

**Potential Cultural Practices of Raya Alamata People for Tourism Development: Ethiopia**

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**Abstract**

Cultural tourism is new forms of tourism which can be attracting tourists who seek a meaningful cultural experience. Thus, the main objective of the study was to assess the potential cultural practices of Raya people and their contributions for tourism development. It also tried to assess reasons why tourism activity hasn't been exercised yet in the study area and its surroundings. Indeed, the study is descriptive in its type and used both qualitative and quantitative approach. It incorporated questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and observation as data gathering instruments. Based on stratified sampling techniques, 155 questionnaires were distributed to the sample representatives in three keblies namely Awudi-Kulu, Selam-Bikalsi and Harrilie. Out of 155 questionnaires distributed, 120 of them were returned and analyzed. Moreover, the quantitative data collected using questionnaires were analyzed by frequency and percentage using SPSS version 16. Therefore, the findings of the study revealed that the study area has huge and potential cultural tourism resource which will help to open the door for tourism as a business in the study area with great hope of expecting future economical, socio-cultural and environmental prospects.

**Key Words:** Cultural Practices, Raya Alamata Woreda

**Introduction**

Ethiopia tourism sector was actually a pioneer on the continent and strong competitor to a current phenomenon on the continent Kenya. But today, Kenya's tourism industry attracts as many more times the tourist arrivals as Ethiopia does by almost a factor of 5 in 2007. What was true in 1960s is still true today; Ethiopia has as many attractions and a greater variety than its southern neighbor to share with tourists. It just has not been able to capitalize on its resources like Kenya has (Melaku, 2010). Despite its relative slow growth, tourism sector is growing fast and stands as the third foreign exchange earns, following coffee and oil seeds (Mann, 2006).

Moreover, Ethiopia is one of the growing destinations of East Africa as TDR in the "long-haul" travel of international tourism and travel market of the world. It has also a great potential and being taken as a Tourist Transit Region for most African countries in general and for East Africa in particular due to its national carrier "the Ethiopian airline" position in connecting Africa.

According to Fleming (1985), Tourism for Ethiopian, is a half century phenomenon this is said to have been started in early 1960s with the establishment of AU in Addis Ababa and in preparation to host the founding submit of the leaders of the newly independent nations of the continent of Africa. With the establishment of the Federal Political and structural governance, the tourism structure is developed to operate in collaboration with newly set up regional bureau of cultural and tourism. The service sectors of tourism facilities are increasing both private and publicly owned.

Having the above point in mind, the study area, Raya Alamata Woreda is one of the forty Woredas found in Southern Zone of Tigray Regional State with huge and potential cultural tourism resources that can share for the development of tourism taking as one of a cultural tourism resource power for the region in general and for the local community in particular. However, the area has not been yet researched to its maximum level.

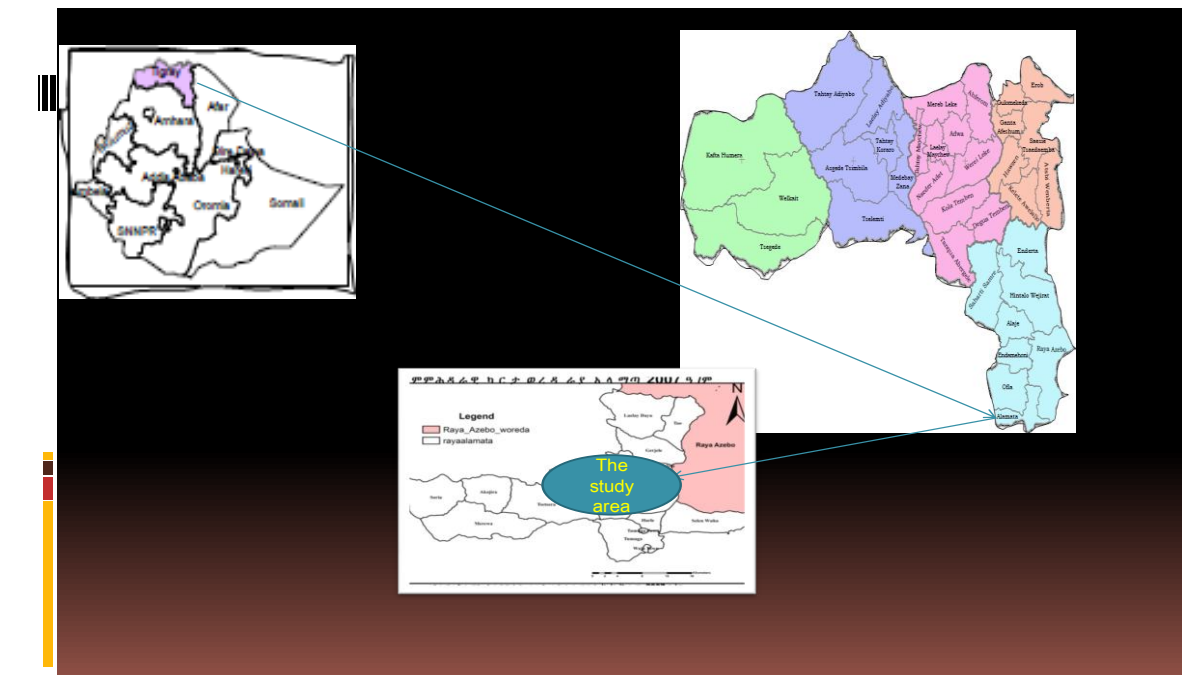
**Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to assess the potential cultural practices of Raya Alamata People for tourism development. In order to handle the objectives the study tried to deal with the following three specific objectives.

