

THE PORTRAYAL OF SOCIETY AND THE  
CONCEPT OF MODERNIZATION IN  
ABBE GOEEGNA'S NOVELS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The School of Graduate Studies  
Addis Ababa University

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In Partial Fulfilment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Literature

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TESPAYE DAGNEW  
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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis on the portrayal of society and the concept of modernization as reflected in Abbe Gobegna's novels has four divisions. The introductory chapter deals with the purpose and method of the study. It also includes a brief biography of the author

The second and third chapters contain the major portion of the study. The Church and the People, Administration and Litigation, Education and the Intelligentsia and Moral Degeneration are the four aspects of Abbe's portrayal of society presented in chapter two. The third chapter shows the author's concept of modernizing Ethiopia. In this part, attention is paid to the kind of social system favoured, educational and religious reforms and economic progress.

The concluding chapter summarises the main points that are discussed in the main parts of the study and evaluates Abbe's concepts.

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## CHAPTER I

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Purpose of the Study

Abbe Gobegna was a prolific writer who came onto the scene in the recent past in the history of Ethiopian literature. His poems, plays and novels which had a great impact on Ethiopian life and society have now become part of the treasures of Ethiopian literature. Concerning the study of the literature of the past, Graham Hough states:

The critic is situated in history and subject to all the historical pressures of his time; but his special concern is with literary history. It is only of this that he can speak with authority; and he has a double duty in relation to it. First to maintain the literature of the past as a part of present experience; and secondly to see the literature of the present as part of the continuous historical process. No critic of present literature can afford to be unaware of the past. No critic of past literature can afford to be unaware of the present. To write of present literature without awareness of the past is to be merely a journalist,...

It is with the awareness of this fact that one cannot neglect to study the literary works of Abbe Gobegna. Cognizant of the fact that "Amharic literature is very much part of the cultural life of modern Ethiopia"<sup>2</sup> and that "Ethiopian authors are strongly concerned with questions related to the future of their country..."<sup>3</sup>, the primary purpose of this research is to establish the major concerns of the author — the portrayal of post - colonial and pre-revolutionary Ethiopian society and the writer's concept of modernization.

Of the different literary forms utilized by Abbe, the researcher has restricted himself to the study of the novels only, for, better than the other genres, "the novel presents a particular society at a particular time, and it is committed to presenting many things as they actually are or were;...."<sup>4</sup>

This study might help researchers who would like to deal with the other literary forms by the same author or with the stylistic features of the novels. It is also hoped that this study helps to reveal what lies beneath the general run of the novels and to enable us have a deeper insight into Abbe's literary art.

### 1.2. Method of the Study

This study is based on a close scrutiny of eight novels written by Abbe Gobegna. The novels are studied for the specific purpose of examining their social portrayal and the author's concept of modernization. In his book entitled Fact in Fiction, Rockwell argues that writers necessarily reflect their own time and this "is the justification for using their fictions to study the facts of their society, ...".<sup>5</sup> This argument rests on a solid foundation when one looks into the literary tradition of Ethiopia. Most Ethiopian novelists are engaged in reflecting their society. In fact, as Molvaer says "... proper appreciation of the modern Ethiopian literary scene can be gained if one relates fictional writing to society."<sup>6</sup> Thus the attempt here is to investigate what light is shed on the society by the novels.

But the information one looks for in a fictional work is not explicitly stated in the same way as a historical document. One method of establishing facts from fictional works is pointed out by Hough:

It must be admitted that literary critics often derive their information about historical situations almost entirely from works of fiction; and in talking about the truthfulness of such works are often therefore arguing in a circle....A truthful picture often reveals itself as such by its coherence.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the coherence of ideas and the author's consistency in developing the stories should be considered in establishing facts about the society.

The study of characters is another way by which we can deduce facts about a society. In describing the relationship between fictional characters and society, Rockwell says: "There seems to be some relationship between fiction and society which is definite enough for fictional characters to be regularly used as prototypes of social roles and social attitudes."<sup>8</sup> The descriptions of the characters, their expectations and behaviours are reflections of the values of the society. Accordingly, this research pays attention to some major characters in the novels that the researcher considers useful in reflecting the society and in discovering the author's concept of modernization.

Rockwell categorizes facts revealed by fiction into two areas:

There are two general categories of fact which may be obtained through fiction: one is specific information about whether a social institution or custom exists or existed in the society which produced the fiction: the state of technology, the laws, the proscriptions of religion and so on. The other, and more important, is the information about values, norms and expectations in the society which may be inferred from the attitudes of the characters in fiction and their behavior.<sup>9</sup>

This study employs the above method. In the first category, facts concerning the institutions of church, administration, litigation and education are studied. In the second category, the novels are studied for their inferences of social values. The writer's concept of modernization is also categorized into the kind of socio - political system favoured by the author, reforms that have to be undertaken in education and religion and the ways in which economic development could be achieved.

The intentions of an author can be understood from his fictional works. Concerning this, Rockwell states, "For the student who wishes to use literature as a key to the specific values of a period or cultural area, the point is to discover the author's intentions: what actions and persons are supposed to be admirable"<sup>10</sup> This is particularly evident with Abbe, who constantly interrupts his story and makes comments while narrating. Thus the researcher tries to discover the intentions of the author.

Except in very few cases, no external work is included in this study because "It is a mistake in criticism to cite factual evidence external to the work under consideration unless the argument really requires it."<sup>11</sup> Even Abbe's own comments in the introductions or prefaces of the novels are not included in this study unless when found to be absolutely relevant.

The fact that all the Amharic novels produced by the author are included in the research should not create the wrong impression that it would make the study superficial. To avoid this, the novels are examined only for the two specified purposes-- the portrayal of society and the author's concept of modernization. Moreover, for the sake of clarity the novels have been divided to focus on specific sub - topics.

For example, the study of the church and the people is mainly based on Idil New Bedel, And Lennatu and Alliweledim. Yeregefu Abeboch and Gobland Achberbariw Tota contain similar themes of administration and litigation.

Most of the discussion on education and the intelligentsia is based on Gobland Achberbariw Tota and Yeregefu Abeboch. Yamets Muzaze, Keltamawa Ihite and Yeregefu Abeboch deal with the moral degeneration of the society.

The three novels -- Melkeam Seife Nebelbal, And Lennatu and Alliweledim are used for the study of the author's concept of modernization.

It should be noted however, that each topic is not strictly limited to the corresponding novels as classified here. The topics coincide partly each other and are discussed from various angles in the various novels. For example, the themes of administration and litigation are discussed in Idil New Bedel as in Yeregefu Abeboch or Gobland Achberbariw Tota.

Except for Melkeam Seife Nebelbal and Gobland Achberbariew Tota, the setting of all the novels is explicit -- it is Ethiopia. Kane's comment concerning the setting of Melkeam Seife Nabelbal that "no one will seriously doubt that Bet-el-fa'os represents sort of an idealized Ethiopia"<sup>12</sup> is true owing to the kind of institutions that we find in it. Although set in an imaginary country Shaloma, Gobland Achberbariw Tota unquestionably refers to the Ethiopian university professors of language who are very much looked down upon by Abbe Gobegna.

### 1.3 The Author\*

Among the generation of writers in the decade and a half or so before the Ethiopian revolution, there arose a much talked of writer, Abbe Gobegna. He was a political essayist, a playwright, a poet and a novelist.

Abbe was born on the 19th of Sene 1925\*\* in Gojjam region, at a place called Korench Abo in the district of Bahir Dar. His father Ato Gobegna Ambaye, who is still alive, earns his living as a farmer with a fairly good income. Ato Gobegna has eleven children from different wives of which Abbe and an elder sister come from the same mother, Weizero Yigardu Belay.

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\* All the information concerning the life of the author is told by his niece, Tiruye Berhanu, who lived with him for some years. She is now living in Bahir Dar.

\*\* All dates referring to the life of the author and his works are in accordance with the Ethiopian Calendar.

As a child, Abbe attended a traditional church school in his village with Merigeta Gessesse, who is said to have loved him for his bright mind. The author then went to different places in Gondar region in search of further knowledge in the traditional schools. There, he is said to have studied Ge'ez, 'quine' and grammar. Having gone through these schools, he came back to his birth place and served there as a 'Merigeta', a traditional teacher.

