hence, the views, knowledge and beliefs of Oromo folksongs in the context of environmental conservation in this paper can be classified into the following four clusters: Environmental knowledge of folksongs for utilitarian purpose, environmental knowledge of folksongs for visualization/envisaging, environmental knowledge of folksongs for aesthetic values and environmental knowledge of folksongs for morality purpose.
4.1. Environmental Knowledge of Folksongs for Utilitarian Purpose

Folklore is artistic in its nature and its artistic nature of folklore is generally subordinate to its utilitarian nature (Dorson 1972). According to Kelbessa (2010), trees are protected among the societies for utilitarian reasons, and at times for aesthetic reasons. The utilitarian views of Oromo folksongs goes hand in hand with the principle of traditional utilitarianism that things that are useful to human beings are good (Kelbessa 2010). Hence, they protect their environment for utilitarian reasons. The idea that certain types of oral literature could have a utilitarian role is a more extreme hypothesis that supposedly characterizes the civilized nations (Finnegan 2012). The following are examples of folksong that have environmental knowledge among the Oromo for utilitarian reasons.

**Song One (1)**

*Dachee haadha hundaa*  
Earth, the mother of all

*Dachee abbaa hundaa*  
Earth, the father of all

*Sirra kaannaa sirraa nyaannaa,*  
We ran on you and we feed up on you

*Safuu uumaa safeeyfannaa,*  
We respect the ritual of the nature

*Kakuu uumaa kakeeyfanna.*  
We promise the promise of the nature

Song (1) shows the importance of the Earth. The song portrays that the life of the human being is dependent on the existence of the Earth/land. Embodied in this verse is the relationship that occurs between human being and the Earth. The song compares the land with mother and father. Implicated in this verse is that the existence of the human being is based on the existence of the Earth/land. It is true that humans and non-human beings cannot survive, move, feed and breathe without the existence of the Earth because everything is contingent upon the Earth/land. The song is the most copious form of expressing feelings among the Oromo of every region about the Earth. The third line of the verse *sirra kaannaa sirraa nyaannaa* of the song shows the importance of soil that covers the land surfaces of Earth for the source nourishments. The phrase *sirraa nyaannaa* specifically carries the message that human activities such as farming and production depend on the existence of the Earth. It is noticeable that the song actually constitutes a living system, combining with air, water, and sunlight to sustain plant life which nature gave people for the continuation of life. Hence, the song clearly indicates the growths of plants are all based on the existence of the Earth. Thus, without land, there would be no flora and fauna, no crops for food, forests, flowers, or grasslands which account for the natural environment. According to Kelbessa (2010), the Oromo believe that *Waaqa* and *Lafa* (Earth) are inseparable. From the above verse, we can also understand that all things originate from the Earth and depend on the resources of the Earth for their survival.

Therefore, from song (1) we can understand that the Oromo people value the nature (Earth) contesting to their mothers and fathers. The song helps the people to recognize that the Earth should be treated as our mothers and fathers. Through the song, the people appreciated and express their feelings of the nature around them. The song does not only depict the viewpoints about the existence of the people without the existence of the Earth, but also carries the viewpoints that other creatures cannot exist without the existence of the Earth. The idea embodied in the first line of the poem is the view that the natural environments are as important as our families.

**Song Two (2)**

*Odaa lagaa odaa lagaa*  
River odaa river odaa

*Odaan jalli bishaan lagaa*  
Under odaa is river water

*Doobbaa gaafni deeyilaa bari*  
Know that Doba’s horn is bent

*Aayyoo harki deeymaa bari*  
Know that mother’ s hand is honey

The song depicted in (2) is about the relationships between an ever green indigenous tree-*odaa* (sycamore) and the existence of river water that flourishes flora and fauna. The first two lines of the poem are different from the remaining parts of the song in their context. The song associates greenness with abundance in water; where there is *odaa* there would be water. Implied in this song is that there is an intrinsic value where there are no trees, there would be draught. The first two lines of the song
do not have the same semantic contexts. *Odaa* among the Oromo people is specifically associated with humidity. Under *Odaa* is a place the Oromo used for reconciliation, worship, where traditional laws (*seeraa* and *Heeraa*) are legitimated and the *Gadaa* power exchange takes place. According to Jalata (1998, p. 13) *Odaa* is a symbol of general discussion of and it is a place where *Gadaa* political philosophy undertaken. Claude Sumner in his collection of Oromo proverbs and folktales explored that *Odaa* is the most respected tree under which the Oromo treat their court cases and where fertility rituals are performed yearly or periodically. He further explained that *Odaa* is the tree of culture and it is considered as the most elegant of all trees. The elegance of *Odaa* is compared with the elegance of woman or man (Sumner 1996a).

