

Females' Voice through Oral Poetry among Limmuu Oromo, Ethiopia

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This article discusses about the role of Oromo oral poetry in helping girls² and women³ to express their idea in their social life. It also aims to illustrate the talent of girls and women in creating and poeticizing oral poetry to display their opinion on social occurrences such as marriage ceremony, birth rite and at work place. During data collection, ethnographic methods such as observation, focus group discussions and semi-structured interview were employed. I interpreted data collected from the field through these methods. The analyzed data shows that oral poetry has a crucial role to help girls and women to express their idea in pre and post marriage respectively. Before marriage, it helps girls to display their feeling, thought and emotion concerning their future life and their friend's social life. By using oral poetry, they advise their friends and show their devotion for each other. In post marriage, through oral poetry, women pray Waaqaa (Oromo God) for a woman who unable to bear child. The paper concludes that, oral poetry helps girls and women to express their opinion in every aspect of their life such as marriage, spiritual, and reproduction issues. Therefore, it helps them to make their voice heard in the community and enhances their creativity.

Keywords: Females' voice, oral poetry, oral creativity, Oromo, Ethiopia

Introduction

Among the Oromo and elsewhere, oral poetry is influential verbal art to express feeling, emotion and idea in most powerful, creative and authentic way. Among the Limmuu Oromo of Eastern Wollega, where this research delimited, oral poetry plays crucial role in helping the society in general and females in particular to express their opinion artistically.

Oral poetry is a poetry that originally composed and performed orally. The poem that is unwritten because the culture in which it occurs is oral culture (Bauman, 1922). Once oral poetry is created, it transmitted from one place to another and across generation. Oral memorization and recitation is the main medium through which oral poetry is publicized and disseminated. Reciters pass their favorite and influential poetry from one area to another and from one generation to the next (Jama, 1994). The influential and outstanding oral poetry survive in the community for long period of time and have great role in constructing and reshaping history of the nation as well as expressing people's opinion (Muhammad, 1996).

The function of oral literature in general and oral poetry in particular is enormous; because it affects every daily life of people, wherever they are. Oral poetry, proverbs, riddles, and other genres of folklore are used as acts of communication and as a form of education; entertainment and they play a vital role in customary courts and in tribal and political affairs (Jama, 1994). Usually, people use oral songs to express their moral and cultural values and stress their attitudes (Ersoy, 2015; Muhammad, 1996). Especially, in oral African society, women use oral poetry as instrument to express their opinion publicly (Al Tinawi, 2014). However, the role of women's oral literature in expressing their opinion is not studied. Qashu (2009) discussed wedding music of Arsi Oromo. However, the author did not focus on the role of oral poetry in helping women to express their opinion in detail. Therefore, the present study profoundly discusses the Oromo women's oral poetry in relation to its role in helping women to express their idea in their social life.

Oromo girls and women create and use oral poetry to display their idea on their social life. They use it as instrument to fight for their right and to criticize actions against them. Girls and women create and use oral poetry to express their idea, which they have no right to utter in usual discussions. However, by oral poetry, they have right to address whatever their sentiment. The culture tolerates them to express their idea by oral poetry. Furthermore, Oromo girls and women voices not widely focused and investigated by researchers. However, in rural areas, folk song is a most important means by which girls and women blast their voice.

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² Is *durba* in Oromo and are unmarried virgin girl.

³ Is *dubartii* in Oromo and are married women.

The Study Community: An Overview

Oromo are one of the Cushitic people which originated in the Ethiopian highlands and were who firstly started civilization of producing food in east Africa. Historians recorded that Oromo lived in present Ethiopia with other Cushitic groups for more than 5,000 years (Stokes, 2000). They are large in population size occupying extensive areas of Ethiopia (Dirribi Damusie, 2011, p. 17). All Oromo claim to have the same father called Orma. From this word the name Oromo comes. By this name, they identify themselves from others (Salviac, 1901). Their language *Afaan Oromoo* is one of the widely spoken languages in Africa holding a third rank next to Arabic and Hausa (Dirribi Damusie, 2011, p. 17). The language belongs to the eastern Cushitic language (Muhammed 1994). The Oromo constitute larger share of population of Ethiopia (Samatar, 1992). As Gemetchu (1993), the Oromo divided into five major groups: the Tulamaa and the Macha, the Sabboo and the Goonaa, the Rayyaa and the Aseboo, the Siikkoo and the Mando and the Ituu and the Humbannaa.

The Oromo groups inhabited in Limmu district of Eastern Wollega, study area, are descended from Macha group of Oromo subgroup. Elders confirm that, Macha had a son named Jawwi. The Jawwi had nine sons, namely Guduru, Horro, Amuru, Jimma, Gudayya, Jidda, Limmu, Eabantu, and Ilu. From nine Jawwi this research concerns Limmu Oromo. The Limmu Oromo occupied in Limmu district of Eastern Wollega Zone, Ethiopia. Limmu also has many sons, which formed clans. These clans are Saphera, Guto, Warsu, Manni, Anno, Bariso, Kube, Dimma, Harru, Sirba, Indibo, and Dange.