Then of his own accord, he decided to join a modern school and went to Dangla, Gojjam region, where he attended up to grade six. Although there was no one he could stay with and rely upon in Addis Ababa, Abbe suddenly went to the capital in search of work. Fortunately, he got a job in the Ministry of Information and later in the Ministry of Health where he worked for a total of seven years. His niece Weizerit Tiruye Berhanu is not sure whether he continued his studies during those years, but she says that she once saw a card which certified that he had completed grade twelve.

For about fifteen years, Abbe did not have any permanent job and sustained himself by the sale of his books. In 1970 he went to Bahir Dar, very near to his birth place, and became an agent for the wholesale distributors of the textile products of a factory there.

On Yehatit 2, 1982, at the age of forty seven, Abbe died in Addis Ababa. The cause of his death is not clear, and the family are very much distressed at this. Abbe has left behind him a son and two daughters.

Tiru, Abbe's niece, says that her uncle was frustrated towards the end of his life. He used to drink a lot and his personality deteriorated a great deal. Whenever she asked what was wrong with him, he used to say, "I am only concealing myself; that is the only way I can live."

Abbe was a zealous Christian; and yet he always violently attacked the clergy and some of their practices. The clergy, he used to say, were unproductive. The church did not encourage the farmers to work; it rather forced its subjects to spend their wealth on unnecessary feats such as commemorating the dead.

In his time, Abbe attracted a wide range of readers. His lucid language, emotional tone and constant criticism of the defunct regime appealed to a large audience. His political novels, which in particular roused most of the educated youth of the period, contributed to Abbe's popularity.

His bold and constant tendency to expose the corruption of the oppressive regime resulted in three years imprisonment and exile in Gore, Illubabor region. One of his books was banned after publication.

Abbe Gobegna may not be classified among the best of Ethiopian writers. He lacks the skill of developing situations and characters in his novels. Moreover, his writings contain too much propaganda. He, in short, lacks literary grace. The defects may be the result of the author's lack of formal literary education and his over-eagerness to expose the regime. Nevertheless, Abbe shares the same zeal with the best of Ethiopian novelists for changing the society and modernizing the country.





The ignorance of the clergy, however, does not prevent them from exploiting the laity. The highly demanding priests consider it their privilege to be served better than others in any feast. Though the person who gives the feast may be poor, he must, in any way, fulfil the wishes of the priesthood:

ሰባህናቱ ገን በተቻለ መጠን ልዩ ጥረት ማድረግ  
የተሰመደ ነው :: ጠላው እንዲወፍርና እንዲጠራ  
በገደ ያሰፈልጋል :: ወጡ ሰነሱ በቻ ከተረዱኛው  
በገ ሥጋ ይሠራል :: ምንም ቢሆን ለነርሱ በርገዶ  
ሥጋ መቅረት የለበትም ::4

It is customary to make a special preparation for the clergy. It is essential that the 'tella' be first class and clear, the 'wot' be prepared from the meat of a sheep especially killed for them. Raw meat is indispensable.

It is an accepted belief that churchmen are supposed to ignore all material benefit and practice abstinence so that they can acquire their place in heaven, where temporary worldly discomfort is compensated for by eternal happiness. Contrary to this, however, the novels of Abbe show us that the teachers of this doctrine give priority to their secular pleasures. The 'modern priest' who baptizes the hero in Alliweledim is thus described:

ዘመናዊው ቄስ ሰውነታቸውን በረሃብ፣ በመታረዝ፣  
በሰገደትና በፀሎት አገባቸው ከሚኖሩት ጥንታዊያን  
ቄሶች በሚንኛውም ነገር የተለየ ለመሆኑ ከፊት  
ሰህይና ከደረቱ ስፋት የበለጠ ምስክር አያሽም  
ነበር ::5

There is no more concrete evidence of the modern priest with his chubby face and bulging chest, which markedly distinguish him from the traditional priests, who chastised their flesh through fasting, exposure to heat and cold, worship and prayer.

It is further explained in the novel that the comfortable life of the priest is attained at the cost of the labour of the working Christian population.

The church not only exploits the people through its demanding priests, but also subjects them to poverty and desperation because of the established religious customs. One of these is the provision of expensive commemoration feasts for the dead. In Yanets Iluzaze, the narrator's account of his background shows that one of the causes for his family's disintegration is the amount of wealth spent on the commemoration feast for his dead father and mother. A character in the same novel makes the observation that the money spent on the feast could otherwise have been used by the children for their education.<sup>6</sup> In another novel, Keltanawa Ihite, Azene, the narrator, describes the costly commemoration feast of his dead mother:

የአናታችን ተዘካር ከአባታችን ንበረት ሩቡን ፈጅቶ  
በጣደሰደገቅ አኳኑ ወጣ :: በዚያ ቀን ያልጠገበ  
ምን ጊዜም ጠገብሁ አይል ::7

The commemoration feast of our dead mother that cost a quarter of our father's property was astonishingly accomplished. He who was not satiated that day, would never say that he would ever be so.

Thus, one fourth of what has been acquired through years of hardship is lavishly spent in just one day because of the religious custom.

The Ethiopian farmer, in particular, is shown by Abbe's novels to be the section of the society which suffers most from such religious customs. This is powerfully recounted by the sad story of a poor farmer called Geremew in Idil New Bedel.

Geremew's wife dies in an epidemic disease leaving six children behind her. As if that were not enough burden for poor Geremew, his father confessor, Kes Bitew, orders him to give a commemoration feast and pay for the Holy communion and all other prayers so that his wife may secure 'a home in heaven'.<sup>8</sup> Though Geremew tries to explain his difficult financial situation, Kes Bitew insists that Geremew should prove that he is 'a lover of God' even by selling his two oxen. Geremew must obey:

ለዓመት ቀለበና ለዘር ቢበቃ ተበሎ የተቆመው አሀል  
ሁሉ ለመሰና ለአገጂራ ሲበል ለአገሩ ቀን ይገሰ ገጣሽ  
በገጣሽ ተቆመለ ::... ለተዘካሮ ቄሶች የርጥብ  
ሥጋ ጥሎሽ አሰረሰገ ገዳጅ ስለሆነ ከሁለተ በረዎች  
አገጥን የተዘካረ ዕለት ሟት አረደ ::9

Half of the grain which was stored for the year's subsistence and for sowing was used up in a 'day's feast of 'tella' and 'injera'....Since it was compulsory to supply the clergy with fresh raw meat, one of the two oxen was slaughtered on the morning of the feast day.

It is clear to the reader that the little property which could have helped to support the children is woefully spent by the church's orders. Neighbours and relatives who earlier had done little to alleviate Geremew's sorrow gather to enjoy the day's feast. Thus, the church which ought to teach the people to be wise and to help each other at times of difficulty, instead, goads them on to prey on each other's miseries.

The wealth used up for the commemoration feasts might be tolerable if one were able to afford it. Unfortunately in this regard, the church does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. Moreover, instead of encouraging the people to work hard and make up for their loss, the church further contributes to their impoverization and idleness by sanctifying about two-thirds of the days of the year and prohibiting any form of work during these holidays.

During the 'Demene Mesafint', priests could stop even a whole army from fighting on certain 'holy' days.<sup>10</sup> As late as the post - Italian period, priests had the same controlling power over the Ethiopian farmer. At the sight of a farmer going to the field with his oxen during a holiday, all a priest need say is gezichalehu, 'I have excommunicated you' and the farmer has no choice but to return home. Kes Bitew, a non-productive priest engaged in telling people not to go to work during this or that day and from time to time in informing them to give commemoration feasts is the scourge of the peasants. Thus, Geremew, a victim of this order, finds it impossible to support his family:

ከ365 ዓመት ቀናት በገመት ሁለት መቶ ገደም  
ዓበዓል ቀናት እንደመሆናቸው መጠን ደሀው ሆነ ሀብቱም  
ክርስቲያን ከሆነ በውገዛት ተገዶ ማክበር ስለለበት  
ለሀው ገረመው... ያነበረው ተስፋ ጤርሶ የማይቀከር  
ሆነ ::11

Of the 365 days in a year, probably around 200 of them are holidays, and christians -- whether rich or poor -- observe them for fear of anathema; thus, poor Geremew... found it impossible to realize any of his hopes.