On the other hand, *odaa* is seen as a source of peace and symbol of identity and unity in the history and culture of the Oromo people. It is highly respected and blessed among all trees with the Oromo due to the beliefs and political implication in the *Gadaa* system. *Odaa* is naturally green and can survive for a longer period of time even during the dry season. It is often grown around water and humid areas. Thus, in the song above we can understand that there is a close relationship between the *Odaa* and the Oromo people due to the fact that it has an implication in its socio-political orientations.

### 4.2. Environmental Knowledge of Folksongs for Visualization/Envisaging Purpose

The Oromo people are also very close to nature in line with the visualization purpose. The following song is an example of this kind:

**Song Three (3)**

| Querransa yaa abbaa Tullee | O tiger, father of Tulle! |
| Haati kee haadha hundaati | Your mother has given birth to many, |
| Abbaan kee abbaa hundaati | Your father begot many, |
| Hundumtu querransauma | They belong to the tiger, all those he begot |
| Querransa ija burii . . . | He who decorates his eyes with ‘buri’ |

The analysis and reconstruction of song (3) reveals the closeness the Oromo people have with fauna. This song was taken from Sumner (1996a, p. 92). In the song, the singer is admonishing the audience to refrain from visiting the dangerous abode of the tiger. According to the song, the tiger’s mother and father are the mother and father of all. The implication of this literal metaphoric expression is that all species of tigers are tigers that make people or other animals to fear. In this case, we agree with (Bourdeau 2004, p. 9) when he says ‘nature can be seen as beautiful and harmonious but it also inspires fear in man who has had to fight it in order to survive’. The singer has assumed the role of an observer reporting the incident. The simple connotative statement results in the revelation of the persona’s state of eagerness. The singer is also afraid of this animal that it causes all others to flee. Nonetheless, s/he is thrilled by the fact that a tiger is the source of so much alarm. The singer thus admires the tiger for its mastery and dominion over the other wildlife. In metaphoric terms, this image of emphasizing the strength of the tiger connotes the exaltation of the tiger as causing a kind of stir of which even humans are incapable. Thus, at first sight, it would seem that the song elevates the tiger’s prowess above that of humans, thereby depicting how admirable the tiger’s power is. The song sees the dread inspired by the tiger in the world of fauna a meaningful of the power of humans in their environment through personification. Thus, by likening the power of the tiger to that of humans, the song personalizes the two opposing species-humans and the tiger how they dominate their surroundings. In spite of this difference, the persona perceives the tiger and humans as being linked by the fact that they both inspire dread in their surroundings.

The surprise in the persona’s message suggests that it is witness to this incident and is, therefore, present in this realm of the beast. It is logical that by personalizing the strength of the tiger, the song’s message envisages the effect of cautioning humans against the danger involved in the encounter with the tiger. The first two lines are linked by the substantial complement of the cause. This implies an appeal for the control of human activities in the realm of nature. Here, the collection of grammatical elements of human activities is mirrored upon the tiger by personification. In presenting the power
of the tiger, the song emphasizes the relationship between the tiger’s power and human beings in the Oromo culture. The song generally represents tigers as powerful but socially and culturally cohesive beings.

In some instances, the song in Oromo oral literature is used to express respects of flora and fauna and they share relationships with human kind. It is an association made between wildlife (snake) and tinny trees (jajjaba). The song illustrated in (4) is typical example:

**Song Four (4)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mar'ataan jajjaba raasa</th>
<th>Snake shakes jajjaba trees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haaraassaa manusaattii</td>
<td>Let him shake, it is its home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amataatu gargar nu baasa</td>
<td>Gossipers isolate us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haataa'u ka dhalisaattii</td>
<td>Let it be, for his descendants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Song (4) depicts that the Oromo people have respect for the wild life including snake varieties. Jajjabas are tinny trees where snakes often live. The snakes have the right to live there, because nature gives them an accommodation to live there. The first two lines of the verse are about how important to think of the homes/places of snakes. The message depicted shows that although some individuals hate all snake varieties and believe that they are revengeful, they should not be killed. The Oromo believe that if you kill them, they will kill your animals or your family members (Debelo 2012). As a result, they do not want to kill this kind of wildlife. Hence, we can say that the social and moral concerns of fear and religious beliefs influence the Oromo view of wild nature as a whole to give them protection. The simple reflection of verse (4) is that wildlife resources should be protected and utilized in a sustainable manner on the basis of careful assessment of natural heritage in flora and fauna subtle ecosystems, sites under pressure and endangered species, with the participation of, and benefits to, the local communities. In song (4) we can understand that Oromo society mediates historical events and places through different folkloric arts of environmental values. Here we agree with Adugna (2014) when he says that the Oromo do not regard animals just as a wealth which should be browbeaten by human to the extent of annihilation. According to Kelbessa (2010), with regard to the wild animals as well, the Oromo have no desire of eliminating the animals, they show kindness to the animals whether they are big or tiny. In a similar way, the song has been a deep-rooted belief among the Oromo that any disruption in their relationship with non-human things in the environment would displease Waaqa and invoke punishment in the form of drought, famine, disease and war (Debelo 2012).

