

**ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS AS  
REFLECTED IN AMHARIC PROVERBS  
AND ORAL POEMS OF WEST GOJJAM  
ZONE**



**A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL  
OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTR OF ARTS IN LITERATURE**

**BY  
YAREGAL EMRIE KEBEDE**

**JULY, 2009**

**Addis Ababa University**  
**Institute of Language Studies**  
**Department of Foreign Languages and Literature**

**Analysis of Gender Relations as Reflected in Amharic**  
**Proverbs and Oral Poems of West Gojjam Zone**

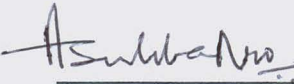
**By**  
**Yaregal Emrie**



**Approved by**

**Dr .A. Subba Rao (Professor of English)**

**Advisor**

  
**Signature** 15.06.09



**Examiner**

  
**Signature**

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my indebtedness to Dr. A.Subba Rao (Professor of English), my advisor, for the devoted guidance, help and comments he gave me at various stages, from the beginning of the writing of the proposal to the completion of the thesis.

My thanks are also due to the West Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Department, Amhara State Finance and Economic Development Bureau, Amhara State Culture and Tourism Bureau, Amhara State Women's Affairs Office as well as some *Woreda* Sport and Youth Offices for their important contribution in providing me the data and related information. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all my informants for the unreserved cooperation they provided me during the field work.

Last, but not least, my heart felt thanks go to *W/ro Azeb Yemane* and *W/t Firehiot Worku* for the practical support in the technical complexities of computer setting.



## Table of Contents

Pages

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Glossary of Amharic Terms

### **Chapter One - Introduction**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1.1. Statement of the problem.....          | 1 |
| 1.2. Objectives of the study .....          | 2 |
| 1.3. Significance of the study .....        | 2 |
| 1.4. Scope and limitation of the study..... | 3 |
| 1.5. Methodology .....                      | 4 |
| 1.5.1. Interview .....                      | 4 |
| 1.5.2. Document Analysis .....              | 5 |
| 1.6. Translation .....                      | 6 |
| 1.7. Organization.....                      | 6 |

### **Chapter Two - Review of Related Literature**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2.1. The concept of oral literature.....                           | 9  |
| 2.2. Characteristics of oral literature .....                      | 10 |
| 2.3. Functions of oral literature .....                            | 11 |
| 2.4. Proverbs .....  | 13 |
| 2.4.1. Social Functions of proverbs .....                          | 14 |
| 2.5. Folk Poetry.....  | 15 |
| 2.6. Gender Relations and Images of women .....                    | 16 |
| 2.7. Review of previous studies on gender focused oral genres...20 |    |
| 2.8. Socio- cultural background .....                              | 21 |

### **Chapter Three - Data Analysis**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 3.1. Proverbs and oral poems that show negative images of women | 25 |
|---|----|

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3.1.1. Proverbs and oral poems that discourage participation of women in leadership, decision making, and other socio-cultural spheres ..... | 25 |
| 3.1.2 Proverbs and oral poems which indicate that women are economically dependent on their husbands .....                                   | 29 |
| 3.1.3 Proverbs that belittle capabilities of women in acquiring knowledge.....   | 33 |
| 3.1.4. Proverbs that describe women as untrustworthy, adulterous and thieves .....   | 36 |
| 3.1.5. Proverbs which portray women as destructors, childish, foolish and frivolous .....  | 40 |
| 3.1.6. Proverbs and oral poems that exaggerate women's laziness, talkativeness and negligence .....  | 42 |
| 3.1.7. Proverbs and oral poems that belittle women's skill in household work and home management .....                                       | 45 |
| 3.1.8. Proverbs which consider women as subhuman beings and as beast of burden .....   | 47 |
| 3.1.9. Proverbs which describe women as intriguers, trouble makers, cruel and arrogant .....   | 50 |
| 3.1.10. Proverbs and oral poems that describe women as greedy Gluttonous, selfish .....  | 51 |
| 3.1.11. Proverbs that portray women unfit for alcoholic drinks .....   | 53 |
| 3.1.12. Proverbs and oral poems which describe women as physically weak and naturally cowards .....  | 54 |
| 3.1.13. Proverbs that generally degrade women's personality and highlight men's superiority .....  | 57 |
| 3.2. Proverbs and oral poems indicating positive images of women .....   | 58 |
| 3.2.1. Proverbs that glorify the contribution of women as housewives .....   | 58 |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.2.2. Proverbs that show women's kindness as mothers ...  | 60        |
| 3.2.3. Proverbs that depict wisdom of women .....  | 63        |
| 3.2.4. Proverbs and oral poems that appreciate women's<br>skills in housework and their excellent home<br>management ..... | 64        |
| <b>Chapter Four - Summary and conclusion .....</b>   | <b>68</b> |
| Bibliography   |           |
| Appendix 1   |           |
| Appendix 2   |           |

## **Abstract**

This study is based on analyzing gender relations as reflected in Amharic oral genres of West Gojjam zone- with special emphasis on poetry and proverbs. The study has four chapters. These are Introduction, Review of Related Literature, Analysis as well as Summary and Conclusion.

The first chapter introduces the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitations, organization, methods of data collection and analysis and translation. The second chapter discusses theoretical issues of the study. The concepts of folklore and oral literature have been discussed as background. As the study mainly revolves around oral literature, attempts have been made to clarify its characteristics and functions. Definitions and some other aspects of proverbs and oral poems have also been provided specifically.

The data collected reveal the patriarchal view of the traditional community of West Gojjam. Most of the proverbs and poems reflect superiority of men and inferiority of women. Women are subordinated in many instances.

Therefore, some aspects of gender relations and images of women have been assessed from the feminist theoretical point of view. In addition, chapter two has incorporated assessments of previous researches on gender based oral genres. The-socio cultural background of West Gojjam zone has also been discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Chapter three, deals with the analysis of the data. The proverbs and oral poems have been classified into two broad categories. The first category which is subdivided into 13 topics shows negative images of the society towards women. The second one depicts positive images of women in West Gojjam though only in a few cases.

The last chapter, which is chapter four, tries to summarize what has been done in the study. Based on the findings of the study conclusions have been drawn and some recommendations have also been made.

## A Glossary of Amharic Terms

1. Gan-----a large pitcher used in making beer.
2. Kumoker-----one who never got a husband throughout her life.
3. Akumada-----leather pouch used to contain grain.
4. Dawit-----Psalms of David adapted in book form by priests.
5. Menisheer-----a non- automatic gun which is believed to have a strong shooting power and range.
6. Teff-----Millet like cereal; its flour is used as an ingredient for *enjera*.
7. Enjera-----bread- like food (Ethiopian staple diet).
8. Natala-----a shawl- like garment made of single layer of cloth usually worn by women.
9. Harag-----a shoot of creeping plant used for tying.
10. Agelgil-----a woven basket
11. Machakal-----Name of a place in West Gojjam.
12. Waskambia-----the cover or lead of a basket or pot
13. Tishal-----who is better than
14. Tibis-----who is worse than
15. Kuna----- a utensil which is used to measure grain (usually consists of 10 kilos).
16. Kita----- A kind of bread prepared from unfermented dough
17. Elbet-----Crud- like food prepared from beans flour, especially during fasting.
18. Shiro-----sauce usually made of pea flour
19. Sanbate-----Sabbath where the people meet at church to have feasts
20. Tella-----local beer
21. Chiraro-----dry sticks

22. Kewlala-----one who is loitering about (based on context)
23. Mugid-----a cover of oven usually made of bamboo and mud
24. Dulla-----stick
25. Mala-----idea for solving a problem
26. Girma-----majesty or dignity
27. Amalmalo-----wad of raw cotton
28. .Araki-----a dry local alcoholic drink
29. Taskar-----a memorial feast for the dead relative
30. Dinbit-----a very small bird
31. Safaf-----unpurified bee wax

# **Chapter one-Introduction**

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Obviously any society has its own oral traditions that reflect its people's way of life, culture and other values of that particular society. Like any other people, the Ethiopian people in general and the Amhara people in particular, the West Gojjam community have rich oral heritage. Many research studies have been made on Amharic oral literature encompassing various areas including West Gojjam. However, studies on gender relations for academic purposes as such are rare. It is due to this fact that the present researcher wants to deal with this topic.

West Gojjam is one of those areas of Ethiopia where gender discrimination is rampant. In the rural areas the society in general is patriarchal, favoring superiority of men over women. Women are subordinated in all aspects of social, political and economic spheres. Women are victims of stereo - typed division of labor. They are made to be limited only to household activities such as fetching water, rearing children, baking, taking care of the members of the family including the husband and the like. The major socio-cultural activities are all reserved to men.

Even being confined to the house, women are highly criticized by the society in various respects. They are blamed almost for every flaw created in the community. The society's negative and positive attitudes towards women are reflected in West Gojjam oral literature. This study examines and analyzes Amharic proverbs and oral poems which focus on gender issues either praising or ridiculing women. Further it investigates whether there is a balance between these two contradictory attitudes towards women which are negative and positive respectively.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

This research has the general objective of assessing the role of oral literature to determine gender relations among the West Gojjam people. It has also the following specific objectives:

- A. To find out the importance of culture in determining the role of gender in the society,
- B. To explore the images of women in relation to men as reflected in the oral heritages of the community,
- C. To investigate negative and positive effects of the oral heritages in relation to gender issues, and

## **1.3 Significance of the study**

In the present context of empowerment of women in modern Ethiopia, a research study on image of women will throw light on how gender balance can be achieved and how oral literature can be used as the foundation for bringing an attitudinal change in the community. For instance, the positive images of women can be highlighted in the government programs of women empowerment. Similarly, the negative images may also be highlighted to expose patriarchy.

Conducting research on gender issues in relation to oral heritages of a certain community in countries like Ethiopia, where the oral traditions reflect the true images of that community, will be of a great help for higher educational institutions like Addis Ababa University. This is because; they will be able to use the research findings to enrich their research centers.

Above all, the research is expected to benefit the West Gojjam community in particular due to the fact that its findings will contribute

their part in creating vivid images of the socio- cultural panorama of that area.

In fact, future researchers on related topics can also use the findings of this research as a spring board for further investigation.

#### **1.4 Scope and Limitation of the study**

This study has been conducted in all districts or Woredas of West Gojjam zone which consists of 15 Woredas. These are Yilmana Densa, Mecha, South Achefer, North Achefer, Womberima, Bure, Dembecha, Finoteselam, Jabitanan, Daga Damot, Quarit, Sekela, Gonji Kolela, Bahir Dar area and Bahir Dar town. Bahir Dar has been the central area of the study.

West Gojjam is also one of those areas of the country that are rich in oral literary genres. To cover all the genres is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the present researcher has dealt with proverbs and oral poems that are related to gender relations.

The present researcher was planning to find many informants in each district of the zone. Also it was his plan to make observation of some occasions like wedding and mourning ceremonies, various feasts, celebrations, and the like and recorded narratives in actual setting. However, financial and time constraints made it not possible for him to accomplish such type of tasks. Therefore, he has limited himself in reviewing some documents and consulting a few informants in some Woredas. Fortunately, the data collected are representative enough



## **1.5 Methodology**

For the purpose of this research, different books, senior essays, theses and seminar papers have been surveyed. This helped the researcher to get research experience and understand the concept of oral literature including its roles in depicting gender relations.

The next step was the collection of proverbs and oral poems told in West Gojjam zone. The data were collected from primary as well as secondary sources. As many as 125 proverbs and some oral poems that describe gender relations have been collected. Out of these 88 proverbs and 20 Oral poems have been classified. The classification is divided into two broad categories using thematic methods of classification. The first group portrays negative images of women. Most proverbs fall under this category. The second group deals with positive images of women. A considerable number of proverbs and oral poems have been used in this section also.

The two broad categories are again divided into sub-categories each comprising some oral traditions which reflect the conceptions the patriarchal society and have been analyzed. On the whole the analysis is descriptive in nature.

The techniques which were employed to collect the data were interviews and document analysis.