Abbe's condemnation of religious customs which discourage productivity but encourage excessive feasting as the cause for the misery of the predominantly farming population of the country still rings true to this day.

Another aspect where the novels of Abbe criticize the church is in the unequal treatment of its subjects. The burial ceremony for example, is not the same for the rich and the poor. This is emphasized in Keltanawa Ihite when the narrator of the story, Azene, comments on the religious ritual for the death of his rich mother:

መኾኖ የሀብቱ ሰው ልቅሰና ፍታት ከርዝማኔው ብዙ  
ነው ፡፡ ለፍታትን የተደረገው የቀበር ሥነ ሥርዓት  
ቀኑን ሙሉ ፈጆ ፡፡ ከንጹሃውም አባባ የዚያን ጊዜ  
ቢኖሩ ሁሉን ቀን ሙሉ ሰይቆ የሚቀር አይመስለኝም ፡፡ 12

True, the mourning and absolution ceremony at the death of a rich man takes a long time. The burial rites of our mother took the whole day. In fact, had Father been present, it would have taken no less than two days.

The ritual is long for the wealthy because they can afford to pay more. The burial rites for the poor, on the other hand, is done in a rush. Thus, Abbe argues that the church's practice here is clearly contrary to the christian teaching that all men are equal in the eyes of God.

The relationship between the clergy and the ruling members of the society further reveals the partisan nature of the church. In And Lennatu, Kassa's mother, Atitegeb, is threatened by Dejazmach Maru and asks for a sanctuary in a church. The priests, however, belittle her appeals and glorify the claims of the noble governor, Maru. Because of this, Teizero Atitegeb blames the priests for their unfair treatment of people to whom life has already dealt a hard blow:

የኛ ከሀፍት ቀን የሰጠው ስታዩ በከንቱ ውዳሴ መከብጥ፣  
የታገዳ፣ ቀን የገደለበት ስታዩ መናቅ ማቀረድ  
ልጣዳችሁ ነው ፡፡ 13

You, our clergy, have the habit of exalting the fortunate with flattering words of praise while belittling and reviling the poor.

This comment against the clergy refers not only to the Ethiopian clergy in Tewodrose's period, but also to those who belong to Abbe's generation for whom he wrote his novels.

Unless its interests are threatened, the church sides with the secular leaders whether or not justice is done to the people. That is why when the court condemns the protagonist in Alliweledim to death, the priests in turn, deny him God's acre.<sup>14</sup> Abbe accuses the clergy for having made the people completely servile to political authority by teaching them to show absolute respect to their secular rulers whom they claim are chosen by God.<sup>15</sup>

The church is generally accused of shaping a society that is Christian in name only. It baptizes children forty or eighty days after birth but does not teach adults the tenets of the religion which it terms as "mysterious".<sup>16</sup> Abbe manifests the outcome ironically: a long period of fasting is followed by the Easter feasting which is celebrated by slaughtering stolen cattle.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Abbe's novels show us a society given over to melancholy, fear and ignorance brought about by the church. The churchmen exposed the masses to these evils by making them unproductive and absolutely submissive to the ruling classes.

## 2.2. Civil Administration and Litigation

A study of the administrative and legal institutions as presented in the novels of Abbe helps us to be more acquainted with the society in the pre-revolutionary period. In Abbe's time, the duties of the two institutions were so intertwined that it was difficult to treat them in isolation. In fact, in some cases, it is even impossible to differentiate between the roles of the governing and the judicial bodies. In Idil New Bedel, for example, we find a sub-district administrator involving himself in a case which ought to be the court's concern. The reason was because in feudal Ethiopia, a chief governor doubled as chief justice as well in his district.

When Alliweledim was published for the second time in 1974, Abbe in his introduction declares that the rotten administration of Ethiopia during Haile Selassie's period was the cause for the embarrassing situation in which the country was immersed. Explaining that he was conscious of what was going on from the beginning, the writer says:

የተጠማለቀውን አስተዳደር ጉዳሉን መመልከት የቻልሁት ገና አገር ቤት ስለሁ ከመስክል ወረዳ ገዛት ጀምሮ ነበር :: በጋዜጠኝነት ወደ መንግሥት ሥራ ከገባሁ በኋላም ብዙ ብዙ አሳፋሪ ተግባሮች በከፍተኛ ባለሥልጣኖቻቸው አንደኛው ለመመልከት ቻልሁ :: 18

I was able to observe the shortcomings of the rotten administration when I was in the countryside, beginning from the sub-district level. Later, when I got a government job as a journalist, I witnessed many shameful acts committed by higher officials.

Abbe adds that whenever he got the chance he exposed this reality in his novels:

የማይሠራ ምን ዓይነት ገና ነበር? ይህ መሆኑን በመረዳት ስባቤን ለመገለጽ ዕድል በጋጠመኝ ጊዜ ሁሉ ስሞክር ቆይቻለሁ :: 19

Was there any offence that was not being committed? I knew this and whenever I got the chance I have been trying to express my ideas.

Accordingly, Abbe reflects a society brought down to poverty and desperation because of maladministration and injustice at all levels of the hierarchy both in the rural areas and urban centres. In the countrysides, there is 'Yathiya Dagna', the neighbourhood judge, who is an appointed government representative of the small village community.

The village judges are supposed to settle disputes among members of the community in a peaceful way, so that the villagers would not waste their time by going to higher authorities in town. But, in reality, these judges are the beginning of the ladder which has to be climbed by the poor villagers. The village judges are slow in giving decisions because of two reasons: firstly, they have to be bribed; secondly, they should make all arrangements so that the higher authorities can have the same opportunity. Abbe exposes this inequity in Idil New Bedel.

Geremew's ox is stolen by a gang of thieves. Geremew appeals to the village judge, Grazmach Jemere, carrying with him a bottle of 'Katikala' so that he may be favoured in return.<sup>20</sup> But Grazmach Jemere (the name itself is indicative of the beginning of bribing) states that the case is beyond his capacity and refers it to the higher authority -- the sub-district governor. The village judge is not incapable of settling the dispute; but as the Grazmach himself remarks, the higher authorities do not allow the village judges to settle the disputes quickly:

... ለነገሩ ያጠቃላይ ዳኛች ለማስታረቅ ጭር  
ነበር የተቆጣጠሩ :: ነገር ገን ይህን አዳዎራን  
በነገሩ ወስኑል ወረዳ ገዥ አያስቀጠንም /21

...In fact, we village judges are supposed to settle disputes. But if we are found doing this, the sub-district governor will not tolerate us.

The sub-district and district governors and other members of this bureaucracy are thus reluctant to give decisions on the disputes referred to them by the village judges. They consider it their right to benefit from the country folk including free physical labour. This point is mentioned in the confessions of the narrator in Yamets Nuzaze<sup>22</sup> and is the fabric of the story in Idil New Bedel.<sup>23</sup>

The novelist's portrayal of the background of some of his characters reveals the fact that administrative and judicial bureaucracy in the countryside is mainly controlled by so-called patriots and members of the feudal ruling class. Fitawrari Bizu, the sub-district governor in Idil New Bedel boasts that he was a guerrilla fighter during the Italian occupation. But, we are told that in the guise of a patriot, the Fitawrari has been a more cruel bandit to the villagers than the Italian Fascists:

የርሰቸው [ፊታ፣ ብዙ] ቀጥሮ ከጣሊያን ይበልጥ  
በሰገሩ ያሠቃዩት ከነበሩ ሰው-አርበኛ ሸፍቶች  
መካከል ነው። ሌሊት በየመንገድ አዳገቱ በሰገሩን  
መደብደብ፣ ከብተን መንጻት፣ ገንዘቡን መዘረፍ  
ያማግባው ነበር። "አርበኛ" ና "ነፃነት"  
የሚባሉት ቃላት ልብ ብለው ያጠኑትም ጣሊያን ከሌደ  
በኋላ ይህን የምክትል ወረዳ ገዢነት ሥራ ለማግኘት  
ደጅ ሲጠኑ ነው ።:24

His [Fitawrari Bizu's] place is among those bandits, who in the name of patriotism oppressed the villager more than the Italians. He used to sneak into the villages at night to beat the villagers and pillage their cattle and money. He actually learnt the words "patriot" and "freedom" while he was supplicating the authorities to become a sub-district governor after the Italians left the country.