Theoretical Frame Work

The study of oral poetry can be an emotive subject, often shot through with deeply held assumptions and value judgments. Some grasp of the repercussions of these assumptions, theories or models is essential. Many assumptions are so much part of the unspoken premises of some writers that one constantly meets them stated as firm truth (Finnegan, 1979). However, there are theories used to study oral poetry. Oral-Formulaic Theory is one of nineteenth century folklore theory, which used to study Oral poetry. This theory emphasizes on the actual performances and compositions of the oral poetry as well as their impact on the audiences. It focuses on whether an oral poetry is the memorized verbatim or composed anew each time an epic singer recited it (Foley, 1988). The other theory employed in study of oral poetry is theory of oral-formulaic composition theory. The key idea of the theory is poets have a store of formulas and that by linking this formula in conventionalized way; they can rapidly compose verse (Schoeler, 2006).

The other important theory used by scholars to study oral poetry is Romantic Theory. The central strand of this theory is to study the expressive, emotional art and genius of poet/ woman poet in expressing his/her opinion through oral poetry. This theory, considers poet or woman poet as the vehicle for spontaneous emotion, which bubbles up through him in the form of poem (Dudareva, Milovanova, Anisina & Shorkina, 2017; Finnegan, 1979). As national folklore theory, folk songs are reflection and weapon of class conflict against proprietors, bigoted priests, and grasping mill owners. Therefore, social groups use oral poetry as instrument to express their opinion in fighting for their right (Dorson, 1963; Dudareva et al., 2017; Citamak & Yigit, 2012).

The other approach used in this analysis is feminist interpretation. This approach enables folklorists to address the issues like women's culture, women's folklore, women's creativity and women's expressions. This approach got consideration by folklorists in response to realization that when compared to other approaches such as structuralist and functionalist approaches a small number of studies and articles had been published about women's culture (Sims, 2005). Therefore, this study is one of the feminist interpretations of folklore; specifically women's oral poetry.

Performance theory also applied in this study. Sims, (2005) discussed that, folklore functions more obviously as an active transmission, a performed communication that allows members of a group to share and understand its identity. Lore has essential role in social relationships and its communicative interaction. This approach also used in this study in the case of showing the role of women's oral poetry in strengthening women's interaction, relationships and enable them to share their experience and express their idea as women in the performance of oral poetry.

Performance in Oral Poetry

Performance of oral poetry lies at the heart of the whole concept of oral literature; however, it sometimes forgotten. Oral poem has no existence or continuity without its performance (Finnegan, 1979). The main feature of oral poetry is its performance because it distinguishes oral from written form of poetry. While composing its lyrics, the poet, already thinks about its final performance. That is what makes oral poetry an art of face-to-face communication between performer and audience in contrary to the cold privacy of written form (Okpewho, 1992). A poem to be oral or oral poetry, three factors should be considered: its composition, its transmission and its performance. If one of these factors is met for certain poem, it can be considered as oral poetry (Finnegan, 2011). The ability of poet to perform, imagination, creativity, and beauty are apparent in performance of oral poetry on the natural

setting (Dereje, 2013). The way the oral poetry appeared to different audience, the positive or negative feedback of the consumers or audience to the performance aids the interaction between performer and the society. This in due course creates direct contact between the oral artist and the audience; and the lively involvement of both sides actually means the enrichment of the composition of oral poetry and enhances creativity (Eshete, 2012).

Oral Poetry as Women's Voice

One way of empowering women is by enhancing and encouraging their oral skills. African women have great talent in creating and using oral poetry to reveal their opinion regarding political, social, historical and economic issues (Adra, 2008; Kaschula eds, 2001, Muhammad, 1996). For instance, Sudanese women generated oral poetry to inspire men to struggle bravely against enemy during Muhammad Ali's invasion of Sudan in 1820 (Muhammad, 1996). Darfurian women in Sudan also create oral poetry to declare their strong desire and passion to marry their lover. They also generate and use oral poetry to resist their family decision to be engaged to a man against their will. They compose oral poetry and declare their refusal in the market places, festivals, marriage weddings; also, they wander from village to village and from town to town singing and dancing in any occasion. Therefore oral poetry used as women's voice to express their desire, emotion and opinion (Al Tinawi, 2014).

Additionally, Somali women use oral poetry to make their voice heard in the community. They usually recite work poetry when performing their customary tasks such as churning milk, weaving mats, or pounding grain. Using oral poetry, they express their opinions to advise their daughters about their futures, marriage, housekeeping, and accuse their husband who abuse them unethically (Jama, 1994).

Gender Equality in Oromo Culture

Even though, women are subordinated by male in some world's culture in regard to socio-economic and cultural endeavors (Ahmed, 2016; Karatas & Oral, 2015; Yurtseven & Altun, 2015), the Oromo have indigenous democratic politico-juridical institutions known as *Gadaa* system which ensure the right of women (Alemayehu, 2012). Within the *gadaa* system, women's institution like *ateete*, *qanafaa*, and *siinqee* are cultural system through which women safeguard and defend their interest both in the family and in the community level (Deressa, 2002). *Gadaa* protects the right of women not to be broken. Oromo believe that, women are respected because Waaqaa (God) made them to be respected. As *Gadaa* principle, women come together and elect their *shanacha* or *saddeeta* (women committees) from among themselves (Daniel, 2002). According to Gemetchu (1993), women were considered vulnerable part of the society and regarded as *muka laaftuu* (soft wood). Therefore, the law of *muka laaftuu* protects their right. The law is in the *siinqee* institution that protects the right of women by functioning hand in hand with *Gadaa* system.