**4.3. Environmental Knowledge of Folksongs for Aesthetic Purpose**

Among literary genres, there are various folkloric genres that obviously play the role of aesthetic function (Bascom 1953). The Qaalluu institution among the Oromo according to Kelbessa (2010) has had a positive impact on the environment and carries aesthetic implication. They perform prayer ceremonies besides the natural objects which are often green and distinguished by their size or other impressive qualities. These may include rivers, big mountains, hills, and trees which have aesthetic appeal. There are some folksongs that have the message or the theme of aesthetic value. The following song which was taken from the songs collected by Sumner (1996a) is an example this kind.

**Song Five (5)**

*O flower of the Odaa,*  
*The most elegant of all!*  
*O flower of ‘muri’,*  
*Life for the elegant one!*

‘Muri’ is an evergreen bushy plant; it is shorter than the Odaa and blooms frequently. Here the singer is wishing long life, freshness and happiness to the elegant person in question according to Sumner (1996a, p. 95). The Oromo also protect trees for aesthetic reasons. The song indicates that plants have aesthetic value. The Oromo people used this to express an aesthetic value of plants and
their beautifulness. They believe that the green nature is essential for the health of eyes. Greenness of plants around people’s homestead and in open fields also represents individual self-images and aspirations. In a similar way, Kelbessa (2010) advocated that the Oromo do not consider trees as mere resources that can be used without limit. The use of trees and other resources is regulated by saffuu (a moral concept that serves as the ethical basis for regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard conduct appropriate to different situations) (p. 200). Song (5) further compares the beauty of odaa with murii. The feelings of the beautifulness of the two trees are interrelated with pleasure one derives from simply observing their flowers. Hence, the feeling of beauty could be light reflected off a flower, giving pleasure from odaa and murii. In addition to the aesthetic element, odaa is the symbol of the greenness of Oromia and this symbol is in the hearts and minds of every Oromo. As a result, it is the most respected tree and the most ritually significant among the Oromo. We can infer from the above song how the Oromo is environmentally friend through their oral literature. Through the song, they express their feeling, values, knowledge and beliefs of environmental issues. Thus, the Oromo use folksongs for aesthetic or recreational process and to show its social position in their local community (Kaučič 2005).

Song Six (6)

Margi tuntun jettec,  The grass begin to regenerate
Jabbiin buburraaqxe, The calf gamboled and gamboled
Bishaan gogee ture,  The water that was drought
Deebi’ee faafinee Came back to drip

From song (6) we can understand that the Oromo express their longing and hope for a relief from drought. This relief is interesting and inbuilt in nature. The above song carries literarily, three different things that interdepend on each other: the grass, the calf and contentment. The song shows that the ecology of natural environment that carries the regeneration of the grass is very important for the healthy life of grazing animals. In the song above, it is indicated that the rejuvenation of grasses after the rainy season improves the availability of cattle’s feed. These grasses support the livestock of the calf and cause the calf to jump and jump because of happiness. They feed, satisfied and continuously bounced. In the song, the message harnessed with the bouncing of the calf is regeneration of the grasses immediately after the rain began to shower. The song depicts that in the Oromo folksongs, environmental change determined by the growth of plants occurs and simultaneously determines the life of living things. The absence of rainfall or recurring drought often discourages the growth of trees and the growth of grasses. Grasses are the primary source of food for domestic and wild grazing animals. Overall, the song contains both functional aesthetic values. Here both the functional and aesthetic value of the folksong is important for the environmental viewpoints. We understand from the song that an indigenous knowledge of the Oromo people recognizes not only the issue of co-existence as an essence which guides the day to day of the people but also the remaining of living things as well.