- To assess the potential cultural practices of Raya people and their future contributions for tourism development in Raya Alamata Woreda and its Surroundings
- To identify the future prospects of tourism for the people of Raya and its surroundings

## Methods and Materials

**Description of the Study Area:** Raya Alamata is located at 14°20' North Latitude and 39°29' East Longitude at a distance of 178 km South of Mekelle City and 600 km North of Addis Ababa City. The Woreda is found at the Southern extreme point of the Tigray Regional State and bordered with Woreda Ofla in north, Raya Azebo in North East & the Afar Regional State in East, and with Amhara Regional state in South. The woreda is divided in to fifteen administrative villages (or kebelles).



**Figure: 1.1 Map of the Study Area. (Source: Authors developed, 2016)**

## Research Methodology

**The Study Design:** Research design stands for advance planning of the methods to be adopted for collecting the relevant data and the techniques to be used in their analysis, keeping the objective of the research, time and money. Generally the design need to minimize bias and maximizes the reliability and validity of the data collected and analyzed (Kothari 2004). As long as the aim of this study is concerned, it is obvious that it is to assess the current potential cultural tourism resources or products of Raya people and their future contribution for tourism development in general and for cultural tourism activities in particular. Thus, cross - sectional design whereby to ask on the basis of recall as well as current state of affairs is appropriate bridge to answer the research questions. Sources of Data: This research involved both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and field observation, while the secondary data were gathered from the existing relevant published and unpublished documents which are relevant to this particular study or thesis.

**Methods of Data collection:** The methods that were employed to collect data were household survey (questionnaire) key informant interview, Focus group discussion, and field observation. Each method has been described in detail as in the following way:

## Results and Discussions

**Characteristics of Respondents:** The characteristics of respondents were selected from three independent village kebelles for this particular study. From 155 distributed questionnaires, 120 questionnaires were returned and the writer of this thesis found it valid to be the data analyzed. In addition, the characteristics of respondents were identified as gender, age, livelihoods, level of education and family size for the results of this particular study.

## Potential Cultural Tourism Resources in Raya Alamata

Every tourism destination has certain assets that attract domestic and international visitors. These attractions are often the focus of visitors' attention and may provide the initial motivation for tourists to visit a destination (UNWTO) as cited in (Neckermann, 2013) and it is cultural tourism related activities that helps travelers come to the destination and have a better understanding of the unique, sensational and exceptional cultural and natural environment around the world.

### Clothing and Hair Dressing Styles in Raya Alamata and its Surrounding

As long as the dressing custom and the hair style of the people of Raya is concerned, the clothes are made of in such way that to fit with the weather condition of the particular area. The lower the latitude the thinner the cloth will become and vice versa. Thus, in Raya, the two common and indigenous types of clothes are "boffie" and "mayimaye"

"Boffie" or "mayimaye" is a type of fine and soft thread used for the production of the cloth of both men and women. A man or woman who wears a cloth made of 'boffie' and "mayimaye" is believed to be higher in status than those who wear a cloth made of 'abujedid'. Using the fine thread, a cloth of different types for both sexes of different ages is made by local weavers - called 'shemanie.' The weavers produce clothes like 'diig,' 'shemma', 'kuta,' 'tiftif,' 'netela,' 'jano,' 'gonbiso'. In this context, the cloth of women is different depending on their age. Women below age twenty have to wear clothes like 'gumaji' and 'tiftif' without 'meqenet.' This means she is not married yet. Likewise women above the age of twenty wear 'gumaj', 'tibeb' and 'netela.' Based on its function, cloth of women is classified into three.