### **1.5.1. Interview**

The task of searching informants was held by getting information from some government organizations. The West Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Department, and some Woreda Sport and Youth Offices helped

the present researcher much to inform and/or introduce some known people in the study area.

After several discussions with concerned experts of these offices, the researcher has selected some informants considered to be suitable for interviews. The interview included civil servants, retired officers, ex-soldiers, and peasants. This technique helped the researcher to interact with people face to face and to exchange ideas. Ten people have been interviewed. Almost all the informants were experienced in narrating different oral genres including proverbs and oral poems.

The contributions of the informants range from providing the data to describing the contexts where and when these oral traditions are told. All the information was collected by taking notes.

### **1.5.2. Document Analysis**

More than seventy percent of the data for this research were obtained from documents. The researcher has visited Culture, Tourism, Information, Women's Affairs, Education Departments and other offices from woreda to region in order to assess documents. The following documents have been used as main sources to collect the poems and proverbs analyzed in this research.

1. *Makraze*-a magazine published by Amhara State Youth, Culture and Sport Affairs Bureau.
2. *Women's Vision*-a magazine published by Amhara State Women Lawyers Association
3. *Tigat*- a magazine published by Amhara State Education Bureau.
4. *Gender*-a magazine published by West Gojjam zone Women's Affairs Office.
5. *Mahidere-Timihirt*- a magazine published by Amhara State Education Bureau.

6. *Oral Literature on Women*-a collection of proverbs and oral poems by Jabitananen woreda Youth, Culture and Sport Office.
7. *Statistical Abstract*-a magazine published by West Gojjam zone Finance and Economic Development Department

### **1.6. Translation**

All the original data collected in Amharic were translated into English. Although the English version may not have the flavor it has in Amharic because of cultural differences, utmost efforts have been made to translate the oral traditions without missing the meaning of the originals.

Paraphrases and expressions in English are used as means of minimizing some difficulties. Expository notes are also given for some concepts and words that do not have equivalents in English.

### **1.7. Organization**

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. It consists of the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study as well as methods of data collection and analysis.

Chapter two is a review of the related literature. Some concepts of folklore, oral literature, gender relations and images of women are some of the issues discussed in this section. The socio-cultural images West Gojjam zone have also been reviewed here.

Chapter three presents the analysis of selected gender based oral poems and proverbs. The last chapter gives summary, conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Related literature

Before discussing oral literature, it is appropriate to understand folklore owing to the fact that oral literature is one component of folklore.

Fekade (1999:6) argues that folklore as a concept is a controversial issue that needs the provision of appropriate definition. The controversy, according to him, lies in the fact that folklorists have not yet reached an agreement concerning its meaning. This shows that different but related definitions have been given by different scholars to folklore.

The purpose of this research, however, is not to provide an appropriate definition; nor is it to consider the various definitions. Doing so, will be beyond the scope of the research. Rather an attempt will be made to refer to some common features regarding the concept of folklore.

In their book, Folkloristics: an Introduction, Robert, A Georges and Michael Owen Jones argue that the word 'folklore' refers to some expressive forms that human beings consider as traditional and learn, teach, utilize or display as a customary practice during face to face interactions. They believe that folklore revolves around "something traditional because the expressive forms are based on known precedents or models as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space, human knowledge, thought beliefs and feelings" (1995:1).

In this regard, Beniam (2005:22) quoted the UNESCO Declaration which gives a general glimpse about folklore. It says.

*Folklore is the totality of traditional based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group of individuals and recognized as reflecting the expressions of a community so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity its standards and values are transmitted orally by imitation or by other means. Its forms are among others, language, literature, music, dance, mythology, rituals, customs, handicraft, architecture and their arts.*

From the above definitions one can learn that the study of folklore deals with antiquities. It seems that the term refers to the study of traditional-based human knowledge transmitted from generation to generation by oral medium.

Richard M. Dorson also argues that studying folklore is a disciplinary sub-field. That means, it is not an independent field. Rather it comprises other fields in it such as literature, anthropology, history, linguistics, geography, musicology, sociology, psychology and the like. Because of this, he believes that the folklorist needs to have “sufficient familiarity” with such subjects. The implication, according to him, is that the folklorist who has a good knowledge of literature can investigate the literary use of folklore, and one who has knowledge of anthropology can easily explore the relationships of folklore and culture. Similarly familiarity with history enables one to comprehend the historical validity of oral traditions. Therefore, Dorson concludes that the folklorists should have ample knowledge in their respective fields of study in order to be successful (1972:6)

According to Dorson, in recent years, there appeared another term, folk life, which includes, “the whole panorama of traditional culture including oral folklore” different from folklore which mainly deals with

traditional arts and crafts. He says that folk life is more comprehensive than folklore. In his opinion, the areas that a study of folklore and folk life studies concentrate are classified into four broad genres. These are oral literature, material culture, folk custom and performing folk arts (1972:7).

The present researcher, however, does not find it necessary to explain each of these categories of folklore because his focus is only on oral literature as it has direct relevance to the objectives of the present research.



## **2.1. The Concept of Oral Literature**

Dorson (1972:2) observes that oral literature, which is sometimes referred to as verbal art or expressive literature, is one of the fields of folklore and folk life studies. He explains that, under this category, we find various forms of traditional utterances. Concerning the forms that folk literature includes and their mode of transmission, Melakneh explains in the following way:

*(Folk Literature is) the verbal heritage of mankind transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth. In other words, it refers to folk speech (local and regional forms of phrases that deviate from formal language used in education, court proceedings, mass media and public administration) plus verbal arts, expressive literature voiced forms of traditional literature such as folk narratives, songs, folk poetry, war chants, proverbs, riddles, legends and creation myths (2005:12)*  
(First bracket supplied).

Fekade (1999) also shares these ideas on oral literature. He discloses that the spoken form comprises folktales, proverbs, jokes, and the like. In contrast, the sung form consists of wedding, funeral as well as other

similar songs. He also explains that, because oral literature is one aspect of folklore, it helps to understand the beliefs, philosophy, experience, likes and dislikes and the people's out look on life in general.

Any society has its own oral heritage. In this regard, Okpewho (1992:120) states that Africa is one of those continents which possess rich oral traditions which reflect its history, ways of life, culture and other values. He further states that, although Africa has enormous oral traditions, they are not properly studied. Ethiopia is not different in this respect. As a country that has ethnic and linguistic diversity, it is obviously endowed with oral traditions that reflect the values of its nations, nationalities and peoples. However, research studies on this area are scarce.

## **2.2 Characteristics of Oral Literature**

In her book, Oral Literature in Africa, Finnegan discloses that oral literature has some peculiar characteristics unlike those of written literature. One of these distinguishing features is its performance, which is non-verbal and involves all parts of the body on the part of the artist. In this regard, she writes:

*Oral literature by definition is dependent on a performer who formulates it in word on a specific occasion. There is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product. Without its oral realization and direct rendition by a singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all (1970:1).*

It seems that the significance of performance exceeds a simple definition of the term 'oral literature' due to the fact that performance

by nature has important contributions to preserve a particular literary work. Such a point, according to Finnegan, becomes obvious if a literary form is designed to be displayed for a certain audience. She emphasizes this fact and says "if we take forms like a play, a sermon, poetry, even something as trivial as an after dinner anecdote, in all these cases the actual delivery is a significant aspect of the whole". She believes that these situations prevail in written forms also but they best achieve their real goal while performed (Ibid: 3-4).

Another significance of performance, according to Finnegan, is the oral artist's face to face interaction with the audience. She argues that the artist can take great advantages to enhance the impact as oral transmission is employed in a more visible manner by the speaker's gesture, expressions and the like (Ibid:5).

Still another important factor that Finnegan points out is the participation of the audience which is not the case in written literature. The idea is that the artist can perceive his listener's reaction. As there is face to face confrontation, the artist can involve his listeners as, for instance, in story telling situations. Normally the narrator opens with set formulas that arouse the attention of the audience. He/she also expects the audience to actively participate in the narration, for example by joining in the chorus of the songs with which he/she introduces the narratives. The author further explains that the presence and/or reaction of the audience can, in one way or the other, affect the actual literary production (1970: 6.)

### **2.3. Functions of Oral Literature**

In **Understanding oral literature**, Chesaine observes that oral literature is the heart of people's way of life. This is because oral traditions are the best ways of reflecting the culture of a certain

community in a natural manner. He also states that oral tradition serves to preserve values of the people and to express the world view of the society concerned. He further argues that oral literature is considered as a foundation on which the cultural development of a certain community stands. In this regard, he quoted another folklorist, Okot P' Bitek, who stated that oral literature consists of and expresses the political, social and moral philosophies of the people, their out look on life and death (1994:841).

In fact, we can observe many functions of oral literature in Melkneh's Map of African Literature. It is stated as follows:

*Among other things, it (oral literature) has been used as a means of preserving traditional wisdom, recording history, social harmonization and sharpening of wits for ages as it flourishes in pre-literate societies. It also serves an etiological/explanatory function, which has to do with the genesis of natural and social phenomena that entails a moral sanction. Its pedagogical function thus aims at inculcating established norms and codes of behavior in the younger generation as part of the social harmonization process. Moreover, it has been exploited as a rich source of written literature .....it is also a means of soliciting or reflecting public opinions (2005:12) (Bracket supplied).*

Finnegan (1970) also points out another important function of oral literature. That is its escapist role. She underscores that in our day to day life, we may encounter various inconveniences. Therefore, to escape from such harsh realities and to be released from the resulting tension, people use different forms of oral literature such as proverbs, riddles, jokes, stories, folktales and the like. The present researcher has tried to show the roles of proverbs and oral poems in this respect.

## 2.4. Proverbs

Many interpretations have been given concerning the nature of proverbs. In **Folklore and Folk life**, Roger D. Abraham defines a proverb as “one of the most easily observed and collected genres of traditional expression, yet one of the least understood.” This misunderstanding, according to him, is due to the fact that proverbs are very familiar to us. The implication is that we usually give attention to something unusual (1972:117).

However, it seems that a proverb does not have a universally accepted definition. That is why, Miruka (1994:36-37) in **Understanding Oral Literature**, has put various definitions. Although the objective of this thesis is not to discuss the nature of proverbs, it is useful to see some of the definitions and try to draw some common features. These are given bellow.

- ❖ *A proverb is a short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson, a by word, a saying that requires explanation (Chambers Twentieth Century English Dictionary).*
- ❖ *A proverb is a short well-known saying usually in popular language (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).*
- ❖ *A proverb is a short saying of wisdom in general usage (Akivaa and Odaga, 1982).*

Finnegan (1977) also has the same idea concerning the conception of a proverb. Her definition is "a proverb is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and distinguished by popular acceptance of truth tersely expressed in it".

A careful observation of the above definitions of a proverb reveals some common characteristics in them. Shortness, brevity, compactness, fixedness and lucidity are the prominent features. The word 'saying'

also appears frequently in the definitions. Therefore, one can deduce that proverbs are short sayings capable of expressing truth, wisdom and similar other popularly accepted facts or ideas.

#### **2.4.1 Social Functions of Proverbs**

Miruka explains that proverbs have some basic social functions; one of them is aesthetic function. In this respect, he quotes Chinua Achebe's observation, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." This expression indicates that proverbs have the power to add flavor to language. He further explains that proverbs play a facilitating role in speech, writing and other forms of verbal communication (1994:37).

Another important function of a proverb according to Miruka is its use to reflect the wisdom of a certain society. The happy or unhappy experience of a certain community can be reflected by its proverbs. He has also discussed the normative functions of proverbs. By this he meant that proverbs are used as "vehicle of society's perceptions through warning, cautioning, satire, advice, counsel, invective, encouragement or any of those roles for which proverbs are claimed"(Ibid: 47-8).

These functions of proverbs are used in our day-to-day communication. As people's attitudes and thoughts are better reflected in oral genres than written forms, the role of proverbs in pointing out the cultural, social, political and economic relations of a certain community is really significant. This also includes the attitude of the society towards gender relations. Literature, whether it is written or oral has the capacity to reflect the images of men and women in a given community. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that gender-based proverbs and oral poems are likely to serve as vehicle of reflecting the attitudes and stereotypes of women in the West Gojjam community.

