

Analysis of the Values of Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) in The Socio-Cultural Life of The Gurage of South-Central Ethiopia



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ABSTRACT: Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) is a traditional multi-purpose crop mainly used as a staple/co-staple food crop over 20 million people in Ethiopia. The Gurage are sedentary agricultural people of patrilineal persuasion who speak a Semetic language and inhabit in a sparsely fertile semi-mountainous region in south-central Ethiopia. Enset, their staple food crop, commonly called the “false banana plant”, is produced in abundance by each Gurage homestead. The objective of this study was to document the socio-cultural values of enset plant among the Gurage. In this study, a qualitative methodological approach is employed in extracting information from different sources on the subject in question. The study relied mainly on primary and secondary sources. According to findings, three types of food, viz, *Kocho* (fermented product from scraped pseudo stem grafted corm), *Bulla* (dehydrated juice), and *Amicho* (boiled corm) can be prepared from enset. As a food crop, it has useful attributes such as foods can be stored for long time, grow in wide range of environments, produces high yield per unit area and tolerates drought. It has irreplaceable role as a feed for animals. Enset starch is found to have higher and widely used as a tablet binder and dis-integrant and also in pharmaceutical gelling, drug loading and release processes. Moreover, enset shows high genetic diversity within a population which in turn renders resilience and food security against the ever-changing environmental factors and land use dynamics. Enset is totally involved in every aspects of the daily social and ritual life of the Gurage, who, with other several tribes in southwest Ethiopia, form what has been termed “the Enset Culture Complex Area”. From birth, when the umbilicus is tied off with a fiber drawn from enset fronds, the life of the Gurage is enmeshed with various uses of enset, not the least of which is nutritional.

KEY WORDS: Socio-Cultural, Values, *Ensete ventricosum*, Gurage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Enset is distributed as a wild species in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Mistre, 2019; Marsha, Robert and Samuel, 2014). It is the main crop of a sustainable indigenous African system that ensures food security in a country that is in food deficient (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Mistre, 2019). The plant occurs in wild forms mainly in East, Central and South Africa. It became an emergency food during the Second World War in Vietnam (Asia). But, it is cultivated only in Ethiopia (Mesfin, Kumelachew and Osamu, 2018; Lisanu, 2020; Mistre, 2019; Getahun, 2020)

Studies have identified three major good crops, which can be linked with three broad cultural ecologies in Ethiopia. These crops include, teff, mainly cultivated in the Northern highlands, where it is produced as a staple and cash crop, enset, a major or co-staple in the more humid southern and south-western, and maize and sorghum in the Eastern and Western parts of the country. This Zoning pattern was used as a basis for re-using the agro-cultural diversity of the country. However, in contrast to this suggestions, under the current conditions of farming, many crop plants have dispersed from one cultural ecology to the other through exchange or movement of people, with the exception of enset (Almaz, 2001)

Studies have revealed as Ethiopia is one of the centers of diversity and origins for various agricultural crops. Among those crops, enset which is also one of the oldest cultivated plants of Ethiopia. The country is the only one to domesticate the plant over large swaths of land and uses it as food and fiber crop. Records mentioned that enset has grown in Ethiopia for more than 10,000 years. The cultivation of enset in Ethiopia was estimated to spread over 67,000 square kilometers (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Mistre, 2019)

The plant is commonly known as the ‘false banana’ because of its close resemblance to the domesticated banana (*Musa spp.*) plant (Wolf, 1956; M. Acero, S., B. Mukasa and Y. Baguma, 2018; Getahun, 2020). It is Ethiopia’s most important traditional staple crop in the densely populated south and south-west parts of the country; where it is grown and exploited for its starch to

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make various food products (Z. Yemataw, 2014; Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; M. Acero, S., B. Mukasa and Y. Baguma, 2018; Getahun, 2020)

As several findings have suggested, more than 20 percent of the population of the country found in the highlands of southern and southwestern and eastern Ethiopia depends upon on enset for food, fiber, animal forage, construction materials, medicine, means of earning cash and insurance against hunger (Z. Yemataw, 2014; Yemane, 2020; Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Mistre, 2019; Getahun, 2020). The plant has high landrace (clone) diversity in Ethiopia. Studies have reported a total of 278 clones with distinct names from seven enset growing Zones. Hadiya is the richest Zone with a total of 59 clones followed by Kembata (43), Dawuro (42), Wolaita (39), GamoGofa (34), Gurage (31) and Sidama (30) (Getahun, 2020). Gurage is one of the areas known for its surplus production of enset plant. Enset crop grows at a wide range of altitudes; however, it grows luxuriously at elevation between 2000 and 2750 meters above sea level under rain fed conditions (Lisanu, 2020; Almaz, 2001)

