

# AFAR

## LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Afar is an Eastern Cushtic language with four main dialects:

- Northern Afar
- Central Afar
- Aussa
- Baadu.

Afar is distantly related to Somali and Orom. Afar people have traditionally practiced Islam. They also believe in the spirits of ancestors which is evident by a yearly feast called *Rabena* which means “feast of the dead.” The Afar people live in small shelters that can be easily disassembled and reassembled to fit their nomadic pastoralist lifestyles. Although marriage and leadership roles are mainly patriarchal, women have a pivotal role in building nomadic hut, collecting wood and water, weaving mats, preparing food, and acting as the tribe’s musicians.

Afar people are increasingly moving to larger cities instead of continuing to embrace their traditional nomadic lifestyle. The Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, has a large and vibrant Afar community. Furthermore, Afar people often establish settlements on the outskirts of large towns and act as a trade liaison between nomadic traders and those living in the city.

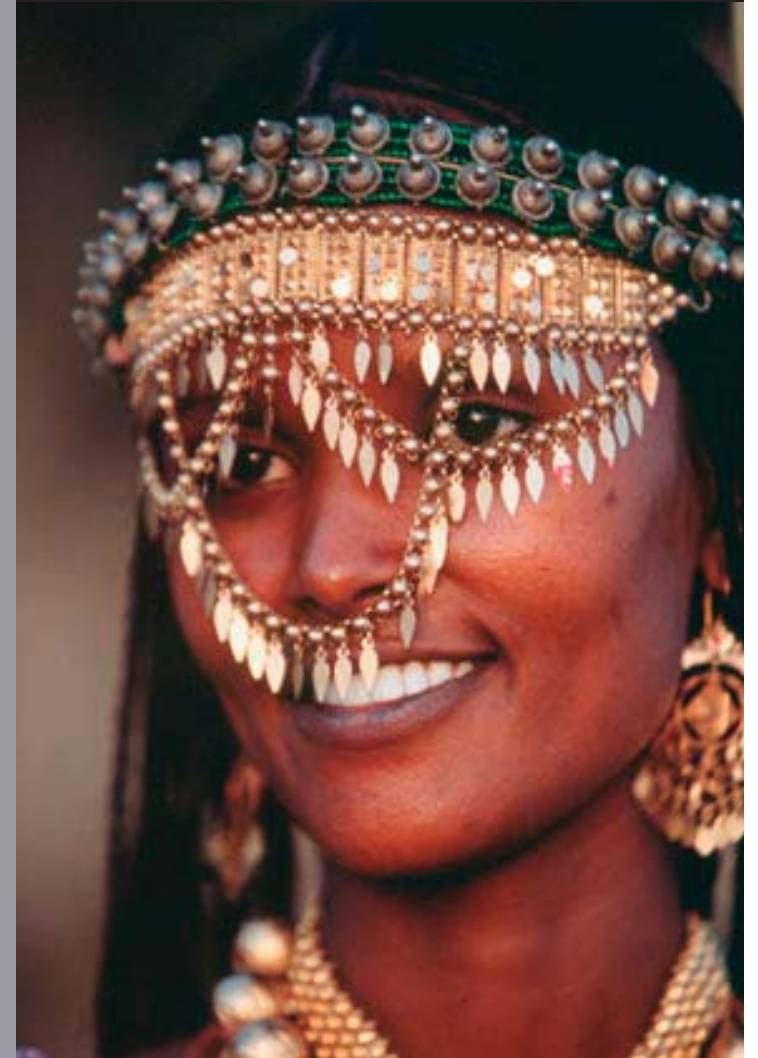
## STUDYING AFAR IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



NATIONAL AFRICAN  
LANGUAGE RESOURCE  
CENTER (NALRC)

701 Eigenmann Hall, 1900 E. 10th St.  
Bloomington, IN 47406 USA  
T: (812) 856 4199 | F: (812) 856 4189  
E-mail: [nalrc@indiana.edu](mailto:nalrc@indiana.edu)  
Website: [www.nalrc.indiana.edu](http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu)



AFAR WOMAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE  
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

## WHO SPEAKS AFAR

The Afar people are believed to be the descendants of Arabs, potentially from Yemen. They settled on farm land in the Ethiopian highlands some time before 1000AD and have since been nomadic pastoralists, raising goats, sheep and cattle. The area that the Afar people inhabit, known as the Danakilia Desert, is one of the hottest and driest spots on earth, yet it also has some of the lowest temperatures on earth.

The Afar people group themselves into mela, which is a basic territorial, political and fighting unit similar to a tribe. The Afar were traditionally ruled by four Sultans, however they are now increasingly under the control of national governments. They still, however retain a great degree of political, social and economic independence and Sultans still act as religious and political leaders of their clans.



*Afar man from Ethiopia*

## WHY STUDY AFAR

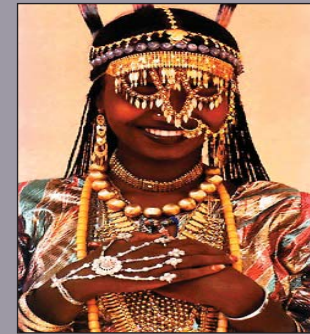
Afar is spoken by over 1.5 million people in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. The area where Afar is spoken is sometimes referred to as the "Afar Triangle." In Eritrea, Afar is one of the nine national languages and thus it is widely used in national radio broadcasts as well as in a version of Eritrean constitution. In the Afar region of Ethiopia, the language is used in some educational institutions.

The Afar people are traditionally nomadic and therefore, the geographical distribution of the Afar is believed to be quite wide throughout the Horn of Africa. Due to the current lack of educational materials in the Afar language, it is difficult for many Afar people to gain access to vital information in their own language.

Implications of this deficit in materials are profound in terms of education, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and many other social issues where communication is essential. Afar is therefore a crucial language to study for those interested in aid and the development work, anthropology, linguistics, government work, and many other disciplines relating to the Horn of Africa.



*Afar women from Djibouti*



*Afar woman of Eritrea*



*Young Afar woman*



*Afar tribe warriors, Assaita, Ethiopia*



*Afar Woman with scarifications*