Volume 21 Issue 15
Originally issued as C1



Global Journal of human-social science: C
Sociology & Culture
Volume 21 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Socio-Cultural Benefits of Curses and Blessings in South Wollo, Ethiopia

By Almaz Zewdu Akalu

Abstract- The study was based on the socio-cultural significance of blessing and curses in Worailu Woreda, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia. The main aim of this study was to study the origin of blessings and curses and to demonstrate in detail their benefits and purposes. Thus, the study could be a baseline as a starting point for researchers who want to study around the community, examine the interaction between blessing and curse, the sequence of performance as well as a detailed and in-depth look at the community's reaction to the subject. Both primary and secondary data sources were considered. The available data was analyzed by a functionalism approach. The finding showed that blessing and curse used to develop the moral law of the society used to shape the generation with humanity and ethics. The local community gives responsibility for the clan chiefs, religious leaders, and public figures to perform blessings and curses, and it has been believed that these individuals had relationship with the supernatural power (God). The finding confirmed that curses and blessing used by the people as conflict resolution in the study area. On the other hand, the study found that curses and blessings used to reflect and influence human emotions such as anxiety, fear, dismay, joy, and sadness.

Keywords: *blessings, culture, curses, performance, socio-cultural benefits.*

GJHSS-C Classification: *FOR Code: 160899*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2021. Almaz Zewdu Akalu. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Socio-Cultural Benefits of Curses and Blessings in South Wollo, Ethiopia

Almaz Zewdu Akalu

Abstract- The study was based on the socio-cultural significance of blessing and curses in Worailu Woreda, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia. The main aim of this study was to study the origin of blessings and curses and to demonstrate in detail their benefits and purposes. Thus, the study could be a baseline as a starting point for researchers who want to study around the community, examine the interaction between blessing and curse, the sequence of performance as well as a detailed and in-depth look at the community's reaction to the subject. Both primary and secondary data sources were considered. The available data was analyzed by a functionalism approach. The finding showed that blessing and curse used to develop the moral law of the society used to shape the generation with humanity and ethics. The local community gives responsibility for the clan chiefs, religious leaders, and public figures to perform blessings and curses, and it has been believed that these individuals had relationship with the supernatural power (God). The finding confirmed that curses and blessing used by the people as conflict resolution in the study area. On the other hand, the study found that curses and blessings used to reflect and influence human emotions such as anxiety, fear, dismay, joy, and sadness. Thus, it has been believed that a person who is cursed, who has no morale, whose morals are inferior to another, whose work is unsuccessful, and whose activities are unacceptable in any life, whereas an individual with blessings expected to achieve universal goodness and psychological development.

Keywords: *blessings, culture, curses, performance, socio-cultural benefits.*

I. Introduction

Folklore is one of the areas in which culture has been studied. Thus, it includes the spiritual and material resources of a society. These resources have been studied by sub branches of folklore such as ethnography, material culture, and ethnography practical skills. This study focuses on the socio-cultural significance of blessings and curses, which are part of the rituals in Woreilu, South Wollo, Ethiopia.

Blessings and curses are parts of the oral tradition passed from generation to generation orally. It is the expression of the desire to be loved by the human beings and by their creator for their good deeds and actions. Leslaw, Wolf./1973, 158/ describe it as "act or words of one who bless a special favor, mercy or benefit, a favor or gift best cowed by God there by bringing happiness. And the evoking of God's favor upon a person etc." From this narration, we learn that the words of someone who bless are a special gift from God, the source of happiness, prayer, good desire conveyed to one in good will for good conduct.

People face many challenges in their life, and they want the good things of the past to come back and the bad to disappear forever. Therefore, they wish all their sorrows be turned into good, that they might have healed; they would like to have a full, satisfying, and happy marriage, need no divorce, want wellbeing and long life. So when they bless, they express their desire for life, wealth, marriage, love, and peace to someone. Thus, the blessing is the reward that a human being receives for their good deeds in life. John H. Mc Dowell (2000, 6),well narrated that blessing one desire for good things to come to us; when he describes this idea, "the blessing describes a condition in which everything in a person life is fruitful, prosperous, healthy reproductive, victorious and uplifted."

