

EDUCATION OF AWARENESS OF NATURE PROTECTION IN SOME WORSHIP RITUALS OF THE EDE PEOPLE IN BUON MA THUOT CITY

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ABSTRACT

The worship ritual of the Ede people from ancient times embedded many significant educational meanings, education of awareness of nature protection is a typical example and its topicality has still remained unchanged. Through the practice of worship rituals, the Ede people educate their children to be aware of protecting forests in particular and natural resources in general: Nature is an invaluable asset; Nature is governed by spirits; It's important to respect plants in nature; Praying for favourable weather conditions and plants' growing well; It's required to protect nature for ourselves and for future generations; It's absolutely important to protect the land. These research results contribute more scientific materials to the study of Ede ethnic group's culture, education of awareness of nature protection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking of local ethnic groups in Buon Ma Thuot city, the Ede people must be mentioned first. Worship rituals, which are one of the important components that make up the cultural identity of this ethnic group, have significant underlying educational implications. The study of the meanings of nature protection in some Ede people's worship rituals is essential to confirm these educational meanings, that need preserving in Ede people's folklore especially as the natural environment has been increasingly exhausted by human destruction. On the other hand, in the current times, the worship rituals of the Ede people has changed in the process of communication and cultural exchange with other ethnic groups. Therefore, it's necessary to conduct the study to gain an objective view from a scientific perspective and find out the meanings of nature protection education through some worship rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot city. It also help to explain the establishment, existence and movement trend of worship rituals. Accordingly, the researchers hope to make a small contribution to the establishment of important foundation for educational management agencies in the Central Highlands in general and in Buon Ma Thuot city in particular to give more suitable educational guidelines and policies on nature protection. Ultimately, it can help preserve and promote educational values in the Ede people's cultural identity.

This article presents the result of analyzing the meanings of educating awareness of nature protection in some worship rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot city.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of worship rituals

The Vietnamese Dictionary of the Institute of Linguistics edited by Hoang Phe (2012) stated that "*ritual has a similar meaning to rite*" (pp. 872) and defined "*the rite are rituals of a ceremony (in general) and sequences of proceeding*" (pp. 724). And the Anthropologist E.B. Tylor (2001) in his work *Primitive Culture* argued that "*ritual is the means of communication with spiritual entities*" (pp. 946) and "*it is best to believe in spiritual entities as a minimum definition of religion*" (pp. 947).

The Vietnamese dictionary of Nguyen Ton Nhan & Phu Van Han (2013) stated that "*Worship is the one by rituals and praying*" (pp. 1049). While the Vietnamese dictionary of the Institute of Linguistics edited by Hoang Phe (2012) said that "*Worship is to show respect for a god, a sacred object or the soul of the dead in forms of a ritual, a worship based on customs or beliefs*" (pp. 1222) and "*praying is to raise offerings to the gods or the dead's souls, under traditional beliefs or customs*" (pp. 198).

From the above concepts, it can be understood that *worship rituals are the etiquettes and sequences of steps for ritual practice towards predecessors, grandparents and ancestors, sages and saints who had merits to the country and the gods who are the ones that are always respected and prayed to observe our gratitude.*

2.2. Overview of the Ede people and worship rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot city

Buon Ma Thuot city is the name of a “*mountainous village*” of the Ede ethnic group. At the end of the nineteenth century, there was only one village with about 50 long houses governed by chieftain Ama Thuot. In the early years of the twentieth century, Buon Ma Thuot city was no longer a single village but gathered and developed dozens of other villages. However, Buon Ma Thuot city was still a big village of the whole region and it was also governed by chieftain Ama Thuot. Currently, Buon Ma Thuot city has about 40 ethnic groups, among the indigenous ethnic groups, the Ede people is the most populous (Provincial Party Committee - People's Council - People's Committee of Dak Lak province, 2015, pp. 1328).