## **2.5. Folk Poetry**

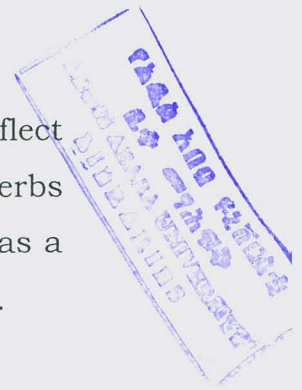
Poetry is one of the most popular literary forms found everywhere and practiced almost by everybody whether literate or illiterate. Fekade (1999:84) defines poetry as oral narrative whose composition, performance, transmission, and preservations handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and expressed through music, dirge, lamentation, and other sung forms.

Finnegan (1977:8) also maintains that oral poetry can be described as poetry composed in oral performance usually by people who cannot read and write. In this case, it is synonymous with traditional and folk poetry by which the traditional community can express its various values.

With regard to its characteristics, Richmond (1972:79) points out that oral poetry is not easily recognizable unlike other genres. He believes that one can identify a novel or a written poem by looking at its appearance. Folk poetry, however, is different from other genres not only in terms of form but also in terms of its manner of transmission. It is transmitted from elders to the young generation by word of mouth and changes over time.

According to Finnegan, oral poems cannot be considered and studied as literature proper. Rather, they are considered as part of traditional and popular culture. However, she argues that the study of oral poetry cannot be viewed independently. That means, it falls within the study of literature and is taken as part of it. She even argues that often there is no clear-cut demarcation between oral and written literature. According to her, one who tries to distinguish between the two will encounter persistent overlaps (1977:2-3).

Oral poetry, like other literary forms has the capacity to reflect indigenous conceptions of a given society. Accordingly, the proverbs and oral poems used in this research work are supposed to serve as a firm ground of exploring people's attitudes towards gender relations.



## **2.6 Gender Relations and Images of Women**

Gender relations refer to the social ways in which men and women relate to each other. They describe what is considered appropriate behavior or activity for men and women. Gender relations are important in all aspects of social activities including access to resources for production, rewards, or remuneration for work, distribution of goods and income, exercise of authority or power, participation in cultural and religious activities and the like( Aster 2004:ix).

Concerning the concept of gender, Stergard argues that the term should not be confused with sex. That means, it does not refer to biological differences between men and women. Rather it is a social creation. He believes that the expectations of masculinity and femininity vary in accordance with culture. In this connection, he writes:

*Gender refers to quantitative and independent character of women's and men's position in a society. Gender relations are considered in terms of relations of power and dominance that structure the life challenges of women. Thus, gender relations are considered not fixed biology but constitute an aspect of wider social division of labor, and this in turn, is rooted in the conditions of production and reinforced by the cultural, religious, and ideological systems prevailing in a society(1996:6).*

From the passage above, one can learn that it is the culture of the society that shapes men's and women's gender. If so, it will be appropriate to show the relationship between gender and culture including their definitions. The Ethiopian Cultural policy has accepted the agreement reached by the General Assembly of the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of 1982 concerning the definition of culture. Accordingly, the policy defines culture as "a concept which incorporates all intellectual, ethical, physical, technical, and other activities that characterize human kind as a rational being." The policy further states that culture consists of the mode of life, beliefs, traditions, and the whole set of material and spiritual wealth of a certain society as distinct from others (1997:20).

Culture, which includes literature, plays a crucial role in determining the status of gender in a society. That means, the gender of an individual is not dependent on whether he/she is male or female. It is the culture of a certain community that shapes the gender of the people within it. In this regard, Almaz states "the socially learned patterns of behavior that differentiate men from women in a given society are referred to as one's gender role. Gender is then, the learned behavior usually related to one's sex, but sex status does not necessarily determine gender role" (1991:2).

By 'gender role' Almaz is referring to the socially constructed functions assumed to fit men and women to do something. This assumption, according to her, has obviously brought about a universal status of female subordination in terms of power and access to different resources. Concerning gender roles, Almaz further elaborates that the issue takes into consideration the division of labor by gender to delineate activities and the length of and/or amount of time spent by individuals to perform their tasks(ibid:3).

If we compare the length of working hours and the amount of time spent and done by men and women, obviously women work longer hours than men. This is because in developing countries like Ethiopia, domestic duties such as fetching water, cooking, raising children, taking care of households, collecting fire wood, and the like are considered to be women's day- to-day duties. Men are exempted from such type of tasks which are not only time taking but also laborious and routine. This reveals that men engage themselves in prestigious activities.

This, according to Genet, does not mean that women are not involved in productive work. Specially in rural areas, Ethiopian women involve in weeding, applying manure, processing food, taking care of cattle and the like(1991:89). In fact in addition to the customary practices such as those mentioned above, women play significant roles in various social, political, and economic spheres. Nevertheless, almost in all societies women are fewer beneficiaries than men. This is because in the phallo-centric patriarchal history, it is believed that women are inferior to men. It is to confront such type of unbalanced situations of women and to change the attitude of patriarchal society that the feminist movement emerged.

In his supplementary material for the course, Literature and Language Teaching, Rao (2008:41) defines feminism as "a socio cultural movement appeared as a result of the injustice perpetrated on women by patriarchal society". He argues that "women are entirely considered to be inferior to men and suppressed for centuries in the history of human society". Feminists believe that our culture is patriarchal which favors men's superiority over women. In this respect Biniam quoted Kate Millet: "--our society like all other historical civilizations is a

patriarchy." As a result, men take prestigious positions and dominant roles in the society. This in turn, leads women frequently unable to participate in socio-cultural activities fully (2005:17).

The primary motive of feminist criticism, therefore, is to expose the social, economic and political imbalances created between men and women. According to Cuddon, feminist criticism attacks male notions of values in literature by challenging traditional male ideas about the nature of women and how women generally respond to life (1992:338). Jefferson and Robey (1982:201) strengthen this assertion by saying;" Feminist criticism and theory must in some way be relevant to the study of the socially institutional and personal power relations between the sexes."

Although discussing feminist literary criticism is indispensable to understand the representation of women in literature, presenting a full analysis of the movement will be beyond the scope of this thesis. Also the present researcher believes that it is not written literature that plays a significant role in revealing the socio- economic and cultural images of women in-non literate societies like West Gojjam where oral genres like proverbs and poetry are the real vehicles to express people's feelings. As a social phenomenon, gender relations can also be reflected by such oral literary forms in any society.

The indigenous communities of West Gojjam, especially those who dwell in the countryside are entirely non-literate. Therefore, the findings of this research are supposed to reflect the actual views of that society concerning gender issues.

## **2.7 Review of Previous Studies on Gender Focused Oral Genres**

A number of B.A Senior Essays and M.A theses have been written on oral genres including poetry and proverbs. Most of them raise the social, cultural and historical issues in their respective local settings. The present researcher, however, could find only a few studies on gender relations as reflected in oral traditions such as proverbs and poetry.

Biniam Yakob's MA thesis, under the title, **Analysis of some Gender Based Kembatta Proverbs,** is one of these works. Biniam has collected fifty- nine gender-based proverbs. He has categorized fifty of these proverbs into eleven sub- sections or headings, out of which one category (comprising six proverbs), show positive images of women. The remaining reflect negative attitudes of the society towards women. Biniam's study is similar to this study in that its concern is gender relations. But the type of proverbs, classifications, analysis and the social settings in which the data are collected are different.

Another study on similar issue is Nuria Ibrahim's B.A Senior Essay in Amharic entitled, **Proverbs with a focus on Arsi Oromo Women.** The entire focus of Nuria's Senior Essay is on how the Oromo culture and the Islam ignore women's prestige by limiting their roles to domestic activities such as raising children, cooking and fetching water.

Another research paper on women's issue is Tadesse Eshte's B.A Senior Essay in Amharic under the title, **Proverbs Reflecting Women's Inferiority.** Tadesse has collected as many as 170 Amharic proverbs. Some of the proverbs are similar to the collection of the present research. However, Tadesse has tried to analyze his collection

classifying them only into five categories. As a result, his analysis is not only too general but sometimes unrelated proverbs are also listed under a single category.

The present research is different from Tadesse's study in several respects. First of all, much more effort has been made for the classification to be as specific as possible. Only relevant proverbs and poems have been categorized together. Moreover, the present thesis tries to analyze gender relations using both proverbs and oral poems. The idea of the category of proverbs in the analysis is strengthened by the analysis of oral poems having related messages. That means, the two oral genres have been presented in an integrated manner to show their common focus.

Another important difference between the above-mentioned studies and the present one is the treatment of a considerable number of proverbs and oral poems which enhance positive images of women. The oral traditions that glorify positive images of women demonstrate that the society not only undermines women but also recognizes their positive role in some instances

## **2.8. Socio- Cultural Background**

The fundamental reason for the present researcher to choose West Gojjam zone as a setting for this study is nothing but familiarity with various aspects of the society. He was born around Bahir Dar, grew up and educated up to grade 12 there. As a civil servant also he worked in some *woredas* and in Bahir Dar town. Due to these reasons, he, more or less knows the culture of the community.

It should, in advance, be noted that the purpose of this sub-section is not to explain the history and development of West Gojjam Zone in a detailed way. The immediate concern is to describe its present status briefly. According to the statistical abstract of the West Gojjam Zone Finance and Economic Development Department, the zone is situated in the North Western part of Ethiopia. West Gojjam is one the eleven zones of Amhara state. Its boundaries are North Gondar and South Gondar zones to the North; East Gojjam zone and Oromia Region to the South as well as East Gojjam and Awi zones to the West.

The abstract shows that West Gojjam has an area of 13317.28 square kilometers with a population of 2,639,946, of whom, 1,327,235 are male and 1,213,711 are female. As mentioned under the scope and limitations in chapter one, West Gojjam zone is established comprising 15 *woradas*.

The abstract further explains that the temperature of the zone ranges from Dega (cold climate) Woyna Daga (temperate) and Kola (hot climate) (2008:2-5).

In terms of religion, there are two officially known religions. These are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. But nowadays it is common to see Protestant Christian Churches also in district capitals.

Amharic is the only language spoken in the zone. According to Yihenew, Negede Woyto is said to be the only ethnic group found in West Gojjam. This minority group resides in and around Bahir Dar town. In terms of religion, they are followers of Islam. Yihenew further states that members of this community eat meat of some aquatic animals such as crocodiles which the rest of the community consider impure or vicious. Because of this they are outcast from the community. Although

members of the Woyto community are famous for their hard working capacity, they are poor (1996:39).

Occupation-wise, the majority of west Gojjam people are engaged in farming. Most farmers raise cattle, sheep, goats, and keep traditional beehives to produce honey in order to supplement their income. There are also some farmers who possess grain mills and even transport vehicles in addition to their farms.

Like any other people of the country, the West Gojjam people lead their social life in a communal way of living. Usually close relatives (families) live in groups, building their huts close to one another. Nowadays the living standard of the people has changed and huts are being replaced by houses roofed with corrugated sheets of iron. This is encouraging indeed. The people, especially in the countryside have various occasions in which they come together.

Some of these include wedding and mourning ceremonies, Senbete (or Sabbath) the people meet at church compound or sometimes in villages to feast on Sundays. Teskar (memorial feast for the dead relatives) is celebrated on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup>, day and also every year). Mahiber (feast association) is another occasion on which members of the association prepare the feast turn by turn to praise their Saints keeping patron Saint Days every month.

The above occasions are practiced by the Orthodox Christians. The Muslim community also has few occasions where they gather together. These include coffee ceremonies, chewing chat, and wedding.

On all these and numerous other occasions, people employ chatting, conversations, discussions, and the like on various issues. It is on such

type of occasions that the people exhaustively use oral traditions as a means of ornamenting their conversation and to strengthen their arguments. Oral genres are also used by farmers while they are performing communal work. Like other oral genres, proverbs and oral poems are widely used by this traditional community to express the socio- cultural conditions that include gender issues.