The root of the word curse is the Geez word "curse." If a person in a particular social norm does what he is not expected to do or doesn't do what he is expected to do in the community, he will be punished and get cursed. Cursing stems from bitter hatred and malice; when love runs out, hatred emanates from the spirit realm. Therefore, a curse is a way of expressing the evil desires upon the cursed person in different ways. In his book "The Curse of Tongues" (1957, 11), Douglas Busk tells us about the meaning of a curse, "the expression of a wish that main future, evil doom befall on another. A formula of charm intended to cause such misfortune to another." On the other hand, scholar James A. Matisff states the following about the nature of curses. A curse is a prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one; a cause of great detriment of misfortune utter off ensue words in anger or annoyance; to call upon divine or supernatural power to send injury upon; be bring great evil upon, afflict (1979,6). He described curse as a desire in which bad luck, misfortune, and mischief come upon someone.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the origins of blessings and curses and to show in detail how they are functional and useful. The author selected the study area because of the unique blessings and curses performed by the local community. The author has never had a national or international report on the socio-cultural benefits of blessings and curses performed in South Wollo. And this study is believed to

Author: *Ethiopian Biotechnology Institute, Department of Public and International Relation, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*
e-mail: zewdu_almaz@yahoo.com

© 2021 Global Journals

fills such a gap and reflects a unique perspective in the study area.

II. Research Methods

The intended objectives were attained by primary and secondary data sources. After the study's aim and the research questions identified, various published and unpublished information sources related to the subject were collected from the library. Key informants, observation, interviews, and group discussions were used as primary data sources. The data was analyzed by a functionalism approach. The data analysis focused on some typical blessings and curses performed on the moral value development of the people in the study area.

a) Study Aria Description

Woreilu is one of the 18 districts in the South Wollo Administrative Zone of Amhara regional state. It is located 91 kilometers south of Dessie town. It is bordered by Dessie Zuria Woreda in the north, Jama Woreda in the south, North Shewa Zone in the northeast, Albko Woreda in the northeast, Kelala Woreda in the west and Leganbo Woreda in the northwest. The capital of the district was founded by Emperor Menelik II from 1863-1864 E.C; the average annual rainfall is 1,150 mm and the average temperature is 20°C. It is located at 1,500 to 3,600 meters above sea level.

Based on the data obtained from the district officers 91% of the population lives in rural area, and the rest, 9% live in towns. Topographically, Woreilu is characterized by a plateau and with some highland areas. The livelihood mechanism of the people is mainly subsistence farming. Barley, wheat, beans, teff, peas, peas, chickpeas, and others are the main crops grown in the area.

III. Result and Discussion

a) Origin of Blessing and Curse

When we talk about the origin of curse and blessing, it is appropriate to ask questions like how, by whom, and when. In this regard, there are various opinions about its origin that have been found in various religious books.

Both the blessing and the curse are the reflections of the social connection that accompanies the creation of language as human beings began to live in a community. Like other literary fields, these are not the products of a particular individual or group. Evidenced showed that curses and blessings created in collective participation. The performance is in between two or more parties because there must be curser and the cursed; the one who offer the blessing and blessed as well as the superpower must be considered.

About the origin, Matisoff, James A. said that "the origin of curses and blessing is to obey God and be blessed, disobey God and be cursed." Hence, those who obey God get the blessing, and those who disobey God get cursed. In this regard, the Bible is the primary reference. The first part of this book, Genesis, gives a direct answer to the views of the followers of Christianity. This indicates the need for independent research. This section is found in the Old Testament and deals with the creation from the beginning up to the end.