This major food crop is principally cultivated as a highly resilient staple that withstands a wide range of environmental conditions and can buffer seasonal variation in food availability (Lisanu, 2020; Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Solomon, 2019; Getahun, 2020). The primary strategic importance of enset in food security is that enset helps prevent famine by surviving prolonged drought when other crops fail. Once enset plants are established, they are able to tolerate occasional years of very low rainfall. Secondly, it gives higher yield per unit area than other crops, thus supporting the densely populated areas of the country (Almaz, 2001; Getahun, 2020). Enset yields 1.3 to 3.5 times more food energy per hectare per year compared to cereals grown under similar area and management conditions. Thus, for households facing shortage of land, the higher productivity enset relative to cereals makes enset an important food security crop. Thirdly, the processed enset food products can be stored for long term uses. The ability to store processed enset products for long periods with little storage loss provides household with a mechanism to smooth consumption during periods of food shortage (Almaz, 2001; Getahun, 2020). Yemane, et.al. 2020). Fourthly, enset plants can be harvested at any time and growth stage, allowing households to pass periods of food shortage (Yemane, et.al. 2020; Getahun, 2020)

The edible parts of enset comprise the starch rich pseudo petioles forming the pseudo stem (overlapping leaf sheaths) which are decorticated, and the corm (the underground base of the stem that serves as a storage organ which is pulverized and pressed. The two main tissues are collectively processed, using fermentation pits, into starch staples including *Bulla* and *Kocho*. *Kocho* is the bulk of the fermented product and is backed into thin fibrous bread considered to have a good shelf life. *Bulla* is a small amount of water-insoluble starch product separated from the *Kocho* during processing by squeezing and sometimes consumed separately. The corm of enset is also occasionally consumed boiled much like potato and this is called *Amicho* (Yemane, 2020; Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Solomon, 2019; M. Acero, S.B. Mukasa and Y. Baguma, 2018; Z. Yemataw, 2014)

The Gurage ethnic group of Ethiopia is typically dependent on enset as their main staple. They identify themselves as "People of Enset". In the Gurage Mountains, enset is extensively cultivated and plays a vital role in the community's economic and social life. Its intensive cultivation enables the concentration of large communities into compact and permanent village. Well-planned techniques of cultivation and systematic storage of enset food make it possible for the Gurage to live well above the subsistence level (Mesfin, Kumelachew and Osamu, 2018). Mean while, since it does not require a large area of land, it remained the major means of livelihood to the Gurage (Haile, 2009; Yemane, 2020)

The Gurage's dependency on enset growing as their primary agricultural occupation is perpetuated by: scarcity of farmland because of over population, overuse of the available land for such a long period that the soil has become seriously impoverished, exposure of the land to soil erosion because of the rolling hills and deep gorges that form the physical feature of the land and lack of adequate and easily accessible water supply to make for crop diversification (Haile, 2009)

The most important value chain constraint which affected the production of enset and its process, market and its actors along the chain were: lack of modern technology to support the farmers, marketing of *Kocho* and *Bulla* products, poor linkage of actors in the value chain, inadequate institutional concerns which underestimate the producer to get comparable price from the sale of products. Lack of access to road is also great influence, even though the study area is not far from the main market center (Addis Ababa). Moreover, the existing extension service has failed on enset productivity and marketing which have no one to support on; lack of expertise on the field of enset plant and weak information flow among the chain actors. Lack of links between producers and consumers and packaging problems, market issues such as poor market policies, lack of market access and poor market facilities and warehouse services were critical (Mistre, 2019; Lisanu, 2020)

With all aforementioned constraints, there also opportunities that can benefit enset value chain actors in the study area. Among the opportunities, nowadays most of the Ethiopian cultural foods, made up of raw-meat (*kitfo*), need bread made-up of *kocho* and also used complement with vegetables. The demand is increasing, especially in Addis Ababa, the capital of the country. Moreover, the rising of cereal prices also increase demand for enset products as a cheaper substitute. If consumption increases, this can encourage increased enset production and expand the positive impact that enset has on Ethiopian food security. The increase in awareness toward nutritional as well as medicinal value of enset food products also create additional demand (Mistre, 2019)