To mention, yezebot, or cloth to be used during usual days, 'mewucha,' or cloth for special religious purposes and 'yekit' or cloth to be used during special occasions like attending wedding ceremonies and holidays. 'Yezebot,' a cloth is made without special care in terms of its quality and size since it is used for work. It is also soaked with butter and full of impurities.

The second one 'mewucha,' however, is a cloth type made with due care and attention and the weavers are seriously told to make the cloth under a careful instruction of the people who needs to be more of as expected. It has to be neat, washed and decorated with ornaments of tilf (or embroidery) and 'melgom' (an ornament to be attached in the front side of the cloth).The ornament is usually made from silver or gold materials. 'Yekit,' in other ways, is a cloth mostly made white and clean since it is used for religious festivals like epiphany, Meskel (finding of the true cross) and Easter. Embroidery is also common in Raya. It is the art of decorating fabric or other materials with needle and thread or yarn. Embroidery has also incorporated other materials such as metal strips, pearls, quills. There are machine embroidery and hand embroidery today.

However, hand embroidery was the common one in that particular study area and its surroundings in the previous era. Now days even if the art of decorating the cloth with different materials survives, the style and thread to protect traditional cloth is totally changed. For instances clothes imported from Europe and the Middle East are now dominating the local products though the Post-Ethiopian millennium period witnessed the revival of technologically produced clothes like opera, jeans and others ignoring the previous cloth called 'essuu bessu' or 'boffie' during the military time.

As far as the haring styles of Raya people is concerned, members of both sexes had developed their own ways of haring styles. For example in Raya, follow variety of hair styles based on their ages and marital status. Young women have their haired dressed on the side of the head left unshaved at the back of the head. That became known as 'gamena quncho.' The shaved part of the head will slowly close over the years. By the time a young lady is married and gets kids, she officially enters womanhood and began to adopt the fully braided hair do. Some of them include 'albaso', 'afesaso,' 'qarisa' and 'dermamo.'

Like that of women, men especially the youngsters developed their own styles of hair do. Just to mention some of them, 'guttana' or 'goffere' (in Amharic) are the common ones. They adorned their hair using materials like, locally made comb and leafs with pleasant odors, for example, 'ashikiti,' 'natran,' 'ketenayu' and 'ades' leafs etc... all these are the plant products which are mostly known by the people of Raya having a pleasant odor as it has been mentioned earlier.

Both sexes show grate care to the hair do they followed. They have to be dressed with the most amazing artistic skills of the people developed for ages. There are women who specialized in the skill and that are what they do for living or livelihood means. When the hair do is done by these skilled women, it looks like an art more than hairstyle of this contemporary world. The jeweler is worn by woman is also very unique in its kind and is made mainly from gold and silver as well as copper. The dressing, haring and

or wearing styles added with the heart breaking songs of Gumaye and the accent reflected by both Amharic and Tigrigna speakers gives a especial flavor for the cultural make up of Rayans. However, what is practiced today is not as similar as the previous one due to the influx of alien cultures.

### **Making of Household Tools (Hand Crafts) in Raya Alamata District and its Surroundings**

It is obvious that human beings began to manipulate their hands using tools some thousand years ago. From that time on wards the use of sharp and fine tools are improving at a faster rate. Though it is difficult exactly to date when and how household tools were made, the Raya community have developed their own way of making tools.

According to (Belay, 2014) and the notable figures of the local community, the house hold tools were classified in to home tools and field tools, both of them however are made of up of either indigenous tree or animal skins. Some of the trees used for making of tools in Raya include: cordia Africana and olive tree are trees used as a means to produce field tools for plow like 'mofer' (yoke) and 'errif' (manipulated through hand) 'kenber' which will be tied on the neck of the oxen. 'Menshi,' 'lada' and 'mekoferia' are also made of this type of trees

Besides, Cordial Africana and 'Garbe' are very important trees to curve different types of house hold tools. House hold tools like 'gebeta', 'muqecha', 'kerfo', 'qorie', chair of different kinds are made of these trees. 'Gebeta' is an instrument which looks like 'safa' or 'tist' but wider at the top and narrower at the bottom but thicker than 'safa'. To curve this particular house hold tool, it takes at least 10-15 days depending on the size of it. 'Gebeta' which is smaller than in size is used for the purpose of eating porridge where as 'Gebeta' larger or bigger than the former one is used for the purpose of making dough, washing cloth, and storing water. It is curved or shaped either from Cordial Africana or olive tree.