It says that the Creator completed the creation of the immortals and the inanimate, the giant, and the microbes in six working days. On the fifth day, he created underwater insects and flying birds. When God observed that his creation is good, it tells us that he has blessed the creatures. "God blessed them, saying, reproduce and multiply and fill the waters of the sea; and let birds multiply on earth (Genesis 1:22). It also tells us that on the sixth day, after he completed all the rest of life forms on earth, he created man on the earth and created man in his image. This creature, human beings, has been empowered and blessed as the ruler of all the rest creatures. "God created man in his image. He created them as male and female. And God blessed them, and he said them, let you be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth; and rule it. Let human being rule the fish of the sea and the beasts of the earth; rule every bird of the sky, and every living creature, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."(Genesis 1: 27-28). As mentioned above, after creation, God (the Creator) blessed human beings, and he empowered man over the living and the physical world. In general, the blessing is not only created by the community or an individual but also originated from the supernatural power.

In the same way, we find the curse in this metaphor. It said that the Creator gave commands for Adam and Eve, who believed to be the origin of human beings, by placing them in the Garden of Eden. But Adam and Eve were punished for disobeying God's command. And his punishment was on the whole earth. He describes this in Genesis (3: 14-19), because of its disobedience, God said to the snake, unlike the rest of animals and creatures, let you be cursed forever, creep with your chest or stomach, and graze soil forever. Besides, God said to the woman, "let too much anxiety be upon you, give birth in too much of anxiety and pain, and after you give birth, your desire will be to your husband. We can understand from this narration that curses, like blessings, and other literary, created not only in human terms but also directly from the Creator.

Adam and Eve, or Adam and Eve, are believed to have been the first humans, as both Christianity and Islam claim. They were made of dust and received the blessings of their Creator. At the time of their disobedience, the land of their origin had cursed. Hence, they ha cursed because they originated from earth dust. As this mythology, blessings and curses came from the Creator to Adam and his life, and as it has been indicated in the Old Testament, from them

© 2021 Global Journals

passed on to Cain, the son of Adam who killed his brother, and then to all humanity.

We recognize that this practice had been used by the society to punish the disobedient, condemn the enemies, weak (elders and mothers) relies on the cursing as anchorage and is a reflection of a long-standing society. Cursing, by its very nature, as it is prophetic and lustful, does not happen at one time or place. Knowing this, clients wait patiently for the curse to come upon those cursed, calling on the name of their God or the spirits they trust. The point is whether the weaker, the steadfast believers of the curse, were able to find spiritual relief by cursing their enemies and wrong doers. In this regard, James Hasting (vol. 4, 367) states that "the curse is particularly the weapon of the wronged and oppressed against their more powerful enemies; and Zealots against their bigoted opponents."

About the origins of curse and blessing, the scholars who studied the development of non-religious societies said that humanity in their life processes face natural disasters and challenges due to various conflicts among themselves. Hence, to win and get relief from these catastrophes, they probably worshiped the sun, moon, stars, light and darkness, hills and rivers, etc. They also prostrated for powers starting from sculptures made by them up to the spirit created in their minds. As a result, they believe that there is no power other than these forces, and because of this belief, they ask God to give them the good deeds they do and destroy the bad ones. So they said that the blessing and the curse came from these sources. James A. Matisff (2000, 4) John H. M CDowell (2000, 3)

It has been found difficult to point out the exact time when the blessing and the curse began. Still, as it has been described so far, records show that it took place when civilization and the spread of various beliefs, as well as the creation of human beings.

b) Circumstances for Blessing and Cursing

Cursing, like all other forms of speech, has its own set of circumstances to occur, such as anger, trouble, injustice, hatred, fear, and so on. The New Catholic Encyclopedia states that "the occasion for the course may be anger and fear, but it may also be hate and envy." Hence, cursing is a phenomenon that occurs in the spirit of anger, fear, hatred, and jealousy.