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Together they functioned as the nucleus of Menelik's embryonic rural administration, collecting, until it was abolished, the despised *gebbar* tax imposed upon the Gurage since the late 1880s for having resisted Menelik's expansion. These colonial outposts spread the use of teff grain where feasible, and through the rigid tax system, accelerated the seasonal migration of workers that has continued down to the present day (Phillip, 1974). Although some groups of Gurage developed institutions of kingship, there has never been an overall ruler of the Gurage instead they have most usually been loosely organized in "houses" or clans (Gideon, 2000)

Therefore, this study attempted to explore the Socio-Cultural Values of Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) among the Gurage of South-Central Ethiopia

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the Study Area

Gurage Zone which is part of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) is located in the western part of central Ethiopia. It is bounded with Hadiya Zone and Yem Special Woreda in the south and south-west respectively. The northern, western and eastern portions are sharing border with Oromia regional state (Dirsha, 2019; Haile, 2009). Astronomically, Gurage Zone is located between 7.8^o-8.5^o North latitude and 37. 5^o-38.7^o East longitude along the equator. The Zone comprises altitudes ranging from 1,001 to 3,500 meters above sea level. Mean annual temperature of the Zone ranges from 13 to 30^oc and the mean annual rainfall ranges from 600 to 1600mm (Tesfaye and Wondossen, 2019; Meseret, 2018)

The Zone was named from Gurage people, whose homeland lies in this Zone. The Zone has 13 Woredas and two urban administrations with 412 rural and 50 urban kebeles. The Zonal capital, town, Wolkite, found on the distance of 155 kilometers from the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa. Gurage Zone has four agro-ecological climates namely, Wurch (4.1%), Dega (27.5%), Woine Dega (65.3%) and Killa (3%) (Samuel, Jemal and Lemma, 2020). Gurage covers 5893 square kilometers area of land (Samuel, Jemal and Lemma, 2020; Dirsha, 2019; Haile, 2009)

The total population of Gurage Zone was 2,290,274. The major ethnic groups who are living in the Zone are Gurage, Qabena and Mareko. Among these three, the Gurage live in the western portion of the administration region (Haile, 2009). A look at the settlement pattern asserts that 7.6% of the populations are urban dwellers while 92.4 are living in rural areas (Meseret, 2018). Gurage Zone is one of the most densely populated areas in the country, with an average of 273.5 people/km² mainly concentrated in the agro-ecologies of highlands and mid-lands (Dirsha, 2019). Linguistically speaking, the people of Gurage are grouped into the Semetic language family. Out of the total population of the Gurage Zone, 73.8% of the population is the speaker of Guiragigna language, 2.4 are Qabena speaker, 3% are Mareko speaker and the remaining 20.8% are Kembata, Amhara, Oromo and other language speakers (Meseret, 2018)

The livelihood of the majority of the population of Gurage Zone was highly dependent on agriculture. Mixed farming was the predominant agricultural production, where enset was the perennial staple crop, a back-breaking job for women as they laboriously indulge in most of the production process-harvesting, storing and preparation for consumption (Samuel, Jemal and Lemma, 2020). The other major crops grown in the area are, Barely (*hordeum vulgare*), Field pea (*Pisum sativum*), Fabalean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), Teff (*Eragrostis teff*), Maize (*Zia mays*) and Khat (*Catha edulis*) (Dirsha, 2019). Livestock rearing also plays vital roles in generating income to farmers, creating job opportunities, ensuring food security, providing services, contributing to asset, social cultural and environmental values and sustain livelihoods (Dirsha, 2018). However, the trend of modern agricultural system is not highly practiced and the majority of the people of the area use traditional farming system. The existing farming systems of the area are based on animal tracing and human labor. Generally, the agricultural base is poor; it is common reason people to migrate across the major towns of the country, in search of cash earning opportunities to generate remittance income. The high mobility of this ethnic group is not limited to men although the number of women remaining in the villages is greater than men. Married women often are the guardians of the households in the absence of adult men, and as the new head of the household, she becomes the major supply of labor (rented, exchanged or otherwise) for activities that are associated with agriculture production, thus compounding the already unfavorable situation of women (Meseret, 2018; Samuel, Jemal and Lemma, 2020)

