

RECEIVING THE SEASON

THE SONGS OF BIRRAA

“*The elders and the youngsters, the men and the women, all gather up their beautiful ornaments and dress up in fine clothes to give thanks to their God and to express their joy.*”

Songs and dancing are the most authentic reflections of a culture and what better season to sing and dance than the calm Birraa with its sorely missed sunshine and occasional drizzle?! This is the perfect time for many celebrations, songs, dances and rituals for the Tulamaa Oromo living in the central highlands of Oromia. During the cold rainy season, there isn't much social interaction due to the rivers that fill up and become impassable but once Birraa comes rivers begin to recede and people come out of their isolation to greet the season with much joy. Traditionally, they believe that Waaqaa (God) put down his Bokkuu (a stick that symbolises power and authority among the Oromo) during this season and when it touched the ground, it finally dried it all up. Everyone in the community has different ways of celebrating this season but almost all have to do with thanksgiving and blessings. The elders and the youngsters, the men and the women, all gather up their beautiful ornaments and dress up in fine clothes to give thanks to their God and to express their joy.

*“Maraam yaa mudaayehoo
Farcaasaan urgaayeho”*

A married Tulamaa woman is considered an elder who owns property. She would typically begin her celebration a lot earlier in the Birraa season making different types of food and especially preparing a butter known as Xobbee for the rituals. Once the women prepare all these items, they give thanks to Waaqaa (God) sprinkling the butter on their riches, their children, their homes, their cattle and even themselves as they sing the

songs of Ateetee. This ritual is called Facaa-fannaa and the owner of the home is called Haadha Ateetee (the mother of Ateetee). She will be the first one to eat the meal that has been prepared before she begins to sprinkle the butter. After her, the young women eat and then prepare a traditional meal known as Marqaa. When the meal is ready, they begin to dance and sing this song

“Beautiful round madaayehoo (an ornament women carry)

*Sprinkle your butter with the Artemisia
Oh the Aroma of the Artemisia plant “*

The Ateetee song is sung in a manner where one woman would chant some words and the other women would repeat her chant and sing the main melody after her in a choral 2/8 type rhythmic pattern. The women then make a hi-hat-like rhythm with their mouths giving the song its special groove as they dance to it by bending their knees and coming back up again. This is a very empowering type of music, that signifies the empowerment of the Tulamaa Oromo women to which Ateetee is a symbol of equality and women's power.

Among the younger group of girls of the Tulamaa Oromo, there is a celebration called Shinooyyee. Shinooyyee refers to a couple of things that are a part of the ritual itself. Some women say it is in reference to the butter placed in traditional cups known as “shinii”. The girls would go door to door singing the songs and, traditionally, the woman in charge of the house would take butter from the traditional cup and smear the girls' heads. The girls would then move on to an-

THE
OROMO

other house to repeat the singing and dancing. The second term is the symbolic meaning of the number five, "Shan", among the Oromo. This number is very important in the Gadaa system, starting from the five Gadaas and the fact that the final month before new years is for the most part five days. Therefore it is debated that the original term was actually "Shanooyyee" and not "Shinooyyee". The term could also have something to do with the flower Shinooyyee that blooms during the Birraa season. The girls carry this flower with them as they move in groups.

Young women in Tulamaa often live in very strict homes where they aren't allowed to go out and interact with their peers that often. They are home most days waiting eagerly for the Birraa season when their families finally allow them to go out and sing, dance, gather flowers and get approached by the young Tulamaa men. On the Ingilchaa holiday and the day before that, they are allowed to go out and enjoy themselves. They gather different types of flowers and grass, while wearing their bright floral dress commonly known as Shaamaa Burree. They sing of spring and how beautiful it is. They get to go to different houses and people would traditionally give them things like butter and food, as well as cash. The young men also come to see the

finely dressed and decorated ladies. When they find one they like and that likes them back, the man would give her a perfume and she would show her interest by giving him a piece of candy.

They sing of the season and dance tirelessly. The young ladies would walk around singing, often carrying a drum and clapping in a fast and fierce manner. They also make a circle and sing together as some of the young ladies dance in the middle of the circle. The rhythm often varies and the song would slow down and escalate making it such a fun variation for the ladies to dance to shaking their heads and clapping to the music.

The young ladies also take the opportunity to express their grievances to their family who don't allow them to have the social life they want, by singing this song ..

*"Yaa muraa shinkurtii (oh onion head)
Birriitu caala jettee (she says money is better)
Haati ilmoo gurgurtii (and sells her, young this mother)
Baddaa Baddaa jedhuu (they call it covered)
Guggubataa kana (this burned up thing)
Abbaa Abbaa jedhuu (they call him father)
Gurgurataa kana" (this merchant being)*

The reason they sing this song is because oftentimes, they would just remain in the homes and then finally be married off into a family their family picks for them. The family traditionally receives a lot of dowry in the weddings which the girls compare to selling one's own child in their songs.

