

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**GURAGIE SOCIETY'S GENDER MORALITY
AND THE CHALLENGE IT FACED FROM YEKAKIE WERDEWET**

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CHAPTER ONE

1 Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The gender morality of Guragie people and the challenge it faced from Yekakie Werdewet, (a controversial woman of early 19th century) is a topic that needs scholarly research. The Guragie society has plenty of gender morality issues that are not studied from the angle of moral philosophy. Guragie society is known as both polygamous and monogamous, polygamy is found in some part of the society and the other part of the society is known as strict monogamous. The things that forced the society to be polygamous differed in different centuries.

Guragie women are hard-working. They shoulder a lot of responsibilities both at home, in their farm lands and at market places. At home, they are responsible to take care of their children, to prepare food for all family members, and to keep the house clean. In their farmland they are responsible to prepare the false banana and at Market places they sell what they have prepared for sale (such as butter, house decorations and local drinks) and buy things which are necessary for their home. They are also responsible to buy materials for necessary kitchen services. The Guragie saying “Mesehita babena gonehita yeretebena” which is to mean A woman whose farm gives enough cultivation is comfortable than a woman who depends on the budget of her husband (CFELS, 1991: 98) shows as Guragie Women depend on their effort more than the help they get from their husbands

Guragie society is a society that has very constrictive culture to respect women’s right. The Guragie Customary Law KITCHA¹ gives women freedom of

¹ KICHA is a Guragie people’s customary law

school and celebrating their own festivals saying “Unless the girl is willing for the marriage proposal, it is strictly prohibited to marry a girl without giving her the chance to complete her high school education.... Once in a year there must be a festival which will be colorfully celebrated by mothers and also there should be one festival every year which should be celebrated by girls in different occasions”(GPSDO, 1991: 24 & 28) The society is also an owner of a culture which is unfriendly to women. The constructive culture is that the Guragie customary law has strictly opposed those men who attack women in various ways. There are also cultures in Guragie society that are unfriendly to women. One of these unfriendly cultures is that men have the right to make a divorce whenever they want after suiting their case to the local elders, whereas women have no equal right for divorce. Unless the husband is agreed on the divorce case that is suited by his wife, the women will remain with her husband until two years tolerating the pressures that he brings to her life. Sometimes the husband will marry a second wife and unless she suffered from financial cases, the women have no right to complain against the polygamous act of her husband.

The KITCHA the Guragie customary law gives more power and right to men than it does for women. This community law has a part called “Ankit” which shows once a woman is married she is under her husband. Even if she is unhappy of her husband, she has to wait for two years after she has raised a question of divorce. “If a man become incapable of administering his house, and if his wife proposed divorce case to which he refused, the woman will be obliged to stay with him for two years and the proposed divorce will take palce after two years” (GPSDO, 1991: 16) But Werdewet become free of this community law only due to her strong straggle for right.

In order to promote positive Gender morality and to fight negative moralities against women, it is interesting to show the general gender morality of Guragie society and how Yekakie Werdewet has fought against the negative gender morality that existed in her time. Due to her strong struggle to fight for her

right and for the right of her fellow women, Yekakie Werdewet had brought a great change in the value of women in her time and became a legend in Guragie Society. Even though she had a numbers of weaknesses in her life time and her feminist activities which should be critically analyzed, she has become a legend in Goragie society as a strong woman who fought for her right and for the right of her fellow women.

For those who question whether Yekakie Werdewet is a myth or a reality, history tells as she is an existing woman from Germegne² and she was in life between 1840-1899. Her father Kakie Werabo is a well-known person in Guragie society for his religious personality and his wealth. Kakie was called Damo³ Kakie. Werdewet is a name given to the daughter of Kakie, she is popularly known as Yekakie Werdewet. In his historical and folkloric novel entitled “Embita” Endulegeta Kebed have discussed the story and the feminist activities of Yekakie Werdewet and the activities of Guragie women during the time of Werdewet and now. (Endalegeta, 2006)

The starting point for the feminist struggle that had been waged by Werdewet was believed to be the ignorance of Guragie husbands for the needs of their wives and the judgments passed by the Guragie elders at her home and at any other places where the elders gather together. Werdewet was not a first wife for Agaz⁴ Furcheye, but for her he was the first. Due to her being not a first wife, she had no chance to be with her husband whenever she wanted him, and her husband used to gives the priority for his first wife. Being second or third wife, Guragie women at the time of Werdewet used to face hard time in case of divorce. When the husband suit a case for divorce his voice had weight for the elders, but women had no right to leave their husbands who used to give them

² A local village in Mehur wereda of Guragie zone.

³ Damo is a title that was given to respected men in the society.

⁴ Agaz is a title given to Guragie warriors who fought and made hostage 100 enemies. If there are two to three worriers from the same father and mother, the first who managed to kill 100 enemies is declared Agaz. The next brothers are named, Abagada, Berkefet, Esseh'iarib when they reach the level of 100. Half-brothers could also be both named Agaz if they meet the criteria.

very hard time. For Werdewet, such incidents were additional hot reasons to fight for women's right.

When Werdewet have decided to stop such oppressions against Guragie women, she began to challenge the elders considering them as they are oppressing innocent women and not giving justice to women. Then she organized women and discussed to start fighting for their right.

Werdewet's feminist movement was started with aim to give freedom to all Guragie women. The conclusion of the movement was the achievement of the freedom for herself and the smoothening of the customary law part called 'Ankit'⁵. Due to the attainment of this freedom she became a free person to separate from her husband without waiting the usual two years and to get married to the man of her own choice.

On the day that was planned for Werdewet and all Guragie Women to stand in front of the community high court 'Yejoka'⁶ to demand freedom for all Guragie women, except Werdewet, all other women did not appear before the community high court, then the elders decided that Werdewet is free of Ankit. Even though werdewet have got the chance to be treated equally with men in the line of marriage the community did not allow her to share land ownership with men and her name was declared as disobedient for the community law and for natural gods of the Guragie society.

⁵ Ankit was a tie that rope and oblige woman to stay with her husband until she could get the good will of her husband for question of divorce.

⁶ Indigenous supreme court of the Guragie society

1.2. Statement of the problem

Even though Ethiopia is ruled under a national law, the Guragie society is always loyal for its cultural laws which give fewer places (in comparison to the family code of Ethiopia) for women. Also while Werdewet was an activist of her time, she didn't get practical follower in her time and the result of this is she couldn't get the chance to be glorified in Guragie Society, Ethiopia and the rest of the world. Since Guragie society members believe as they have genuine gender morality, women of the society stay in hard circumstances during their life time.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The general Objective of this research is to give a critical analysis on the gender morality of Guragie society and to analyze the feminist activity of Yekakie Werdewet and her value for Guragie society and beyond.

The specific objectives of this research includes

- Showing how Guragie society treats women and showing the reasons why Guragie women want to join feminist activities
- Discussing and analyzing the values that Guragie women shared with Yekakie Werdewet.
- Analyze the gap between the Guragie community law and the family code of Ethiopia.
- Critically analyze Werdewet's misuse of her freedom and the question of her being Legend.

- Showing whether the Current Guragie Women find it moral to divorce from the husband whom they do not want and to marry the man of their own choice just like Werdewet.

1.4. Research Question

My research focuses on answering some specific questions which need to be answered by professional research. The specific research questions that can be the starting point of my objectives are the following:-

- How does the Guragie society treat women?
- What are the mistreatments that forced the Guragie women to join a feminist movement?
- What lessons had got the Guragie women from Yekakie Werdewet?
- Does the Guragie community law have a space to give freedom to all other women like it does for Yekakie Werdewet?
- What are the controversies between the local Guragie community law (KICHA) towards women and the family code of Ethiopia?
- Does it seem moral for a Guragie woman to marry and divorce with any man like Yekakie Werdewet had done?

1.5. Methodology of the study

This research will be based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative method I will collect the secondary data that describe the area and will analyze them and in the quantitative method I will visit some parts of Guragie Zone to collect primary data from the local residents who can give explanation about the research area.

1.6. Significance of the study

The researcher strongly believes that the conclusion and suggestion that will be given at the end of the research will have immense significance in showing the gender morality of Gurage society, how women were oppressed by men and the feminist activity that have started by Werdewet and its partial acceptance by the society elders. The research also gives suggestions that can fill the gap between the Gurage community law and Ethiopian family code focusing on women right. In addition to this, anyone will get a critical analysis on Werdewet's feminist activities and have a chance to glorify her feminist activities. The researcher also hopes as this research will be a helpful research paper for future researchers who will study further on Gurage people's gender morality and on life and feminist activity of Yekakie Werdewet.