Additionally, among the Oromo, women are equal with men. In *Gadaa* government, all human beings are equal and it protects human rights; especially crime against pregnant women is not tolerated. According to *Gadaa* law, high ranking *Gadaa* officials could be removed from power, if they mistreated women (Tsega, 2012, p. 85). This indigenous institution, *Gadaa* system, was declined by the appearance of feudal kings since the 18th century, the incorporation of the Oromoland into Emperor Menelik's Empire in the late 19th century, and the introduction of alien religions, Islam and Christianity. The decline of *Gadaa* government led to the decline of socio-economic status and political roles of Oromo women (Bula, 2008). However, Oromo women and girls still continued to affirm their role and express their ideas through their musical performances. Through music, they create a united group or force that can be reassembled in times of need (Qashu, 2009).

Methods and Data Sources

During data collection for this research, I employed ethnographic fieldwork. I observed two events of birth ritual and one marriage ceremony on which girls and women create and poeticize oral poetry. The observation conducted in December 2014 at Limmu District. On the cultural occurrences, girls and women poeticized oral poetry. Therefore, during the ritual, I collected oral poetries at the spot.

Additionally, I used semi-structured interview during the fieldwork. By using this method, I selected few individuals purposely from the community depending on their knowledge and experience about the oral poetry. The interview was conducted in December, 2014 to January, 2015 at Limmu District of Eastern Wallaga Zone, Ethiopia. I designed basic guidelines and a framework of themes explored to help my informant to raise issue of the study; but depending on the situation, the guideline was changed and reformed during the interview. By this method, I conducted interview with well-known traditional women poets and married men to know the role of oral poetry in encouraging men to protect women's right. Additionally, I conducted interview with traditional poets on marriage ceremony.

The other method implemented during data collection for this research was focus group discussion. This also conducted between December 2014 and January 2015. Informants who know about oral poetry as well as women

traditional poets were selected. Depending on this, four groups of seven traditional poets formed from each of the selected *ganda* of the district and I allowed them to discuss on the issue. The women of all groups told me different oral poetries they memorized during the discussion. They also discussed the contextual meaning of oral poetries and the cultural occurrences on which it performed.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from field were sorted, sifted and discussed as its types, classes, sequences, and patterns. Then, I designed and reconstructed the data in to a meaningful or comprehensible fashion. I transcribed and translated the oral poetry collected from the field in to English. In translation, I searched and used the related English words to show meanings of words in *Afaan Oromo*. However, there are some challenges in getting direct meanings of *Afaan Oromo* words in English. In this case, I employed semantic translation to sustain original meaning. After translation, I interpreted and described the data qualitatively.

Validity

Quality of the data that were gathered from the field was assured by different mechanisms. One is interviewing informants deeply and repeatedly. I asked different informants the same questions to check the validity of the data. I also used different methods of data collection such as observation, interview and focus group discussion. I compared data that collected by these qualitative methods. These techniques enabled me to confirm that the data collected for this research is reliable and valid.

Research Questions

This research answers the following research questions:

- ✓ How do Oromo girls and women express their idea through oral poetry?
- ✓ What types of female's oral poetry are there to help them express their emotion, feeling and thought?
- ✓ On what types of cultural occasions females express their idea through oral poetry?
- ✓ What types of matters females display through oral poetry?

Results

Oral poetry is common in every culture of the society regardless of time and space. All society, especially oral society, used it as instrument to express their idea in most impressive and artistic way. As one part of the society, girls and women also use oral poetry to express their idea in their social life. Therefore, this study focuses on the role of Oromo girls and women's oral poetry in expressing their idea in their life. The oral poetry practiced in both rural and urban community of study area. In the town of the district, Gelila, the oral poetry is existent and performed by girls and women during marriage, rites of birth and other cultural and social events. However, the practice of oral poetry is decreasing among urban dwellers because of the expansion of alien religions like Christianity and Islam. This two religions are populous in urban than rural. People converted to these religions do not practice Oromo folk song; it is against their religious discipline.

Girls' Oral Poetry

Among the Oromo, women generate and poeticize oral poetry on different social and cultural events. The cultural occasions on which women generate oral poetries include marriage ceremony, work place, birth rituals, and traditional worshipping places. These occasions create conducive environment for creation and performance of oral poetry. Oral poetries used on the ceremonies for recreational and counseling purposes. Performers also pray and give thanks to *Waaqaa* (God) through oral songs.

On marriage ceremony, the existence of oral poetry and its performance is required. According to Qashu (2009), among the Oromo, wedding period takes place during a break time, between fall harvest and preparing the land for the crop planting. The author also added that, on the night of preceding a wedding, often the voices of youths gathered outside, practicing their songs, which accompanied by the *dibbee*⁴ can be heard from a distance. Therefore, in two locations, women initiate the folk-song. They also come to the ceremony with their *dibbee*. Unless, girls go to the ceremony, young boys would not go there to perform folk songs. They go there to find and meet their lover. They select girls who poeticize well for establishing love/relationship. The society honors and privileges the talented girls

⁴ One of women's traditional musical instrument that is single or double membrane, circular, metal framed drum.

in composing oral poetry. Contrary to that, they despise the girls who have no talent to poeticize; boys also do not select them for love.

Therefore, to get lover, girls should be able to generate oral poetry and be credited a poet. Meanwhile, this helps girls to develop their talent to create oral poetry and use it to express their feeling about their social life. All girls needed to compose their own verses and some girls become famous by composing more than others compose. Composing is more fascinating than memorizing the verses. That is why we can fetch ocean of oral poetry in general and girls and women's oral poetry in particular from Oromo culture.