## Chapter Three

### Data Analysis

In this chapter proverbs and oral poems which reflect patriarchal views have been analyzed. The oral traditions are classified into two broad categories indicating negative and positive images of the West Gojjam community towards women respectively. The two broad groups are also divided into sub-sections each consisting of some proverbs and oral poems and analyzed in descriptive terms as follows:

#### **3.1. Proverbs and Oral Poems that show negative images of women**

##### **3.1.1. Proverbs and oral poems that discourage participation of women in leadership, decision making and other major socio-cultural spheres.**

Tyson (1999:83) explains that in a male dominant society, the decision making role is left to men. They make all major socio-cultural affairs. But women are expected to abide by the decisions set by men. The following gender-based proverbs exemplify this fact.

1. ሴት የገዛው አገር በግ የጋጠው ደንበር።

A country ruled by women is the same as the border grass grazed by sheep.

2. የሴት አስተዳዳሪ የጦጣ አስታራቂ የሰውም።

There is no a woman administrator as there is no arbitrator for an ape.

3. ሴት በማጅት ወንድ በችሎት።

A woman is to a larder as a man is to a court.

4. የሴት ስጅ መብቷ ማጅቷ።

The right of a woman is her larder.

5. ሴት ምን ብታውቅ በወንድ ያልቅ።  
No matter how knowledgeable a woman is, it is only a man who could bring a wise finishing.
6. ሴት የመጀመሪያዋ እንጂ የመጨረሻዋ አያምርም። It is only the first impression of a woman that sounds good, but the last one is bad
7. የሴት ብልህነት የጋን ማብራት።  
A woman's wisdom is like a *gan* light.
8. የሴት መላ እንደ ብርጫቅ ተሰባሪ ነው።  
The method of a woman is brittle like a glass.
9. ወንድ ቢል በዕለቱ ሴት ብትል ባመቱ።  
Whatever men decide is implemented immediately but that of women may last a year to be practical.

The above proverbs belittle women and indirectly prohibit them from taking part in social, political and economic spheres of the traditional community. Women are portrayed to be limited only to domestic activities and they cannot make decisions however knowledgeable they might be.

Proverb number 5 is a good example for this assertion. Even if a woman is believed to have knowledge which can benefit the society, she is ignored merely due to her gender. Nobody in the community gives attention to the opinion of women. Proverb number 9 also shares this idea.

**Whatever men decide is implemented immediately but that of women may last at least a year to be practical (9).**

This proverb reflects inferior status assumed to women. The conception of the society is that women's decision takes the community or women themselves nowhere. Therefore, nobody is concerned for its

implementation. This shows that in West Gojjam zone, the voice of women remains unheard.

The above proverbs also confirm that women's administration is useless and/or destructive. Let us examine proverb number 1 and 2. They have similar ideas. **A country ruled by women is like a border grass grazed by sheep** (1).

By their nature sheep graze grass deep into the root. And, mind you, the grass on the boarder is longer and greener than the grass in other areas. This is because such grass is not usually exposed to cattle. The proverb shows distraction. It doesn't mean that women are necessarily corrupted. The comparison shows that women do not have the potential to rule a society, and as a result, if they get a chance to administer, they will lead that society into a complete distraction. Proverb number 2 further belittles woman's administrative abilities. **There is no a woman administrator as there is no arbitrator for an ape** (2).

In terms of ruling, women are compared to wild animals. The degree of inferiority of women to men in this respect goes to the extent of giving them sub-human features. Proverb number 7 and 8 also indicate that women's system of administration is useless. That means they are not capable of producing outstanding results that promote their community socially, politically economically.

Some of the above proverbs even declare that women do not have the right to participate in socio-cultural spheres. Proverb number 4 describes this belief. **The right of women is in her larder** (4).

This proverb implies that the traditional society not only limits women to stereotyped domestic duties but also claims that women do not have

the right to raise equality issues all together. Proverb number 3 further substantiates this argument. **A woman is to a larder as a man is to a court** (3).

This shows that women are naturally made to accomplish household duties while men are made to rule. In fact inferiority of women to men in socio-cultural spheres is also pronounced in oral poems. Look at the following examples.

1. ሴቶች ዝም በሉ ወንዶች እናልቅስ  
አደባባይ ሄደን የምናጣው ዋስ ::  
Be quiet the females  
Let men cry  
After all, it is we that will not get a guarantor  
In public spheres.
2. ነገረኛ ዶሮ ቀፍቅፋ ቀፍቅፋ  
ሁሉም ሴት ሆኑና ከኩ የሚል ጠፋ::  
That intrigued hen  
Which hatched lots and lots of chicks  
What a pity all became females  
And there is not any a cock to crow.

Contextually, the first poem is a kind of dirge. The scene is the death of somebody (male) that the patriarchal society is very much proud of. In west Gpjjam, this type of hero is expected to be the guarantee of the community in general. The dirge composer who is producing this song praises the dead person for his courageous deeds while he was alive. The singer is claiming that the society has lost a famous man who cannot be substituted by other men. And such a loss seriously affects

men; after all it is not the women but the men that are responsible for the well-being of the society.

Poem number 2 conveys a similar idea. It is a kind of fable in which human beings are represented by animals. The story is not, of course for animals as such. It is a political allegory expressing superiority of men over women in social, economic and political activities. A cock represents a man who has got respect in the society. Such people have high recognition of the society. And whatever they say is believed and their decisions are effective. Indirectly, the poem shows the inferiority of women. That means, women do not have any role to give order or to rule the traditional community. As hens cannot crow, women cannot propose any kind of idea in public spheres.

### **3.1.2. Proverbs and Oral Poems which indicate that women are economically dependent on their husbands**

10. ሴት ከወንድ እህል ከሆድ።

Women are to men as food is to stomach.

11. የሴት አገር ባሏ ማደሪያዋ አመላ።

A woman belongs to her husband's country, and lives on her good conduct.

12. ሴት ከባልዋ እንጂ ከአባቷ አትወርስም።

A woman inherits from her husband, but not from her father.

13. ካንኝ የተሻለኝ ባለገኝ እንዳታገቢ ጠብቂኝ።

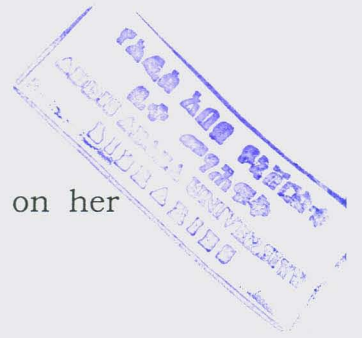
Wait for me unmarried in case I don't find a better woman than you.

14. አልጋው ሲገኝ ባሉ አይገኝ።

A husband may not be available when a bed is obtained.

15. የተኳሉትም ባል አጥተዋል።

Even those women who have been beautified haven't got husbands.



The proverbs under this category indicate that women are parasites. Men are portrayed as hosts and protectors of women. Women are rather considered as commodities that any man who has money can buy. Let us try to exemplify this assertion by explaining the proverbs according to the context they are used in the society. **A woman is to a man as food is to a stomach**(10).

The implication is that, as a person cannot exist without food, women too cannot survive without men. Proverb number 11 and 12 also strengthen this idea. Both indicate that a woman does not have her own property, especially land. She is dependent on her husband. It is the husband who has complete power and authority on the land and the whole property. In West Gojjam girls are not entitled to own plots of land. Proverb number 12 is trying to explain this phenomenon.

For many families, especially those living in poverty, a daughter is considered to join another family- that of her husbands, and would thus not be useful to help her parents when they get old. To date, inheritance of family property in the rural areas, mainly land, is given to sons and not to daughters. Because males are heads of the family, a plot of land given to a daughter will be passed over to another family when she is married. Thus, a daughter is not thought of as a contributor to the family's income, despite the fact that her help in domestic duties begins at an early age. However, nowadays it is common to give a cow or an ox to a daughter when she is married. Otherwise, she will not get a husband.

Women are extremely dependent on their husbands economically. Therefore, they are very eager to get married, not for the sake of love but to get protection from their husbands. In most cases girls do not have the chance to choose a better man. As long as the man has plots

of land and oxen, the parents will force their daughters to perform their marriage with men that they don't know. But men have better freedom to choose their wives. Especially when a man wants to marry another woman after he has divorced his first wife, he is the one to decide whom to marry. He can choose a wife based on his own criteria though the main criterion is property. Proverb number 13 indicates man's freedom in choosing a wife from among those unmarried girls or widows in the area.

Paradoxically, however, women in West Gojjam are culturally bound not choose their own partners for marriage. In this case, women are so unfortunate that if they are not asked by men, they will not marry at all. Even worse, the patriarchal society demoralizes them by saying 'kumoker' (one who has never married in her life). Proverb numbers 14 conveys this message. **A husband may not be available when a bed is obtained** (14).

The bed in this proverb symbolizes wealth on the part of the women. As noted earlier, a girl in the rural areas gets a husband if and only if she has at least a cow or an ox. However beautiful or skillful a woman is, nobody asks her for marriage if she has no such animals. As a result, girls from poor family usually become house servants with little money paid on an annual basis. They have to serve for many years in order to get enough money to buy a cow or an ox. Most of such girls migrate to nearby towns to work for better wages but unexpectedly their life shifts. They may be persuaded by the advice of some people or be harassed for sex, and then become prostitutes.

Even those who have a strong stamina and become successful to get enough money may not be asked by men for marriage due to the fact that such girls have wasted their right marriage age. Proverb number

14 is showing this grim social phenomenon. This is one of those factors that influence parents to get their daughters marry at an early age.

In this regard, Rahel quoted Chukukere who stated that in the traditional society women are made to believe that their future and stability depend on the success of their husbands. Their life is materialized in the institution of marriage. She further clarifies that the glory of women (females) is said to rest on their husbands who are given a very much extolled status like "God takes care of His creation" (2004:32).

Economic dependence of women on their husbands is reflected in some oral poems. The following two poems are examples for this fact.

3. ወይ አንዱን አትሄድ ወይ ባል አታገባ

እንደጠፋ ደብር ከሰዉ ተደርባ::

She does not go any where, nor does she marry a husband  
She is merely an idler like a lost Ark  
That has no its own temple  
And placed with another Ark in another temple.

4. አንች ማጉን ፍተይ እኔ ዘሃውን

የጋራ ባላችን እራቁት አይሁን::

You spin the cotton  
I shall stretch the thread  
So that our common husband will not be bare.

Poem number 3 is usually addressed by a married woman in the village who suspects the addressee (usually a widow) of attracting her husband for love. This is because in West Gojjam it is common for men

to have concubines in the village. Indirectly, however, the poem indicates that women are economically dependent on men. The speaker is proposing marriage concerning the woman that she is looking up. The assumption is that women should marry somebody or be a concubine of someone there in order to survive

Poem number 4 conveys similar idea. 'Our common husband', in the third line shows that the man behind the scene has one wife and one concubine or two concubines at the same time. Obviously it is the economic problem that forces women to lose their social status as such.

Thanks to women's associations, civic society, governmental and non-governmental organizations, the situation is showing remarkable improvement. Such bodies are engaged themselves in awareness creating activities, especially on the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Also widows do have their own plots of land today. When they divorce their husbands, they do have the right to take their share of land. In the case of their husband's death also women can inherit his property including land. As a result, many women are now productive enough even though they have no husbands.

### **3.1.3. Proverbs that belittle capabilities of women in acquiring knowledge.**

There are numerous deeply- entrenched social attitudes, proverbs and oral poems that belittle women's capabilities in education and this in turn stands as major obstacles to women compete their male counterparts in academic life. The following proverbs disparage women's personalities and capabilities in order to justify the social predominance of men.