1.7. The Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research focuses only on Gender morality of Gurage society and discusses the feminist activity of Werdewet. Financial problem, the largeness of Gurage Zone, less numbers of secondary data's and time are among major limitations of the research. Due to the largeness of the Zone, the primary resources will be collected only from Mihur, Ezza and Cheha wereda residents.

1.8. Organization of the Study

This Thesis will have four chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction and other necessary directions of the thesis. The second chapter deals with the general gender morality of Gurage society. The third chapter discusses the life history of werdewet and her feminist activity. The fourth chapter is for conclusion, reflection and critics.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Life of Guragie woman and her challenges with reference to the culture of the society

2.1. Early life of Guragie woman and her journey towards marriage

2.1.1. Early Childhood

A Guragie woman starts to face gender inferiority from the day of her birth. As soon as the new baby is identified as a baby girl the joy to be felt is not as much as that of a baby boy. If it is girl, the society declares that it is “just a baby” and if it is a boy then it is declared “a beautiful baby boy”. This kind of gender inequality is relevant in most tribes of Ethiopia because “Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position” (Haregewoin and Emebet, 2003). A baby boy gets more attention and care from his family than his sisters. During the time that secular education were harder to find in a village near by, boys have more chance to go to schools than girls. Even today the number of men students in elementary schools is more than the number of girls. The length of the time to stay on playground differs for boys and girls. Boys have more freedom than girls. Girls are always under the strict control of their families.

The load of the house works distributed to boys and girls is not the same. Boys are assigned to keep cattle on the grazing land and to collect grass from field as a hay for cattle. During the time they look after cattle, boys will get enough time to spend on playgrounds with their fellow. In their early childhood, the duty of girls at home is to fetch water, to help their mothers in keeping the house clean, in cooking meal for the household and working in the garden. Such kind of work distribution gives hard time for the girls as Simone De Beauvoir wrote

“If the girls want to struggle with the boys and fight for their rights, they are reprimanded. They are doubly envious of the activities peculiar to the boys: first because they have a spontaneous desire to display their power over the world, and, second, because they are in protest against the inferior status to which they are condemned. For one thing they suffer under the rule forbidding climbing trees and ladders and going on roofs..... The little girl to whom such exploits are forbidden and who, seated at the foot of the tree or cliff sees the triumphant boys high above her, must feel that she is, a body and soul, their inferior.” (De Beauvoir 1956 p290)

Girls carry more responsibility in attending market places. Since women supposed to visit the local markets in order to buy and sell things, girls accompany their mothers carrying some items.

In the case of being orphaned boys have more chance for being adopted from girls. Because, people who are willing to adopt children prefer to adopt boys than girls.

Sometimes boys could be awarded or given one sheep or goat to keep them for breeding and sell them when a need arises .But girls are not awarded even a single false banana plant to sell and use it for themselves. In vacation, boys have more chance to travel with their parents than girls. So girls do not have equal opportunity for enjoying their vacations.

2.1.2. Choosing life partner

A Guragie girl is not free to choose her future partner. In the modern world, girls are free to choose their future life partner and fix the time to live together. According to the Guragie culture, a girl marries a man only by the will and arrangement of her parents. Her partner is not a man of her choice.

Young Guragie men usually have the chance to propose and announce girls of their choice to their parents. If parents are happy by the choice of their son and if the chosen girl is from the right family members (In Guragie culture and custom, if the man and the girl are members of the same family line, they are not allowed to get married. (GPSDO 1991 p 27) they will send elders to the

family of the girl and request to allow their daughter to marry their son. Contrary to this, if a girl falls in love with a young man whom she wants to marry, she cannot declare her love to her parents.

Because of the mentioned cultural practices, a Guragie girl is obliged to marry to a man while she is not in love with him. The man whom she is obliged to marry may have even some physical or mental problems which may make her feel discomfort.

In some cases a girl may be given to someone while she is mentally and physically immature for marriage and the man takes her as wife in her early age. This kind of marriage takes place between the family of the young man and the family of the girl in order to strengthen their family bondage. Some families give their daughters to sons of families who have lend them large amount of money. They believe that, this act would strengthen their family relationship and bring a chance to be free from paying interest.

In rare cases girls make hidden deal with young men of their choices at school, market place, playground and festival places. Even though this initiated by girls, the request for marriage comes to the families of the girls only through the parents of the young men..

A large number of Guragie girls join new households or families being new wives for young men whom they do not know in detail. Sometimes while they are unmarried underage girls, they could be given even to a married man as a second wife. “Researches show as 41.7% of Ethiopian girls between ages 15-19 are married” (Yetenayet, 2003: 3) Girls are never asked if they want to get married or not. They can also be given as wives to divorced men or to men who have lost their first wives by death. In such cases the major disadvantages of the girls are numerous. The first wife of the man may be infertile to have children and becomes jealous of the new wife. In another case the first wife of the man might have passed away due to a chronic disease which might be a transmittable one. These practices may give the young girl a very hard time in her new house.

2.1.3. Preparation for marriage and wedding day

A Guragie girl begins her preparation for marriage and wedding starting from the day she is told that she is given to this or that man for marriage. One of the actions she is expected to take is to hide herself from her future husband and his families. This action may cost her lots of things. For the purpose of hiding herself from her future husband and his family members, she is obliged to miss attending market places, she feels shy in school and she is obliged to take very long way as an alternative to her usual way to avoid meeting her future husband and his family members. If she continues to use her usual way and frequently meets her future husband or his family members on the way, then the society considers her as an arrogant.

The wedding day can only be decided by parents of the girl and the parents of the boy. Such traditions suit to the idea of Simone De Beauvoir that: "In such circumstances the girl seems absolutely passive; she *is* married, *given* in marriage by her parents. Boys *get* married, they *take* a wife." (De Beauvoir 1956: 418) If the planned marriage is with a divorced man, then family of the girl makes the arrangement together with the divorced man who planned to marry her. The days are sometimes long enough and that help her to gain psychological readiness. The length of the time also gives her chance to collect information about the man, his family members and his situation. Such information help her to know all about her future house and to prepare herself ready to accept all the situations of her future house.

Starting from the time she is told that she is going to marry, she become shy. Due to her new feeling (shyness) she reduces her time of activity and contact with her friends and peers.

When the wedding day comes, there takes place a ceremony of cutting nails of the bride. This is different from the usual cutting of nails because, it is deep and painful for the bride. This is done to protect the groom, by making he harmless. When the bride and the groom enter their bed room to enjoy their first day, the bride may act nervously.

Starting from the day she received the information that she is going to marry, the girl makes herself busy in collecting home materials. Some can be made by

herself and others are purchased. She does this because she is expected to show herself as a girl capable of equipping her house. She also collects some salon and kitchen items from her mom and her relatives. On her wedding day she gets different house materials as gift from her husband's family members. Most of the time, Guragie girls cry bitterly when they leave their mothers and fathers home. This bitter cry comes from thinking that they do not have any more chance to be in the house where they are brought up. Once a girl is married, she leaves the house and has no right in sharing the resources of the house. Even if she is divorced, unless her parents are willing to do so, she will have no right to come back and live there. Most of the time parents are willing to give place for their daughters who are divorced. But most of the time brothers do not need this. Because, since the society gives land ownership only to men, the brothers of the divorced woman consider themselves as the owners of the land of their family. And they oppose their sisters who are divorced to come to their house.

2.2. Guragie woman and her Family life

2.2.1. Bride's relationship with her parents and the family of her husband

Once she joined a family of her husband, the new bride is expected to lead her life meekly and obediently. In her first couple of months of her life at her new home, there are different things that she enjoys; one is the care she receives from her father and mother in law. Especially her mother in law takes care of her kindly. She also gets a number of visitors with some things on hand as gift. In her new house a Guragie bride is supposed to respect all the family members of her husband. She even call little boys or girls in respective titles. If she calls a little boy who is the son of her brother in-law in a way she calls the son of her brother, then she would be blamed as if she disrespects the family members of her husband. She also joins the shared coffee ceremony with her neighbors.