Girls also memorize powerful and beauty oral poems and poeticize it on different cultural occasions. Alliterations and rhymes of the poems help girls to memorize certainly. This makes oral poems to transmit across geographical area and generation. Oral poetry performed on cultural occurrences, which gathers performers and audience together. It creates face-to-face communication between performers and audience. On the stage, girl poets share their talent of composing and memorizing oral poetry among themselves and for audience. It practiced through the performance of oral poetry. It performed by girls. During the performance girls holds each other's waist and makes circle. Beating her *dibbee*, the girl poet stands at the center of the circle, led the performance, and poeticizes the oral poet. Her accompanies also poeticizes following her.

A. *Arrabsoo Durbaa (Girls' Insult)*

During marriage ceremony girls and women poeticize oral poetry at locations of both bride and bridegroom at least for one week until the day of wedding. It practiced at night by interval of one day. It started at evening and ended at midnight. This ceremony is *jala bultii*. On the side of groom, girls insult families and relatives of the bride. On the side of bride, girls insult the groom and his relatives. During *jala bultii* girls generate the insult in the form of oral poetry. The following oral poetry is insult to the groom:

Reettiin gammoojjii areeda baaftee	Desert goat has grown beard
Areeda baaqqee	A solitary beard
Niitii kee durii saree attam gootee?	Your previous wife, where is dog?
Wareega laatee?	Did you give her for sacrifice?
Wareega hin laannee beeloftee nyaatee	You got hungry and ate her instead

This is oral poetry poeticized by girls on the side of bride to insult the groom. Often bride herself and her girlfriends say it. Even though he is bachelor, they insult him as he has married and divorced. They insult him, as he has married to dog that is considered as ignoble and disrespect. They also insult him that 'he later ate the dog because he got hungry.' His poorness made him to eat uneatable animal. Girls, friends of the bride, insult the groom because he is going to take their friend. They express their idea that they are not comfort for missing their friend because of the marriage. Therefore, by composing oral poetry they express their feeling publicly on the marriage ceremony. The following poem is also poeticized to insult the groom:

Ilkaan jechuunoo kan quba guutuu	The teeth is which fills fingers when touched
Dhirsaa jechuunoo kan barcuma guutuu	Husband is which fills chair when sit on it
Kun hordaa hin taatuu cabsaa gindiishee	It could not be handle of plough, so, break his <i>gindii</i> ⁵
Kun dhirsaa hin taatuu galchaa birrishee	He could not be husband, give back his bride wealthy

This oral poetry is poeticized to insult the groom. Bride herself poeticizes this oral poetry. She insults the groom, as he is short and small. During *jala bultii* ceremony, the bride train and ready to insult him on the day of marriage ceremony. On the marriage ceremony, when the groom arrives at home of bride's family with his *hamaamotaa* (group of men who accompany the bridegroom to bring the bride from her family's home) the bride insults him. Therefore, she prepares herself for it during the *jala bultii* ceremony. The neighbors and her friends also expect her to create poems to insult the groom. If she did not create it, they despise her. Traditional girls and women poets admired among the community in general and have respect among their family, neighbor and relatives.

Starting from *jala bultii* up to the day of marriage ceremony, girls can insult the groom by whatever word they want. They can use taboo word or words, which are against norm of the Oromo to say it in normal circumstance. However, during the ceremony, the culture has given them the right to say these words and insult the groom and his relatives. The following oral poetry is an example:

Boqqolloon asheetee jigee	Corn has reached for harvest
Gurbayyoo jabeessee dhibee	The boy (bridegroom) is in trouble
Gajamoo qara naaf godhaa	Made knife sharp for me

⁵ Traditional plough material used to tear the land to cultivate.

Saqalaatti shaph naaf godhaa
Joojoosaan qax irraa godhaa

Then, tie him to tower
I will cut his penis

When girls insult the groom and his family and vice versa on side of bride, no one accused for the insult. In normal condition, insulting girls and women or somebody especially by taboo words not allowed. It is against norm of the people and it can cause to dispute. However, in marriage ceremony, girls have full right to insult the groom and his relatives as well as bride and her family. In this case, no one can physically revenge the insult. However, the revenge is by insulting through the oral poetry. On the side of groom, his sisters or if he has no sister his girl relative, gather girls at his family's home. Then, they insult the bride and her relatives such as sisters, brothers, father, mother, aunts, uncles and her close friends those insults the groom by helping the bride. The following oral poetry is the insult hurled to the bride's father:

Abbaa kee maafan wallaalaa
Gurraacha fuula sunturaa
Gabaa tamboo gugguufaa
Qiilleensi udduutti ol afuufaa
Harreetu afaanitti dhuufaa

I know your father
Black man with shrunken face
He wanders at the market of tobacco
Wind blows up to his anus
Donkey farts to his mouth

By the above oral poetry, girls insult father of the groom and/or bride. They are saying that father of the bride and/or groom is old man and trader of tobacco in his old age. They also insult as, the bride's and/or groom's father is poor; that is why he trade tobacco. It is culturally ignominy for old men to trade; however, retired and helped by their son. They also live by *dilbii* (store of agricultural product), which they deposited during their adult age. However, person who is not enough to do so will fall in difficulty during his old age. Therefore, girls insult father of the bride and/or groom as if he experienced the problem.