Trade is the second economic base of the Gurage people. According to some sources, some of the societies exchange their product by moving into the neighboring area. After they produce their cereal crop and other products, they began to sell it to the surrounding and distant areas as far as Addis Ababa. In addition to this, some of the societies are pastoralists. There are also a population who resides in the most highland parts of the area and usually not participatory with majority of the populations. Their source of income is also different from other parts of the society. They generate their income mainly from pottery (Meseret, 2018)

2.2. Methods and Procedures

The study was designed qualitatively as a cultural study and ethnographic research techniques were largely employed. Though primary data was very scanty specifically about Gurage, review was made to the very few literatures related to the subject. The

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data obtained from different sources was filtered and organized for triangulation and systematic analysis was made appropriately.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, enset is the most widely used staple food crop for millions of people living in south and southwestern Ethiopia. It is estimated about 20 million people rely on enset for survival. As a consequence, enset plays a central role in the economic life of the south and southwestern people, who rely on it. It gives a higher and more dependable yield than any other known crop. A large household can be supported by enset grown on a limited area of land (Almaz, 2001; Getahun, 2020)

Enset guarantees food security and stability to the household economy in that the processed product can be stored for a long time. In addition, the live plant can be maintained on farm and harvested any time when the need arises. It can be harvested and consumed before it is matured and these qualities of the crop have in part contributed to the fact that enset areas are not characterized by a history of famine (Almaz, 2001; Mistre, 2019; Getahun, 2020)

There is no recorded evidence that tells how and when enset became food and part of the livelihood of the Gurage people. For generations, the Gurage have been using enset as a source of food. It has several, environmental, nutritional, and socio-cultural importance for the Gurage. Ethiopia is a country which has a long history of drought and famine. At least every ten years, the northern part of the country falls victims to this natural disaster. Surprisingly, since enset can resist drought, places that grow enset like the Gurage have no history of severe food shortage. The other reasons that make enset remain as a staple food and means of existence for the Gurage is its yield. The product from one enset can weigh as much as 75 kilograms and the food lasts a family for fifteen to twenty years depending on the size of the family (Haile, 2009)

Enset is not just a food crop, but is a multi-purpose crop of which every part of the plant (except the roots) is utilized, for food or several non-food applications. Each leaf is used for baking bread, for wrapping, for shade or protection from heat and rain, for production of string and rope for tying, for making mats and sheets on which to sleep and sit, and for making women's skirts. It is also used as a brewing pot during the preparation of the local beer called *shoko*. The pseudo stem is the most valuable, as the basal part contains the starch, and the remaining fiber is used for making strong ropes, twines and sack (Almaz, 2001)

Socially, people in the south and southwestern part of the country not only depend on enset for food and cash also consider it as part of cultural heritage. They have strong attachment to the crop and the land. Many farming households' grow enset for economic as well as non-economic purposes. A system of social, economic and ritual practices has developed around the cultivation of enset. The Gurage people, for example, use it for purposes such as medicine, compensation payment, and ritual offerings (Almaz, 2001; Haile, 2009). According to traditional knowledge of enset growers, some of the clones have medicinal value for humans and for animals. The water squeezed from the pseudo stem is given to newborns before breast-feeding and also later to supplement the breast-feeding until the baby starts taking supplementary food. Moreover, a woman right after delivery will be given a product from enset for a period of three days to release the placenta and further reduce delivery-associated stomachache and relieve pain from uterine (Almaz, 2001)

One hour after birth, the first feeding of a Gurage child is ritually administered. The "godmother" places a small amount of soft rancid butter in the infant's mouth, where it slowly melts and is swallowed. Several hours later, he is given the breast, from this time on, the feeding rhythm is determined by the infant's crying, which Gurage mothers interpret as a demand for the breast (Dorothy, 1969)

For the first five days, the child and mother lie on enset fronds beside the open fire, partially shielded from visitors who have come to offer congratulations but who may be unsuspectingly harboring the "evil eye". At the end of this period, a small feast consisting of several specially prepared enset dishes is held, signifying that the new born has survived the first crisis stage of life, for Gurage children often die in infancy. Later the father constructs a crude bed, made either of logs or the stout stems of enset fronds, and both mother and child are removed from the warmth of the fire and secluded behind a screen for two months. At the end of this period, a village "coming-out" feast is held to herald the mother and child; it is at this time that the child is named. *Brabrat*, a special kind of enset food prepared from the plant's root, which is eaten when the placenta is buried and on other ritual occasions, is distributed among the women of the village. This feast in part reflects the principles of reciprocity through the distribution of food, for it is the women of the village who relieve the mother from domestic responsibilities during her period of confinement. Liberated from the chores, the mother devotes her-self almost exclusively to caring for the child. The infant is held except when asleep, and immediately upon awakening he is again cradled in his mother's arms and usually suckled. Until a child is weaned, some two or four years later, self-demand feeding is the norm, and the breast is frequently offered when his discomforts do not stem from hunger (*Ibid*)