16. ሴት ዳሌዋ እንጂ አእምሮዋ አይሰፋም።  
Female hips can get bigger, but not their brains.
17. የሴት አእምሮ እንደጡትዋ የተንጠለጠለ ነው።  
The brain of a woman hangs like her breast.
18. ሴትን ካስተማረ የዳረ ከበረ።  
He who has his daughter got married becomes richer than one who has educated her.
19. ሴት አዋቂ ትወልዳለች እንጂ ራሷ አታውቅም።  
A woman may give birth to a wise man but is never wise herself.
20. ጨረቃና ሴት ዛሬ ብረሃን ነገ ጥልመት።  
The moon and a woman are today bright, tomorrow dark.
21. የሴት ሀሳብና የፈረስ ጋማ አንድ አቅጣጫ ብቻ ይሄዳል።  
The thought of women and the mane of a horse go only in one direction.

In the above proverbs women are portrayed as inefficient for learning. They are believed to think only in short terms. We don't find similar proverbs about men. These proverbs clearly indicate that women are assumed as defective or incomplete by nature. Let us examine proverb number 19 as a case in point. **A woman may give birth to a wise man but is never wise herself** (19).

In this proverb women are portrayed as docile by nature and unfit to participate in socio-cultural spheres which are reserved for men. Proverb number 16 and 17 further illustrate that the brain of a woman is dull as compared to that of a man. **Females' hips can expand but not their brains** (16).

The proverb indicates that women are there in the society not to solve the social, political and economic problems, but to be limited as wives,

mothers, and to some other household activities which confine them to their house. Proverb number 17 also shows that the mind of a woman is one reduced to the organs of the body like her hands, legs breasts etc. This proverb considers women only as physical entity and not an intellectual being.

**The brain of a woman is hanged like her breast (17).**

This proverb degrades the position of women in terms of acquiring knowledge. It seems that women are not governed by their own minds; rather they think instinctively like sub-human creatures. Their brains do not control their activities. The proverb claims that women do not understand anything. Whatever they do is directed by their reflexes, and not by their brains. Proverb number 20 proclaims that women are always in a state of darkness and light and, therefore, confused. **The moon and a woman are today bright, tomorrow dark (20).**

This means both a woman and the moon do not have their own powers. The moon reflects light from the sun. Unless it gets light from the sun, the moon is dark. In the same way, a woman does not have her own capacity that brings outstanding contribution to the society. Accordingly, women's minds are believed to be dark. Even if women generate some useful ideas, that does not last long due to the fact that their minds are not stable. Proverb number 21 is not different. It indicates that women's ideas are unidirectional and fixed.

Due to these reasons the West Gojjam society used to prefer their daughters to get married to sending them to school. Proverb number 18 sums up all the stated ideas concerning women's education.

Having been internalized by members of the society, these proverbs, along with other discriminatory beliefs and practices shape male

children to grow overconfident and superior on the one hand, and females submissive and inferior on the other.

In West Gojjam a male child is made to grow with the conviction that he should not lag behind girls in his performance. As to the girl child, it does not matter whether she scores good grades or not. Because she is mostly expected to be good in housekeeping and stay attractive as marriage is her ultimate goal. In this respect Genet explains that due to various reasons, female students show comparatively poor school performance. Also their education is limited to the elementary level. Beyond poor performance, repeating a class discourages female education as parents prefer their daughters to drop out and get married rather than spend another year (1991:89).

Even if there is some attitudinal change, there is still a general belief that females are inferior in education. And this is a belief of both men and women. Females are generally said to be mentally retarded and short-sighted. The society believes that women's education takes them nowhere since they are idiots.

#### **3.1.4. Proverbs that describe women as untrustworthy, adulterous and thieves.**

22. ባል የሌላት ሴት የመንገድ ላይ እሽት።

A woman without a husband is like a ripped cereal on the road side.

23. በጋለሞታ ቤት ሁሉ ይጣላበት።

Every one fights for the house of a widow.

24. ሴት ያመነ ጉም የዘገነ ።

Thrusting women is like holding cloud.

25. ለሴትና ለልጓም አይዘናጉም።

Never to lose attention for a woman and a bridle

26. ቦርሃህን ለሚስትህ አታሳይ።

Don't show your purse to your wife.

27. ሌባ እናት ልጇን አታምንም።

A thief mother never trusts her child.

28. ሴትን ማመን አይጥን በአቆማዳ መክተት ነው።

Trusting women is like keeping a mouse in *akumada*.

29. ሴትና ዳዊት በብብት።

Women and *Dawit* should be kept under armpit.

The above proverbs reflect that women are dishonest to their husbands and to the society. Women are also portrayed as opportunists. Due to their unreliable nature, they betray their husbands and even try to snatch money from their husbands' purses if they get a chance.

Proverb number 22 and 23 both show that, women who do not have husbands are loose in character. That means they can make love to anybody. **A woman with out a husband is like ripped cereal on the road side** (22), indicates that, during the season where cereals such as peas, beans and the like are ripped, normally a girl has to look out for danger and protect it. She has to protect herself like the cereal from being cut by a pedestrian or infested by birds. Otherwise, the cereal is open for rapping and destruction.

Similarly, if a woman is not protected having her own husband, it is expected that she makes love with any man who has interest in her. Proverb number 23 carries a similar message. **Everyone fights for the house of a widow** (23).

This proverb clearly depicts women as adulterous. If there is a woman without a husband (or a widow), men in that village try to make her as their concubine. Usually they fight one another to make her their own property. The fighting sometimes goes to the extent of killing the

opponent. But nowadays such phenomenon is minimized due to the fear of HIN/AIDS.

In some cases women who have husbands are suspected to have their own lover secretly. So, men are advised through the oral traditions not to trust their wives. Proverb number 25, 28 and 29 glorify this attitude of the society as an essential masculine virtue. **Never to lose attention to a woman and a bridle** (25).

Mules are expected to be dangerous beasts of burden. If a man who is riding a mule forgets holding the bridle for a while, the mule will jump, throw him down and kick him to death. Similarly, unless married women are strictly controlled by their husbands, they may get chances to meet their sexual lovers and ruin their husbands. Proverb number 28 is an exaggerated expression in this regard. **Trusting a woman is like keeping a mouse in *akumada*** (28).

*Akumada* is a container of grain. And rats are always searching for grain. Their livelihood depends on finding something like this. If they are placed in *Akumada*, which is full of grain, it will be a great opportunity for rats. They will be able to freely consume, excrete and live there until the grain is finished in the container. A woman who has been given complete freedom is like a rat and she will undoubtedly ruin the family. That is why, the society advises men to put their wives under their armpits.

Although the reality shows the opposite, the patriarchal society also considers women as thieves. Proverbs number 26 and 27 depict women as thieves. In fact proverb number 26 does not necessarily mean that such a wife takes money from her husband's purse. It may also be used

in a context where men do not want their income to be known to their wives. In the second case it is actually the men who are thieves and not the women.

The conception of the society towards adulterous women is also reflected through oral poems. Let us look at the following oral poems:

5. ቆንጆ ሚስት አግብቶ ለሰው ከማበደር  
አመዳም አግብቶ እንደጊዜው ማደር።

Instead of marrying a beautiful woman  
And share her love to somebody  
It is better to marry a pale one  
And lead a happy life with her.

- 6 ስንቱን በምኒሽር ብዩ ልጩርሰው  
አይንሽ እየጠራ የሚያመጣውን ሰው።

How can I manage to finish  
Shooting with my *Minisheer*  
All those men who your eyes stare  
And come following you?

Men are usually afraid of marrying beautiful women. Especially, attractive widows never get husbands again. This is because their beauty diverts the attention of many men and this in turn may lead them to make love with different people other than their husbands. Therefore, through oral poems, the society advises men not to marry beautiful women. One who marries a beautiful woman is always in risk. He can not trust his wife. He also suspects other men whom he thinks may have some relationship with his wife. Such a husband always nags and even beats his wife without any reason. The jealousy that he may develop can lead the man to quarrel with his neighbors, strangers, and other men who by chance have an eye contact with his wife. The

quarrel may change to a serious fighting to the extent of shooting with *Minisheer*, which is said to be the powerful non-automatic gun used by rural people. But nowadays the government disarmed the people in the rural areas and nobody except peasant leaders is armed. Therefore, the poem refers to practices of the past.

### 3.1.5. Proverbs which portray women as destructors, childish, foolish and frivolous,

30. የሴት ጥፋት የጤፍ ጥራት አይታወቅም።

Mistakes of women and purity of teff are unidentifiable.

31. ሴት ጅብ ትፈራለች አጥር ትመዛለች።

A woman is afraid of a hyena but draws out a beam from the wall of a fence.

32. ሴት ማገዶ ቢቸግራት ምሰሶ ትነቅላለች።

If a woman lacks fire wood, she uproots a pillar.

33. ሴት ነጠላ ካመቻት ያህያ ልቅሶ ላይ ትውላለች።

If a woman has excess *natala*, she attends a donkey funeral.

34. መነኩሴ ቤቷ ሲሠራ ሃረግ ትደብቃለች።

A monk hides *harg* while her house is constructed.

35. በገዛ አረጋጂ እባብ ይዛ ታስፈራራ።

She holds a snake and threatens weed killers on her own weeding.

36. ሴትና ዶሮ ከሄዱ ቤታቸውን ይረሱ።

If a woman and a hen go out, they forget their houses.

In these proverbs women are compared to foolish men and lower animals. They are also portrayed as destructors. Proverb number 30 indicates that the lives of women are full of mistakes. Nobody can estimate the purity of 'teff' as it is a powder like grain. So is a woman, difficult to judge.

Patriarchal society blames women for every mistake committed. Teff is not only uncountable but also difficult to make it pure easily. The comparison shows that women are there in the society with their flaws in the history of mankind. This is a hasty generalization that the patriarchal society makes about women. Proverb number 32 also indicates that women are aimless creatures. Fence here is symbolized as a protector from external forces or attacks. A hyena is the symbol of enemy or external force. If a woman is afraid of an external authority or power, she should not have destroyed the fence which protects her. But her frivolous nature will not make her realize the truth. The same is true to proverb number 33. **If a woman has excess *natala*, she attends a donkey funeral** (33).

This proverb portrays woman as easy going. Rural women in West Gojjam always wear *natala* outside their home. Especially during mourning ceremonies, every woman has to wear *natala* making the position up side down as it reflects grief or sorrow for the dead person.

In reality, there is no donkey funeral. The implication is reducing woman's humanity. As long as a woman gets access to do something in front of her, she goes ahead without realizing whether it is useful or harmful. The idea belittles women's intelligence too. This is because one who thinks as a human being cannot commit such acts.

Women's foolishness is also reflected in proverbs like number 32. This one particularly shows that they are not totally considerate. As its name implies, a pillar is the center of everything. Literally a house cannot be erected properly without a pillar. With out a polar or pole, it will rather collapse. The assumption is that women do not think; and to solve a simple problem under their nose, they will commit serious mistakes which may cause the destruction of the whole system.



Proverbs, number 34 and 35 point out women's foolishnesses. These proverbs show that women are good for nothing even for themselves. In these proverbs we see that women are obstructing their own work and growth.

In rural areas, 'harag' is used to tie the various parts of the hut being constructed. It functions as nails. The action of hiding the *harag* implies that women do not know what they are doing. They are acting instinctively. Proverb number 35 expresses the above idea in a different form. Under this category proverb number 36 considers women as very simple pet animals. The hen is probably the smallest pet animal in the house. A hen may lose its home once it goes outside. It is likely that it may be chased by birds, or wild cats. Comparing women to such pet animals and inanimate objects like 'harag' is nothing but ridiculing their personality.

### 3.1.6. Proverbs and oral poems that exaggerate women's laziness, talkativeness and negligence.

37. ውሻም በላው አንችሞ በላሽወ. ካልከደንሽው።

Whether it is eaten by a dog or by you, it is because you don't cover it.

38. ሰነፍ ሴት ያገባ በሬው በሰኔ ገደል ገባ።

He who has married a lazy woman shall let his ox fall into a cliff in June.

39. መስራት ነው ወንድነት ማውራት ነው ሴትነት።

Working is manliness as talking is womanliness.

40. ወሬኛ ሚስት ዘርዛራ ወንፊት።

A talkative wife is like a lose sieve.