In the same novel, the Awraja (provincial) governor, who is a Dejazmach like his forefathers, was a patriot during the invasion. But later he is portrayed as a bad administrator because 'to shoot with a gun and to administer people are two different jobs.'<sup>25</sup> Thus, these feudal governors and pseudo-patriots are shown by Abbe to be the causes for the unhappy lot of the villagers.

The rural population was not the only victim of this injustice and maladministration. The majority of urban settlers were also subjected to the same wretched situation. In spite of the truthful claim of the poor, the feudal court always favoured the rich. The central character in Yeregefu Abeboch, Alefe, who is the rightful inheritor of his dead mother's wealth, demands his share by appealing to the court against his rich father, Ato Tezera. But he is unable to win his case because of the time consuming 'muget', and is forced to make a concession to his father.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the prostitute in Keltamawa Ihite tells her brother that she had two children by a rich husband who later deserted her. She goes on to tell him that the court of law failed to give her justice and that it contributed to her becoming a prostitute:

የልጆች ማሰባሰቢያ ብዬ ስክሰ ሞክረ ነበር፡፡ ነገር  
 ገን አሰቅጥ በፍርድ ቤት አንደኛውን ገንፍ ሰውየው  
 በቀጠሮና በማይገኝ ተሰፋ ስንገሰታና ልጆቼን  
 አረቄና ሰውነቱን ሸጠ አንጻሰሰውን አሆናለሁ በማለት  
 ሁሉን ጎቼ ያለገዜዎና ያለ ሁኔታዎ ወደዚህ አሰዘኝ  
 ኑሮ ገብቻ ከኪዳሰክ ወደ ኪዳሰክ አንከራተታለሁ፡፡<sup>27</sup>

I had tried in a lawsuit to get some alimony for brining up the children. But, knowing that I could not win the suit against him [her husband] and fearing the agony of court delays, I left every thing out of desperation and decided to sell liquor and my body in order to bring up my children. Thus, though unfit for my age and my nature, I started this sorrowful life wandering from kiosk to kiosk.

Freedom and justice in the country, as the protagonist in Alliweledim puts it, are controlled by money and power. A grotesque picture of this is given in Gobland Achherbariw Tota where the judges respect the rich ape, Gobland, and look down upon their fellow human beings.<sup>28</sup> The children of Chura Konu accuse the ape of illegally taking the family's wealth. Although the children are the legal inheritors of the property, it is hard for them to win the case against the prosperous ape because of the deliberate delaying mechanisms used by the judges in order to favour the ape. The court of law is ridiculed as a place where truth and justice are mocked at, not practised.

Abbe's novels stress that the hair splitting interpretation of the detailed articles of the legal codes confused the illiterate and always put the majority of the population at a disadvantage. Moreover minor disputes, which in the traditional society used to be settled quickly, began to take longer because of the intricacies of the new codes thus becoming causes for regression rather than for progress.

In short, the novels depict a society damned by a new fangled bureaucracy and where justice is the prerogative of the rich or high government officials. Contrasting the new with the old, the poor farmer, Geremew, wonders why legal and administrative matters could not be facilitated in spite of the increase in the number of bureaucrats and the spread of literacy. His friend Ato Bisewer, tells Geremew that it has only resulted in an increase in the number of parasites.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3. Education and the Intelligentsia

The early post - colonial period does not mark the beginning of mass modern education in Ethiopia. It was still a time when the young generation was being entreated to join the newly emerging schools and the students that joined these schools procured certain privilages compared to those who went to the

traditional church schools. When he applied to join the government school, the narrator in Yamets Muzaze recalls how pleased the school director was. The school supplied him with the necessary writing equipment because:

በዚያ ወራት የወጭ አገር ነጭ ሰጠጥ በሃገራችን  
ወሰሩት ወጪዎች ነበር። ተግሪ እየተሰመ ነፍ  
እየተቆሰመ የሚጠሩት ጊዜ ነበር ።:30

It was a time when foreign education was beginning to spread in our country. It was a time when the student was pampered to learn and was carefully taken care of.

After completing his elementary school education, the narrator goes to Addis Ababa to join a boarding high school where all expenses are covered by the government. With the new schools, a new life style gets introduced. The contrast between the traditional and the new school life is described in Keltamawa Ihite by Amene's father, when he allows his son to go and join the government school:

ገዳሰዎ ሂዱ ልጄ አሰሰብኩም እንኳ  
በዚህ ወቅት ሰጠጥ ሰጠጥ ሰጠጥ ከአናት  
አባት አብልጠ በመጠንቀቅ የሚያስተምርበት  
ወልባዎ ጊዜ ድር ደበሉ ሰብሰቡ ፣ ጥሩ ቆይተዎ  
ወሃ ጠጥቶ በሚጠሩት ጊዜ ሰው ልጁን  
ተጠር ብሎ ይሰድ ነበር አይደል ።:31

Never mind my son, go I shall not bother you. Let alone now, a fine epoch when the state takes care of the health and subsistence of the students more than can the mother and the father, a man used to send his son far and wide to acquire learning, even in the hard, old days.

Although we see that the society resisted to accept modern education in general, we can infer from some of the novels that women, in particular, were not encouraged to join these schools. In Yeregefu Abeboch, Roman quits her studies to be married to a merchant, whereas her brother, Alefe, continues with his studies to a higher level. Similarly, in Keltamawa Ihite while Azene secures the privilege of going to school, his sister, Rahel, is made to stay at home. The boys in both families pursue their studies whereas the girls are not encouraged to do so.

The traditional scholar in Ethiopia mostly devoted himself to spiritual pursuits and rarely rendered services to the secular leaders. But with the introduction of modern education, those who could read and write joined government offices to become influential members of the society. A 'Fitawrari' in Idil New Bedel reveals the reversal of situations in society by remarking: 'the pencil has now taken the place of the bullet in killing men!' Reversing his position as a servant, the literate has become a master.<sup>32</sup> This, however, is a comment on the primary stage of the whole process of individual and social changes brought about by the spread of modern education.

Abbe in his novels questions the end of modern education and at times boldly denounces it. Azene, for example, in Keltamawa Ihite is pessimistic from the beginning about his education. He doubts if his learning will enable him to support his family and serve the society at large.<sup>33</sup> The novels show that juvenile delinquency is generally a result of modern education in Abbe's time. For example, the hero of Yamets Huzaze is trapped by the habits of smoking, alcoholism and other evils after he joins high school.<sup>34</sup> The same thing happens to Azene in Keltamawa Ihite.

Arega, a character in Yeregefu Abeboch, who holds a degree in Economics from the University College of A.A. and later receives two years' education in America, always behaves contrary to the good old customs of Ethiopian society. He is jealous, inhuman, selfish:

በርሱ አስተሳሰብ የአገሩ የሠለጠነ የዘመኑ ሰው በሕርጭ ለርሱ የሚሆኑ ከሆነ ማንኛውንም ርኩህና ሰብዓዊ ያልሆነ ተግባር መፈጸም ለርሱ ስልጠኔ ማንኛውንም ነገር መያዝም ነው። 35

In his view, the behaviour of a civilized modern man is to commit any depraved and inhuman act if he finds it beneficial for him and to oppose every thing if it is not advantageous for him.

The novels reduce the whole aim of the country's new educational system to producing a group of people full of cozenage and pride who are only interested in the accumulation of wealth. This group is portrayed as a monster of modernization and is condemned as a burden on the community, exploiting the labour of the ignorant masses. 36

In his address to the intelligentsia, Prime Minister Melkeam criticizes them for using their learning in order to suppress the people, in which case they become mere substitutes of the old feudal rulers:

ክምህርት ራሱን ከሌሎች መለያ፣ ተሞራካላሁ ማለት የመገጠቂያ መሣርያ ነው ብለዋል። የተረገጡት ሆኑ ይመስላሉ ሊቀኙ ሆይ! የዓለም ሕዝቦች ከሁን በፊት በሰባቶችና የታሰሰቅ ዘሮች በሚባሉ ሲቀጠቀጡ ናሩ። አሁን ደግሞ አኖውቃሰን በሚሉ ደገቶቻችን አገራቸውን ክፍሎቻችን ማለት ነው። 37

I think that you consider education to be a means of isolating oneself from the masses, and learning to be an instrument of exploitation. Dear elites / In the past the masses of the world were oppressed by feudal lords and so-called aristocrats. And now, does it mean that you want them to be subjugated by ignorant men who call themselves learned!