A Guragie bride is expected to be the humblest woman of her village. Whenever there is a community fest to be prepared by the women in the village, the new bride is expected to come first and work harder than others. The new bride is

also expected to help her mother in law in all kinds of works, such as kitchen work, fetching water and going to market places. If the bride is taken as second wife and lives in the same village or compound with the first wife of her husband, she is supposed to respect and sometimes to help the first wife of her husband.

In her new home the bride has not only things of enjoyable nature, but also experiences of pains she usually faces two kinds of pains. The first is psychological; she misses her parents and friends. When the families of her husband act unfriendly this pain would be more serious. The second pain usually comes from her first sexual experience. Especially when she is under age and married to an older man the pain becomes serious.

Once a Guragie girl is married, she need at least three months to visit her parents and has the right to stay not more than one month with her parents. When she returns to the family of her husband, culture of the community expects her to have hand full gifts from her parents' house to be presented to her family in-law. Such kinds of cultures were very embarrassing to women who can't bring money or gifts from their parents' house. Now days the Guragie community law (KITCHA) have dismissed these laws and allowed women to visit their family and get back with empty hand. The new law stats, "A new bride who visited her parents for her first bridal visit does not carry any obligation to bring back any money or material for her mother and father in law. So she is allowed to come without any money or material in hand. Even bringing money or material is forbidden on the customary law" (GPSDO, 1991: 26)

2.2.2. Child care

Similar to other Ethiopian women who are part of other ethnic groups, Guiragie women carry the responsibility of child care. In Guragie culture, children are under the care of women. The responsibility of child care begins right from the time of early pregnancy. Due to lack of the concepts of contraceptive methods,

a fertile woman becomes pregnant without any plan to have the first or additional baby.

In different societies of the civilized world women make plan for giving birth to babies and decide the season in which they like to give birth. (Most European women prefer to give birth in summer rather than in winter). Fiona Robinson wrote:

“In income-rich countries, in the absence of accessible, affordable, universal child-care programs, many women working outside the home now purchase transnationally the reproductive labor that they no longer have time to provide” (2011: 64)

But Guragie women cannot make such plans. In case they consider to use contraceptive methods, they endanger their relationship with their husbands and their in laws. Fearing these, they give birth to babies without their plan and sometimes without their will.

Once given birth, the newly born babies need the total responsibility of their moms. Of course husbands provide the necessary materials to be used as an ingredient for food preparation.

In Guragie society men are mostly for outdoor works and women are for house and kitchen work. The house and kitchen work of women include the care they take for their children.

Guragie women face in their responsibility of child care very hard time. When the child gets ill, the husband is responsible to take the child to hospital or cultural healers or physicians. But if he does not have budget for the health care of the child, the days that the child stays with illness would be longer. This would give her hard time. If they have no cow at home, children cannot get milk and butter. This would make the immunity of children weaker and weaker. These problems Makes children to be ill now and then. The

responsibility to buy a cow is that of the husband. If he does not buy this cow the consequence would be the burden of the wife.

Not only Guragie mothers but also Guragie girls are active on child care. The girls are supposed to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. While the mother is busy at kitchen, garden and market places, the young girl in the house carries the responsibility of child care. Even If there are older brothers in the house the younger girl is the chosen one for the responsibility of child care.

2.2.3. Home management

In Guragie society the manager of the house is woman. But her house management is always dependent on the budget she gets from her husband. The House of Guragie society has five separate parts. These are a place for fire, place for domestic animals, place for meal, place to sleep and stair to collect fire woods and other materials. All the above mentioned places need the management of the woman.

The woman decorates the wall of the house using colored mud and different handmade decorations. She also hangs beautiful cultural souvenirs and dining materials. The fire place must always be clean and filled with under ash fire. Whenever the husband brings fire wood the woman is responsible to store the fire wood in proper place. The other major responsibility that Gurgie woman carries is to milk the cows every morning and keep the place of the domestic animals clean. While doing her cleaning job, a Guragie woman does not use modern materials that can protect her from hygienic problems.

In addition to cleaning, the woman is also responsible for fetching water, washing clothes of the family members and cooking meals for all family members.

In some cases a Guragie woman would fall under psychological stress, because the budget she gets from her husband and the materials she gets from their garden are not enough for the demand of their family members. Due to this

budget gap women work very hard to make kitchen and other household materials for sale in order to fill the budget gap with the money she gets from this.

Young Guragie girls are also active to help their mothers in running house management. They usually fetch water, clean the house and kitchen. They also do cooking based on their age and maturity.

For the annual Meskel festival the effort of the Guragie women is even more serious than it has been over the rest of the months. The house must be cleaned better than it was in the past. The traditional table materials should be cleaned and set as ready for use. She is supposed to have more cooking materials in her kitchen box.

In Guragie society the cleanness or the uncleanness of a house is the major point to judge whether the woman is wise, hard working or careless.

2.2.4. Domestic violence and the way to tackle it

In Guragie society women and sometimes girls are victims of domestic violence. But, it is unusual to see men as victims of domestic violence. Sometimes women are physically and psychologically attacked by their husbands without any fault. A drunken husband feels as if it is his right to beat up his wife and he does this frequently.

Women usually stop this kind of abuse only by begging their husbands to stop it and to call elders who can rebuke him to stop. Ethiopian society of population studies has made a study on the case of women beating. "The fact that, overall, only 19% of women in the study do not agree at all to wife beating for any reason (in other words 81% of women believe wife beating is acceptable for at least one reason) shows the dismal status of self-esteem that the majority of women have in the country in this regard. This shows the extent to which the socially ascribed low status of women is inculcated in them. That is to say even women themselves believe that physical violence towards them is

acceptable. Surprisingly, in the same survey, men's attitude towards wife beating is better. 48% of men in the survey do not agree to wife beating for any reason." (Ethiopian Society of population studies, 2005: 52-53)

A woman who is married to a violent husband suffers a lot. The good thing is a Guragie woman is not a victim of violence outside her house. The traditional elders always protect women not to be harassed by any man on their way. If a man is found to have attacked a woman on street or market place, he would be punished by elders and is made to pay ransom for the unlawful act he has committed. Due to this strict traditional law, men except the husbands do not attack women. But the punishment for husbands who has abused their wives is not so strong and this makes husbands to feel free to beat their wives.

Most of the time women do not take the aggressive act of their husbands to elders. Because they think that taking a family case to elders is a disgrace to the family. But husbands do not understand the tolerance of their wives.

In Guragie society girls are more victims of domestic violence than boys. They are victims in two ways. The first is drunken fathers shout on girls than they do on boys. There are many reasons for this. We can take for example girls should bring warm water to wash their fathers feet. If they are a bit late to do this they would be insulted or beaten up. The second is girls are victim psychologically. When they see their fathers beating their mothers, they feel as if their future will be the same as their mother. Due to this psychological stress they fear to get married.

2.3. The Position of Guragie woman in the society

2.3.1. Challenges on Economic freedom

In the Guragie society the major financial issues are controlled by men. Unless the man is morally good person, he does not discuss with his wife about financial issues. There are very limited conditions in which Guragie society grants financial freedom to women. Since the life of Guragie society is based on agriculture. When

this sector is affected by the environmental crisis, women become highly vulnerable to the impact. “Agriculture has shifted into two sectors: the cash-mediated masculine sector and the subsistence-oriented feminine sector.” (Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy. 2009)

The capital of the family, (the grains, trees, cattle and other domestic animals) is financially under the control of the man (husband). Whenever he wants to repair the house, he cuts down some of the trees in his compound. He uses some of the trees and graces construction of house and the rest are used for the laborers and his leisure time spending. The husband also has the right to sell some of the domestic animals for the purpose he planned and use some of the money for his leisure.

A Guragie woman also has some ways through which she makes money. The usual way of making money for Guragie women is making traditional household materials and filtering local alcohol drink (Arekie). They sell the materials in market places and the Arekie in their houses. The money that they get from this transaction is under their own control. Women spend their money to buy coffee and kitchen material.

While Guragie men use some of their income for their personal leisure time, women have no even experience of spending leisure time. They spend all their income for the purpose of their house needs.

Even in some modern Guragie family life women neither know the budget of their home nor decide on important financial issues. Some husbands give some amount of money to their wife every month for the spending of the household. In some Guragie families women get only the daily expense from their husbands. This kind of spending is a challenge to the life of many modern Guragie families.

Now a days there are constructions in different Guragie towns. Men work as workers and gain additional income. But they spend it without the consent of

their wives. On the other hand women find it hard to take part in the construction work and earn some additional money, because they have a lot of responsibilities at home.