Oromo girl traditional poets create oral poetry to warn a man who has married previously and went *jala bultii* to sing with them. Girls do not want to marry and/or perform song with married men. It is indignity for girls to do so. Instead, they want to perform song with bachelors. Sometimes, married men go to ceremonies and try to perform song with girls. This results insult and advice from girl poets at the spot. In the following oral poetry, girls poeticized to advice married man who wants to sing with them and want them for love.

Yaa kefoo hin daraariini
Deebitee keelloo hin taatuu
Yaa suubbo hin maraatiini
Deebitee qeerroo hin taatuu

Oh, Green Pepper Berries do not bloom
You could not be yellow again
Oh married man, do not be mad
You could not be bachelor again

By the above oral poetry, girls insult to married man who ask them for love. After his marriage, a man passes from *qeerroo* (bachelor) to *suubboo* (married man). After this rite of passage, *suubboo* do not act as *qeerroo*. Girls consider *suubboo* who act as *qeerroo* and ask them for love crazy. That means, he is practicing what is culturally awful. By composing oral poetry, girl advices such like man in the form of insult. Therefore, oral poetry helps girls as art of speech by which they express their idea to fight against illicit acts provoked on them by men.

Among *Gidda* Oromo, when groom and *hamaamotaa* come with the bride, groom's sister blocks the entrance with her companions until he pays her some amount of money. They do not let the bride enter the house and if she got they leave the door (Gemechu and Assefa, 2006: 245). The same is true among *Limmu* Oromo. Girls block the entrance by saying folk poetry as:

Ulee lookoo
Hin laadhu balbala obboo koo
Balbalee balbala indaaqqoo
Hin laadhu balbala obboo koo
Birrii fiddan malee
Gindii dhiittan malee
Hin laadhu balbala obboo koo
Uran gindii gamaa
Uramtittii kanaaf
Hin laadhu balbala obboo koo

Straight stick
I will not give gate of my brother (the groom)
The gate is gate of hen
I will not give gate of my brother
Unless you give money
Unless you make terracing plough
I will not give gate of my brother
The terracing plough holed
For this deflowered girl
I will not give gate of my brother

The groom's eldest sister poeticizes the above oral poetry with her friends. They block the entrance and perform dance until groom gives them some money. By the oral poetry, they insult the bride as if she lost her virgin before marriage. They tell that they are not going to allow the bride to enter home unless they get money. They insult the bride that she is not worthy to enter home because they assume that she has lost her virgin. They do not stop the folk song until they receive the money. If the groom becomes late to give them the money, the girls raise dispute. Sometimes they pinch or beat the bride from her back. By doing so, they hasten the groom to give the money. When they receive the money, they leave the entrance for the bride and the groom to get in.

On marriage ceremony, girls also poeticize oral poetry to insult the bride as if she lost her virgin before marriage. At the mid night of wedding day, groom deflowers the bride when girls recommend him through oral poetry to do so. The girls and boys stay there throughout the night, perform folk dance and says oral poetry. Girls do not go home until they realize that the bride is virgin. When the time is coming to evening, they initiate the bridegroom by oral poetry to deflower the bride. They say:

Waarinee, waarinee hoo
Nutoo waarinee dadhabne hoo
Obboo koo hin dhibne,
Intaloo dhibnaan waarinee hoo
Manni keenya tulluu gamaa
Humni keenya cubbuu qabaa
Dhaqi ilaali obbuule in gallaa

We stayed here throughout the night
We are tired of staying here long night
The problem is not with bridegroom
But with the bride
Our home is beyond the mountain (far)
Our exhaustion results sin
Oh my brother, go and sees her virgin! Then
we will go home

While girls poeticizing the above oral poetry, the *jaala* (best man) leave the *gola*⁶ and the bridegroom checks bride's virginity. Among the Oromo, virginity has great role during marriage ceremony and throughout women's life after marriage. The community considered the girl who having virgin at the night of marriage as hero and her family and in-laws proud of her. Otherwise, (Gemetchu & Assefa 2006; Qashu 2009) asserted that, if the bride is not a virgin on the wedding night, the husband may beats her with *alanga*⁷ and send her back to her family or a woman loose her respect among the society and her in-laws.

If she is with her virgin, the best man come back in to the *gola*, touches blood of the virginity with white cloth and shows it to girls singing outside. The white cloth mixed with blood is evidence by which girls become sure that the bride is virgin. If bride is virgin, girls become happy and do not insult her again. She is hero and girls praise her by oral poetry as:

Adaan taa'i yaa baala geeshe hoo
Yoonna booni yaa haadha deesse hoo
Nagaan taa'ii yaa qarmii gamaa
Akkas malee yaa sanyii namaa

The *geeshe*⁸ leaf, stay in flower
Oh, pride to mother of the bride
Stay in peace the farmland
Oh bride, we proud to you

They praise not only the bride, but also her mother. That is because mother is model for her daughter. Oromo proverb says, '*Haadha ilaalanii intala fuudhu*' which means 'by gazing behavior of mother, one marry her daughter.' This means, if mother is wise, her daughter also learns from her and become wise. It is considered that, behavior of the daughter resembles that of her mother. Daughter learns many things from her mother and mother is responsible for shaping behavior of her daughter in good comportment. Therefore, mother plays a vital role in helping her staying with virginity until marriage. It is why girls praise mother of the bride on the day of marriage ceremony. In the above oral poetry, girls express their idea that a girl who have virgin during marriage considered hero.

