

‘Fichchee’

Sidama New Year, Celebrated in Kenya

Our East African Reporter, Nairobi

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I. Background,

Fichchee, among others, is one of the most important values and traditions inherited from ancestors that uniquely characterize Sidama nation. This event has been celebrated in Sidama since time immemorial. Sidama is one of a few nations in the world and may be the only nation in Ethiopia and in the horn to have its own calendar.

II. Nairobi Celebration

Tens of Sidama community accompanied by their family celebrated their Fichchee festival, ‘New Year’ of the nation in Nairobi with a great enthusiasm. Other community members of Oromo and South nations and nationalities were invited and attended the event as honorable guests. According to the tradition, elders of the community opened the occasion with conventional blessings, i.e., “Canbalaalla! Iille, Iille”, is meaning happy New Year. Elders explained about Fichchee and related festival undertakings like local dancing, intense delightful chants, etc. Then home prepared food stuff of “Waasuu Saagaale, or also known as “Shafeeta” specially prepared meal, made of Sidamas’ staple food Waasa’ with butter (Burisame) with milk was served to the members and guests.

According to the tradition, no meat is allowed to be prepared and served on this day. On the occasion, guests from Oromo community participated in the blessing of the occasion. They expressed the cultural and traditional unity of the two nations and called to strengthen the struggle against the dictators. The celebration came to an end with the blessing of the Sidama elders-“Fichchee Jeeji, Fichchee Jeeji”. It literally means Long Live Fichchee, whereas this symbolically expresses longevity for Sidama as a nation. Finally, all participants solemnly vowed to celebrate the coming Fichchee at their home land.

Meanwhile, Fichchee was celebrated by Sidaama nation across the board in Sidaama land. Especially, in Awassa (Adare) town, capital of Sidaama, this year’s Fichchee was celebrated with dual set of feelings. One set of feelings was celebrating the festival with high spirit of nationhood. Another feeling was the expression of renewed sense of mourning for those innocent Sidaamas massacred by tyrant Ethiopian regime led by Meles Zenawi and his Southern surrogates such as H/Mariam Desalegn and Melese Marimo on May 24, 2002; and for those who continues to perish without any remorse on constant bases. Fichchee has officially been declared as Sidaama national holiday and offices and business centers remain closed throughout Sidaama on this day since 1995.

III. Canbalaalla- Series of Festivity

Canbalaalla is a day where series of cultural festivities take place. Fichchee is the eve of Canbalaalla. Sidaama exercises lunar system of calendar. An ascetic group of elders, after dealing with the movements of moon, star and other sky bodies, declare the eve of Canbalaalla-Fichchee. In previous days, eve of Canbalaalla was being communicated to the public through announcements made at market places,

'Laalaawa' across the nation. At present, Fichchee and other public issues are being announced through Furra radio-the Sidaama national broadcasting station. On this evening, all sections of the community gather at the house of the elders nearby. Waasa, a product of Enset (false banana like plant used by Sidama people as a staple food), cooked with butter only and called "Burisame" is put in special earthenware pot "Shafeeta" and placed in the middle but under the direct auspices of the concerned elder.

On the day of Canbalaalla, lots of events take place. Children and adults go door to door of each house and say "Ayiide Canbalaalla" (meaning, Happy New Year). Then the insiders reply "Iille, Iille" (happy New Year to you too and come in). Visitors would be served with Burisame and milk at each house. On this day, children and adults are free from any physical labour at house and in the fields. No one would utter words of curse and inflict any punitive offenses on any of human beings and even on animals and any of Godly creatures.

More surprisingly, cattle enjoy special treatment on this day. As mentioned above, no curse and no punishment on them. On this day, cattle are allowed to graze on the new field of grass paddocks that were kept closed previously. This reveals the level of attachment and affection that Sidaama nation has for cattle and any creature.

In previous years, Canbalaalla festival resumes for two or four weeks. On the first day of Canbalaalla, congregation of each village from different directions flock together and gather into huge crowd to take part in religious, cultural and national ceremony at respective "Gudumaale" 'places that are designated for such special gatherings' in each former 10; but today's' 19 districts of Sidaama. And, Gudumaale is sacred place where only religious and cultural events take place. At Gudumaale, ascetic elders offer sacrifice in favor of God for past transgressions and for the bright future.

At Gudumaale, young boys gather into congregations and enthusiastically chant rhythmic, heroic and cultural words called "Qexaala". Girls on the other part gather together and chant rhythmic words of aspiration and affection called "Hore". In late hours of the day, boys and girls group get along with each other and go in for local dance called "Faaro" and (Siriba). "Qolo" and "Hafare" is formal Canbalaalla dress for girls and boys respectively. Boys and girls ornate their hair, dress and body with different local decorative objects and appear with high level of grooming. This is also one the most essential times for the youngsters, both boys and girls, to choose their life long soul-mates.

At the end of each day's Canbalaalla festivities, all participants come together and loudly utter a phrase "Fichchee Jeeji! Jeeji!". Fichchee is a symbolic representation of our identity and each of us have generational obligation to honor our deep-rooted cultural heritage and pass over to our descendants to sustain the identity of the Sidaama Nation.

Fichchee Jeeji! Fichchee Jeeji! Jeeji, Jeeji!!

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