In West Gojjam women always work from dawn to dusk without break. Nobody is able to count women's roles in the house. To mention some,

washing dishes, preparing the morning meal, taking cattle to the shepherd, sweeping the area, making a mile round trip to fetch the days water supply, tending children, caring for the animals, cultivating the garden plots, washing clothes in the village stream, grinding grains and spices, clearing the cattle pens, collecting firewood, preparing the evening meal, going out to bring the cattle back home, washing the feet of her husband, serving supper to her husband and children (if any) and the like are some of the household activities that a rural woman in west Gojjam has to perform everyday. Most of the time a woman will not rest until midnight. During harvest season, she has to go out to the farm to take lunch to her husband and also to pick up weeds.

Not only these, at least once a week, she has to go to the near by market to sell some grain or butter and buy commodities for household consumption. In so doing she carries a huge basket during the return trip. However, in view of her husband and the society, such a woman is not taking on some useful work. Her husband takes it that she is free of work so long as she is not in the farm picking up weeds or harvesting crops.

Despite her tiresome jobs, the society considers a woman as idle and talkative. The proverbs reflect such hasty conclusions of the patriarchal community of the West Gojjam. Especially proverb number 39 reflects dominance of man over woman. **Working is manliness; talking is womanliness** (39).

This proverb claims that women do not have any role other than chatting with one another. But men are there for a noble cause, to accomplish useful works that promote the life of the society. The reality, however, is just the opposite. Some of the proverbs deliberately exaggerate women's laziness. Let us examine proverb number 38. **He**

**who has married a lazy woman shall let his ox fall into a cliff in June.**

Oxen are the most important means of production for West Gojjam farmers. Especially during the rainy seasons, from June to September, oxen are very helpful, because these are the seasons where peasants sow most cereal and grain seeds. A farmer whose ox died at this time of the year is very unfortunate. The comparison of women's laziness and the death of the ox does not, however, reflect the real situation in that community. Women are not lazy as such. It is a mere exaggeration. Women's laziness in West Gojjam is best expressed through oral poems. Look at the following examples;

7. እንዝርቱ በአገልግል እየተላቀሰ

የተኛችቦቱ ጎንዋ በሰበሰቡ።

While the spindles are crying  
Being placed idle in the *Agelgil*  
Her ribs on which she has slept  
Become rotten.

8. ባልባሰብኝማ የማቻክል ምላስ

በአመት ትስፋሰች የወሰከሚያ ራስ።

Had it not been for the Machakel's gossip  
I would have claimed that  
It takes her a full year  
To stitch a *Waskambia* head.

9. በወር አንድ ልቅ በአመት አንድ ኩታ

እናቷ ቢሰሙ ሞቱ በደስታ።

She accomplishes one roll of thread in a month  
One shawl in a year  
When her mother heard this  
She died of happiness.

All the above oral poems indicate that women are very lazy. These poems are narrated by husbands complaining the laziness of their wives. The first of these poems shows extreme bitterness. The poem depicts that a woman is so idle that she cannot perform any kind of work even if she has the skill. The second and third poems show delays. Such women are trying to accomplish some household activities. The poems do not express lack of skills. Rather, they emphasize laziness of the women in an exaggerated manner. A *waskambia* head is expected to be stitched in one or two days under normal circumstances. But one day and one year show unimaginable difference. The third poem also expresses the same idea in a different context.

### **3.1.7. Proverbs and oral poems that belittle women's skill in household work and home management.**

41. ምጣዱ አንድ ሴቱ ብዙ።  
A lot of women for one oven.
42. ትሻልን ሰድጂ ትብስን አመጣሁ።  
I divorced *Tishal* and married *Tibis*.
43. ለስሚ መጠሪያ ቁና ሰፋች።  
She stitched *kuna* to be named after it.

These proverbs belittle women's skills. In West Gojjam unless a woman has a good skill in food preparation and house management, she cannot get a husband. Event if she is married to someone by chance, her husband will divorce her and marry another wife in case she fails in those skills. Unless the man studies carefully, he may marry the one who is worse than the previous one. Proverb number 42 is usually referred to this kind of context. Proverb number 43 also ridicules women's skills. *Kuna* is one of the household utensils that do not have

outstanding functions. It is only used to measure grain in the market while buying or selling it. Otherwise, it is idle. This woman is portrayed as unable to do something better than this simple hand work. In fact, belittling women's skills in the household work is better expressed through oral poems. Look at the following:

10. ጣቷ ረጃጅም ነው ቁጣ ለመጋገር  
እንዝርት አታሳያት ትወጣለች ካገር።  
Her fingers are so long to bake *kita*  
Don't show her spindle  
She may flood the area.

11. ያ ወዳላ ክንድሽ ቁጣ ያሳበጠው  
ምነው በርበሬውን አልሞ አልደቆሰው?  
Why not that big arm of yours  
Which got fat from *kita*  
Did not pound the pepper finely?

These poems show that women prefer to engage themselves in something trivial to performing useful activities. *Kita* is a kind of bread which is not fermented and also baked by an unskilled woman or children. It is not appreciated by the society as food. Usually it is given to house servants and cattle. To some extent, it is believed that children and some gluttonous women love eating *Kita*, and therefore, they like to bake it now and then. Spindle, on the other hand, is a simple instrument used to spin cotton, which is believed to be the activity of skilled women. The overall implication of the poem is that women prefer to accomplish something useless instead of tackling useful tasks that promote the life of society.

Generally the oral traditions under this category portray that women are not only lazy but also unskilled. This is really unfortunate, and most women in the rural areas are conditioned to this kind of life. One can deduce that behind this kind of pattern of living is a long history of gender discrimination to which women have been subjected.

Such oral traditions damage the personality of women. Instead of filling the gap between the roles of women and men, they widen it further.

### **3.1.8 Proverbs which consider women as sub-human beings and as beast of burden**

44. ሴትና በቅሎ አንዳገሪዋ ነው ::

Women and mules behave like the man who trains them.

45. ሴትና አህያ ዱላ ይወዳል::

A women and a donkey are reared through beating.

46. ለሴት ምክር አይገባትም::

Women can not understand advice.

47. ሴትና አህያ የማይችሉት የለም::

Women and donkeys can carry any burden.

48. ከናቷ ጉልበት የደረሰች ልጃገረድ የማትችለው የለም::

A girl child who reached her mother's knee can do anything.

49. የሴት ልጅ ምራቁ ወፍራም ነው::

Women's saliva is thick.

50. የሴትና የበሬ አንግዳ የለውም::

There is no stranger for a woman and an ox.

The above proverbs declare that women should be abiding by patriarchal rules whether they like it or not. Physical punishment of women is considered normal and/or natural. Beating a sister, a wife or women in general is believed to be appropriate in order to correct their misbehavior.

A husband who does not beat his wife is considered as a woman himself. The belief is so deep rooted that there are even some women who hate their husbands who do not punish them. Because of these the society proclaims appropriateness of women's physical punishment. Proverb number 44, 45 and 46 express this attitude of the community. Wherever a peasant rides his donkey, he frequently beats it with a stick. He does not realize whether the beating hurts the animal or not. His motive is the donkey's fast walk towards his destination. Men also beat their wives in the same way they beat their donkeys. Otherwise the women will not behave at an expected standard. The society believes that the more a woman is punished, the better she will be. Proverb number 44 is a case in point.

When a woman is in the hands of a 'hero', one who severely punishes his wife, she will be a nice woman. But if the husband is a womanish for himself (one who advises instead of beating), the woman is expected to behave badly. In this respect women are compared to a very difficult beast of burden, the mule. The proverb **women cannot understand advice** (46), is also applicable here.

In the proverbs women are also portrayed as extraordinary creatures capable of carrying any kind of burden. Here also we see the comparison of women with a donkey which is believed to be the most stupid of all tamed mammals. **Women and donkeys can carry any burden** (47).

There is kilogram limit to load a donkey. From their own experiences, peasants do not load a donkey beyond its capacity. In fact the strength of donkeys varies from one donkey to another. The load they carry also varies. The same is true with women. But the proverbs do not show this truth. They simply claim that women and donkeys can carry

anything. The assumption is that a woman and a donkey don not have the right to limit the weight and type of load they are to carry. It is the man (their owner) who is able to decide it. The fate of a donkey and a woman is to accept any load, try to go ahead with it and/ or fall down (or die) when exhausted.

It must be this type of conception of the society that makes women engaged in extremely tiresome and routine household activities for more than 16 hours a day. Even worse, a woman is not shown any respect for her hard work. Even in a condition where a woman becomes a guest in some body else's house, she should not be allowed to sit idle while other women are working. The proverb, **there is no stranger for a woman and an ox** (50), describes this situation.

Female subordination begins from childhood. Male children are exempted from household duties, because they have to be strong to discharge the farm work in their later life. They are expected to be source of security to their family when they grow. Therefore, they will be reserved and exempted from such kinds of tiresome responsibilities. It doesn't, however mean that boys do not work at all. Child labor is common in the rural areas of West Gojjam. But, as compared to girls, boys are safe. They are at most made to look after cattle, sheep, and goats and sometimes collect fire wood. The girl child, however, shall accomplish almost all duties done by her mother, and she has to learn the skills from her mother in her early age. Proverb number 48 reflects this grim reality.

The discrimination between boys and girls in the family is also reflected in the way of feeding. The responsibilities that boys will take over in their later life are expected to be decisive. Therefore, boys should be fed well. The fact that men should eat more and women less seems to be

taken for granted as one aspect of culture. Traditionally women are believed to endure any hardship including hunger. Proverb number 49 that says, **a woman's saliva is thick**, is used by the traditional society to reflect this belief.

### 3.1.9. Proverbs which describe women as intriguers, trouble makers, cruel and arrogant.

51. ከሴት ነገር ከበቅሎ መደንበር አየታጣም።

Trouble from women and bolting from mules are common phenomena.

52. ጨስና ክፉ ሴት ሰውን ያባርራሉ ከቤት።

Smoke and cruel women drive men a way from home.

53. ተንኮለኛ መበለት በፆም ዶሮ በፋሲካ እልበት።

An intriguing nun serves chicken meat during fasting and *elbet* at Easter.

54. ሴት ያቀጣጠለው አሳት አይጠፋም።

A fire lit by a woman never extinguishes.

55. ሴት የላከው ጅብ አይፈራም።

A man sent by a woman is never afraid of a hyena.

56. መንቻካ ሴት አትሆንም ባለቤት።

A stubborn woman cannot be a wife.

Almost all the above proverbs show that women are responsible for men's troubles in the society. **A man sent by a woman is never afraid of a hyena** (55).

In the rural area of West Gojjam, hyena symbolizes authorities, leaders, respected elders and other dignitaries who are thought to be powerful in the society. But one who is completely filled by women's intrigues goes without hesitation, to fight against these bodies without realizing

the consequences. Proverb number 54 glorifies women's intriguing nature. **A fire lit by women never extinguishes** (54).

Fire symbolizes the intrigue that women hatch. Such proverbs indicate that women are dangerous. The proverbs depict that men are victims of women's potential. In the traditional society like West Gajjam any woman is said to have the power of wit and cunning and the power of influencing men to commit misdeeds. And this is believed to be a habitual action of women. That is why men are advised through oral traditions to take care of women. Proverb number 51 generalizes all the aforementioned ideas. Mules are said to be the most dangerous of all domestic animals. And, concerning their cunning behavior, women are usually compared with this dangerous beast of burden. Generally these proverbs portray women as evil creatures.

### 3.1.10. **Proverbs and oral poems that describe women as greedy, gluttonous, selfish**

57. ሴትን ሲታዘቧት ሥጋ ቀቅይ አሉዋት።

They ordered a woman to cook meat to judge her.

58. ስትወልድ የምትበላውን በእርግዝናዋ ጨረሳችው።

She ate the entire nursing food during her pregnancy.

59. ከባልሽ ባሌ ይበልጣል ሽሮ አበድሪኝ።

Lend me *Shiro* as my husband is superior to yours.

60. በሰው ብድር ልጅዋን ትድር።

She gets her daughter married at some other peoples' expense.