2.3.2. Social acceptance and participation on social issues

In Guragie society, women are less accepted than men. The society gives more respect to men than to women. Important societal issues such as social legislations, land dispute cases, and conflict resolutions are taken by masculine elders of the society. Criticizing such culture Charlotte Witt writes:

“Being a man and being a woman are social positions with bifurcated social norms that cluster around the engendering function. To be a woman is to be recognized as having a body that plays one role in the engendering function; women conceive and bear. To be a man is to be recognized as having a body that plays another role in the engendering function; men beget.” (Charlotte, 2011: 40)

Women are allowed to establish a kind of self-help organizations among themselves. Usually they have a coffee ceremony every day, rotating in the neighborhood houses. During the coffee ceremony they discuss their own issues. Some of the issues are about the behavior of their children, their plan for market, if there is someone who needs their visit and help and their duty to be done at farmlands. This activity reminds us of what De Beauvoir said,

“In some circumstances women help one another, discuss their social problems, each creating for the others a kind of protecting nest; and what they do and say is genuine. For some women this warm and flavolous intimacy is dearer than the serious pomp of relations with men.” (De Beauvoir, 1956: 519)

Guragie women also make saving during their coffee ceremony. The saving is not only in cash, but also some times in kind (Butter). This kind of saving is done usually before the celebration of Meskel festival.

Whenever there is special concern in the house of one of the women, the Guragie women help each other when someone passes away, when there is spiritual festivity and wedding ceremony. Guragie women help each other by sharing work duty, money and material resources. The material contribution includes bringing coffee for the guests and donating and borrowing kitchen items.

During the time of condolence, Guragie women are very active in taking care of the guests. Responsibilities are entrusted to women who are the neighbors of the woman who has lost a family member or a relative that has lost member of relative. They take their meal to the family and eat together. They also make the rotating coffee ceremony permanent in the house of that family for a couple of some weeks.

If a conflict appears between neighboring women, the first mediation to resolve the conflict is done by the elderly women among the fellow neighbors. The respect and title of being senior is given to the women who early joined that village and to the wives of the most respected men of the village. The above women are always respected in the society. In coffee ceremony they are respected by having the first cup of coffee. When there is an issue to be discussed by the women of the village mostly the discussion is held at the place of these senior women and they are the leaders of the meeting.

A Guragie woman is honored by a title Ajyet⁷, Etet⁸ ... that gives her more respect in the society. If a woman is honored with such respectful title, she is considered to be the figure of the village and when she dies, her burial ceremony takes place in special way.

⁷ A wife of hero

⁸ A wife of king

2.3.3. Land Ownership

In Guragie society, land is under the control and the name of men. Even though women can own land in towns of Guragie zone, the land is permanently given to men and owned by men. If someone has five children and four of them are girls, his land passed to the only one boy. In contrast, if a father has five children and four of them are boys, at the end of his life the land would be distributed to his four sons. Women leave their parents' houses to join the family of their husbands, who have the rights to share the land of their fathers.

Due to the traditional and cultural law that allows land to be owned by men, some people who fail to have a baby boy from their wives may marry a second wife. In case of this the first wife who failed to have a baby boy usually does not make any effort to stop her husband from marrying another wife. If the man succeeds in having a baby boy from his second wife and the husband himself passed earlier, the first wife who is mother of only girls has the right to stay at her land. If the same woman has also passed earlier her daughters stay at the place until they get married. These girls cannot bring their husbands to this land, rather they go to their husband's land and the land ownership passes to the son of the man who is born from the second wife.

Women face very hard time when they are divorced due to different reasons. If her parents are still alive a divorced woman will return to her parent's house and stay there until she gets a second husband. If her parents are not alive the divorced woman faces the hardest time in her life, because mostly her brothers who owned the land of her parents and their wives do not give her the care she needs.

There are also cases that show as there are young men who left their birth place to big towns and abroad and girls who left the same house due to marriage. In this condition, if the parents passed away, the land will be registered by the name of the boys who are living in big towns or abroad. Even though the women are living in nearer village to the house of their parents, the

priority of land ownership right will not come to them. Due to such rules men will own the house and will bring landless peasants to farm the land and live for free. They come whenever they want and will take the fruit of the land. A Guragie woman owns land only when her husband proposes divorce after she stayed long with him and has children. The article on the customary law says:

“If husband and wife have stayed long establishing family and capital, and if the husband proposed divorce to which the wife responded negatively, the wife have the right to stay at her place owning the land and the husband can leave the house and establish a new house in another place” (GPSDO, 1991: 28)

CHAPTER THREE

3. Yekakie Werdewet and her feminist activity

3.1. Werdewet's family status

3.1.1. Early age of Werdewet

There is no any reference that shows the exact time when Werdewet was born. But traditional historians (Elders of Guragie society) have the consensus that Werdewet was born in 1840th and become activist in 1970th. Her time and the century before her time was a period when sex or gender issues were not popular. Michael Foucault described that seventeenth century was a century in which sex and gender issues were believed to be a taboo.

“The seventeenth century, then, was the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies, an age which perhaps we still have not completely left behind. Calling sex by its name thereafter becomes more difficult and more costly.” (Michael Foucault, 1978:17)

It was such time that Werdewet came up with an issue which was directly linked to sex. One of her starting points that forced her to come up with questions of sex was the polygamous practice of her husband and the scarce opportunity of having her husband whenever she wants.

To justify the time, they mention the major historical happenings that took place during her early age. Such kinds of mentioning time and period is usual in all Ethiopian elders. She was accordingly born in the last years of Emperor Tewodros and lived during the expansion time of Menilik II. In the present time there are third generations (descendants) of her father and close family member (the well-known warrior Agaz Shebeta) some of whom are living in her birth place and some others in Addis Ababa. They justify that she was really an existing person sharing their family lines.

Damo Kakie Werabo the father of Werdewet was a much respected person in his society. In his village Germegne a Gefoere⁹ is named after his name, which shows the respect that the society had for his generous actions. Also in front of the house where he used to live, there are three big stones that lie together with other two elder colleagues used as court sittings. Damo Kakie Werabo was the one who always sat in the middle.

3.2. The Legacy of Werdewet's Father

Werdewet is always called YeKakie Werdewet (Which means Werdewet is daughter of Kakie). Werdewet was born, brought up lived and died in Ethiopia, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region, located in Guragie Zone, Mehur and Aklil Wereda in a local village called Germegne. Her father Damo Kakie Werabo is Mehur Guragie and her mother Ajyet¹⁰ Amina was from Welenie Guragie, born and brought up in Muslim family. Mehur is one part of Guragie which is known for its strong culture adhering to the Orthodox Tewahido Christian religion. While living in such society with strong religious culture of orthodox Tewahido Christianity, it was surprising to see Damo Kakie werabo marrying a Muslim woman. In addition to this it is not usual for Mehur men to get married with Welenie women. According to the above facts, Damo Kakie has trans passed two traditional boundaries of the society That is marrying Muslim woman from Welenie. Because of this some people ask whether Werdewet learned the act of trespassing traditional boundary from her father.

3.2. Werdewet and Feminism

3.2.1. Werdewet's First Marriage

Since Werdewet was from the well-to do family whose financial status was secure, she had no hard time during her childhood. There were servants who

⁹ Public Venue

¹⁰ Ajyet is a title given to respected woman who is a wife of hero or generous man.

would do all house works in her parental home. But she had no chance to go to either to traditional or to modern school.

When she reached of age for marriage, she was given to Agaz Furcheye the well-known warrior from Ezha Guragie. Agaz Furcheye and Werdewet knew each other while Agaz furcheye visited Wrdewet's Father Damo Kakie to have his blessing before he left to warfront and came back with victory from warfront.

3.2.2. Werdewet's challenge towards her marital life

Werdewet was not the first wife for Agaz Furcheye. Due to two reasons, Agaz furcheye was not spending every night with Werdewet. The reasons are,

1- Since he was a well-known warrior he used to spend most of his times at war front.

2- Since she was not his only wife, after he returned from war front, Werdewet was to share her husband with other wives and had to wait for her turn to have fun with him.

For Werdewet the above reasons were not enough to miss her husband whenever she needs him. She also thought that she had to have the right to sit with her husband in order to discuss and decide about to which warfront and when should he go and when he could go to other wives and when he should stay with her. But the response from her husband was not what she wanted. She began to think that the values of her ideas were less in the mind of her husband.

