Analyzing The Meaning/Interpretation Of Folk Beliefs In Gondar City

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Abstract
This study is focused on Folk beliefs. The general objective of the study is to analyze the meaning/interpretation given to these folk beliefs. In this study the researcher used two kinds of data collecting tools. The main data collecting tool used was in depth interview, the supporting one is unstructured observation. Since the study is based on qualitative data/superstition folkloric aspects, its design is descriptive. The participant of the study were the Azezo Dimaza and Ayer Marefiya sub city of Gondar(Ethiopia )elders. The technique used to select these participants was snow ball sampling technique. The data analysis method of the study is qualitative i.e. descriptive using words and phrases. As the result of the data analysis showed, the meaning/interpretation gave to these folk beliefs is related to: addiction, coming of a guest, hearing new information, gain/loss of money, being excess of house hold assets, facing of good/bad fortune, giving birth going far and attacking by devil/illness.

Key terms: Folklore, folk, belief and superstition.

1. Introduction
Social folk custom is one of the four genres of folklore. As the name implies, social folk custom is a general name of different societies repeatedly performed and ordered rituals. The main folkloric elements included in this genre are: public events, folk games/plays, folk belief, folk medicine and folk calanderical custom (Solomon:2007:179).

As mentioned earlier, folk belief is one of the main folkloric elements of social folk custom. It mainly states good or bad life occurrences which will happen in the near/far future. The day to day belief performances and rituals to welcome the good or prevent/cure from the bad life occurrences happened in some one’s life. The folk belief also well describes the existence of the seen, natural and the unseen/imaginative world (Fekade:1991:14).

A faith that folk beliefs based on, is a process of giving a mental symbol for ever day life occurrence. This mental symbol is a spiritual interaction in between the person who perceived the event and its justification as true and the event/object (Schoemaker:1990:51).

There are different types of folk beliefs among the word’s different societies including Ethiopia. Hence, superstition (ማልኪ ኢት.ob), magic ,evil eye ,cult, wrath and believing in the power of devil(አ ድባ ር/ቆ ሌ) are the main kinds of this folk belief. However, this study is focused only on superstition sub type of folk belief. Superstition (ማልኪ ኢት.) is a type of folk belief concerning mainly on the good or bad occurrences which will happen in the individuals near/far future (Solomon: 2007:182).

As Solomon(2007:183) stated, in its nature, there are also four types of superstition which are perceived as true occurrences amongst the studied societies of Ethiopia. These are: the meaning of dream (የ ህ ልምፍች), good fortune(ገ ድ), bad fortune(መጥፎ ስ), and being pessimist/negative thinking (ሟር ት). Of this superstition types the study is also foc used only on the three, excluding the meaning of dream since it is abroad concept and may result another full paper by itself.

In the study area there is a belief superstition that is known by the name good fortune(rchive). Good fortune superstition is a symbol for the happening of a good fortune in the day to day life the individual. When the person felt this will happens, she/he becomes so happy by saying repeatedly welcome and pray to God to happen. On the other side ,there is also a belief and its expression of a bad fortune called (መጥፎ ስ) that are a symbol for epidemic, loss of money/any other asset,
devils attack of an individual and even occurrence of death. When a person feels and recognizes that bad fortune will happen fear/frustration will prevails on him/her. To abandon from this, he/she may perform different rituals related to the folk belief and strongly pray to God in order not to happen (Solomon:2007:183-184).

Thinking negative (ሟር ት) is another type of superstition folk belief i.e known and perceived as true by the society. Whenever an individual think negatively, the bad/negative outcome happen in his/her life. The negative life outcome happened due to negative thinking includes: illness, loss of money, devil’s attacking of a person, even death of a thinker/his closest relative. So, an individual may pray to God not to happen these, put a piece of steel, especially for the mother that gave a birth (Solomon:2007:185).

As it is mentioned before, even though the focused society member individuals has been believed in so many type of superstition; the main focus of this paper is on the three types of it, particularly, that faced/think over when the individual weak up from his/her sleep up to the evening slept on his/her bed.

As Schoemaker (1990:52), during the individuals perform their day to day activities; there might happen different animals barking/shouting, crossing of their road, different types of movement of their body parts, even persons themselves blinking of the eye lid, itching of palm/knee, bitter test of mouth, the coming together of sunlight and rain etc. Whenever these all happens, due to the folk belief he/she believed in he/she feels/ thinks either good or bad things and perform rituals. But these belief and rituals do not have the consent and recognition of the institutionalized religions(Christianity, Islamic or Catholic etc.). Since they also don’t have a written rule and regulation, the belief and the performed rituals transferred orally from generation to generation.

There are two main reasons to held on a study on this particular issue. The first one is, the need to know folk beliefs meaning /interpretation given, the second is the researcher’s interest of answering the question why and how this folk beliefs and rituals perform by the individual and as to how they come existence across time.

1.2. Objectives of the study
The main objective of the study is to analyze the meaning /interpretation given to folk beliefs in Gondar area particularly, Azezo Dimaza and Ayer Marefiya sub cities.

1.3. Significance of the study
Conducting this study may have the following significances: it gives enough information to individuals whoever wants knowing the meaning/interpretation of folk beliefs. It may create awareness on the gain/loss of an individual who believes in and perform such beliefs. In addition it may also become a base for other researchers who want to study folk beliefs in the future.