Proverb number 57 and 58 show women's greed. Number 57 indicates that women are not ready even to accomplish household duties honestly. Meat is not always available in the country side. It is only obtained during certain occasions, as for example, in wedding

ceremonies, at Easter, at New Year, and the like. In other words, for rural people in West Gojjam meat is precious. The idea of the proverb is that such precious food should not be made freely accessible to a woman who is an irresponsible creature. The implication is that she will take her fill from the cooked meat and serve the family only the leftover.

Oral poems also express the gluttonous nature of women. Look at the following:

12. የአያ እንቶኔ ልጅ የበላችዋል ቁጣ  
ሌትማ ቢይዘው ሰንበቴ ባወጣ።

The *kita* that \_\_\_'s daughter ate  
Would have been enough  
To celebrate *senbete*  
Had it been managed by a skilled woman.

We have seen earlier (poem number 4) that *kita* is not a regular food. It is expressed in oral traditions of such a type on occasions where the society wants to criticize women's greed. The ingredients used to bake a loaf of *kita* are expected to be 4-5 enjera if it is well fermented.

So eating one loaf of *kita* at once, means eating so much enjera. The poem (12) highlights women's gluttonous nature. This shows irrationality of the traditional society towards women. As far as knowledge of the present researcher is concerned, women in West Gojjam are not greedy and/or gluttonous either. The reverse is true. Because from early childhood boys are made not only to eat much but also to get nourishing food in order to make them strong with the view to enabling them effectively discharge the farm work which are the

backbone of the family, girls are not given much food. Even after they are married, women provide much of the food they prepare to their spouse and children. Therefore, the conception of the society as reflected in these proverbs is glaringly wrong

Besides their greed, women are considered selfish by nature. Proverb numbers 59 and 60 are reflecting this idea. They indicate that if a woman gets an opportunity, she will not hesitate to take somebody else's property leaving her own aside. Beyond property, the proverbs also reflect women's selfishness in other socio-cultural relations.

### 3.1.11 **proverbs that portray women as unfit for alcoholic drinks.**

61. ሴቶች ከሰከሩ እንግዲት ጦም አደሩ።  
If women get drunk, guests will not be served dinner.
62. የሴት ሰካራም ቤት አይሠራም።  
A drunkard woman cannot take a household responsibility.
63. የሴት መጠጥ ደፋር፣ የወንድ አይናፋር አይረባም።  
A drunkard woman and a shy man are both useless.
64. ለሴት ጠላ ለፈርስ ቆላ አይስማማቸውም።  
Beer for women and hot climate to horses are not suitable.

In West Gojjam, it is only men who are culturally allowed to take alcoholic drinks officially. It does not mean that women do not take alcohol. They drink in their own houses, when there are special occasions like wedding, *senbete*, Saint Day feast, and the like. Even on such occasions, women should not drink much. If they drink much, it is believed that they lose their personality as women.

Women are not, by any means allowed to go to bars and local beer sellers to take alcoholic drinks. It is a taboo. If a woman frequents local beer houses to quench her thirst when she goes to the market, and if her husband hears this degrading act, he will not only punish her with severe beating but also fires her from the house automatically. Paradoxically, however, a man can visit any bar and take any kind of alcohol until he becomes intoxicated if necessary. A man may even pass the night with his concubine without any fear.

On market days some husbands take their wives to beer houses or bars along with them. But women will not stay there long. They will drink tea or coffee if it is a bar or *tella* if it is a beer house and leave immediately for their home to reach before the children and the cattle come back. The husbands, however, can stay and drink their fill. This is a serious discrimination and socio-cultural practice in which women are officially subordinated.

### 3.1.12. **Proverbs and oral poems which describe women as physically weak and naturally cowards.**

65. የካህን አፋር፣ ያህያ እውር እና የሴት ደፋር አይረባም።

A shy priest, a blind donkey and a carageous woman are all useless.

66. ማንን ታሸንፋለህ ቢሉት ሚስቴን አለ።

He claimed that he only wins his wife.

The proverbs indicate that women cannot be heroic because they are physically weak and naturally cowards. Even if a woman tries to perform courageous deeds, nobody takes it into consideration. Proverb number 65 shows that women should not act like men. Proverb number 66 is not addressed to a woman. It refers to a man who is known for his cowardice or physical weakness. But he claims that he

can win his wife. This is because the conception of the society is that however physically weak a man is, he is able to win a female. The following oral poems further illustrate the weakness and cowardice of women.

13. እኔን ትሰድበኝ ወይ እኔን ወንድምህን

ሴት ስትጠፈጥፍህ የገላገልሁህን።

How you dared to insult me

I, who intervened and saved your life,

While a woman was slapping you severely.

Again this poem is addressed to a cowardly man who was beaten by a woman. The addresser is expressing his feeling with great surprise for that he is insulted by a man who he had saved him from being beaten by a woman. Such a poem is a kind of satire which indirectly criticizes women's weakness. Women are portrayed incapable to resisting men's aggression. The following poem also belittles women's interest to march to the war front

14. አስከትለኝ ጓዱ ሴት ናት አትበልና

ደኑን የሚያያዝ ጨራሮ ነውና።

Make me follow you comrade

Don't ignore me due to my femininity

It is the *Chiroro* that lights the forest.



In this poem a woman is the addresser. The addressee is expected to be a hero or a war leader at least. It seems that the deep-rooted belief of the society that women are cowardly, persuaded women themselves. This is because it is the woman who is claiming herself *Chiroro*. *Chiroro* here symbolizes very thin, dry sticks used to light fire wood, a forest and the like. This grass like stick burns quickly and turns to ash immediately. But it serves just as a mach stick to light other objects.

That means the function of the **chiraro** does not last long. In the same way, the woman is persuading the war leader to let her accompany him although it is believed that she will not play a decisive role in the war. The following two oral poems also strengthen the cowardice of women in general.

15. ተዋጋ ቢሉት በአባቱጋሻ

ለናቱ ሰጣት የበት ማፈሻ ::

He was entitled to his father's shield

To fight against the enemy

But he gave it to his mother

To scoop dung with.

16. ፈሪ ለናቱ ያገለግላል

ምጣድ ስትጥድ ሙግድ ያቀብላል:

The coward serves his mother

He can hand over *mugid*.

While she bakes *enjera*

These two poems (15&16) also describe about cowardice of men. They are not directly depicting women's inferiority. The motive behind expressing these types of oral traditions; however, is to state that women cannot accomplish heroic tasks.

A shield is a large piece of armour carried out on the arm to protect the body when fighting. As women are not fighters, shield belongs to men. Normally, fathers transmit shields to their sons when they get old. A son who takes over this responsibility is expected to use the shield as a fighting instrument. But we see that the cowardly man in poem (15) gave this respected weapon to his mother. The assumption is that even if she is given, a woman can not do anything with the shield other than using it to scoop *dung*, because she is not a hero.

Similarly, poem (16) addresses a cowardly man. *Mugid* is a cover for an oven. In the traditional community of West Gojjam, baking *enjera* is the activity of women. Men have nothing to do there. Such a cowardly man, however, is portrayed as giving special service to his mother by holding the *Mugid* whenever the mother removes the *enjera* from the oven and giving it back to her when she bakes one again. The implication is that if a man is cowardly, he is considered as women and must accomplish women's duties.

**3.1.13. Proverbs that generally degrade women's personality and highlight men's superiority**

67. ሴት ከመውለድ ይሻላል ማሰወረድ።

Abortion is better than having a female child.

68. ሴትን ካሳደገ የገደለ ፀደቀ።

One who has killed is more pious than one who reared a female.

69. ሴት አግብተው ሴት ቢወልዱ የት አለ ንግዱ?

Marrying a female and having a female child has no profit.

These proverbs convey the vituperation of the patriarchal society towards female gender. No reason is given for the bitterness. This is blaming women blindly without any rationale or justification. In real life, it is the females who are working longer hours than men both as members of the family or as housewives. It is also obvious that men cannot lead their lives properly without women. The generation itself will not continue on earth unless women give birth to children. Paradoxically, the traditional community permits killing of females. Proverb number 67 and 68 express that such a community hates females to the extent of trying to eradicate them from the face of the earth.

### 3.2. Proverbs and oral poems indicating positive Images of women

The study undertaken in this research has so far showed that women are usually given negative images. And most oral traditions are expressing this type of attitude of the West Gojjam society. However, oral traditions that glorify females are also there. This indicates that there are some attempts to depict women positively. The problem, however, is that women are portrayed positively in a very few cases. And the positive images of women revolve only around conceiving, rearing children, taking care of spouses who play major roles in social activities, and the like. We shall examine some of these oral traditions bellow:

#### 3.2.1. Proverbs that glorify the contribution of women as house wives

70. ሚስቱ ደግ ስንዴ ራቱ ወይራ እንጨቱ ደስታ ነው ቤቱ።  
One whose wife is innocent shall enjoy wheat for dinner, olive tree as wood and lead a cheerful life.
71. መልካም ሴት ለባልዋ ዘውድ ናት።  
A good woman is a crown for her husband.
72. በሴት የከበረ ከማሪያም የተማከረ።  
He who is satisfied with woman is advised by Mary.
73. ባልና ሚስት ካንድ ወንዝ ይቀዳሉ።  
Husband and wife are fetched from the same river.
74. ጠመንጃ ያለጥይት ዱላ፤ ወንድ ያለሴት ቀወላላ።  
A gun without bullet is *dulla* as a man without a woman is *kewlala*.
75. ከያንዳንዱ ስኬታማ ወንድ ጀርባ አንድ ጠንካራ ሴት አለች።  
Behind every successful man, there is a strong woman.

All these proverbs portray women as very decisive segments of the family and society. It seems that gradually, gender disparity would leave its way to equality between men and women. According to these proverbs, women as wives and household managers are not depicted as victims of stereotyped gender roles. Rather, they are portrayed that, without them men cannot lead a complete life and a house is no more a house. Most of these proverbs imply that women are not subservient and need not obey the rules of male-oriented society but they are equally strong and real partners of men. The proverb that says, **behind every successful man there is a strong woman** (75), becomes applicable in this context. Let us try to analyze some of these proverbs.

#### **One who is satisfied with a woman is advised by Mary (72)**

Mary (the mother of Jesus Christ), is believed as a Christian superhuman power by followers of Orthodox Christianity. Almost every faithful has great respect for this saint. It seems that Christ himself is not so much respected as His mother. The implication is that a man who prayed to marry for a good wife can be rewarded with one that has all-round personality. As Mary satisfies her followers, the woman also satisfies her husband in every aspect of his life.

Proverb number 74 states that without a woman a man is extremely miserable. He will be simply loitering about. The comparison itself is metaphoric. A gun with out bullet actually does not give a better service than functioning merely as a stick. A man may live without a wife, but his life will be incomplete

Proverb number 73 can be interpreted in two ways. It can reflect both negative and positive images of women. If both husband and wife have a similar behavior accepted or rejected by the society, the proverb is used to express either of these qualities. The proverb can also be used

to express similar complexion of husband and wife, usually referring to their attractiveness.

Generally speaking, the above proverbs affirm that females have an unavoidable role in shaping men's behavior according to expected standards of the traditional community.

### 3.2.2. Proverbs that show women's kindness as mothers

76. ልጅ ያለ እናት ቤት ያለጉልላት።

A child without mother is like a house without dome.

77. ልጅ ከናቱ አይብ ካንቱ።

A child is to his mother as cheese is to its whey.

78. ከናቱ ያደረ እንቁላል አይሠበረም።

An egg staying with its mother will not be broken.

79. ካልጨከኑ እናት አትቀበርም።

Unless as a last resort, mother will not be buried.

80. እናት ለልጅዋ ነብይ ናት።

A mother is a prophet for her child.

81. የናት ሞትና የድንጋይ መቀመጫ እያደር ይቆረቆራል።

The death of a mother and a stone seat cause discomfort from time to time.