3.2.3. Beginning of Werdewet's feminist activity

When she understood that her ideas which were beyond the culture of the society were not accepted by her husband (due to the deep rooted culture of the society), she decided to start fighting for her right. Her Husband advised her to stop raising questions mentioning the respect he had for her and

discussing how the society had respected women by giving annual festivals for mothers and girls.

It is true that the Guragie society have Antrosht¹¹ on which mothers receive several gifts from their children. Sons and daughters slaughter sheep, goat or ox to make the celebration of Mother's day colorful. On this day mothers stay at home and will be served by their children. The society also has another ceremonial day known as Neqwe¹². On which girls receive several gifts from their brothers and other family members and spend the day being entertained and eating in the house of a newly married bride. Even though there are such festivals which are dedicated to women Werdewet was unhappy about the gender morality of the society that obliged women to be governed by men. All these made her to start fighting for her right.

3.2.4. The Advancement of Werdewet's Feminist activity

Werdewet understood that, her lonely struggle for right would not take her as far as she wished to go. So she declared her idea to her neighboring women. She explained to them how heavy burden was loaded on Guragie women. Then she organized women and started fighting to gain their natural right. Werdewet and her fellow women tended to go beyond the cultural feminist ideas. They focused on fighting men's definition of being women rather than fighting the real oppression of women and come up with their own definition of being woman. As Linda Martin explained:

“Feminist thinkers have articulated two main responses to this situation ... The first response is to claim that feminists have the exclusive right to describe and evaluate woman. Thus cultural feminists argue that the problem of male supremacist culture is a process in which women are defined by men, that is, by a group who has a set of experiences and

¹¹ A day for annual fest of Mothers

¹² Girls Day

interests very different from that of women, as well as an evident fear and hatred of women.

The second major response has been to reject the possibility of defining woman as such at all. Feminists who take this tactic go about the business of deconstructing all concepts of woman and argue that both feminist and misogynist attempts to define woman are politically reactionary and ontologically mistaken. Replacing woman-as-housewife with woman-as-earth mother is no advance.” (Linda Martin Alcoff, 2006: 134)

In such organized struggle, Werdewet’s contribution to the struggle of women for right in Guragie society is unforgettable. Because she is the one who for the first time organized women and appeared in front of Yejoka court.

3.3. Werdewet at Yejoka

3.3.1. The steps that Werdewet followed to stand before Yejoka

All members of Guragie society believe that Yejoka is the indigenous supreme court of the society and decisions made by it are unchangeable. Gebreyesus Hailemariam describe Yejoka as follows

“Yejoka is the name of a place selected for gathering all Guragies to discuss matters of mutual concern. ... It was at Yejoka where appraisals with regard to the implementation or otherwise of orders and administrative laws were made, social behavior checked and adjusted; marriage laws, divorce cases and regulations, criminal acts accounted for and the degree of their punishments laid down; peace planes discussed and security, and so on ascertained. ... Details were also given that the then sebat bet Guragie had its own gathering place for discussing internal administrative matters and that it was only when they were too difficult to resolve that they were brought up before Yejoka.” (Gebreyesus, 1991: 35)

Werdewet planned to appear before Yejoka to gain unchangeable right for women. Before she appeared before Yejoka, she had follow three steps of elders.

1- She have started her case appearing in front of elders from her neighboring houses.

2- She appeared in front of Dessene Jefore (The courtyard on which elders of her husband's family line here a case and give decision)

3- She notified her case to the spiritual leader (Yogepecha Demam) who is a dominant member of Yejoka court.

And then finally she appeared in front of Yejoka.

During all the above steps she was appearing in front of the elders together with other fellow women who are tired of oppression and eager to obtain their freedom which can give them the chance to live a valuable life which can even add value for their husbands, their children and parents.

In following the above steps Werdewet have fulfilled the rules and regulations which give an individual a title to be named a "Feminist". In his book, Gebreyesus also described how Yejoka discuss cases of individuals and family members:

“ When private matters were brought before Yejoka after having been thoroughly examined by the respective areas, there were also certain individuals (a screening body) set up to find out and attest to the gravity of the issues and to recommend whether or not such issues were matters of general concern and whether Yejoka had to handle them. If they were rejected for failing to fulfill certain requirements, this was done with certain guidelines, but if they satisfy the requirements, discussions were opened. The procedures followed were similar to those in a court of law. If it was a private issue or accusation, claimants presented their case

orally to the public in general (in Yejoka) and defendants also heard. Then the elderly and illustrious people commented on the issue one by one giving examples or precedents either for or against, and express themselves either for or against. Because of divisions of opinions, the matter is never brought forward to majority vote. Five or more very knowledgeable persons are requested to listen to the arguments carefully. They are barred from commenting. Finally, those five or more are requested to get together a little distance from the public, and after analyzing the issue, to come up with a final decision. The verdict is announced to the public and it is without appeal. Such an ad hoc group is called Yemesseya Dane, which means ‘case reviewing and decision-making body’ (Gebreyesus. 1991; 36)

3.3.2. Werdewet’s First appearance before Yejoka

The first time Werdewet and her fellow women have appeared in front of the Yejoka court was a surprise. The surprise was for both men who were around the Yejoka and all women with Werdewet. The men were surprised to see women before Yejoka for the first time and it was surprise for the women to appear before the Yejoka for the first time in the history of that society. The elders at the court were not repulsive towards Werdewet and her fellow Women. They rather welcome them and asked them to speak their case that forced them to come to Yejoka without any fear. Werdewet thanked the elders for giving them the chance to speak before the court. Werdewet began to present the cases that brought her and fellow women to Yejoka.

3.3.3. Werdewet’s main questions

The basic questions that Werdewet put to the for the society elders who gathered at Yejoka were based on the following ideas.

1- Werdewets first question to the elders was to get the right to stand before Yejoka. Women should be given the right and opportunity to appear before

Yejoka whenever they feel they are oppressed. She even demanded that there must be a rule that allows women to be a member of the jury of all levels of court.

Because in the culture of Guragie society, women were not allowed to appear before Yejoka Elders until Werdewet did it. According to Gebreyesus Hailemariam's narration Werdewet appeared before Yejoka and presented her request saying

“We (women) are not asking either to test us in the battlefield at the initial stage. This can come eventually. All we are asking you is to give us some minimum rights, like to be free to come to Yejoka and to share our views with you concerning all problems pertaining to ‘your country’ or if we would be allowed so ‘our country’.” (Gebreyesus, 1991: 158)

In the above statement Werdewet tried to show that the “Guragie world” is men's world not women's world. That is the reason why Werdewet used the phrases ‘Your country’ and ‘our country’ While she presented her and her fellow's questions, there was no woman at Yejoka as a member of the jury and even now there is no practice of electing woman as a member of Yejoka.

2- The other pressing issue that Werdewet raised was about polygamous practice. The Society allows men to marry more than one wife (based on their financial ability). But such norm and practice need to be stopped and men have to be obliged to marry only one wife. She raised this question not because of on her religious stand, but rather she wanted to stop oppression of women and to make men take care of their wives.

3- The third concern Werdewet presented was about distribution of resource and opportunities. Since women are not included in the decision of capital and land distribution, they are always dependent on men. So to avoid such dependency the society must allow women to take part in the making of decisions concerning the distribution of land and capital.

4- If men are not restricted to stay with one wife, the society needs to revise its norm and equally allows women to simultaneously marry more than one husband. Unless such laws are made to be in place in the society, the society would keep on discriminating women and giving them less respect.

5- The society gives freedom to men to marry more than one woman provided that they have enough land and financial resources. The society should also grant the same opportunity to women in so far as they have enough land and financial means to marry more than one husband.