On the wedding ceremony, girls also insult the bride who deflowered before marriage. This consequence of loss of virginity, encourage girls not to practice sex before marriage. Oromo culture does not allow sex and pregnancy for girls before marriage. It considered as against norm of the people. If girl practiced sex, and become pregnant before marriage, it is shame for her family and her clan. Girls poeticized the following oral poetry to insult the bride lost her virginity before marriage.

⁶ The room where bride and bridegroom stay for one or two week after their marriage

⁷ Whip made from skin of hippopotamus.

⁸ A tree found in Ethiopia and used to prepare local alcoholic drinking.

Intaloo yaa qinxiraamee
 Michuun kee maal siitti dhaamee?
 Isa siiksee asii si waamee
 Durbummaa kee siif ilaalee

Oh uncircumcised girl (the bride)
 What is message of your lover?
 He invited you by hissing
 Then, he deflowered you

If girls do not get the cloth touched with blood, they start to insult the bride by the above oral poetry. They say that she lost her virgin because she has not circumcised. Culturally, girls who circumcised do not lose their virgin because; it believed to reduce interest of girls for sexual intercourse.

B. Mararoo Durbaa (Girls' Mourning Poem)

Mararoo durbaa is oral poetry poeticized by bride when she is ready to go with the groom and *hamaamotaa*. It is her last word for her family, friends and relatives. Through oral poetry, she tells her discomfort and disagreement with the marriage. The following oral poetry poeticized by bride to blame her father and mother for giving her for marriage.

Abbaakoo maalan balleessee?
 Marageen diida bareechee
 Arameen bo'oo fageessee
 Dhaabeen keessummaa geggeessee

What is wrong with my father?
 I beautified your home
 I uprooted weed from farm
 I served your guest

Yaa deessee diinqa shaashotaa
 Har'allee siif hamaamotaa
 Boor yona sitti dhaamotaa
 Iddoo ciisa koo gumbii dhaabbadhuu
 Iddoo nyaata koo garaa guuttadhu
 Dibaa qorree koo kuusaa kuufadhu
 Yaa deessee diinqa walashee
 Booramma teessa qophaakee

Oh mother that owns beautiful salon
 Today is ceremony for you
 Just tomorrow, you are alone
 The place where I sleep put your barn
 Fill your abdomen with my food
 Eat bread with butter of my hair
 Oh, mother beauty salon
 Tomorrow you will be alone

By the first oral poetry, the bride blames her father because he is giving her for marriage. She is asking that, if there is fault with her for which her father pushing her to align. By the oral poetry, she is saying that she have no any fault; but she done for her father good things like cleaning compound, working at farm land and serving guest. She is blaming that even though she served her family a lot, her father ignored it and giving her for marriage. In the second oral poetry, the bride is blaming her mother. She is saying that her mother will regret for her act of giving her daughter for marriage because, after the ceremony she will be alone.

When the bride says the above oral poetry, her relatives weep and cry. From her birth to time of the marriage, she has brought up in and with her family, relatives, friends and clan. Now she is going to strange environment. She is ready to mix with new family and clan. It might be difficult for the bride to adopt with this new environment and new social life at the location of her husband. It might also be difficult for her to depart from her friends, family, clan and relatives. These entire situations motivate her to compose oral poetry and express her feeling. Her family also knows this issue and become terrible with her when she says the oral poetry. The following oral poetry is also the bride's last word for her friends.

Simbirroo yaa wayaa shaamaa
 Lafti har'aa maaf barii saamaa?
 Bariitee maal walii taanaa?
 Bariinaan nu gargar yaanaa
 Hiriyyuule nagaan dhaama

Oh, bird of beauty cloth
 Why today is running fast to the morning?
 What shall we do, it is running to morning?
 At morning we will go apart
 My friends, stay in peace!

After blaming her father and mother, the next thing that she utters is wishing good time for her friends, *addooyee*. Since the departure is must and soon, she tells her friend that she wishes them peace. When the bride say the above oral poetry and cry, her friends also advise her not to cry since the marriage is must.

Friend of the bride also blame father of the bride for giving her to marriage. They utter their blame by oral poetry as:

Leeqaan timboo murmuraayee	Leeqaa ⁹ chops tobacco
Hin boo'iin yaa hiriyyee koo	My friend (the bride), do not weep
Abbaatuu ilmoo gurguraayee?	Would father sell his daughter?
Leeqaadha gabaan leeqaadha	It is market of Leeqaa
Murmuree baasa timboosaa	He chops and brings his tobacco to the market
Hamaadha abbaan hamaadha	Father is not worthy
Gurguree nyaata ilmoo isaa	He exchange his daughter with bride wealthy

In the oral poem, girls are blaming father of the bride that he is giving her for marriage. They blame him that he is giving her to marriage for the sake of getting income from bride wealthy. Girls do not need their *addooyee* given to marriage. They want to continue their friendship and perform cultural songs on cultural occurrences. Contrary to that, their families want to give them for marriage when they are mature for it. Therefore, on marriage ceremony, girls accuse father of the bride by the above oral poetry for they are going to miss their friend because of him.