At birth, the Gurage tie the umbilical cord of the newborn baby with *Kacha*, fiber which is made of enset. When they die, they cover their body when they prepare them for burial. In their life time, the Gurage, use parts of the living enset for many things. After uprooting, they chop the parts to make food for the family. Thus, enset provides a lot to the people who are depending on it (Haile, 2009)

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In the Gurage area, a person's status is determined by the numbers and quality of enset one owns. Accordingly, enset serves as vehicle for the social organization of people. Acquisition of wealth, rank and gender roles are associated with the plant. The wealth of a family is exhibited by number and quality of enset they own. In addition, it also serves as a milestone in the description of the Gurage identity (*Ibid*)

Gordera is a very strong log of wood Gurage use to build a house. It prevents the house from falling for a years. The Gurage call *EnsetYafetra*Gordera, equivalent to the pole of the soul. In all meals, they serve ensetwith different sauces. When there is a coffee ceremony, which is very important, as in many other parts of Ethiopia, the snack is enset. When women or men are working in the field, the lunch they serve is enset, with varieties of sauces, the Gurage have no meal rather than enset. What makes the dish they serve different each time is the kind of sauce they serve with it, but there is enset all the time. When her child cries, a mother gives it a piece of *Wesa* and the child immediately stops crying. They feed their dogs, cats and chicken with enset(*Ibid*)

When they prepare a wedding ceremony, the food they prepare for the bride and the guests is ensetwith*kitfo*(food prepare from raw-meat),*zemwamwejat* and cheese. When a number of the familydies, they prepare a prayer ceremony *tezkar* and the food they prepare is *Enset* with raw-meat or with *welanda*. These all tells us that enset truly is the Gordera of the Gurage people (*Ibid*)

The utilitarian products of enset are numerous. A fiber from heavy stem of the plant's fronds is marketed for cash. Goods and personal items are wrapped in suitably sized sections of the pliable fronds, making a virtually watertight bundle. On ceremonial occasions, food is served on "plates" shaped from small pieces of the fronds. When a fiber breaks out, the thatched roofs of nearby huts are covered with the moist green fronds to provide protection from flying embers. These, though only a few of the uses to which enset is put, are enough to indicate the range of utilitarian and food needs served by this staple food crop (Dorothy, 1969; Haile, 2009)

Having a field that encompasses the homestead is considered aesthetically desired by enset-based societies, enset beauties the landscape by its green foliage(Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016). When Hailemariam describes enset as a source of beauty, he says that the beauty of the area just after crossing the Wabe River is admirable to any observer, with the mountains and valleys covered by a perpetually green plant called enset (Hailemariam, 1991). It also affects the macro-environment of an area in a positive manner. The native soils are altered positively through the long-term application of manure in areas where enset is grown for many years. Enset's perennial leaves canopy and the abundant accumulation of litter also reduces soil erosion and organic matter depletion. It plays the same role as trees in protecting people, other plants and animals from winds and sun. Other species like enset possessing deep roots and leaf canopies of long duration improve the hydrological dynamics of an area. They improve water in the soil and aquifers through increasing water infiltration and reducing surface run-off. As a result, this increases water availability and discharge to springs and decreasing the effective dry season length (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016)

The living plant of enset has the power in facilitating life in the Gurage village. For example, if we take the leaves of the plant as illustration, we can see how far the plant is important in the daily life of the community. They chop the leaves into pieces and give it to their animals as fodder. They put the flesh leaves on fire and when it become flexible, they cut it into shapes and use it as a dish to serve sauces like *Ketfo*, *BraperatZemamujat*. When they go to the open markets to buy meat, the butcher wraps the meat they buy with the leaves of enset. The Muslim members of the community use clean enset leaves to stand on when they pray. When they die, their bodies, they will be kept by wrapping them with clean enset leaves before burial. They also use it to sit on it in groups and chew chat. If fire breaks, every one runs into the backyard to cut leaves of enset to use it for extinguishing the fire. They also carry it like an umbrella in the rain. When women prepare storage to keep *Wesa*, (the bread made from enset) they cover the *Wedera* with clean leaves. When the leaves start to dry, they turn into *Wedere* and *Enwa*. These two partially dried leaves are useful for many things. When they build a house, they tie the walls and parts of the roof with *Wedere* they sleep with *Kapwat* which is made out of *Wedere* and *Enwa*. They use *Enwato* cover pots when they churn milk to make butter in a traditional way. They also use *Enwato* keep pepper and other spices for a relatively long time(Haile, 2009)