6- Whenever conflict arises between husband and wife, the husband usually asks his wife to leave the house that belongs to both of them. This is unfair. According to the contention of Werdewet, the society should establish a law that obliges the husband to leave the house. This question seems to have been accepted. Because on the customary law of Guragie society (KITCHA) that actively functions, there is an article that says

“If husband and wife have stayed long establishing family and capital, and if the husband proposed divorce to which the wife responded negatively, the wife have the right to stay at her place owning the land and the husband can leave the house and establish a new house in another place” (GPSDO, 1991: 28)

Contrary to the above mentioned law if a woman wants to end up her marriage with divorce, and if her husband disagree with her proposal, she has no right to divorce her husband and get remarried a second husband. Such kind of legal obligation is known as Ankit. Ankit obliges a woman not to marry a second husband unless her first husband agrees to the proposed divorce. In case she does it her first husband can go to a judge called Yeankit Dane. The Judge to who an appeal is made has the power bestowed on him by Yejoka and most of the time the power would be inherited from fore fathers. (In the society it is believed that the son of a judge has the chance to listen to the discussions being held between his father and other elders. Such kind of experience gives

the boy the chance to be expert on legal issues). The judge has the power to execute marital cases by deciding according to the law of the community. When the first husband have suited a case against his not divorced wife and the second husband, The Judge will see the case and order the second husband to make a divorce and sent back his wife to her first husband. If the second husband and the woman disobey to accept the decision of the judge, then the judge will pass the case to Yekoka court and if they disagree to divorce they will be sanctioned. Gebreyesus has written the following two sanctions to be imposed in the man and the woman:-

“1- If the man refuses to divorce and chase the woman away, he and his children are not allowed to mix with other people at any occasions; his cattle cannot mix with other people’s cattle for grazing; he is not allowed to take fire from his neighbor; if one of his children or anybody in his house dies, no one assists him on burial, etc

2- The woman who is released through such pressure is to stay without marrying for a certain period of years and she is only freed after she has carefully observed such a sanction.” (Gebreyesus, 1991: 53)

Such kind of law was unacceptable for Werdewet, because of which she presented her request to the judges at Yejoka to lift up the law of Ankit from the shoulder of all Guragie women. Since Yejoka is geographically found in the same area of Waq, (The warrior God and the sky God) people who disrespect the judgments of the judges would be considered as those who are fighting the of community and Waq¹³. William A. Shack have described this as follows:-

“Guragie make no linguistic distinction between the name of the superior court and the sacred area where it convenes, referring to both by the same term Yejoka. This linguistic and symbolic fusion of secular form with sacred space is but one indication of the close correspondence

¹³ Waq is a god for most guragies specially for Cheha Guragies

between Guragie religious ideas about supernatural punishment and law in their concept of justice. Judgments handed down at Yejoka are, therefore, believed by Guragie to be ritually sanctioned, permeated with morality, and the deliberation of the high court judge is conducted with full awareness of the ritual consequences of supernatural punishment imposed when those interested with justice misuse it.” (William A. Shack. 1996)

Even though she was loyal to the belief of the community, Werdewet was not afraid of the dominant belief of the society and it did not make her stop her fight against the society’s norm that oppressed women.

7- It is believed that Werdewet had brought a question regarding Khat to the attention of people. She insisted that elders should prohibit men from chewing Khat. The good reason for her argument comes from the fact that , she believed that men who usually chew Khat are weak in bed. So she proposed that men should be restricted not to chew Khat.

3.3.4. Challenge on Werdewet’s Question

According to the story that I have heard from Ato Tesfayie Goitie¹⁴, Werdewet had faced a challenge for her question stated in number four. She was asked “If you marry more than one husband and have time of fun with both of them in the same period, how do you know that the baby that you give birth to is fathered by this or that husband? And in whose name will be the baby called?” For Werdewet, the answer was clear, she said, “the baby can be called in the name of his/her mother. Because, mother suffers a lot to conceive and give birth to”

¹⁴ He is Head of Guragie Cultural Center

3.3.5. Was Yejoka fair court in case of Werdewet and her fellow Women?

If we see only the above chances that were given by Yejoka to Werdewet and her fellow women to appear before jury, we may think that the Guragie society had Democratic system and life. But it is necessary to consider the things which have been done at the back side of the court.

After Werdewet had presented all the requests of her and her fellow women to the elders who heard cases at Yejoka, the elders were surprised by the demand of the women. They responded that they accepted their cases with respect and need some time to discuss them deeply and decide. Then the elders gave appointment to the women and told them that they should come to Yejoka on the date of the appointment.

Accepting the request that Werdewet and her fellow women presented in public the elders advised all Guragie men to oppress their wives in order to make them stop meeting Werdewet and appearing with her before Yejoka on the day of their appointment. Some of the women were too weak to resist the advices of their men to commit themselves to the activity of Werdewet. They rather showed their loyalty to the existing Guragie culture that made men to be superior to them all. Those women who did not accept the advice of their men that and failed to stop their contact with Werdewet, were beaten by their men and silenced.

Here comes a serious question to the elders of Guragie society who used to always gather together at Yejoka. These elders were considered as the most respected people in the society. The society also believed them as elders who gave importance to the moral issues of the society and stood for the right of the society. The Guragie customary law which was developed by the members of the court also contained different articles that gave some rights to women which are not enough.

But, for anyone who examines the advice of the elders given to men of the Guragie society, it is understandable that the discrimination of women is further consolidated. It encouraged men to beat up their wives and mak them stop their contact with Werdewet. This kind of exercises undervalues the efforts that the elders exert for the welfare of the society.

Many members of Guragie society proudly speak of Yejoka as a well-organized court that promote justice in Guragie society. But it seems that this is not true. Because, the court does not at least have women as jury members. This shows that, the customary legal system of the Guragie society has no space for women who are half of the total population of the society.

3.3.6. Werdewet gained the same rights and obligations as men

On the day of the appointment, Werdewet was the only woman who appeared before Yejoka. The jury members asked her if she knew why the other women were absent. She told them that all the respected jury members knew all what happened. When she was asked whether she was still demanding the requested rights for all Guragie women, she responded that she was there to still demanding her right about the seven points mentioned above. The jury members again discussed with each other and gave her all the rights she demanded. She gained freedom to all the rights, duties and obligations that were also given to men. This victory helped to gain opportunity to participate in the political, economic and social matters just like men. She had full right to accept or to oppose, and she became free to marry or divorce. But she was also made two exceptions, rules:

- 1) She had no right to marry more than one husband at a time.
- 2) She shall not go to any warfront leading worriers.

Gebreyesus wrote that as “Yejoka has drew some rules and guidelines concerning the life of Werdewet, among which were:

- 1) In order to avoid any type of conflict, she should be the one to choose her husband but not the man who would go to her and propose.
- 2) No husband was to stand in her way when she told him that she is going to divorce him.
- 3) Her presence or absence in Yejoka should be optional.” (Gebreyesus, 1991. 59)

Such Decisions were new and surprising for the Guragie women. But the then women who demanded the above right with Werdewet but quitted the demand because of fear couldn't get the right to gain the freedom that Werdewet was able to get.

3.3.7. Controversies on the exceptions that are made on Werdewet

The two exceptions that were imposed on Werdewet had posed a controversy between one group that supported and the other group that opposed the exceptions. The group that stood in favor of the exception tried to give reason for the exceptions, “ Even though a woman is given the right to marry a man whom she loves and wants to live with, there had to be a restriction that should make her to stay with only one man at a time. This is very important particularly in case of pregnancy. Such kind of monogamy would give her the chance to easily identify the father of her new baby. Hence it helps her to be free from confusion. In case of war, it is better for a woman to stay at home for the betterment of the family in general and to take care of children in particular. If a woman would go to a war front and die there, her children would face a lot of problems. So both decisions and exceptions were right”.

The anti-exception group argued by saying “There should not be half freedom. If Werdewet was given all the rights, duties and responsibilities on equal footing with men, and if she was made free and equal as men were, she should also have the right to own land. She had to organize soldiers to fight against enemy and had to have land in her own name and even get married with more

than one husband at a time just like men of the society who would marry more than one woman at a time.”

3.3.8. Gaps Yejoka failed to fill

It seems that there is a gap to be filled by Yejoka concerning women’s right. While lifting up the law of Ankit for Werdewet, the elders failed to do the same for correcting the constitution and legal steps that were the hindrances of all other women’s right. Since there were women who came with Werdewet, Yejoka was expected to accept the women’s demand and lift up the law of Ankit for the other women too. It also seem that Yejoka didn’t give women equality in social participation. Because women are still not allowed to be members of court. Women equality on decision-making and political participation is also one of women’s right which is ignored by Yejoka. If we focus on the seven demands that Werdewet requested the society and the response from Yejoka we can clearly see as there is a gap between the questions and the response.