Ede ethnic group was derived from the Malay language speaking ethnic group in the Pacific Islands. Currently, the Ede people still follow matriarchy. The Ede people include the following main groups: Ede Kpã, residing mainly in Buon Ma Thuot city and scattered in districts of Krong Ana, Krong Pak, Cu Mgar,... Dak Lak province; Ede Adham, residing mainly in districts of Krong Buk, Cu Mgar, Krong Nang,... of Dak Lak province; Ede Mdhur, residing mainly in Mdrak district of in the Eastern Dak Lak province; Ede Bih, residing mainly in Krong Ana and Krong Kno districts of Dak Nong province; Ede Krung, residing mainly in the districts of Ea Hleo, Krong Buk of Dak Lak province... (Provincial Party Committee - People's Council - People's Committee of Dak Lak Province, 2015, pp 1596). In their daily life, the Ede people follow matriarchy, so children take mother's family name. The wife will marry her husband and the man after marriage will live in his wife's family. The Ede people's livelihood in Buon Ma Thuot city used to be mainly farming but today, they also process agricultural products, grow industrial crops such as coffee, rubber, pepper, cocoa... The main livelihood of Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot city is mainly agricultural cultivation.

Rooting from polytheistic beliefs, since ancient time, there have been an abundant and diverse ritual worship system in the cultural life of the Ede people. Like other cultural phenomena, worship rituals of the Ede people were formed through practice of their labor, creation, fighting against the harshness of nature, together with the desire to conquer nature. The worship rituals are the clearest and most typical expression of the Ede people's cultural life in the early stages of the ancient agricultural civilization. The occasions when the Ede people organize worshiping rituals are the opportunities for this ethnic group to show their creativity in various types of folk art and culture such as performance of gongs, dancing, singing, creation of tomb house statues ... Besides, worshiping rituals are also an opportunity for the Ede people to exchange cultures and gain experience in real life, thereby enhancing cohesion in the Ede community and sharing good values in daily life. The worshiping rituals of the Ede people clearly reflects the cosmic outlook of this ethnic group in real life. Due to the strong cohesion within the Ede people's community in their daily life, there are many ceremonies in the worshiping rituals of the Ede people that are imbued with festival characteristics. Therefore, in addition to the Ede people's typical worshiping rituals such as: *ceremony for praying for pregnant women, naming ritual, ritual of blowing air on baby's ears, adulthood ritual, wedding ceremony, funeral ceremony, ceremony of praying for good health, ceremony of praying for upland fields, ceremony of praying for rain, ceremony of worshipping God of Wind, ceremony of plucking off the rice, ceremony of processing the God of Rice to warehouse, ceremony of processing K'pan chair, ceremony of worshipping for entering new house, etc.*, the Ede people also have many other worshiping rituals that feature rich festival characteristic, *for instance, celebration of the first rain, ceremony of eating new rice, ceremony of worshiping river wharf, ceremony of eating buffalo for celebrating a bumper crop - New Year,...* Each ceremony in the worshiping rituals of the Ede people contains underlying humane messages which are expressed throughout the ceremonies with the spirit prayers. With the belief “everything has a soul”, the Ede people have a huge system of worship rituals but within the scope of this article, only some of the most typical worship rituals would be mentioned to clarify the meanings of nature protection education in the worship ritual of the Ede people.

2.3. Meanings of educating awareness of nature protection in some worship rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot city

2.3.1. Nature is an invaluable asset

From ancient times, the Ede people led a lifestyle which was close to pristine mountains and forests, so the relationship between the Ede people and nature is very close. This ethnic group has an idealistic disposition, so they always worship the Gods in the hope that the Gods would give them good things in life. The Ede people always believe that the Gods are the supernatural beings that control the power of nature and worship rituals are also the Ede people's treatments towards the Gods, towards the nature. That is clearly expressed by the life philosophies in the worship rituals of the Ede people. For them, each object and phenomenon in the nature has a God residing inside