The novels also raise other points about modern education. The hero of Alliweledim indirectly disapproves of the text books for he claims that they teach treachery, false heroism and other improper values.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, modern education is criticized for giving emphasis to theoretical learning and for disregarding knowledge acquired through long years of practical experience.<sup>39</sup>

Although the novels do not explain the causes, we find that people are employed in jobs outside their fields of study. Hussien, a character in Yeregefu Abeboch is a graduate from the teacher training school in Harrar, but after some years of teaching he abandons his job to become a coffee merchant. In the same novel, we find a similar case concerning a character called Felleke:

በግምት አልሠራበትም አንቺ ወጭ አገር ከሰዲሰት  
ዓመት በሰይ ያይቶ በሰይንስ ዓማኝተር ጻገሪውን  
አገገቶ ተመልሷል ::40

Although he did not work in his field of study, he stayed abroad for more than six years and came back with a masters degree in science.

Abbe openly attacks Ethiopian literary personalities. It seems that the author had a grudge against the professors of language. In the notes at the end of Gobland Achberbariw Tota, the author states:

አንዳንድ ሊቃውንት በተለይ ከቋንቋና ከሥነ ጽሑፍ ጋር የተያያዘ ዕውቀት አለን የሚሉት የሃገራችን ደራሲያን አንደኛዎቻቸው ደክመው ያቀረቧቸውን ጽሑፎች አያነሱ፡ አዳግሎ ራሳቸው ለራሳቸው በሰጡት ከፍተኛ ቦታ ላይ ተቀምጠው ቢተር ተ ይገኛሉ ::41

Some learned men, especially those who claim to have knowledge related to language and literature are, from the position of hauteur that they assume, unfairly criticizing the works of our authors who produce their writings with maximum effort.

These words are a proof to the author's outright dismissal of criticism concerning his literary work. He held the wrong view that it was only a creative writer who could be a critic. This stubborn attitude of the writer resulted in a strong hatred of professors of literature whom he ridiculed in two novels:- Yeregefu Abeboch and Gobland Achberbariw Tota. In the introduction to Gobland Achberbariw Tota, the author explicitly states his aim in writing the novel:

ሰለ ሥነ-ጽሑፍ አውነተኛ ከትንሳኤ ሆነ የተፈጥሮ ሰጠታ ሰይፍራቸው በደራሲያን ላይ ለመገለጥ የሚሞክሩ አንዳንድ ሊቃውንትን ለመምከር ተገድሏል ::42

I am impelled to give a few words of advise to some learned men who have neither the proper background nor the natural talent for literature, but who try to ride on the backs of authors.

In this novel, Gobland, the ape who learns the language of the people and is awarded degrees by foreign universities represents the literary men. The ape though unable to write, can recite the poems written by many great poets. With the help of his secretary, he produces a literary work of undistinguishable genre in an ungrammatical language. But Gobland claims that his work can be understood only by learned men. Besides, the ape is a heavy drinker, a cheat and totally corrupt. These base characteristics of the ape are implicitly meant to refer to the personality of the literary critics.

Professor Golja in Yeregefu Abeboch is given the physical description of an ape.<sup>43</sup> He is a professor of Amharic who is in every way pedantic but despises the artistic heritage of his country. Golja's treatment of the university students is described as completely unethical. Concerning the professor's use of language, one character in the novel says:

የአንደኛው [የጉልጃ] አጣርኛ አንጻንድ አጣርኛን  
ለጣጥፋት የጣሹ የቋንቋ ፕሮፌሰሮች አጣርኛ  
ሰለሀኝ ለተራ ሰዎች አይገባም ::44

The Amharic of one of the professors [Golja] is the kind of language used by some who are fond of eradicating it; thus, we laymen cannot comprehend it.

In so viciously portraying the literary men, the author seems to be completely blinded by his hatred. Hence, although quite entertraining, his viewpoint has no correspondence with reality at all.

2.4. Moral Degeneration

An article on "The History of Prostitution in Ethiopia" states:

The coming of the Italians, who included hundreds of thousands of soldiers and workers, thus inaugurated an era of extensive, highly developed prostitution, the legacy of which continues in Asmara, Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian towns to this day.<sup>45</sup>

The spread of prostitution as a calculated means of income in the post-colonial period holds a substantial place in the fictional works of Abbe. Through Weizero Abebech, in Yeregefu Abeboch we are informed of the rare phenomenon of prostitution in Addis Ababa just before the Italian invasion. Weizero Abebech was a victim of this rare phenomenon at the time. The difficulty one had to pass through in order to go to bed with her is described in the following way:

በዚያ ጊዜ [ከፍላጎት ወረራ በፊት] ብዙ ያከተሉ ሴቶች አሳሪዎች ስለሌላ ነበሩ... አንድ ወንድ አርባ ተወገን [ወ/ሮ አበበችን] ለማግኘት የሚያደርገው ደጅ ጥናት አጅግ ከፍ ያለ ነበር:: ያሰበው ሙከራ ተገትቶ፣ ቅቤው፣ ነጩ ጤፍ ተጭኖ በጊዳ በር አየገባ ዘረዎ ነገዎ በመመለስ አለማቆም በመሰከ ደጅ አየተጠና ብዙ ጊዜ ስለራ በጎሳ ነበር የሚገኙት::<sup>46</sup>

Since there were not many prostitutes at that time [before the fascist take over], any man who sought her favour [that of Weizero Abebech] had to wait for days. She was available after quite a long time through persistent visits and go betweens, after she had received a fat lamb, butter and white 'teff' through the back door.

But, when the Italians came, the situation changed:

ፈሽስቶች ከገቡ በኋላ የቤተ ብዙት በየቀኑ እየጨመረ  
ሰለጠኔ በቤተኛ አዳሪነትና በከጫሪነት ሙያ አገደ  
ጥገታ ብርቅ ሆኖ መታየታቸው [ ወ / ር አበበች ]  
ቀረ :: 47

When the fascists came in, the number of loose women increased from day to day; therefore, she [Weizero Abebech] was no more considered a rarity in prostitution and in selling 'tej' like the old days.

Thus with the coming of the Italians prostitution became rampant in the towns and continued to be more so after independence.

The novels reveal some of the causes for the spread of prostitution. One of these is the reluctance of parents to control their children. Parents feel they are modern when allowing their children to go their own ways. For this reason, three girls in Yeregefu Abeboch who were earlier schoolmates open a bar at Nefas Silk and end up as prostitutes.

Abbe accuses Ethiopian society for degrading the sanctity of married life. Marriage, he argues, has been reduced to mere pursuit of individual pleasures.

The prime Minister, Melkeam explains the causes for prostitution:

የሽርመጥና ተገባር ከመገጨባቸው ነገሮች ዋና  
ዋናዎቹ ሥነ-ሥርዓት የጉዳላው ጋብቻና ለተሠ  
ነውረኛ ሥራ የተሰጠው ፍጹም ነፃነት ናቸው:: 48

Of the causes for prostitution, the main are: the kind of marriage that lacks discipline and the absolute freedom given to this wicked act.

The narrator in Yamets Muzaze admits that he married his wife only because she was rich and she, in turn, was attracted to him in anticipation of his good prospects.<sup>49</sup>

Abbe's novels frequently refer to marriages between people of considerable age differences. Rahel, in Keltamawa Ihite, had been married to a young man before he betrayed her by marrying another rich woman as old as his grandmother. Consequently, circumstances force Rahel to marry a dissolute old man who is only fond of young ladies.<sup>50</sup> In the same novel, Rahel's father, who is very old, gets married to a girl far below his age, after the death of his wife. All these are considered to be examples of degeneration.