During our discussion on the feminist activity of Yekakie Werdewet, Ato Tesfayie Goitie¹⁵ commented that “Yekakie Werdewet had made contributed a huge contribution to the question of the gender morality of Guragie society in her time. Her first fundamental question was the appeal she made to the society to treat woman in the same way that it treats men”. Ato Tesfayie added, “Even though her requests were not accepted(Due to several sabotages that was made by men) she could be considered as a pioneer for the Guragie women. She showed that women can raise their questions and bring them before the community courts starting from family elders to Yejoka. She is the one who first appeared before Yejoka and showed others that there is possibility for women to appear before whenever is required”. Also Ato Tesfayie Goitie discussed that Yekakie Wrdewet’s questions showed that the attention of Guragie community was weak in respecting women’s right. Because of this Yekakie Werdewet is highly respected by most Guragie Women (The Eza

¹⁵ Head , Guragie cultural center

Guragie society members have no deep respect like those Cheha and Mehur Guragies. The reason of their disrespect to Werdewet was, she had divorced and humiliated her first husband, the well known Agaz Furcheye, a member of Eza Guragie) and men who were pro feminist activity.

3.4. Werdewet's Ups and Downs

3.4.1. Werdewet's Life after Freedom

After gaining her freedom Werdewet had to live her life following all her needs and listening her instinct. The first thing she did after gaining her freedom was to divorce her husband Agaz Furcheye and to stay with her family in Mehur. Then she began to collect information about the fame of Guragie heroes. She did this not to become rich in studying Guragie History rather to choose one of the heroes as a husband. Such kind of mental freedom set her to be considered as a modern woman of 21st Century who had freedom to choose the best person she wanted to marry and to propose him for marriage. Also many Guragie heroes were interested on marrying Werdewet, but due to the restrictions set by Yejoka on werdewet, that says she is the one to choose and propose her husband, the Guragie heroes had no direct chance to propose her for marriage. Then some of the Heroes of Guragie society had proposed her indirectly.

3.4.2. Werdewet's remarriages

The first man she proposed to be her husband was Eshiareb Fuga the son of the well-known Damo Gieremo. Eshiareb Fuga got Werdewet in a systematic way. When Eshiareb fuga declared that he was interested in marrying Werdewet, the well-known poet Jiere Benesye met Eshiareb Fuga and told him that he will bring Werdewet to his house. But he asked a cow with her calf in advance for the service. Eshiareb Fuga agreed with the Poet and gave him a cow with her calf. Then Jire benesye arrived at the house of Damo Kakie Werabo (Father of Werdewet) as by passer. While staying at the place of Damo

Kakie he developed interesting poems which were deliberately focused on telling the heroic and humanitarian activities of Eshiareb Fuga. After listening these interesting poems Werdewet showed her interest to meet Eshiareb Fuga and decided to live with Him. She arranged time and went to house of Eshiareb Fuga to stay with him as wife and husband. After staying for some time with Eshiareb Fuga, Werdewet left him and went to another Guragie hero Abagada Chepa. Abagada Chepa was living in a highland where Werdewet stayed as his wife. But she did not stay there long. She left Abagada Chepa and converted to Muslim to marry another man named Yeghrgray Assena.

3.4.3. Werdewet failed to use her right

Werdewet's behavior of marital life was not accepted by all Guragie women. Because, all Guragie women were expecting that Werdewet would continue her fight for the right of women till they could achieve freedom. She also had the chance to use her right in order to stand before Yejoka and to keep on demanding the freedom of equality for women in Guragie society. To organize women she had plenty of opportunities, such as mobilizing women of market places, raising hot issues on women's festival days and exchanging ideas of freedom in their coffee time.

There are some members of Guragie society who criticized Werdewet for her lack of communication system. If she had communicated the women of Guragie region after her first appearance before Yejoka, she might have organized the women in the society to follow her way of asking right. But she decided to conclude her fight for women's right on the very day she became free of Ankit.

3.4.4. Werdewet and the Thunderbolt story

The death of Werdewet is one of the incidents that made her feminist activity unpopular. She died by thunderbolt on her way to Zenabener (one of the large open markets in Guragie region). The Guragie society believed that dying by thunderbolt is a serious punishment from given by gods. The society believed that Wak punishes those persons who are not obeying the spiritual guides that the society obeys. Since Werdewet went beyond the norm of the society, most people believed that her death was is the punishment of Wak. There is a Guragigna poem that tells how thunderbolt smashed Werdewet and set her to death:

Yekakie Werdewet	Werdewet of Kakie
Zenabener titwerd	When she was going to Zenabener
Adegenam beg ^{wet}	You threw her on dust
G ^{wet} messerenam anêet	She thought the dust was a mat
Anêet messerwnam danera leather sheet	She also thought the mat was a

(Gebreyesus, 1991. 162)

Most of the time poets in the Guragie society are loyal to Wak and that is why they organized such poem in order to show the might of their gods and the punishment that inflicted on Werdewet. Other people who are the pro feminist activity of Werdewet express their suspicion about Werdewet's death. They suspected that the members of Guragie society deliberately disseminated such death news to end Werdewet's story with horrible version.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1. Conclusion, Reflection and critics

4.1. Conclusion

Guragie society strongly believes that it has a positive gender morality, that treats women in a best manner. Contrary to the above mentioned thinking of Guragie society's gender morality, feminist activists like Yekakie Werdwet have challenged the society's outlook towards women. In Guragie society, whenever someone is informed that a lady has given birth to, the first question she/he asks is, "Mer Chenechim?" the literal translation of this word is "To what has she given birth?" Many members of the society do not consider this question as simple. They raise this question not because they doubt that the lady has given birth to human being, rather they want to know whether she has given birth to a baby boy or a baby girl. This question enforces a preference to have a baby boy. As Endalegeta Kebede learned from the society during his time of preparing his novel entitled "Embita" most of the time members of the society prefer their first born baby to be girl. This preference is considered not only because the baby girl is a good fortune caller, but also because the girl is believed to help her mother in keeping houses. Otherwise the society wishes that all babies become boys. The fact that the society thinks as such, shows that this society does not have strong and constructive morality towards gender. For Example a man who is married and has failed to have a baby boy from his wife blames his wife for becoming a mother of only girls, and then starts to search for a second wife to try his best to have a baby boy. During such action the man never tries to investigate the cause behind his being a father of only girls. Even if a biological failure is on his side, he always blames his wife. At the time of child upbringing the society gives more priorities to boys than to girls. This is how Guragie society acted against the universal right of women. This short sight of the society towards women from the early beginning is one point to be criticized. Even though she was brought up in a

rich family where there were a number of peasants who would make her free from work burden, Werdewet considered herself as one of the women who were ignored by the society. During her fight for women's right, she put the demand that she had to be seen and treated equally with men.

Many members of the Guragie society think as Damo Kakie Werabo has thought Werdewet as breaking traditional boundaries is possible. Because, her father, who was known for his strong belief in Orthodox Christianity have married a Muslim woman.

At the life time of Werdewet, there was no modern education in Guragie society. And even there was no traditional education for people to read and write. Due to this fact, Werdewet had no chance of attending either modern or traditional education. But her love for wisdom was deep. Whenever a poet visited her father, she was enthusiastic to listen to the poems. Such a love for wisdom made her to think differently and to see the other part of her life. It was also because of her interest to listen to poems that Eshiareb Fuga sent the well-known Poet Jire Benesye to attract her through poem. Due to the wealth of her family, she did not face any stress of heavy job at home and at family farm land. Her father had a number of servants who were responsible for both house and field works. But the luxurious life she had did not prevent her to fight for the right of Guragie women who suffered from hard works at home and on farm lands.

Werdewet was a girl who had her own ox that her father gave to her as a present. Such kind of gift from father to daughter was not familiar in Guragie society, that gave only sheep and calf to boys as a present. So the act of her father was believed to have inspired her to think differently.

At the time of Werdewet, the idea of choosing a life partner was unthinkable for women. Women were only supposed to wait for the choice of their family and the interest of someone else on them. Even Werdewet got married to her first husband Agaz Furcheye following the interest he had in marrying her. Such

limitation of choice for life partner was one of the reasons that made her to start a fight for women's right. After gaining her freedom from the law of Ankit she began choosing her partner freely.

In marital life, Guragie women face several challenges. One of these is the polygamous practices since men are allowed to have more than one wife. There are different reasons for men to practice polygamy. One is the need that the husband has to be familiar with a tribe of his new wife. The other is the fact of having small number of children from his first wife and the third is the number of boys that he got from his first wife. Werdewet challenged this tradition because; act of polygamy did not give chance to women to spend ample time with their husbands.