4.4. Environmental Knowledge of Folksongs for Morality Purpose

Some folksongs are concerned with moral functions. They may function not only as a form of recreation, but, depending upon social conditions, as an agency for integrating society or as a technique for maintaining the social order (Freeman 1957). The following verses are typical of examples of songs that implicate for morality purpose:

Song Seven (7)

Muka hunda hin muranii All trees are not cut down
Muka murantu jiraa There are trees to be cut down
Mana hunda hin bulanii Not all households are slept in
Mana bulantu jiraa There is households where slept in
Lammii hunda hin faarsanii Not all citizens are praised
Lammii faarsantu jiraa There is citizen to praise
Song (7) contains environmental ideas that the Oromo are very careful when they want to cut trees for different utilization purposes. They do not cut all trees they find, rather they have their own customary preferences. It is common among the Oromo people to cut trees for different utilitarian purposes. They cut trees for firewood, house furniture, house building, and etc. However, when it becomes a necessity to cut big or growing trees, the Oromo will show their condolence by putting green grass on the remaining parts of the trees wishing them quick recuperation because they believe that cutting the sacred trees down is tantamount to the violation of the will of Waaqaa (Fufa 2013). The Oromo people also plant trees for different purposes that include for reforestation, shadow, fruit (food), and etc. As in the traditional custom of the Oromo, all trees are not cut; they have preference in cutting certain species of trees; and they also prefer growing and planting trees. Their choices mainly depend on further importance of the trees. For example, eucalyptus trees are being planted for the purpose of house building, wadessa trees are best chosen for durable house furniture and much more trees are also planted and grown for the purpose of shade. Hence, trees are preserved not only for their shade, majestic look, but also for their conservation impact on their environment (Huluka 1996).

Some of them are grown for their ability to flourish in the local environment without harming other local species. As a result, one cannot take an axe and go out and chop down trees. A certain ethical rule such as saffiu should regulate it. Accordingly, the utilization of trees for different purposes should be reasonable and respectful. It is also prohibited to cut and drop the leaves of some kinds of trees on certain days calling it as ‘caggino’—a version of saffiu because they believe that they will be dried on these certain days (Fufa 2013). According to (de Salviac 2005, p. 20), the Oromo do not deforest the land for cultivation; they believe that the branches are sufficient for the structure of their dwellings; cutting a big tree down is considered as lifting out and making their beehives or their poor furniture. In addition, when a forest is degraded or cleared, the loss of environmental services may in large part fall on those current and future generations who neither live in forests nor own them (Wiggins 2004).

Song Eight (8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eega gobeelleen goge</th>
<th>Here after Gobbelle river dried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garba guddaa hin amanuu</td>
<td>I cannot trust the bigger Ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eega meettaan shamatee</td>
<td>Here after Meta mocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uuda garbuu hin amanuu</td>
<td>I cannot trust threshing floor of barley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kan jaldessi hin lolle</td>
<td>If a baboon cannot fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurmuu guddoo hin amanuu</td>
<td>I cannot trust a big crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kan sobee numa ganaa</td>
<td>He who lies can betray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ani jirraa hin amanuu</td>
<td>I cannot trust here we are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Song (8) abounds that there is no hopping sign in representing waterlessness of Small River in the Hararghe Oromo popular song even for the bigger one. The song symbolizes that they cannot trust the bigger rivers after small water is dried. Gobellee is a name of Small River in Hararghe that is known for its survival for a longer period of time even when the rainy season does not come according to the usual one. Through the song, the Oromo has tried to extend morality to non-human species and the natural environment. The song compares one object in terms of another object that is familiar to their society, and warns the audience to give a hope on the objects that are assumed better in the belief of the Oromo. There is direct strong relationship between the two objects (gobellee and garbaa, mettaa and uudaa, jaldessa and gurmuu guddoo, rely and promise). The song contains flora and fauna which lend itself to symbolic use in the Oromo oral literature. The song communicates the beliefs and values of the people and helps to associate the physical environment and the social life of the people. The differences and relationships among the objects in the song are displayed through one of the literary device referred to as imagery which helps the audiences learn and acquire knowledge from the surrounding environment. The song indicates that the people will be conscious of their environment and prepare themselves for the necessary consequences as a result of the message. This leads to a close relationship with nature and the people because it helps to communicate hopefulness or hopelessness.
We can therefore understand from song (8) that environment is often used to communicate to the people the experiences of the natural world around us.