'Muquecha' and alit (zenezena) are also the house hold tools made from the above mentioned trees. The size of 'muquecha' varies according to the function it gives. The smaller one is used for the purpose of grinding coffee and spices whereas the bigger one is used for grinding cereals, pepper (burberie) and 'geshoo'. After the cereals are poured into 'muquecha', they are grinded into pieces using alit or 'zenezena'. 'Karfo' is one of the household tools that is curved out of cordial Africana or Garbe trees. The function of this house hold tool is solely to milk cows and save the milk as well. Likewise 'qorie' is used for storing butter which is made of in a similar wood. It is smaller in size with 'karfo'.

The ladies in Raya always kept it with them because it adds some sort of grace and nice outlook for their beauty. And even it is taken as one means of considering for measuring of beauties when the ladies are with it. The kind of trees which were mentioned and used earlier for the making of all these house hold and field tools are now out of existence due to deforestation as well as global expansion of the western culture. As a result all the house hold tools are now totally replaced by the today plastic and metal nature goods.

In addition to the house hold tools made from trees, there are also house tools which are particularly made of clay soil and leaf of palm tree based on the indigenous knowledge and experience of the local community of Raya. Among these jar, pot, 'jebena', 'mitad' (a black and flat stone used for the baking of 'injera', 'quita', 'hibist' and anebabero and 'gan', a very big pot which is used for making tella are among some of the house hold tools made from the clay soil. 'Sefeied', 'quna' (similar in shape with 'gebeta'), 'wonfit' (sieves), 'moseb', 'lemat', and 'agelgle' are also some of the house hold tools made from the leaf of the palm tree or locally called 'angua'.

'Sefied', 'quna' and 'wonfit' (sieves) are used to separate a dust from cereals whereas 'moseb', 'lemat' and 'agelgle' are used to provide traditional meals or dishes of Raya. Besides, the tools made with different colors are well decorated where by hanged on the wall of the house of farmers. These decorated house hold tools really give a beauty for the house. The house with these tools is more beautiful than the house without them, and even a woman having these house hold tools in her house can be taken as a quality or sign of beauty and getting recognition by the local community as well as a sign of hardworking woman when she is compared with a woman sitting alone or doing nothing.

There are also household tools made from animal hide or skin such cow, goat and ship. Among these kinds of tools 'mazel', (kids holding tools), 'akemada' (is used as a means of transporting grains from one area to another), 'maragebia', (is used as a means to avoid impurities from teff), and 'agoza' (is a mat usually used for sitting when guests come as well as for the people who live in the house.) 'Mintaf' (or mat), 'giraff' (whip), 'tirik chama', (shoes made from leather) for both sexes, traditional drum of all



kinds-ecclesiastical (or 'kebero'), Islamic name 'dibie' and secular ('atamo' or 'negarit') are some of the products which can be made from skin products.

The culture of using a shoe made of skin of cattle is not usual in Raya. The way how to make the shoe is unique from those shoes we accustomed from westerns. And according to the key informant or notable figures of the community, the shoe which is made from the skin and found in Raya is quite different from the other part of Tigray. The shoe is also supported by thick plastic like material at the bottom to increase or maximize the duration of use. The shoe made for females, with few exceptional features, is almost as similar as with males in its shape and design. Though, this type of shoe is common in Raya by Rayans, however, now it is under the influence of the modern plastic shoes either imported from abroad or produced locally.

### **Traditional Feeding Style in Raya Alamata District and its Surrounding**

Depending on the economic level of the people we can witness different kinds of feeding habits in Raya. Most of the foods are made out of milk and milk products. In addition to milk, one can find foods of different types prepared from different types of cereals like 'teff', sorghum, maize and barely.