On wedding day, Guragie brides leave the house of their parents with materials that are helpful to decorate their new house and run their kitchen effectively. But Werdewet had left her parents' house taking the ox she was given earlier by her father. This suggests that Werdewet had no intention to be considered as a simple house wife. The exemplary action that Werdewet took would give courage to Guragie brides and initiate them to carry their own asset to their new house.

Even though there are different challenges for new bride (such as calling all the relatives of her husband in respected way, being the first to discharge the duty that the society assigns and bringing present for her father and mother in law) in her new house from the new families, Werdewet had no story of complaint. This shows that she seriously respected the culture that order new brides to be humble and obedient to all her family in laws.

Even though Guragie society consider itself as a society that has special gender morality for giving preivilagessuch as Mother's day (Antrosht,) Girls day (Neque), fest of St. Mary in January and their equal opportunity of blessing. For Werdwet, these festivals and rituals do not have any contribution for avoiding women inequality.

While most of Guragie women remained silent and fearful to ask their polygamous husbands to fix time to stay at home, Werdewet raised the question. When she found that the answer was unsatisfactory she used to object it and this is the starting point of her feminist activity.

Werdewet did not face a strong challenge to communicate her idea of feminist activity to fellow Guragie women. She began to share her idea during the time of coffee ceremony and by organizing women beginning from her village. Werdewet is appreciated for her wise way to organize women and to appear before all Guragie juridical bodies step by step. Even though she had a question which had weight for all Guragie women, she did not mobilize her fellow women for revolution. Rather she preferred to raise questions in the society step by step until she appear before Yejoka.

To appear before Yejoka was a big step for Werdewet's feminist activity, because this was a place where a final decision is given. In appearing before Yejoka, Werdewet had shown to women that it was possible to appear before Yejoka and fight for their right.

When Werdewet and her fellow women appeared before Yejoka, Werdewet presented seven questions as demands of all Guragie women. The seven questions that Werdewet raised about getting right to appear before Yejoka. Restricting men to one wife each. Women should be allowed to be land owners. If men were not restricted to stay with one wife, then women should be allowed to have more than one husband. To allow women to own land enable them to have the right for a second husband. At the time of domestic conflict the husband should be sent out of the house and men should be prevented men from chewing Khat which is believed to reduce the sexual interest and strength of men.

Some of the above demands were challenged by the jury members. One of the challenges that were posed to Werdewet was about the complexity of having more than one husband. If a woman simultaneously has more than one

partne,r it would be difficult to identify the father of a baby she would have, and a problem would arise in giving a name to the new born baby. But Werdwet argued that the baby could be called by the name of his mother who carried him for nine months in her womb and suffered a lot of labor during the time of birth giving.

Werdewet presented the demands of all Guragie women. But the court decision was very complicated. While the demand was the demand of all Guragie women, the final decision was a decision that made only Werdewet free. The advice which was given to all Guragie men by the Jury members of Yejoka was unfair for Guragie women. In the day of the final appointment, the jury members advised all Guragie men to silence their wives and to hinder them from coming to Yejoka

Since Guragie men were free of Ankit they could marry and divorce whenever they wanted. But Guragie women had no right to divorce unless their husbands were willing to do so. On the final decision of Yejoka, Werdewet became free from Ankit and got the right to exercise freedom that men had. She became free from Ankit and able to choose her husband and to marry who ever she wand and to divorce whenever she wanted. Werdewet also gained the right to participate in social and political activities of the society. But she didn't use this chance.

After becoming free from Ankit, Werdwet got married and divorced with several husbands. Due to such actions, Werdewet become controversial.

4.2. Reflection and critics

Guragie is a society that still believes that it treats women positively in a natural way. But it is not true because the society fails to fulfill the natural right of women among which is having equal right to own land. In the society, women are still living without the right of land ownership. Starting from the time of Werdewet up until now, the Guragie society has not given a clear

answer to women's demand of land ownership. So Guragie society should treat women equally with men in the case of land ownership.

The society still believes that men have right to marry more than one wife and the elders of the society did not make any new law to restrict men to only one wife. Such practices should be abandoned because, in this time, living with more than one life partner is not only a matter of injustice but also exposes people to different deadly infections. Also such action can be considered as ignoring the demand of women. Because, women are willing to live with only one husband without sharing him with someone else.

Yejoka is still respected by members of the society. But the advice that it had given to all men of Guragie society to silence their women in any means, Yejoka should be criticized. Because, its advice is against the right of women or human rights. Since the family law of Ethiopia grants equal right to women, Yejoka also needs to have a revised family law which ensures the equality of women with men. Although the official family code gives as equal place to women as it does to men, many Guragie women prefer to go to elders rather than to court seeking solutions to the problem of their family. Because, Guragie women still respect their elders more than they do their civil administrators and officials.

When we consider the views and activities of Yekakie Werdwet, she was not given meaningful recognition from the society. Since she is a pioneer in the struggle for women's right in Guragie society, she should be remembered as a person who had made something positive and progressive for the society. The present society has a moral duty to remember her with a statue at her birth place or in one of major Guragie towns or at woman's center.

Even though Werdewet achieved the right that could be used positively for the betterment of the society's gender morality, she didn't effectively use it. Although she had the opportunity to organize women to let them get the

freedom that she got, she scored no history in organizing women after she become free for herself.

While discussing the story of Werdewet, all members of Guragie society do not raise the weak side of Werdewet for which she had to be criticized. (for example marrying different men now and then). Basically the society should appreciate the good side of Werdewet and also criticize her life style that she had had after the break of her first marriage. The popularity that she gained after achieving her freedom at Yejoka was supposed to continue further and become a legend. But now for many members of the Guragie society, Werdewet is controversial. While some members of her society label her as their hero, others insist on the bad side of her life and label her as a right abuser.

Guragie society always refers the annual and occasional festivals celebrated by women as a sign of women's freedom. The society members mention the mother's day and girls day every year and discuss that there are no such celebration in other ethnic groups. But weather other tribal groups celebrate such festivals or not, the above mentioned festivals cannot be a sign for the equality of women. Celebrating such festivals cannot answer the demand for land ownership. Celebrating such festivals cannot hinder men from the act of polygamy. So even though celebrating such festivals give good time for Guragie women, they demand more than festivals. They demand to be treated equally as men.

Werdewet had numbers of qualities to be appreciated and to be seen as model for the current women of Guragie society, standing up for one's right, organizing fellow women for good end, courage and ability to speak before fellow women and elders and wisdom to follow steps. And Guragie society will be always criticized for its unequal treatment for women.

To do all good things to people whom we need to do good things to and for us is one of the basic moral laws. This moral law is supposed to be respected both in secular and religious communities. Jesus Christ taught the golden rule to his

disciples, “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31) People who do not want to be harmed by anyone should not harm anybody. And a person who wants to gain something good from others should not stand against the good of fellow men. Women are always supposed to get the same respect that men have. But due to different reasons men consider themselves as superiors to women. Guragie society can be considered as a community that does not give the same respect to women as it does to men. To be considered as morally good society, men of a given society need to treat women as they need to be treated. While oppressing women, men should not consider themselves as members of morally good society. Since they need good treatment from their women, they also need to treat their women in appropriate moral concern.

On the preamble of the United Nations Human Right Declaration we will find a sentence that goes as:

“Every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.”(<http://www.un.org/udhr/>)

So the Human Rights Declaration of the United Nation obliges all people living in member states to respect all the rights of their fellow citizens. Since Ethiopia is the member state of the United nations, Guragie society is supposed to respect all women rights which is part of United Nations human right declaration. Article 7 of the declaration says

“All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against

any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.” (Ibid)

Since all are equal before law the customary law of the society should treat women on equal footing with men and give them equal right in the family life and land ownership. The 16th article of the declaration also gives the same right to men and women to get married and dissolve the marriage. It states “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.” (<http://www.un.org/udhr/>) So the society should rewrite its customary law which obliges women to stay at least two years for divorce.

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<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

APPENDIX

No	Name of Informants	Age	Date of Information	Place	Occupation
1	Almaz Neda	60	2015	Emdeber	Widow
2	Birhan Shikur	55	2015	Addis Ababa	House Wife
3	Endalegeta Kebede		2014/15	Addis Ababa	Author/Editor
4	Kerwet Ansa	53	2015	Daqune	House wife
5	Tesfayie Goytie	56	2015	Addis Ababa	Head, Guragie Cultural Center