2. Methodology
Since folk belief is a folkloric element, this study follows a folkloric approach. The design of the study is descriptive in its nature. The main data collecting tool is in depth interview and the supporting one is unstructured observation Goldstein(1996:104),Fekade(1991:96-97) and Alem(1997:69). As Yalew(2004:134) and Daniel and etal. (1994:75) stated, The observation data collecting tool is used to strengthen the validity and reliability of the data gained by in depth interview. Since it is the researcher’s locality the study area is selected by convenience sampling technique. The study participants are being selected through snow ball sampling technique from the two sub cities of Gondar (Ethiopia) that are Azezo Dimaza and Ayer Marefia.
As it mentioned before, the study is based on folkloric data which is qualitative in its nature. Hence, the method used to analyze the collected data is qualitative data analysis method i.e. descriptive by using words and phrases (Yalew:2004:410).

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

The collected data were classified and analyzed in this section. The analysis of the data collected, is according to the meaning/interpretation given to the folk belief itself. Such as, folk beliefs related to: addiction, coming of a guest, hearing new information, gain/loss of money, being excess of household assets, facing of good/bad fortune, giving birth/going far and attacking by devil/illness(Solomon:2007, Schoemaker:1990).

3.1. Folk beliefs related to addiction

There are different types of drinks/foods that make human beings addicted. It is obvious that being addicted to something: drink/food or any practice has its own negative impact on the life of the individual, particularly on health related matters. As the study showed the person became addicted whenever having a drink of local beer (täla) or እንቅለ(አ ረ ቄ) inside the preparing class, drinking a cup of coffee before anything eaten/without sugar, drinking of local beer/coffee before putting it in the floor/table, licking of a finger after any meal. So, in order not to be addicted; the study participants believed in such folk belief and try to abandon from performing them.

3.2. Folk beliefs related to the coming of a guest

A guest is a person who is not a permanent member of a family and living in a relatively distant area. As it is believed by the participant of the study, there are different symbols/indicators of the coming of a guest to someone’s house. Among these, the sunlight exposed sleeping of a cock with his wing stretched, blazing of a fire over the casserole and the folding of injera/one of the most known traditional food in Ethiopia/ on the flat casserole are the main symbols. Whenever these incidents happened, the house owner wife/servant recognized the coming of a guest to the house and say welcome (yäčäre inigida yadrigih).

3.3. Folk beliefs related to hearing of a new information

An individual may hear a new information that makes him/her felt good/bad. Surprisingly, he/she recognizes hearing of a new information early since there is a symbol for this feeling. Such as, a sound heard inside his/her ear and blinking of the eye lid. Whenever this happened, a person recognizes as there is a new information/either good or bad/heard. After this recognition, he/she became ready for that, especially by praying to God to become good or save themselves from the bad.

3.4. Folk beliefs related to gain/loss of money

There are folk beliefs which are related to the gain/loss of individuals money. These includes, itching of palm, sweeping of a house after 5:00(GMT), buying different things and giving a money to an individual during the first day of a month. In line with this whenever an individual feels itching of palm, it is believed that he/she gains a money; whereas when a person swept the floor of his/her house after 5:00, buying different things and giving much money to other individuals during the first day of the month it is believed that there happens loss of money throughout the month. Hence, persons usually try to abstain from such day to day performances particularly that causes loss of money and welcoming/praying to the good ones; folk beliefs that are believed to bring money to them.

3.5. Folk beliefs related to being excess of household assets

In order to led a good life if possible to live in a luxury, human beings usually wish their household assets become excess. Most of the time the realization of the wish is related to folk beliefs and rituals. Among such beliefs and rituals; putting 3/5/7 corns and locally known by the name “ጓ ያ” seeds to the flour inserting a piece of steel/sickle/knife to the local beer jar ear, putting chark/käsäle to the sunlight
exposed malt are the main cited. These beliefs and rituals are not only related to being excess of house hold assets but also it is believed that they enhance qualities.

3.6. Folk beliefs related to good/ bad fortune
As the study participants believed in; individuals know/recognize the goodness/badness of the life occurrence/fortune. Knowing of such fortune is related to the hearing of a person name called, the road crossing of a black cat, stone/piece of wood hitting of the leg fingers, a person’s crossing of a road with full/empty jar are the main symbols. When an individual hears a person called by the name Amare/became beautiful/Dessalegn/I feel happy/ and a person’s crossing of a road carrying a jar full of water; it is believed that a good fortune will occur. As a result of this the believer will continue his going by expecting different good things. On the contrary, whenever a person hears an individual called by the name Kebede/became heavy/hard/, Gezahegn/became ruler/, a black cat crossing of a road and a person’s crossing of a road with empty jar,he/she feels bad and a bad fortune will believed to happen. Hence, he/she may return back to house, pray to God to save to all the bad things that will occur.

3.7. Folk beliefs related to giving birth/going far
The study participants told me that if there is an itching of knee is believed to be a symbol for giving of a birth and the itching of the inside part of the foot is also the symbol/indicator of going far/to the distant area. In addition when a person jumps over some onces stretched leg the disease inside him will transmitted to the jumper and she/he became ill.

3.8. Folk beliefs related to devil’s attacking/illness
The other side of the superstition is related to devil’s attacking/illness. Whenever the individual cross over the river without putting/dropping a little drink of piece of food, when a person open the closed door of the house standing in the left side; the devil will attack him/her highly. By this, they will suffered from different diseases even they may exposed to death. Hence, to abandon from such attacking/illness even death individuals should put/drop a piece/a little food/drink in the river before crossing it and opening of the closed door of the house standing in the right side. Besides, it is believed that putting a piece of steel/knife/sickle will save the drench/a mother who gave birth/from attacked by the devil.

4. Conclusion
This study is focused on Folk beliefs. The general objective of the study is to analyze the meaning/interpretation given to these folk beliefs. As the result of the data analysis showed, the meaning/interpretation gave to these folk beliefs is related to: addiction, coming of a guest, hearing new information, gain/loss of money, being excess of house hold assets, facing of good/bad fortune, giving birth/going far and attacking by devil/illness.

References