The phenomenon of the curse and the atmosphere is dark and gloomy. The occasion of the curses is bad luck, and there is no bright hope for life. To a certain extent, it signifies weakness. The possibilities are out of control. From the ancient Scriptures, Adam had lost his courage after he got cursed. He had broken heart, his knees were shaking. He experienced a stressful life on earth.

On the contrary, blessing takes place on a variety of occasions when there is good and good deeds, happiness and hope, contentment and love. Hence, both curses and blessings are present in any society, and both have reasons (occasions) for occurrences. James Hosting commented on this idea and said that "blessing and curse found in all races. The blessing told by thought and by words. Notably, that the blessing by words is the more powerful, but the curse by thought is more powerful than that by words." According to his narration, curse and blessing are found in all societies and are practiced both in speech and in thought.

c) Interaction between Blessings and Curses

When we are talking about blessings and curses it is clear that one is the opposite of the other. The main point to recall is that according to Matisoff, how people understand the relationship of the words? How the relationship founded between bad and good things? And how do people associate blessing with a curse? Why they relate these issues together? According to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (1965, 367), even though the two issues are contradictory to each other, they are mutually exclusive and should be studied side by side. "Cursing and blessing are perfect opposites, and are therefore, appropriately taken together for analysis and description." Hence, we have to investigate blessings and curses together.

When one gets blessed for his good manners, his enemies will get cursed at the same time. For example, someone who offers the blessing could say that "let your enemy's eyes get darkened and unable to see, and their legs bow down." In so doing, they blessed one for his good deeds and his enemies get cursed simultaneously. Therefore, the narration supports the fact that these two things are inseparable.

According to James Hosting (1965, 367), curses and blessings are verbal wishes for harm or good upon someone. Besides, one can express his desire in the name of God or the Spirit. Hence, the interaction between these issues emphasizes that both have the same power and that there is a state of expression of one on the other. Thus, in one hand it is a matter of destiny and desire, and in the other, it is of will and truth. The speaker can express in a positive or negative way. That is why we said that they must go together, even if they have contradictions.

These two issues may seem contradictory, but when we put them in balance, both play a role in preserving and sustaining the values of the community.

d) Dateless of Blessing and Curse

Blessings and curses have a religious origin and believed to have been passed down from generation to generation in the community with firm basement. As an example, let us look at the expressions, "let your descents cursed, and your offspring blessed;" the above ideas related to curse and blessing. In this regard, we can see that there are

© 2021 Global Journals

individuals who get cursed because of their bad manners, or individuals who get blessed because of their good deeds. Hence, we can see that the curse and blessing given to the parents can pass to their next generations through time. Moreover, blessings and curses based on race, health, wealth, knowledge and understanding, trust, love, and hate, etc., are transcendent.

IV. The Socio-Cultural Significances of Blessing and Cursing

Culture is useful when practiced and preserved. Blessings and curses also have their own goals and purposes. The Bible and the Holy Qur'an, written from the earliest times when human beings created, are seen cursing and blessing human beings. Since then, blessings and curses practiced by mankind as incentive and negative moral deterrents. In this way, the community used it to protect its social value and submit to the Creator justice.

Curse and blessing derived from the customary law of the community, so the blessing and the curse are said to be based on customary law. Hence, the legislation, enforcement, and interpretation of the law are done by the community. Thus, there are elders, religious leaders, authorized local leaders, and others authorized by the local people to curse and bless. These people believed to have the power and authority to seek and interact with the universal divine power before performing their function. During the current study, the author confirmed that they were responsible for their actions.

The authority given to those public figures to curses and bless by the local community is so great and believed to determine human destiny. Thus, when a person is blessed, he or she can imagine a new world in his or her mind. When he/she is cursed, he/she plagued with evil deeds. These make harder for them to move forward, and they reconsider to explore the local culture; because it is not possible to challenge or violate traditional values. Moreover, curses and blessings play vital role in resolving conflicts and various social events in society.