(M.Ner, 1927, tr 22). Therefore, just like human with their ritual of human life cycle, plants in nature also have its own life cycle ritual. They believe that the ancient and great plants in the forest are the symbol of everlasting eternity, typically the Konia tree. This is a type of tree with a spiritual significance for the Ede people. They believe that it's the residence of the Gods, so it's forbidden to cut them down in any way. Therefore, when the Ede people reclaim land for cultivation, they often leave Konia tree (Nivelle, 1966, tr 78). These things have created a harmonious connection between the Ede people and nature in an increasingly stable manner. For the Ede people, all things and phenomena in nature have their own significance, for them, nature is an invaluable asset that provide life resources to human. In the spiritual prayers, the Ede people often teaches the descendants to respect, protect and preserve nature. Therefore, according to Truong Bi and Y Won (2005), the spiritual prayers in the *ceremony of praying for health tell*, "You must guard the door and keep the way /You must keep the forest/ Administer tightly and keep well/ Keep it safe and keep it healthy"(p. 217). The spiritual prayer script in the *ceremony of praying to the god for the mother giving birth* also said: "Let him go quickly to collect firewood, quickly to harvest rice; quickly to go to the forest and go down the water/ God guards the door, watch out the forest" (p.31). And in the *ceremony of praying to the god for midwife*, the prayer script also goes: "Deliver ami E in childbirth (the name of the woman giving birth) so that the newly-born daughter grows quickly/ The newly-born son quickly reaches maturity/ One tree has to turn into a forest" (p. 51).

2.3.2. The nature is governed by the gods

With the long-term adaptation of human to nature, the Ede people have accumulated a lot of experiences in coping with nature, typically in forest protection, soil erosion prevention, crop rotation... These experiences are summarized into human life concepts integrated into worship rituals to educate children of the following generations. The Ede people are often helpless in response to the phenomena in nature, so in response to the good and the bad in life, they rely on the gods. The concept of "all things with existence of Gods" "deifies" all things and phenomena in nature and creates emotions that significantly affect the spiritual life of the Ede people, which makes this ethnic group always fear of supernatural forces. Therefore, according to Truong Bi and Yon (2005), in prayers in worship rituals, the Ede people often pray the names of the Gods residing in nature. Typically, the spiritual prayer in the *ceremony of praying for the following works* said: "Praying to the god of tree standing; Praying to the god of tree lying/ Praying to the god of banyan tree, fig tree, thysanolaena" (p. 93). And prayers in the wine straw placing ceremony said: "Help it cool like a brang tree (ramie)/ Help it warm as a kpaih tree root (cotton tree)/ God of Banyan tree, God of fig tree/ God of thysanolaena, Goddess of midwife; God of fig tree" (p. 247).

In the process of existence and development, the Ede people always rely on nature and in return, nature seems to embrace them. Therefore, their life viewpoint are formed based on their perceptions of the relationship between human and nature. It can be said that the worship rituals of the Ede people not only express ideas for praying for good things in daily life, but also harmonize and balance the opposing relations between human and nature in order to bring harmony in their daily life.

2.3.3. Respect the trees in nature

Before cutting down a forest tree to use, the Ede people often have to perform a praying ceremony of cutting down tree to get permission from the god of forest and the gods governing the tree. In addition, this ceremony is also to praying to Gods for blessing safe cut-down of the tree, wood of the tree is so beautiful to make many household items. This is also the way the Ede people express their respect towards the tree (Anne de hautec loque, 2004, p. 45). With this ethnic group, each tree has its own deity, the cut-down of the tree will only take place smoothly and the tree will have long-time use value when obtaining the permission of the gods. *The praying ceremony of cutting down tree* is usually chaired by the head of the family. The offerings usually include: a boar, betel and areca, straw liquor (rượu cần), tobacco, rice, candle ... displayed in a small bamboo stall. Beside the offering tray, the Ede people place an chinaberry branch hanged with a copper ring and a piece of cotton to expresses the holiness of the gods. The noteworthy main rituals during the practice of this ceremony are as follows: when the gong sounds, the Wizard begins to pray to the gods for witnesses the ceremony of asking for cutting down the tree of the head of the family. The prayers often call on God to help the cut-down of the tree go well, without death, or fatal accidents, good luck to the head of a family, etc. When finishing the praying, the wizard applies the blood of the sacrificial animal and spread the cup of rice around the tree root to pray to the God for peace and good deeds. Finally, he prays while wearing a copper ring for the head of the family. The rituals of the *praying ceremony of cutting down the tree* of the Ede people for alive plants and dead plants are completely different. This ethnic group think that when a forest tree dies, it will

bring bad luck to people, so they must perform a praying ceremony of cutting down the tree before the dead tree is cut down to prevent from the death spread to other plants. Through the concepts in the worship rituals, the Ede people educate their descendants to preserve and protect the natural environment, especially to live in harmony with the forest in nature. Notably, after the practice of the ceremony of cutting down the tree, the head of the family spend the whole day on playing with the tree. When the first ax hitting on the tree trunk does not fall to the ground, for the Ede people, it means that the gods have agreed.