The moral decadence of city folk is reflected through Ato Tezera in Yeregefu Abeboch. He changes wives from time to time; shares the same ladies with his son; and his latest marriage partner is by far younger than his own daughter.<sup>51</sup>

Excessive indulgence in alcohol is another evil which is shown to be common in the city. Yeregefu Abeboch is mostly an exposure of the spread of this bad habit in Addis Ababa. Alefe, the main character in Yeregefu Abeboch, refers in a monologue to the confused situation in Addis Ababa on New Year's Eve:

አዲስ አበባ አዎ /ርቀው ሲያስገቡ ጎናቸው ይሰላሉ  
ማመሽ ከአንድ ሰዓት ጀምረው አገጠሙ አፋፍ ሰይ  
ሆነው ሲያዳሹ አውነተኛ ደማቅ አበባ ሁነሽ  
ጎታያሉ:: ገን በውስጥ ሰንት ጉዳይ ይዘሽል?  
አሁን ጊዜ ሰንተ ሰክሮ ይነባባሩባሉ?...52

Addis Ababa, O, Yes/ When one thinks of you from a distance, you cause nostalgia. Seen from Entoto, at seven in the evening, you are like a real bright flower. But, how much is the evil in you? Now, at this hour, how many drunken people are jammed in you ?...

Although it is New Year's Eve, the majority does not drink for enjoyment. A character in the same novel hints that alcohol is used by the people as an outlet for their various disappointments:

መጠጥ /የከሰረው ነጋዴ፣ አለቃው ያበባጠው ሠራተኛ..  
ሚሰቱ ያበባጠኛው በሰፊ፣ አጭኛው የከፋኛው ጉረዞሳ፣  
ከሠራ የወጣው፣ ሥራ ያጣው፣ ገንዘብ ዋናቶች ደሰቷ  
የሌለው... ሁሉ ይጠጣሃል፣ ያገቀረ ቁርሃል፣  
ይጠልጥሃል፣ ፍት ይልሃል፣ የጉነጭሃል፣ ይጠጥሃል፡፡  
...53

Alcohol! The bankrupt merchant, the worker offended by his boss, the husband angered by his wife, the youth betrayed by his betrothed,... the unemployed, those who have money but lack happiness... everybody sips you, guzzels you, boozes you....

Everybody has a pretext for consuming alcoholic drinks. The degeneration of all sections of the society is mirrored as reality. Night clubs abound; bars are open the whole night to serve young and old.

This lust for drinking is not limited to the people in the big city. In Keltamawa Ihite, the narrator casually refers to a small town where the town folk rush to 'tej houses' and the villagers to the 'tella' and 'Katikala' houses.<sup>54</sup>

ገረመው ይህን አይቷል፡፡ እህሱ ቸውንም ይሁን  
ቅቤ ማራ ቸውን በጸበጸ ሸጠው ሥራ ትቶ  
በትገንገሽቶ ከቱቶ ሲሰከሩ መዋል ሥልጣኔ  
የጭሰሰ ቸው ሰቃቶ አይቷል ፡፡55

Geremew has witnessed this. He has seen people who sell their grain, butter and honey and idly drink in the little towns, and consider it a sign of modernity.

Thus drunkenness is considered a fashion, a mark of 'civilization'.

Abbe draws for us a picture of a society which gradually is shifting from the traditional values of affection for the family, devotion to friends and respect of guests, to indifference, jealousy and suspicion. Traditionally, children are responsible for supporting their parents in old age. The young generation, however, neglects this responsibility driven by the competitive spirit of the new life style. The narrator of Yamets Nuzaze condemns himself for failing to help his poor family because of his selfishness.

The high regard that Ethiopians have for their friends is shown in Yeregefu Abeboch. But this attitude towards friendship appears to be changing as observed by a character in the same novel:

የሚጠቀሱት ሁልጊዜ ከቅርብ ገደብ ያለ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ  
የሚጠቀሱት የሚጠቀሱት ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ ገደብ  
ይበልጥ በቅናት፣ የሚተናኙት ወደ ገሰ ገደብ  
ሲቀር የሚዘገቡት ገደብ ገደብ : 56

Most of them [are] jealous and hateful of their closest friends; if a friend steps ahead of them, they, more than anyone else, become jealous of him, and if he lags behind them, they humiliate him.

It is part of the traditional social mores of Ethiopians to be courteous and helpful in providing food and shelter to a guest. A person travelling from one place to another may call at any village for food and boarding and used to be welcome. But this kind gesture of hosting strangers was fast changing even in the countryside. The following words indicate why people began to become suspicious of strangers:

አንጻንዬ ሌቦች በአገዛዢ አንገዳነት ስም አዳተጠጉ  
ሌሊት አዳሠረቀ መጥፋት በጣምጠቷቸው አንደ ደርጋ  
የአገዛዢ አንገዳን በአምነትና በፍቅር ጣዳት አሰፈሪ  
አዳሆነ መሴደ መጀመሩንም አይቷል ::57

He [Jeremew] has witnessed this: some  
thieves, after asking shelter in God's  
name, steal and escape in the night;  
thus unlike the old times, it is  
becoming frightening to treat God's  
strangers with hospitality and affection.

Most of the novels deplore the degeneration of society  
and the ill-breeding of youth. The author is particularly  
pessimistic about the younger generation. While driving to  
his suicidal death, Alefe, in Yeregefu Abeboch projects the  
tragic end of his generation thus:

"የዛረ አበባዎች የነገ ፍራዎች" የዛረ ወጣቶች  
የነገ መሪዎች" ገና ሰናፈራ የረገፍን አበባዎች፡  
ገርፍ ያጥሰቀሰቀን በረደ የቀረጠን አበባዎች፡፡58  
ያ ሁሉ ተሰፋ ያ ሁሉ ዎኛት እንዲህ ሆኖ ቀረ!

"The flowers of today, the fruits of  
tomorrow" "The youth of today, the  
leaders of tomorrow." Flowers that  
have fallen before fruition; flowers  
overrun with flood and cut off by hail.  
All that hope, all that expectation  
came to nothing!

## CHAPTER III

### 3. Concept of Modernization

The Italian Occupation proved to the people that Ethiopia must civilize or perish. It inspired the educated few to transform their backward, feudal country into a modern state. Literature thus became one of the organs through which this urge for modernization and nation building was expressed.

Foreign influence, however, was not the only cause for the progressive ideas that started to appear in the literary works. The oppressive social system, the backward culture, and the prevalence of poverty stirred an atmosphere of change among many Ethiopians. As a result, many ideas concerning the country's path of development were thrown about and discussed. Ethiopian writers, on their part, began to tackle this question of modernization in their works.

Abbe Gobegna belongs to the second generation of Ethiopian writers who carried forward the banner of modernization in their works. The social system that the country should adopt, the reforms in the educational and religious spheres, and the question of economic progress are all zealously dealt with by this author.

His novels that mainly deal with this subject are Alliweledim, Melkeam Seife Nebelbal and the historical novel And Lennatu. Concerning the relevance of And Lennatu to the contemporary period, Kane says:

In view of the fact that Abbe Gub<sup>vv</sup>anna is also the author of the political 'novel' "Allewwällädm" (I will not be born) which was banned for its caustic allusions to contemporary and probable future conditions of Ethiopia, "And Lennatu" may be considered as the interpretation of Theodore which comes closest to that held by most members of the educated younger generation.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed a serious study of this historical novel reveals the ideals of its author.

3.1. Socio - Political System

None of Abbe's novles considers the necessity of a total change in the social system as a means of modernizing Ethiopia. It is not the social apparatus but the corrupt individuals within it that are considered responsible for keeping the country backward. According to Abbe Gobegna the political system could stay much as it is; What he considers very important for the country's development is the genuineness and good-will of the people at the seat of government. The hero of the political novel, Alliwelledim, for example, offers no particular choice as regards the form of the government:

እኔ በሰው አሰጣጥ፡፡ ንጉሣዊ አገዛዝ ለዓፍርኪ /  
በጥቅር ቤት ሥልጣን ሥር ያለ ንጉሣዊ አገዛዝ  
/ከንስተተኝናል ዋናፍርኪ / በብዙ ሀብታሞች ሥልጣን  
የሚመራ አገዛዝ /ከሪብተክራሲ / በወታደራዊ ሀይል  
በቻ የሚመራ አገዛዝ /ሚሲተሪ ዲክተርሽን /ሕዝብ  
ሊሸጣቸውና ሊሸራቸው በሚችል መሪዎች የሚመራ  
አገዛዝ /ዲሞክራሲ / እንዲሁም ሌሎችን ብትሏቸው፤  
ሁሎችም ለሕዝብ ከተሰማሙና መልካም ከሠሩ መልካም  
ናቸው፡፡ ሕዝቡን ከበደሉ ገን ሁሉም መጥኛ ናቸው፡፡<sup>2</sup>

I do not believe in names: Monarchy, Constitutional Monarchy, Aristocracy, Military Dictatorship, Democracy and others you may mention. All can be good so long as they benefit the people. All can be evil so long as they oppress the people.