Furthermore, Gurage are well-known for *wesa* and *kitfo*. *kitfo*, which is a sauce for *wesa* made of finechopped red raw meat, mixed with butter and chili pepper, is a typical traditional food of the Gurage. It is not available in the everyday regular Gurage dish. Firstly, it needs time and money to prepare it. Secondly, a celebration spirit is associated with *kitfo*, so it is in most cases are prepared for holidays and special occasions. Especially, on the Meskel feast, which happens in the middle of September, families slaughter an ox according to the economic status of the family and prepare a very big *wesa* with *kitfo*eating ceremony. In order to participate in this memorable and highly respected ceremony, Gurage who live in other parts of the countryand abroad come back to their families and relatives. In addition, Gurage, who are spread all over the country, took with them the tradition of*wesa* and *kitfo*to other places outside the Gurage region. Therefore, it became one of the food types hotels serve to their customers. A person who visits any of the restaurants and hotels in most of the towns and cities of Ethiopia can witness that it is common to read *Ye Gurage Ketfoon menus'* (*Ibid*)

Haile forwarded that *wesa*or enset is drawn in the minds of the people who know about it in relation to the Gurage people. A case in point, when we get invitation for lunch or dinner in the house of friends and relatives, our expectation differs based on the ethnic group the family belongs. For example, if the invitation is madeby a family from the Amhara ethnic group we expect to be

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served *Injera* and *Doro Wet* (Special bread backed on clay pan with a sauce made of a spiced chicken meat). If the invitation is made by a Gurage family, we expect to be served *wesa* with *kitfo* or specially made cheese. What makes everybody expect *kitfo* with *wesa* is because there is a shared knowledge which associates *wesa* with the Gurage (*Ibid*)

Even though other neighboring people grow enset, what makes enset different for the Gurage and/or serves as a symbol of identification is its value in the community. It is everything for them. For example, enset is grown in the Sidama and Gedeo areas. Though *wesa* is eaten there, the primary purpose of growing enset or making *wesa* is for sale. In Addis Ababa, Merkato, this is the biggest open market in Africa, there is a place called *kocho tera*, where women sell *wesa*. There one can find two types of *wesa*, one is called Sidama and the other is Chebo. Sidama and Chebo are names of regions in the southern part of Ethiopia where enset is grown. These people sell *wesa* because they depend for their basic necessities from growing and selling crops like coffee, and the geographical location is favorable for the production of fruits and other crops (*Ibid*)

The pseudo stem yields very strong fibers, even the unprocessed leaf sheaths is used for tying livestock, bundling harvests from fields and fencing. The fiber has excellent structure and its strength is equivalent to the fiber of abaca, a world-class fiber crop. In rural areas, the fiber is used to make sacks, bags, ropes, cordage, mats, construction materials and sieves. About 600 tons of enset fiber per year is sent to factories for processing. Fresh enset leaves are used for wrapping foods, serving plates, and pit linings to store *kocho* for fermentation. Men sometimes make cap from enset and the fresh leaves are used as cloths for women skirts and often worn in the markets and ceremonies. The dried petioles and midribs are used as firewood, to make mats, and tying materials for house construction. For cleaning rags, brushes, baby cushions, pot stands, as wrappers for butter, *kocho*, and other items to transport to local market. Particular varieties and enset parts are used medicinally for both human and livestock for problems like diarrhea, birth control (as an abortifacient) and assisting to discharge placenta (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016)

Enset has cultural values during wedding and funeral ceremonies. During wedding, enset leaves can be used on tables for serving food and as skirts for women in some cases in addition to being the major food for the ceremony. At funeral ceremony, people beat the pseudo stems of enset laid on the ground in circle like drums and they also go with enset leaves on their hands. The members of the lineage cut all the enset plant when the head of the household dies, to express their sorrow and desperation. The enset plant can also be sold in some cases and the processed products like *kocho* and *bulla* are sold at any time in the rural and towns markets. Therefore, it is an immediate cash income source for a family to buy their daily needs (*Ibid*)