2.3.4. *Praying for favorable weather conditions and strong growth of tree*

The Ede people worship many Gods who dwell in nature, especially those related to farming activities on the upland fields. At the beginning of the cropping season, the Ede people often hold a ceremony of worshipping the God of wind to pray for favorable weather conditions and strong growth of plants. This ceremony is organized by Ede people at the beginning of a new agricultural cycle. This ceremony is also meant to pray for good crop, so in some Ede people's villages outside Buon Ma Thuot city, it is called a *crop praying ceremony*. This ceremony is often held in a village-wide scale, each Ede people's family must send a representative to participate in. About one week before the ceremony, the host sends people to every family in the village to collect rice to brew wine for worshipping the gods, the rest of the village must prepare the venue of the ceremony, there must be a rope stretching above the altar for worshipping the gods that hang a Koning rattan (Elephant hunting rope) and a Ko Ku stick (the one used to control elephants), because the Ede people have a concept that the god of wind has a power like an elephant, therefore it's required elephant-controlling tools to monitor the wind. The offerings in this event include a pig and a jar of stem liquor together with com lam (made from rice (usually sticky rice) and some other ingredients, put into a bamboo or nehouzeaua tube and baked on fire) to offer the God of wind. When the ceremony takes place, some villagers take farming tools to remove some grass or plants around the worshiping area to symbolize the cultivation. During the *ceremony of worshipping the God of wind*, the Ede people prohibit strangers from entering the area of their village. The content of this ceremony is usually to pray to the Gods such as Yang Argin (the God of wind), Yang Tlua (the God of rain), Yang Kbua (the Goddess of fertility), Yang Roller (the God of the Earth), ... to grant them favorable weather conditions, strong growth of plants ... According to the Ede people, they are the gods who help the upland fields have no strong winds, no tornadoes in order to facilitate the clearing of grass on the upland field. Before sowing the seeds, the Ede people often hold a grass raking ceremony right next to the river wharf of the village to pray that the upland field has few grasses. When the rice sowing season is about to come, the Ede people often hold a *rice sowing ceremony* to pray for the rice to always develop well and have a bumper crop. After this *rice sowing worship ritual* (this ritual is held together by the whole village), each Ede people family will perform *Rice seed worship ritual* for themselves. Until May, the Ede people often hold a rain praying ceremony to pray to the Gods of the rains so that the recently planted rice seeds can germinate well.

Rain praying ceremony is one of the important ceremonies in the Ede people's agricultural ritual, which is prepared with the erection of Lunar New Year pole (Lunar New Year pole in the Ede people's worship ritual is considered a sacred mind, presenting the nobility, the proliferation, a cosmic tree, an axis connecting the earth with the sky; the bridge between the gods and human, a symbol in the spiritual life of the Ede people) and a Puk hut (A hut with two floors, made from forest plants) right on the upland fields, the upper floor of the Puk hut is used to worship the gods, the lower floor is a storage of rice symbolizing a bumper harvest. At the foot of the hut, the Ede people place the statue of the Evil God carved from the forest tree, who often do harm to the plants. In this ceremony there are some notable rituals such as: the offerings are contained in bamboo or nehouzeaua-knitted tools, with wooden statues in the shape of animals like cows, buffaloes, chickens, etc... beside, the wizard stands in front of the Puk hut to begin the ceremony of praying for rain with the prayers to the Gods: Yang Âe Mtao Tlua (God of rain), Yang Angin (God of wind), Yang grab (God of thunder), Yang Ea (God of water),... for letting the rain pour down so that the newly sown rice seeds can germinate and proliferate well. When he finishes the praying, the wizard holds a prepared copper cup of wine and pig's blood to sprinkle on the working tools, then sprinkle on the land of upland field with the implication of inviting the gods to use meat and wine with the villagers. After that, the wizard goes around and sprinkles wine into the traps of wild animals and the objects used to dismiss birds with the implication of calling the gods for coming to witness. At this time, some healthy men dance around the upland field holding a shield in one hand and a spear in the other hand. When reaching to Puk hut, the model of the Evil God is beheaded with the implication of dismissing the Evil God. Finally, everyone participates in the *ceremony of praying for rain* perform the ritual of sowing seeds and watering.