These words suggest that the author has more faith in individuals rather than in systems of governments, or organizations under which they operate. They also imply that the monarchy, the then political system of Ethiopia, was not the major obstacle to the country's progress. The same idea, the belief that there were many kings and dukes who worked hard and benefited their country, is reiterated by the hero of Alliweledim:

በው የሚለካው በሚሠራው ሥራ እንጂ በሆኑ አይደለም።  
ንጉሠ ወይም መስፍን ማለት የነውር ስም አይደለም።  
ለሀገራቸው ስንት መልካም ሥራ የሠሩ ነገሥታትና  
መሣፍንት ነበሩ ።<sup>3</sup>

A man is evaluated not by his titles but  
by his deeds. Being a king or a prince  
is no calumny. There were kings and  
Princes in the past who did a lot for  
their country.

Emphasizing the decisive role of leaders in safe-guarding  
the welfare of their people, Melkeam, the author's ideal  
prime minister, says:

በተለይ በአሁኑ ጊዜ ማንም ሕዝብ በተለይም መሪዎች  
ከራሳቸው ስሜትና ፍላጎት በሰይ የሌሎችን ጥቅምና  
ደስታ የሚወጡ ካልሆኑ ወዳ ለሐዘብ //4  
...

If citizens and specially leaders do  
not heed the needs and feelings of  
others beyond that of their own,  
particularly in these difficult times,  
woe to the masses!

And Lennatu utilizes the past to comment on the present.  
It reflects the author's strong belief in individuals who  
could be the champions in modernizing Ethiopia. In this  
novel, John Bell, a good friend and advisor of Tewodros,  
has this advice for the Emperor in the choice of individuals  
who could administer the people:

አሁን የሚያስፈልገው ተራሳቸው የገሰ ጉዳይ  
ይበልጥ ለሀገራቸው ጉዳይ የሚያስቡ፣ ቅኖችና  
የመሥራት ችሎታ ያሳቸው በዎች አየመረጡ...  
በገርማዊነትም በሚሰገገ መልካም ሕገ  
ሕዝቡ እንዲመራ ማድረግ ብቻ ነው ።<sup>5</sup>

What is needed now is to select persons who are concerned more about the affairs of their country than their own and who are fair and hard working.... The people then can be guided by good laws to be promulgated by your Majesty.

Through the words of John Bell, Abbe pronounces his faith in genuinely honest people for administrative posts. The structural set-up of the government is of secondary importance in his thinking.

Abbe is unequivocal in the removal of corrupt officials. But in the process, he stresses that no blood be shed. In Alliweledim, the army takes over power under the leadership of General Jaferos and kills many members of the old regime. The hero of the novel, however, considers this a barbaric act and explains his preference for a peaceful settlement:

ክኔ ዓመጥው ዛሬ ክርጁ ነገ ልታረዱ... የሚለው  
የልብ ደንገና ነገ ክም ነገ ተወገዱ... ታለቅ ክርቅና  
ሰለም ወርደ ዓነገው ዓለማችን ለሁሉም መልካምና  
ሰለማዊ ኑሮ ክንገደብላለን ነው ::6

What I hope for is avoiding the hard-hearted policy of 'let me kill today and be killed tomorrow'... Our future world must be a place of reconciliation and peace, bestowing on all a wholesome livelihood.

The novels warn against the importation of foreign ideologies. Any adherence to the communist or the capitalist roads of development is condemned by implication. The hero-prime-minister, Melkeam, when asked in parliament which ideology the country should adopt, chooses the middle path:

በመካከሉ ሠራዊቱ ከብዙ ጭቅጭቅ ያድናል ከዚህም  
አልፎ በራስ ዕውነትና ዓላማ ለማራመድ ያስችላል።<sup>7</sup>

Taking the middle path saves from severe contention. It, moreover, enables one to stride forth in one's own beliefs and objectives.

The prime minister is a christian;<sup>8</sup> yet he expounds his belief that his government is ready to borrow ideas, even from the communists, as long as they contribute to the improvement of human life.<sup>9</sup> According to the author Ethiopia should have its own ideology but with an open door policy to what is good from both the capitalists and the communists. Here, we find Abbe's belief to be contradictory because the ideologies governing Capitalism and Communism are in sharp contrast with each other.

Abbe Gobegna's ideal government is comprised of a two party system, one in power and the other in opposition. The ideal set-up which could enhance Ethiopia's modernization is reflected thus in Melkeam Seife Nebelbal. At the top, there is a king, who is the head of state. Then, there is the prime-minister, who runs the government. Melkeam in this case is the Labour Party leader who has been democratically elected. However, his activities are severely thwarted by the party in opposition, the Conservatives.

A one - party system is considered to be unreliable for the country's development. In his warning against the existence of only one party in a country, the hero of Alliweledin says:

ሕዝብ በገደብነት ተጠጥሮ ጥቅሙንና መብቱን  
ካልጠበቀ አንድ ዓይነት ልዩ ዕውቀት ያለው  
ድርጅት ብቻ ለጠቅሰሰው ሕዝብ ተሰማሚ የሆነ  
መንገድ ሊከፈት አለመቻሉን ይገልጻል ነገረክ ቸጊላሁ: : 10

I have repeatedly told you that unless the people struggle in unison to safe-guard their benefits and their rights, no one political organization alone with a definite program can pave the way to progress and prosperity.

3.2. Educational and Religious Reforms

3.2.1. Educational Reforms

Ethiopian writers usually ascribe some of the evil practices in a modern society (smoking, youth delinquency, alcoholism) to the spread of education in the country. Despite this claim, however, none doubt the fact that proper education is the salvation of the country.

Abbe's works emphasize this need to spread education. In Alliweledin, a journalist asks the unnamed hero what is to be done in order to improve the life of the future generation. Of the twenty points that the hero lists one is:

አንድ ሰው ቢያንስ ቢያንስ ራሱንና አካባቢውን  
አንጻህም የሚኖርበትን ዓለም የሚያውቅበት  
መጠነኛ ንግድና ስራዎችን ስይኖረው አንጻይቶ  
ማድረግ : : 11

Not to deprive anyone of at least a little education which enables him to know himself, his surroundings and the world.

The largely illiterate masses of Ethiopian society can broaden their vision and rid themselves of their mental darkness only if they get at least primary education. In the absence of this, there can be no way to modernization. According to Abbe each community is to have a school with its own curriculum which includes compulsory religious education in order to guide the students in the ways of God.<sup>12</sup>

The unnamed hero of the novel further explains the kind of knowledge that the students ought to receive.

ልጆቻችን በጅ ጥበብ በሥነ ፍጥረት፣ በፍልስፍና  
በኪነ ጥበብ በርብ በሕክምና ዐቅጣቸውና  
አክሮጊቸው በቻሉ መጠን አገራዎቹ አናስተምራቸው  
ነበር ::13

To enable our children to progress as far as possible we taught them handicraft, natural science, philosophy, art, agriculture and medicine as far as their capacity and their mind allowed them.

This is an indirect criticism levelled against the prevailing system of education in Ethiopia which was too theoretical. True education — the search for knowledge-- that is offered in the ideal community of the novel is contrasted with the kind of education that shapes self-centered and vain citizens. Abbe argues that education should be used for practical purposes and for the advancement of science and technology.

The portrayal of the professor in Yeregefu Abeboch in a way decries the capacity of higher educators and researchers. Golja is a professor of Amharic at Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University). He got his Ph.D. for distorting Ethiopian history and the history of the Amharic language. Rather than doing his own research, he always echoes Western scholars. He fails students not on the basis of their academic performance but only when he finds them to be challenging him. One such victim, who used to be a student of Golja, remarks:

በታዳጊ አገሮች እነዚህ ዓይነቶች ሰዎች ለአገረ  
 ፕሮፌሰር ገልጃ] አዲስ በቀሎች ስለሆኑ ጅብ  
 በጣም ያውቀው አገር ሄዶ ቀዳ አንጥፏል፤ ይህ  
 እንደሚባለው በሌላ ጽሑፍ ሲቅነት ስም ከገብታቸውን  
 ለጣሰራጩት ይዋከራሉ / 14

In developing countries, such men [like Professor Golja] are foreign planted. As the old saying goes: 'in a country where he is not known, a hyena orders a hide to lie on', such men spread ignorance in the name of learning.