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Young women sing and dance the Shinooyyee at the Shinooyyee and Goobee Carnival in Finfinnee

Abenezer Yonas





Young women dance and sing the Shinooyee at the Shinooyee and Goobee Carnival in Finfinnee  Abenezer Yonas



Young men dance and sing the Goobee at the Shinooyee and Goobee Carnival in Finfinnee  Abenezer Yonas

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The young men will gather early and after they have sent the cattle off to their pastures, they come together and go door to door to perform the Goobee songs.



A young man dances the Goobee at the Shinoooyee and Goobee Carnival in Finfinnee

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A song of the young Tulamaa men during the Birraa season is called Goobee. These songs also relate to burning the wood on the Masqalaa festivities. The young men do a traditional dance of jumping and clashing sticks during this time. Goobee could refer to the songs the young men sing or the young men themselves. Goobee is also called Folllee which refers to the Gadaa age group of younger men. Thus referring to it as the celebration of the Goobee or Folllee. It is said that the songs of Goobee are songs of blessings for a happy new year to those who are alive and have made it to the new year as well as songs that grieve for those who have passed and did not come into the new year. The young men will gather early and after they have sent the cattle off to their pastures, they come together and go door to door to perform the Goobee songs. This happens everyday or every other day until the day of the Demera burning ceremony. Their music is a

bit different from the women's, with a different time signature and a faster tempo. There is often a chant that happens in between a song when the young men chant "ho" as one man sings a part of the song. They take turns and sing a part of the song then all the men sing the main melody together jumping very high and holding their sticks to the sky. This is often a symbol of youth and requires a lot of energy to be performed.

The celebrations of the Birraa season although celebrated in other parts of Oromia too, are probably most widespread among the Tulamaa Oromo. The Maccaa Oromo closely related in culture to the Tulamaa Oromo have similar ceremonies, but they aren't as widely practised these days. In recent years, however, these traditions have once again been revived and are being celebrated by people all over Oromia.



GOOBEE

Gobileho gobileho... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
Gooben geesse jedhani... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(Goobe is here they say .. yes Goobe)
Yoo dandeesse jedhani... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(If you can, they asked..)
Gandi gamaa eelee dhaabe... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(Plant Lillie's in the next town)
Sassattuu seexanni saame... Goobe goobaa ahaayee
(The greedy, the devil steals from)
Dureessi hin kooru jedhani... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(A young man doesn't boast they say..)
Maalo natti hin koorini... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(So please don't boast on me ..)
Dullattin gaanfa qaratte... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(He sharpens his horn with a stick)
Adaraa gaafa dhalattee... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
(When he was born)
Goba liyyu Goba liyyu... Goobe goobaa ahaaye
Dureessa sin jedha biyyu... Goobe goobaa ahaaye

An artist's rendition of the festival season in the Shewan highlands

📷 Hawi Fitsum

SHINOORYEE

Habaabilee ya habaabilee (blooming flowers)
Qaammeen geessee (september has arrived)
Gunnii buqqifannaa (we'll pick the gunni flower)
Kottaa yaa ijoollee (come now children)
Been gunnii buqqifannaa (let's pick the gunni flowers)
Guguddaan keesaaa yaa'ee (we'll take out the big ones)
Xixinnoo duddifannaa (and grow the small ones)
Ansooailaan adii dha (the Impatiens tinctoria is white)
Ijoolleen qaamnee dhiiftee (for children to forget September)
Aadaan dhiisuin badii dha (and not respect the traditions is loss)
Yaa hamtiu fuuraa haamii (uproot our troubles)
Daddarbaaf karraa yaanaa (we will be on our way)
Mee qalloo gan-nuwaamii (call us down)
Walaalee walaalee robe ya koole (before we know it, the new year has come upon us)
Yaa gaaddisee durbaa yaa ijoollee (oh shade for women oh young lady)
Qaammeen geessee (September is here)
Qaammeen yaa Ammas qalooyee
Tulluu qajeellii malkaa (you mountain ready yourself)
Jalaa deemaa yajollee (get away from it children)
Ormii bunaan nudhigaa (strangers drinking coffee)
Agaangillii ya qophe (and the food is ready)
Qophe qophe naa jedhii (tell them all it's ready)
Manaa bay etuu nu hafee (we're about to leave the house)
Yaa Ayyoo qoph bas jedhii (oh mother tell them i'm ready)
Malkaan dhahee dildilaa (the river hit the bridge)
Siif has kennuu Ayyoo too (let it give to you oh my mother)
Muchas morma bilbilaa (a child with a long neck)
Sayyaana yaa sayyaanaa (cattle oh cattle)
Bara egeree dachaana (next year we will come back)
Naxalaa kuula diimaa (our while clothes with the red lines)
Hiddiin qabee tarsaasee (is ripped apart)
Nagaatti yaa hiriyyee (goodbye my dear friend)
Dirqiti addaan nu baasee (need is what tears us apart)