2.3.5. Nature protection for themselves and for future generations

When the first rain drops, the Ede people immediately holds a *ceremony of worshipping first rain* with the purpose of showing gratitude to the Gods who blessed human for the early rain. This ceremony is usually held simultaneously for the whole village and for each family in the village. Within the scope of this article, I only focus on studying the *ceremony of worshipping early rain* within the family scope. This ceremony is organized relatively simply by the Ede people, the offerings are usually a chicken and the tubes used to hold rice along with small packages containing seeds, sticks used to create holes to sow seeds that are placed in large and flat basket (Nia) (Nia is an object made of bamboo with round shape, shallow heart, small and thin holes, often used to make rice free from husk and broken rice), placed in the middle compartment of the long house. When the worshipping ceremony begins, the host of the ceremony reads the prayers for showing gratitude to Ae Die (God of sun) and Yang Gram (God of thunder) for pouring the rain down the village to make the plants grow and God of thunder for not harming villagers. At the time when the rice plant is about to be already inear (a process of differentiation and formation of reproductive organs, which directly affects the formation of rice productivity), the Ede people perform the ceremony of rice watering. This ceremony is usually held at the long house, the offering is usually a chicken as a sacrifice. When the ceremony of rice watering is finished at the long house, they bring a cup of wine mixed with the blood of the sacrificial animal to the upland field and pour into the central position and four corners of the land where they are about to cultivate. According to the concept of the Ede people, these are places of residence of the gods. This ceremony is performed by the Ede people with the expectation that the gods will help the rice plants blossom, produce many seeds and make the grains not flat. The Ede people always believe that nature has powers that human can never resist. For them, only Gods have the ability to control and overcome the nature. They are always aware that their wealthiness is given by the gods, as a favor from the nature and their famine is the punishment from the gods. With such a philosophy, the Ede people are responsible for protecting the nature and future generations.

2.3.6. Absolute protection of the land

For the Ede people, the God of earth plays a very important role in their lives. The name of this god is always prayed in most worshipping ceremonies of this ethnic group. The Ede people always believe that the God of Earth is the god who looks after the land and maintain the fertility of land to feed the plants, so every year, at the beginning of the farming season, the Ede people must perform a solemn ceremony of worshipping the God of earth which is chaired by the head of the village. The Ede people believe that the land of the alive people always has a God of earth who shelters and governs, so they must protect the land completely. This thought is specifically taught and admonished by the Ede people to their children in customary law: "*Land can't be generated more; Land can't be expanded; Do not sell land if we are out of money; Parents will keep the land after the grandparents die; Children will keep the land after parents die; Grandchildren will keep the land after uncles die; Do not lose the land; Do not reduce the land*" (Ngo Duc Thinh, 2003, p. 47). The Ede people assert that the land is always the most valuable because the land helps sustain human life and all species in nature. If there is no land, human and all species do not exist and develop. With such a philosophy, the Ede people always admonish and educate everyone in the community to work together to protect the land in nature.

3. CONCLUSION

The Ede people have a close relationship with nature from ancient times, their lives are completely dependent on nature, they believe that all things and phenomena in nature, whether good or bad, are all created by the gods. The concepts related to the nature in the worship rituals of the Ede people contribute to the education for future generations about protecting the forest and natural resources because they are invaluable assets that need to be preserved by human. Although these concepts have been formed since ancient time in their cultural life, its topicality has been still maintained so far and secured their value.

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