**Song Nine (9)**

- Gororaan hiddasaatii: the secretion of its root
- Baalli libaashasaatii: the coverage of its foliage
- Aannan saayyaa fakkatua: it looks like cow’s milk
- Bishaan feeddaga saaftii: it looks like fedega water

**Song Ten (10)**

- Haati dhiiraa ni beeytii: the mother of man knows
- Firii buute ni fuutii: she collects dropped cereals
- Tafirii buute hin fuune: she who does not collect dropped cereals
- Ganna duraati duutii: she will be died in the first summer

The Hararghe Oromo praises a number of natural elements for the purpose of nourishment in its oral literature. Some of them have been highlighted in verses (9) and (10) that include the sorghum (cereal crop), water, milk, and lives of plants through folkloric expressions. “In many societies folklore is employed to control, influence, or direct activities of others from the time the first lullaby is sung and may also become an internalized check on behavior” (Bascom 1954, p. 346). Sorghum is the most common nourishment that Hararghe produce and consume for food. These elements show us aesthetic images that the people are excited in observing and imagining the described objects within the song. Song (9) begins by describing the secretions from the roots of the sorghum. These have been depicted as being as white as cow milk. In the song, it is described that pigmentation of the saliva from the roots of the sorghum give it much beauty. Its beauty is further described in the praises as compared to clean water. Milk is symbolized as clean and whitened among the Oromo. Hence, the song conveys the beauty of sorghum’s root, as its secretion looks very clear compared with milk and clean water. The expression gororaan hiddasaatii and baalli libaashasaatii in song (9) are describing and representing a well grown sorghum. The events with these phrases help audiences to draw some kind picture to their mind through their sensory experiences. They also create an image that denotes descriptive terms used to produce mental impressions in the mind of the audiences as well as the impressions themselves. Even though song (10) is generally sung about sorghum, it conveys a different message from song (9). The communication embedded in song (10) is about the care to be given during harvesting the sorghum on one hand and the respects that should be given in order to protect it from scattering over the ground on the other hand. Song (10) depicts that an experienced mother in a household importantly knows more about the use of sorghum than inexperienced women who have recently married. Song (10) particularly, shows the interaction between Hararghe women and the sorghum (environment) in the sense that they show how women use the environment as a source of their incomparable and indispensable food crop. The song serves as proof of how women appreciate, respect and value the natural environment as part of their livelihood.

5. Conclusions

This paper has explored an understanding of how the Oromo view their relationship with their surrounding natural world through their oral literature. The Oromo are well known for their preservation of their oral traditions which propagates and helps lead to an environmentally friendly way of life. They do not import such knowledge, beliefs and values, rather they stick to ancestral customs which are handed down through different folkloric genres like folksongs from generation to generation. Therefore, investigating Oromo oral literature is believed to have a positive contribution towards furthering our understanding of how people conserve flora and fauna. This study portrays how the Oromo people communicate sets of values and beliefs in minds of individuals or groups of people concerning the environment through folksongs.
Accordingly, our findings demonstrate that environmental implication entrenched in the Oromo folksongs have many classifications in the critical views of different literary devices such as imagery, symbolism and personification of conserving environments. The Oromo revere some sacred trees, which have spiritual values (Fufa 2013). These trees have symbolic value for the individuals and groups concerned and are respected by the people. For the Oromo, green trees and grasses symbolize fertility, abundance, and the continuity of generations. The Oromo rub ceremonial sticks to pronounce these values. They convey the message that life depends on the green environment. As our environment and humanity become gravely endangered, the study of literature and the environment has become more necessary than ever before. This paper indicates that the Oromo people have lived for centuries in harmony with their environment in different ways. One among is through their folk songs in contributing the efforts of maximizing any conservation of environment (Huluka 1996). The paper presented how important it is to preserve the natural environment such as the soil, lands, forests, and wildlife, because they are the basis life beings. In general, our basic classifications of the Oromo folksongs to protect and conserve the environments are of various reasons: Firstly, they protect for the purpose of utilitarian reasons. Secondly, they conserve the environment for the purpose of envisaging or visualization. Thirdly, they protect and conserve for the purpose of admiration of forests and trees, generally flora and fauna for their aesthetic appeal and finally, the Oromo protect and preserve the nature for the aim of ethical morality.

This paper has enumerated how Oromo and their literatures are close to nature in raising awareness of the need to preserve and maintain the natural environment. The natural environment still manages to fill us with a sense of awe and amazement. Despite the amount of scientific knowledge mankind has gathered, nature still holds great mysteries that we may never be able to unravel. This paper recommends that the experiences passed from generation to generation in dealing with environmental care should be taught, appreciated and refined to meet the challenges of the day; cultural knowledge of plants, soils, and food should be made part of the environmental views (Huluka 1996).

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