When we begin from food types made out of milk, some of them include: cheese, distilled butter, yoghurt, and cream. Food prepared from cereals like 'injera', 'mengelie' or 'qita', (look like pizza mostly eaten during breakfast with milk and milk products), porridge, burkuta (mostly made from maize flour for shepherds when they come out from their house for a long time to keep their cattle around the field) and 'wulmibita' (a type of food made from the mixtures of maize and barely mixed with milk and milk products as well.). According to (Belay, 2014 ) and the key informants of the local community, when a man developed the habit of eating 'wulmibita', 'burkta', 'mengelie' or 'qita' having milk and milk products as well as honey with them, he became physically strong and as the same time became always healthier and healthier than others who haven't this particular habit of eating. In addition, a man who eat different types of stews and stews' products prepared from legume mixtures, no one defeat him and he cannot be easily collapsed by any kind of disease. In this regard, there is a distinction between one ethnic group from the other either in preparing and consuming of the food.

Foods of all types are prepared for different purpose like religious festivals, marriage ceremonies, mourning, 'deboo' (or working together) and arbitrations and conciliation. For example, in Raya, those who want to make a feast in commemoration of God or Allah, a saint or any religious activity, they slaughter a sheep or cow. Likewise, there is a competition between well to do families to prepare huge preparation of feast for marriage ceremonies. A man who slaughter more number of oxen and prepare jars of local beer (or 'tella') than anyone else, he is considered to be the richest and the respected one and the vice versa. Moreover, in Raya having a number of cows with their milk and milk products is a symbol of pride and dignity in the community. As long as milk and milk products are concerned, it is also used to keep the charm and grace of both men and women in Raya. It is believed to be a young man who used to drink milk frequently; he is going to be strong and can participate in raids as well as campaigns. Girls of relatively similar age used to drink milk, put better on their heads, sock their clothes with butter and then the clothes become dark in color, it is a sign of keeping their beauty and becoming attractive with the intention of getting appreciation from the people around in general and from their fiancés in particular.

### **Ashenda and other Related Cultural Tourism Resources in Raya Alamata District**

'Ashenda' is one of the New Year festivals of Ethiopia especially in the Northern part of the country which is in Tigray region. The celebration extends for about three days and nights. This cultural celebrity is one of the most popular and well known in the study area right from mid August to the first week of September. Mostly, Ashenda is celebrated by young girls and women with a special dressing and haring style accompanied by special traditional songs and dancing at public areas and house to house considering the event as a New Year greeting.

### **Marriage Practices in Raya Alamata District and its surroundings**

According to the information obtained from the key informants, marriage in Raya is carried out through agreement. This type of marriage is conducted in terms of the readiness of the family of the two sides to intermarry among each other. Accordingly, the family of the boy selects three elders from their village who possesses an ability and endurance to get the willingness of the girl's family. These guys will go to the girl's house keeping their dignity according to the cultural tradition of Raya. This is usually done early in the morning to catch the father before going to the field or to other community affairs. As soon

as they reach in the house, these guys immediately lay down their sticks near to the gate of the house and stand until they are invited to sit from the side of the owner of that house. After having their seat, the elders will present their cases one by one but the families do not decide soon.

After doing the above issues, the elders have to depart after having made an appointment. This indicates that the elders frequently visit till they get permission. Once permitted, the period followed is referred as a period of fiancé. The duration of fiancé is not fixed. It may take two or three years on average depending on the age of the couples. The younger the couples are the longer the period of the fiancé would be and vice versa. With in the second category of marriage there are three classifications. These include: friendly marriage, non friendly marriage and marriage through 'shimagilie' (mediation). The third one is almost as similar as in steps and procedures with that of marriage through willingness of the two families. However, friendly marriage or 'lijjihen lelijjie' (which means my son to your son) is a form of marriage engagement without the involvement of elders. The two family friends simply promise to intermarry in between each other before they get their offspring.

The third one is a non friendly marriage. The girl or the boy has to marry with whom they do not know well. Non friendly marriage on the one hand is a form of marriage or engagement conducted between the sons and daughters of persons who have previous grievances (it doesn't include extreme cases). These group wanted the marriage as a means of relive for the sack of not remembering their previous conflicts. This is the type of marriage makes the Rayan culture unique since the two disagreed families are tied with a marriage alliance to ignore their previous conflicts as well as differences.

### **Conclusions**

Raya Alamata Woreda and its surroundings are endowed with the potential cultural attractions which help to open the door for the development of tourism in the study area and its surroundings. Of these attractions For example, life performing arts such as assimilating local music and dancing or 'skista', the clothing and hairdressing styles, the making of household tools or hand crafts, the feeding habit of the people, the economic bases and activities of the people, Ashenda, Meskel, Epiphany or Timket and other related activities, the conflict resolution mechanisms, the marriage.

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