For the society to be morally built and for maintaining sustainability in the coming generation, there is a blessing ceremony for parents who wish to raise their children ethically and gracefully, educate children for the benefit of the country and the nation. Hence they said that “let our children grow and develop ethically and let they stand for their nation.” On the contrary, the author has noticed that there are influential curses like “let you become infertile” upon someone’s children with bad connotations that make the fertile person as if she/he is infertile.

Based on the data obtained from the key informants, the local people believed that a person who is blessed is successful in his/her career, successful in life. On the contrary, the cursed person will have the most miserable life ever. Besides, curses have created social stigma, as well as social, psychological, and moral death in the wrongdoer. However, blessing leads to prosperity as opposed to death.

A blessed person is free from self-blame, remorse, punishment, and fear, giving him hope, vision, and resurrection. In this way, the blessed individual will be able to look forward to success. Thus, subjugation in local culture makes it not only a matter of choice and decision but also of obligation. The finding also showed that a person who is disobedient to the community’s socio-cultural values and norms would be cursed. However, before cursing, detailed investigation carried out upon the individual, and advice given to the person by his friends.

V. Conclusion

Documents showed that society believes in curses and blessings, give it a significant place. They originated at one time when human civilization and religious beliefs were not prevalent and were co-created since the creation of human beings.

In this system, we can find individuals who convince themselves of their greatness and claim to be associated with the Creator. These include tribal leaders, religious leaders, and other prominent social leaders. These people have been given the responsibility to bless and curse the community. Therefore, just as a good person blessed in the community, so is a terrible person who receives a curse for his work as punishment.

According to the study’s finding, they had been convinced that the curser will hand over the cursed person to another supernatural power. Thus, the curser believed to have the authority to command the plagues, which can devastate the cursed has hoped for, the dreams he/she has realized, the plans he/she has achieved, the wealth possessed, and the power to seize. On the contrary, it has been believed that a blessed will achieve total success.

These two issues not only increase morale punishment in the community but also build morality in the next generation. Furthermore, the study found that conflicts in the society neglected by the modern law could be investigated and resolved by this system. It used to deliver various social issues, including justice.

Blessings and curses have a powerful effect on human emotions, such as anxiety, fear, concern, happiness, and sadness.

References Références Referencias

1. Bauman, Richard: verbal art as performances. Waveland press, Inc, 1984

© 2021 Global Journals

2. Douglas Busk. The Curse of Jonques. PALL MALL press London, 1957
3. Desta tekileweld. New Amharic dictionary. Addis Ababa; Artistic Publishing House, 1962.
4. Ethiopian Bible Society. Bible Book "Old and New Testaments." Addis Ababa Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1990.
5. Finnegan, Ruth. Oral literature in Africa. Oxford university press, 1970.
6. Finnegan, Ruth. Oral petry: In Nature, significance and social context. Cambridge: university press; 1977.
7. James Hsting. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. 4 Great Britain Marvision Bribblted, 1965.
8. Leslaw, Wolf. English Amharic context Dictionary. otto Harr asowitz, 1973.
9. Raaciff-Brown, A.R. Instrument and function in Primitive society; Essays and addresses. Glencoe, Illinois, 1956.
10. Mesfen M. "The context and content of the Hammins' Blessings and Cursed Cultures." Journal of Ethiopian studes, volume 3, 2000.
11. Marthae Sims and Martine Stephens. Living folklore. Utah state University press, Logan, 2005.
12. Matisoff, James A. Blessing, curse, hope and fears: psyco ostensive expression in Yiddish. Stanford university press, 2000.
13. Matisoff, James A. Blessing and curses. Stanford University, 1979.
14. Mc Dowell John. H. Poetry and violence; The Ballad tradition of Mexico's costa china. Urban and Chicago; university press, 2000.
15. Mesfin Messele. A bbaudde oral poetry in south wollo: A descriptive Analysis. MA thesis: Addis Ababa University, 2000.

© 2021 Global Journals