Some varieties of enset are strongly recommended for treating a person with bone problem. The leaves followed by the stem are the most frequently used parts of the medicine. This may be because they contain high calcium and phosphorous. Even in the central highlands and cities where enset is not staple, *bulla* is fed to a mother who gave birth for strengthening and fast recovery. They also make *atmit* (gruel) and given to a person caught cold. Different enset varieties were reported to have medicinal and religious (ritual) significances for prevention, healing and therapeutic purposes. Tayo is a variety with a light red pseudo stem and midrib with deep green leaf. The boiled corm and starchy powder *bulla* of this variety is eaten with milk to cure ailments such as joint displacement and swelling, broken bone fractures, and used to cure similar disorders in domestic animals, especially if it is fed with salt to dairy cows (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Haile, 2009). Some enset clones like Astar and Tayo are believed to have medicinal values and are used to treat human and livestock. *Officha*, a dehydrated starch suspension and *bulla* are used together with milk for bone related problems (Tadessa and Masayoshi, 2016; Shack, 1966)

Enset plays a very important ecological role. The broad leaves act like umbrella and protect the soil from erosion by reducing runoff. It serves as a shade and improves the microclimate for the undergrowth vegetation and the litter from the leaves and other parts improve soil fertility. Tillage practices are so low in comparison to grano-culture. In fact, the enset plantation areas, native soil has been altered for the better due to the long-term application of manure, natural mulching of leaf and stem reduces, the rainfall capture from the plant leaves and the resulting soil moisture conservation and reduced run-off when compared to bare earth farming (Mesfin, Kumelachew and Osamu, 2018; Yemane G., 2020)

Enset is totally involved in every aspects of the daily social and ritual life of the Gurage, who, with other several tribes in southwest Ethiopia, form what has been termed "the Enset Culture Complex Area". From birth, when the umbilicus is tied off with a fiber drawn from enset fronds, the life of the Gurage is enmeshed with various uses of enset, not the least of which is nutritional (Dorothy, 1969)

It has been argued that, the cultivation of enset, otherwise known as the false banana, which is the most pronounced feature of Gurage agriculture, has to a large extent shaped the nature of Gurage society and thereby given the Gurage some conception of internal unity or homogeneity against this background of diversity (Gideon, 2000)

IV. CONCLUSION

This review describes the socio-cultural values of enset plant among the Gurage people of south-central Ethiopia. As I mentioned earlier, enset is resembled with *Gordera*, which is a very strong log of wood Gurage's use to build their house. As it prevents the houses for years from falling apart, the Gurage livelihood is supported by the enset plant. In the Gurage village, houses are built surrounded by the enset plant. The Gurage family considers the plant as part of the member of them. In other Ethiopian societies,

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farmlands are separated and in most cases are far away from residents, meanwhile in the Gurage village, ensetis planted surrounding their hoses. It shows the tie between the plant and the people.

The farming communities in Gurage are endowed with many landraces of enset used as source of food, feed and income. Enset is predominantly growing in the densest farming communities in southern region including in Gurage Zone, and the people are the least food aid in Ethiopia. This is because enset is perennial drought tolerant and multi-purpose crop, where its food staff can be stored tree age long and after harvest for many years underground.

Enset plays an important role for the social organization of the people. Acquisition of wealth, rank and gender roles are associated with the plant. The wealth of a family is exhibited by number and the quality of enset they own. In the Gurage community, the amount and type of enset owns determine his/her working behavior and the social status. When one member of the community passes by a farm land, looking at the scene around a house, he or she can tell what kind of farmer lives there. A case in point, if the cottage is surrounded by a great number of enset, and if the farmland is clean, this shows the owner is a very strong and hard working person. In contrary, if the cottage is surrounded by a small number of enset, and if the middle of the farm is filled with dried and dead leaves, one can immediately say that the people inside are lazy and careless. In this case, the number of the plant around the Gurage cottage tells about the working behavior of them.

To sum up, enset is a means of subsistence and existence for the Gurage people, all the gender roles are associated with the activities related with the enset plant and enset plays a great role in the socio-cultural life and identification of the Gurage identity.

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