Women's Prayer Poetry

The known rite of birth among the Oromo is *shananii*¹⁰ ritual. The ritual takes place on fifth day after child born. On the fifth day, the women from the neighbor come together at home of the woman who gave birth. They collect leaf from trees and melt it with water. Then, they wash her body by leafs melted with water. On the ritual, they also prepare and eat cultural foods. Men cannot participate on the ritual ceremony. It only practiced by women. On the ritual, women create oral poetry and pray for the woman who is not capable to give birth. They also give thanks to *Waaqaa* (God) for helping the woman during delivery. Therefore, this ceremony promotes women's unity. The following is the oral poetry created on *shananii* ritual by women to pray *Maaram*¹¹ for barren women to give them child.

Maaree wayyaa	<i>Maaram</i> is good
Maaramii wayyaa, yaa maree hoo	Oh, <i>Maaram</i> is good
Dhaka gurguddaa lagaa	The large stone found in river
Bishaantu wal yaabsisaa	The flood puts it upon each other
Maseenni dahuu diddee	The barren women cannot give birth
Deessee guddisuu diddee	And cannot grow up a child
Maaramtuu wal caalchisaa	Because <i>Maaram</i> makes inequity
Maaram maal nama gootee?	Is <i>Maaram</i> against human being?
Kan baala midhaan gootee	She changes flower to yield
Kan dhiiga nama goote	She changes blood to human
Ammoo turii ammallee dahii	Oh barren woman give birth
Yaa maree hoo	Oh <i>Maaram</i>

In the oral poetry, women give thanks to *Maaram* for she gives child for women. She has power to give child for a woman or make her childless. The poem shows that, when a woman becomes bare, it is not her weakness. It believed that the *Maaram* made her childless. Barren woman feels sad because of her childlessness. Therefore, by the oral poetry, women tranquil the sad of barren woman by telling that it is *Maaram*'s task in giving child. The poem also shows that *Maaram* is omnipotent and benevolent that she can give birth for barren women at whatever time she wants. As she can change flower to crop and blood to human, she is also potent to give child for barren woman. Therefore, the women pray the *Maraam* for barren woman to give her child.

Sometimes, her husband abhors barren woman because of her childlessness. Therefore, the oral poetry used to aware husband of the barren woman that it is not his wife's weakness, but *Maaram*'s aim

⁹ One of Matcha Oromo clan found in Wollegga, Oromia, Ethiopia.

¹⁰ Derived from the Oromo word *shan* (five) and it is the ceremony which took place at fifth day after birth.

¹¹ Oromo women's spiritual divine who gives them child.

why she become childless. Generally, the poem used women to express their idea about difficulties they experienced because of infertility.

Women's Work Poetry

Women create and poeticize oral poetry when they do works like grinding maize by mortar and pestle, churning milk and grinding *teff*¹² on stone mill. Primarily, the poetry helps them to refresh their mind from the fatigue of the work. It also helps them to express their idea about their strength, right, status in society and criticize any action of men against women. The following is the Oromo women's work poetry said during grinding crop by mortar and pestle.

Mooyeen bullessuu diddee	Mortar refused to grind maize
Mooyeen maal ana seetee?	What am I for the mortar?
Waanan dulloome na seetee?	Is it recognized me as old woman?
Waanan dhahee hin baasne na seetee?	Is it recognized me as lazy?
Nama nyaatee hin dhugne na seetee?	Is it recognized me as forceless?

The woman who composed the oral poetry is declaring that the women are strong and they can do whatever they like. When she poeticizes the poem, she is not talking to the mortar, but to herself and the people around her. Her audience could be her husband, children and neighbors. The oral poetry retrieves women from fatigue of the work. Additionally, it helps women to express their idea to audience, if any, that they are not lazy.

Discussion

Oral poetry guides our mind to appreciate what is beautiful, devalue what is undesirable, unfair and ugly; and its wide range of functions make us to be more receptive to the imaginative experience (Eshete, 2012). For this reason, Oromo female (women and girls) express their idea, feeling, emotion and thought through oral poetry. This research indicated that, Oromo oral poetry such as *arrabsoo durbaa* (girls' insult) and *mararoo durbaa* (girls' mourn) are girls' oral poetry by which they poeticize on marriage ceremony. From the side of bride, girls poeticize *arrabsoo durbaa* to insult bridegroom and vice versa. The bride poeticizes *mararoo durbaa* to express her grief for departure from her relatives and friends. Similarly, Yagi (2008) discussed that, in the culture of Northern India, by oral poetry women insults the bridegroom and his relatives on the side of bride and insult bride and her relatives on the side of bridegroom. Qashu (2009) added that the wedding is a difficult and sorrowful rite of passage for woman in her life; because, it is the moment she separate from her parent and passage to womanhood. This research also confirmed that, even though it poeticized on marriage ceremony, the messages of the oral poetry is not restricted to marriage issue; but embrace every aspects of girls and women's life such as social, economic, and political issues. This importance of oral poetry for Oromo women to express their idea is similar with that of Sudanese and Somali women's oral poetry (Al Tinawi, 2014; Jama, 1994).

Data from field indicated that, Oromo girls and women compose and perform oral poetry on social occurrences such as wedding ceremony, birth rite and work places. These occurrences creates conducive atmosphere for girls and women to come together and discuss about their social and cultural issues. Oral poetry helps Oromo girls and women to display their talent to the community. This importance of oral poetry also goes in line with report by Sadiqi (2003). The author stated that, Moroccan women show their creativity and dexterity through their oral poetry. The data also shows that Oromo girls and women's oral poetry helps them to fight against illegitimate acts against them. Women compose oral poetry and display their idea by it. This also agrees with work of Al Tinawi, (2014) which discussed that women voices are overt especially in the traditional occasions like wedding, circumcision, planting and harvest festivals. The author added that, always the setting where the audience gathers to attend these folk poetry and songs are in a public place, general outdoors. Works of (Al-Ghadeer 2006; 2012) indicates that, women's oral poetry is cultural poetic production by women that helps them to tell their feeling. Sadiqi (2003) also confirms that, rural women fight marginalization and express their idea by the oral poetry.