Although the author is biased against university professors, what he is trying to suggest is that no modern Ethiopia can be built in the absence of real researchers and educators. The establishment of an institute of science and technology in Melkeam Seife Nebelbal is a sound suggestion.

### 3.2.2. Religious Reforms

Fundamentally, the author does not consider religion as an obstacle to modernization. However, the clergy fall under constant attack whenever the theme of religion is raised in the novels. In his discussion of moralistic-didactic Amharic literature, Kane generalizes that "there is no work in Amharic literature, which could be considered anti-clerical"<sup>15</sup>,



Priority is given to agriculture owing to the vast and fertile land of the country.<sup>23</sup>

The author's concern with agriculture and land use is also reflected in Alliweledim. The hero-narrator of this novel loses his job in the city. With a few other friends, he goes to a remote part of the country where they create an earthly paradise out of the virgin land. The story's implication is clear -- the rich arable land of Ethiopia, if properly utilized, contributes best to her economic development.

Coffee is the main cash crop of Ethiopia -- its biggest earner of foreign exchange. In Yeregefu Abeboch, the author uses a character named Hussien to question the country's dependance on this crop. Hussien had been a teacher before he turned to become a coffee trader. Because of the fluctuating prices of coffee, he loses all his money and in desperation turns to drinking. Hussien speaks of coffee in the following manner:

አንት መጥፍ ፍረ [ቡና] አንድ አንድ ጠቃሚ ፍረ  
ታይተህ መልጫኅ ጠቃሚ ነበር:: ዓአንድ አገር  
ዋና ሀብት ተበላህ መታመንህ ገን ከገተ ተረት  
ነው አንዲያውም አንተ አያያዙ ሰላልታዎ ቀበህ  
በአገራችን ታሰቅ የሀብት መንጭ ከመሆን ይልቅ  
ታሰቅ የዲህነት መንጭና የማገበራዊ ኑሮ ጠንቅ  
ሆነህል ::24

You cursed crop [coffee]! To cultivate you like any other crop would have been beneficial. But to rely upon you as the major national wealth is a false legend. Since our people do not know how to cultivate you, you have become the main source of poverty and evil in social life, instead of being the main source of wealth.

Hussien further elaborates the evils of coffee. First of all, the ceremony of coffee drinking itself is time consuming. Since the majority of the people are addicted to it, three or more coffee ceremonies are held everyday, each ceremony taking more than one hour. Thus, the amount of labour time lost by the rural farmers is considerable. Secondly, Ethiopians who are renowned for their tough constitution, were becoming weak as a result of coffee addiction; thirdly, the coffee ceremony was turning women into gossip-mongers, resulting in breakups of marriages and divorces.<sup>25</sup> Worst of all, many farmers were abandoning the cultivation of other crops for the production of coffee only. Pointing the danger of monoculture, Hussien remarks.

ለጣንዎ አገር ቢሆን በአንድ አይነት በብል ላይ  
ወ ተጣጦን አደገኛ ነገር መሆኑን ተደጋግዎ  
ታይቷል :: 26

It has been repeatedly seen that it is ruinous for any country to rely upon a single crop.

Industrialization, electrification and land reform are the other major topics of modernization mentioned in Melkeam Seife Nebelbal. Many dams and factories are constructed under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Banks and insurance companies are nationalized. Rural land is distributed among the peasants and tenant-landlord relationship is prohibited by law.

These are vast generalizations without any scrutiny of the details involved or the difficulties that may be encountered. The author glibly scans over these issues and has been criticized for being superficial by the intelligentsia. But his effectiveness on the mass readership has been phenomenal.

## C O N C L U S I O N

Post - colonial and pro-revolutionary Ethiopian Society, as reflected in the novels of Abbe Gobegna, is a society of low morale and decadent values caused by the weaknesses of different institutions. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which was meant to give spiritual guidance to the people is a stumbling block instead. The clergy, who are supposed to be learned are in reality as ignorant as the congregation. Instead of aiding the masses, the clergy are shown to be parasitic and corrupt always demanding special favours. These unproductive apostles of the church condemn the rural population to a life of idleness and anxiety scared by excommunication. Moreover, through the excessive feasting ordered by the clergy for innumerable occasions the people are reduced to utter penury.

An ugly picture of the church is drawn by the disparity it shows in the treatment of its subjects, for example, in the different burial rites accorded to the poor and the rich. The church is also shown to be always bootlicking the ruling classes. By preaching that secular leaders are God-appointed, it turns people into docile sheep, incapable of rising up against their oppressors.

The novels also depict the miseries encountered by Ethiopians because of the corrupt administrative and legal institutions. The feudal lords and the bureaucrats always demand bribery in money, or in kind, or even in physical labour. The intricacies of the articles in the legal codes, which are incomprehensible for the unlearned majority, are manipulated by the courts as delaying tactics and for perpetrating injustices.

The effect of modern education is another aspect through which the society is portrayed. During the early post-colonial period the government encouraged students to join the newly established schools. The illiterate feudal lords at first resented this move. But upon seeing later on, respect and privilege being accorded to the educated, they arose in anger and jealousy.

Abbe's emphasis, however, lies on the misdirection of the aims of modern education. Since it was utilized for spoiling the young generation and ignoring the relevant traditional values, he had no place for it. A group of writers before him, namely, Girmachew Tekele Hawariat, Wolde Giorgis Wolde Yohannes and Blatten Geta Hiruy stress the need of modern education in Araya, Agazi and Addis Alem respectively. Western educated Ethiopians in these novels are portrayed to be the road-openers towards modernization. In Abbe's novels, however, the picture of the Ethiopian intelligentsia is in most cases deplorable. Half-baked scholars and quack doctors are viciously attacked. Lacking formal education himself but well-versed in traditional 'guine' schools, he had no sympathy for degree holders but without any grounding in the native disciplines.

The deterioration of moral standards in Ethiopian society is another major concern in Abbe's novels. Prostitution is shown to be wide spreading because of the indifference of parents in properly looking after their children. Alcoholism, cunning and cut-throat competition are also shown to gain ground daily. But the real causes for this state of affairs are not properly analysed or investigated in depth. The author is cognizant of the evils of Ethiopian feudalism but vague on socialist or capitalist set-ups. Unschooled in either system, he focuses his attention on individuals in key government posts to cure the ills of a society in transition.

A government functions under a definite social system. The activities of a government official are, therefore, governed by what the system requires. If an official acts contrary to the needs of the given socio-political system, he is doomed to dismissal or to other worse measures. Abbe's concept of modernization stresses the peaceful removal of corrupt officials from the state apparatus. This was utopian. What was needed was more than that: the hopelessly defunct regime demanded fundamental change of the whole socio-political system. Thus, although Abbe's concepts are filled with progressive ideals, we find them unscientific and contradictory.

Abbe at times seems to approve any political system as long as it serves the good of the masses. The fact is, however, that not all political systems fulfil the needs of the masses. At other times, he dreams of an ideal Ethiopia with two political parties like that of a bourgeois society. But bourgeois ideals are the very values that he so strongly attacks. Thus we understand the author's enthusiasm for change, but fail to understand what change he stands for.

The author was a cross-breed of two characters in his novels -- And Lennatu's Gebreye and Yeregefu Abeboch's Alefe. Like Tewodros' warrior, Gebreye, Abbe was a determined loyalist to king and country. Like Alefe, however, the realities of modern Ethiopian society with which he could not reconcile himself frustrated and killed him. Boldly did he fight against the corruptions of the old regime. But he was unable to come to terms with the changes that he, more than any Ethiopian author, helped to bring about.

NOTES

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- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Hough, p. 116.
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- <sup>8</sup> Rockwell, p. 3.
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- 40 Abbe, Yeregefu Abeboch, p. 119
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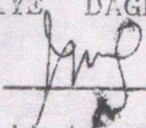
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this study is my work and that all sources of material used for the study have been acknowledged.

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