The study confirms that, girls poeticize oral poetry on marriage ceremony at house of both bridegroom's and bride's parents. Similarly, Qashu (2009) stated that, among the Oromo, the weddings are exogamous, and the ceremony takes place by girls and boys at both the bridegroom's and the bride's houses. Result of this study also indicated the social status of girl and women poet; that the community respects them. On marriage ceremony, traditional girl poets are very essential to embellish the

¹² The annual grass species of crop that is native to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

occurrence. Without them, the ceremony cannot take place. Their family and clan proud of them and admire them for their talent of composing oral poetry. Youths also prefer traditional girl poets for marriage. These all encourages girls and women to compose oral poetry and express their idea artistically through the oral poems. In similar way, the work of Jama, (1994) also discussed that a female poet respected by all listeners regardless of gender and the reason why oral poetry broken the barriers of sex lies in women's talent to express their feelings in an aesthetic form by oral literature. In the study area, girls and women have full right to express their idea by using oral poetry. Even girls can use taboo words in oral poem to insult the bridegroom and his relatives as well as bride and her relatives. In similar way, as Ajibade (2005), among Yeruba people of Nigeria, in folk song without any form of social sanction, women have the right to mention the sexual organs of both male and women and talk about sexual intercourse. This shows how the culture of oral poetry gives them the right to speak their mind breaking any restriction imposed on them by social norm.

The data from the field shows that girls can express their feeling about their marriage through oral poetry. They can blame their mother, father and relatives for giving them for marriage against their wish to enjoy life with their *addooyee*¹³. Similarly, the work of (Qashu 2009, p 1243) states that the bride poeticizes oral poetry when she is going to leave her friends and they will also marry and go to live with another clan one day, so they may not see her again.

This research confirmed that, Oromo girls and women's oral poetry also helps them to strength their friendship. By the oral poetry, they show their love for each other on different cultural occurrences. They compose oral poetry to praise and advice each other. They also use it to prohibit redundant actions against girls and women in the community. The prohibition often showed on the cultural occurrences before audiences. This helps them to strength their sense of unity. This is similar with the work of Jama (1994) which stated that, from the theme of women's oral poetry, one could see the sense of friendship among them.

Finding of this research showed that, Oromo women use oral poetry in thanks giving and praying on birth ritual. On the birth ritual, they also serve each other *marqaa* (porridge) and *anchote* (Oromo indigenous tuber) which (Bula, 2017) stated that, it is considered as the best postnatal meal to help women recover from postnatal ailments. During preparing this cultural foods and serving these foods, women poeticize oral poetry. Haddad and Findly (1985) also report that, women celebrate their ceremony by presenting their prayer to God through their traditional songs. Eyoh, (2011, p 88) attested that praise songs may be occasional but they contain values capable of promoting social unity. Therefore, this practice also help women to come together and strength their unity to express their idea. Not only on birth ritual, data obtained from the field shows, Oromo women poeticize work poetry at work to express their feeling about their life. This confirms the works of Eyoh, (2011) and Jama (1994) who discussed that, traditional work songs contain moral lessons and values in addition to the entertainment they provide. The authors indicated that, women have known to be used work poetry particularly to express their opinions about social or political matters.

Generally, girls and women's oral poetry is artistic form of speech by which they publicly express their feeling, wish, emotion, grief, joy, love and hatred. By the oral poetry, they express their idea on marriage ceremony, birth rite, at work place and other cultural occurrences. These occurrences create favorable conditions for girls and women to compose oral poetry and express their idea publicly.

Conclusion

In oral societies, oral literature in general and oral poetry in particular is instrument by which human beings express their idea artistically. By the oral poetry, one can reveal his/her love, desire, delight, comfort, discomfort, hatred, bravery, contentment and misery. Therefore, Oromo girls and women use oral poetry to express their feeling and idea publicly on different cultural occurrences. It is essential and potential resource of girls and women to express their idea about their social life artistically. Oromo girls and women also played lion share contribution in development of Oromo oral literature in general and oral poetry in particular. In addition to making their voices heard through oral poetry, girls and women played their role in preserving and perpetuating culture, norm, value and history of the community. Oral poetry holds every aspects of social way of life and passes it from generation to generation. New generation can learn history, culture and life of their ancestors from folk poetry composed and sung by their ancestors. Therefore, Oromo traditional girls and women poets have been contributing a lot in composing oral poetry and perpetuating it to the generation. The oral poetry also enables girls and women freely express their idea on social gatherings.

¹³ The friendship relation established between girls before their marriage (Tsega, 2012).

Direction for Future Research

In African culture, there are a lot of ways in which women's voice is heard and their participation in socio-cultural activity is assured. As part of Africa, Oromo have different cultural activities in which women's are involved with men or exclusively their occasion. These are occasions on which females explain their idea creatively for audience through oral poetry. This aspect, gender and folklore, is not studied well. Therefore, in the future, folklorists should consider this feature and explore folklore and gender in African culture in general and Oromo culture in particular.

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