One should be a creative poet or a playwright to express the kindness of women to their children. A mother's contribution has greater importance not only to the well-being of the child but also to the society as a whole. This is because it is the mother who nurtures the future generation. Although fathers love and treat their children kindly, the role of mothers in this regard is incomparable. This is because a woman is naturally endowed with offspring, breast-feeding and the like that a man does not have. In this regard Adanach and Azeb explain

that the characteristics of offspring are equally shared between men and women. But the consequences of pregnancy, labour pains, delivery and lactation are exclusively the natural abilities of the female. They further explain that the exclusion of the male partner at this level of function indicates the sex specific division of labour for it is the female who is capable of doing the job of child bearing(1991:47).

It must be due to these exclusive roles of mothers that the society gives them the highest respect in this regard. This is actually evidenced through oral traditions. The above proverbs exemplify the glory of mothers. It may be appropriate to analyze these proverbs one by one.

**A child without mother is like a house without a dome (76).**

The dome is the extreme point of a hut which serves as a cape and cover to the house. It has a better function than giving shape to the house. The dome is the center of the house attached to the pillar which is the main framework that keeps the balance and stability of the structure. Also unless the dome is properly fixed, rain may come through the roof and damage the house. The same is true of a motherless child. He/she will have to lead a miserable life.

Proverbs number 76 and 77 strengthen the extraordinary importance of mothers to their children. The proverbs depict that a child is treated best only when he/ she is in the hands of a mother. This is because; it is believed that mothers are prophets for their children. The child not only gets feeding, affection and protection from the mother but also learns almost everything necessary for his later life. In other words, mothers are immediate learning environments to their children. That is why almost in any culture, mother's love is deeper than any other's love. Proverb number 79 also reflects this truth. It is only as a last resort that one accepts his/ her mother's death.

On the one hand the society appreciates women's roles as mothers through its proverbs. On the other hand, boys are advised to ignore their mothers' duties and perform that of their fathers'. Look at the following poems:

17. ወንድ ልጅ ተወልዶ ካልሆነ እንዳባቱ

ስጡት አመላማሎ ይፍተል እንደናቱ::

Unless a boy acts like his father

Give him *amalemalo* to spin cotton

Like his mother.

18. ማለዳ ተነስቶ በሬ ካልጠመደ

የሴቲቱን ሥራ እሳት ካነደደ

ወንድ ነው አትባሉት ወደናቱ ሄደ::

Instead of waking up

Early in the morning

And start farming,

If a boy lights fire

Which is the duty of females,

Don't call him a male

As he resembles his mother.

When it comes to division of labour, the West Gojjam society promotes blind beliefs. If mothers' love is greater than that of fathers' for children, boys should not have been warned through the oral traditions not to perform their mothers' duties. The reverse should have been practiced. This is so irrational that should be band by enhancing the awareness of the society .The present researcher would like to propose that the government should work in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, civic societies, mass media and the like to teach the society that there is no stereotyped division of labour as such between men and women. Especially educational institutes will play a

great role in shaping the minds of their students in particular and that of the community in general. Using the experiences of developed countries may also be helpful in this regard.

### 3.2.3. Proverbs that depict wisdom of women

82. መላ እንደ ሴት ግርማ እንደሌሊት።

*Mala is to a woman as Girma is to a night.*

83. የሴት መላ የሾህ አጥር ነው።

*Mala of women is like a thorn fence.*

84. ሴት ምትናገረው መፍትሄ ነው።

*Whatever a woman says is a solution.*

These proverbs indicate that a woman can serve as a counselor to a man. There are also common beliefs that even kings and famous warriors get advice from their wives whenever they face critical problems. *Mala* refers to the wisest idea forwarded to solve a certain problem. In these proverbs the advice to be obtained from women is implied to be dignified and desirable.

Proverb number 83 compares the system of woman to a thorn fence. Nobody tries to pass through or jump over such a fence. This is because it is dangerous. The implication is that a woman's advice is very useful to attain a certain goal. The method devised by a woman protects not only a man but also the community at large. Proverb number 84 states that whatever advice a woman proposes is effective and shows the solution to a problem.

### 3.2.4. Proverbs and oral poems that appreciate women's skills in housework and their excellent home management

85. ቤት ያለሴት ከብት ያለበረት አይሆኑም ንብረት።

A house without a woman and a barn without cattle are useless.

86. ሰማይ ያለደመና ብረት ቤት ያለ ሴት መሠረት።

Sky without cloud is iron as a house without a woman is baseless.

87. እናቲቱን አይተህ ልጁቱን አግባ።

Marry the daughter looking at the mother.

88. እንግዳ ካልመጣ ሁሉ ሴት ዝናብ ካልመጣ ሁሉ ቤት።

All women are equal in the absence of guests as all houses are equal when there is no rain.

Even though rural women's duties are limited to the house like child bearing, baking, fetching water, serving meals and the like, the society distinguishes one woman from the other woman based on their diligence or skill in food preparation, making local beer or *araki*, spinning and other domestic work. Some women are famous in such activities and whenever there is a preparation of some feast in the village like wedding, saint patron day associations, *taskar* and similar others celebrations, famous women are usually invited to manage (instruct) the preparation process of food and drink. There are even some women who are paid for their skills in this regard. Such differences among women are expressed through oral traditions. The above proverbs indicate this fact.

There are, of course, some ambiguous proverbs also. For example, proverb number 87 has two functions depending on the context in which it is used.

### **Marry the daughter looking at the mother (87).**

A person can marry a girl taking her physical appearance or attractiveness as the primary criterion. When this is the case, the action of looking at the mother refers to her complexion, posture and other external conditions. Still some people may take home management and food preparation skills as the main criteria for marriage. It does not mean that there are no women who fulfill both qualities but it is not always the case. That is why, in the traditional community of West Gojjam, the second alternative is usually applicable. After all, the boy does not have full freedom to choose his wife. It is the family of both parties who negotiate about the marriage of their children. But nowadays there are encouraging changes. Even in the countryside, age limit has been legally specified for marriage. Access to education is also increasing. As a result, most girls are frequenting schools though education in Ethiopia is not compulsory. The above proverb will be applicable best in the case of second marriage where the man looks for his own wife by himself.

Proverb number 88 can also be interpreted either negatively or positively depending to the context in which the proverb is used. It can be used, for example while a house leaks in order to describe the bad quality of the house. In terms of women also, it conveys two meanings- either to ridicule or praise their skills. If a woman's beer or *araki*, *enjera*, *wat*, and the like are good, the proverb is used to praise her skill. But usually it is used to criticize the skills of women, because a woman's ability in household work like cooking, preparing items of food is displayed only when there are guests in the house. When there are no guests and when there is no need of a woman's service, all women are equal. The negative implication here is that it is difficult to judge the equality of women's service in normal circumstances. Praising

women's skills in housework and house management can also be reflected using poems. For example:

19. ከዕዳቱ ጋራ ስትጋግረው.

ይመስላለል ሰፈፋን ንቡ የሰራው።

While she bakes the *enjera*

With its neatness and attractiveness

It looks like *safaf* made by bees.

*Safaf* is a bee wax which is clean and attractive to see. Baking *enjera* itself needs skill on the part of a woman. Those women who are so special in their skills are compared with bees. *Safaf* like *enjera* is said to be eaten without *wat*. So women are praised for this skill. The following poem has a similar meaning.

20. ዓገጃ ልጅ ጉብሌ ቁሚ ተጠየቁ

የጠመቅሽው ጠላ ጠጅ ነው አረቁ?

Oh, you young girl

Wait for a while and be asked

The beer you have prepared,

Is it mead or Araki?

Usually the quality of local beer is compared to mead or Araki. These two are also locally produced alcoholic drinks. But their alcoholic level is stronger than the local beer (or *tela*). Therefore, the local beer that has a strong taste is considered as Araki or mead. And a woman who has prepared such type of beer is praised for her good skill in this respect.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present a descriptive analysis of some selected proverbs and oral poems which reflect several attitude of the West Gojjam community, which is, by and large, patriarchal. A majority of these proverbs and poems that constitute the

traditional oral/folk heritage of the community project a negative image of their women. However, some of the proverbs and poems depict a positive image of these women. It is noteworthy that even the positive image of the women is restricted to their roles as mothers and wives, who are engaged in household work, and not in any collective activities. Thus, the positive image of these women is also patriarchal and gender biased.

This situation is in accordance with what Virginia Woolf (1929) described as the roles imposed on women like "angle in the house" which were intended to restrain women's emotions and passions. In other words, even the so-called positive images of women indirectly restrict their life only to the domestic sphere. Therefore, it may be stated here, that both the negative as well as positive images of women in general or the West Gojjam women in particular merely reflect a cultural gambit exercised by patriarchy to keep women perpetual subjugation under male domination.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The conceptual approach to the study of gender relations and images of women in chapter two of this study shows that gender is not the biological difference between men and women. Rather it is a social creation, which is mainly caused by division of labour. The cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in the patriarchal society for ages reveal the injustice in social roles between men and women.

In patriarchal social system women are considered inferior to men. They are subordinated in all social, political, and economic spheres. There is no equality between men and women. Such a traditional community perpetuates the inequality between the two sexes by various institutional and cultural means.

In a predominantly illiterate society like West Gojjam it is the oral tradition which is used as a means of perpetuating gender relations and/or gender discriminations. Members of the society reflect their attitudes towards men and women using oral traditions. The oral traditions by which the society reflects gender based expressions include fairly tales, riddles, myths, folk tales, proverbs, oral poems and the like.

Accordingly, in this research attempts have been made to make a descriptive analysis of gender-based oral traditions with special reference to proverbs and oral poems. The data collected for this research work depict both negative and positive images of the community towards women in West Gojjam.

In this study attempts have been made to show positive images of women using both proverbs and oral poems, but the study could not suggest the balance between the negative and positive attitudes. Women are portrayed positively only in a very few instances. And those few cases revolve around motherhood, house management, skills in food preparation and other similar activities that confine women to home.

Most proverbs and oral poems indicate that in West Gojjam women are submissive, dependent, and play very limited roles. They are restricted to rearing children, taking care of the family, baking, fetching water, collecting firewood, and similar domestic chores.

Despite the fact that women are performing tiresome activities and longer hours than men, the society does not believe they are accomplishing useful tasks. Rather it is believed that women are idle and economically dependent on their husbands. Such deep-rooted beliefs, practices and a long history of discrimination to which women have been subjected made women themselves to accept their inequalities with men. They think that the inferiority is not a social phenomenon but something in-born and eternal and unchangeable.

The oral traditions show that men are there in the society to rule. All the administrative and decision making roles are left to men. Men are also believed to be source of the family income or economy. In other words, men are hosts to their wives who are parasites. As generators of income, men are engaged in prestigious activities.

Women are not only given subordinate positions and secondary status in the West Gojjam society. There are some expressions which degrade women's dignity and ridicule their personality. In some cases women are even considered as animals and commodities to be manipulated by

their owners. The overall result has showed that oral traditions are self-sufficient to express the people's attitude towards relations between men and women. Men are generally glorified but women have been given very little attention. Moreover, women are despised

In conclusion, the present researcher proposes that further studies have to be made regarding the role of oral traditions in depicting gender relations. It is the belief of the researcher that, when further studies are made, more oral traditions which praise women may be obtained.

Furthermore, all bodies concerned including governmental and non governmental organizations, civic societies, and the public in general should work in cooperation to empower women and maintain equality between the two sexes.

Also educational institutions, women's associations, research institutions and individual researchers have to exert efforts to inculcate a new awareness in the traditional community not to use such oral traditions deliberately to ridicule women and praise men. Especially educational institutions from elementary to tertiary level have to enlighten the entire community that such type of oral traditions should not play any role other than providing historical significance.



## Bibliography

- Abrahams, D. "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions", (Ed) Richard Dorson. 1972. Folklore and Folk life: An Introduction. Chicago and London: Chicago University press
- Almaz Ehet "A perspective on Gender and Development"(Ed) Tsehay Brhane-Selasie. 1991. Gender Issues in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.
- Adanech Kidanemariam and Azeb Tamirat "Gender Influence on Women's Health: A Review of the Ethiopian Studies"(Ed) Tsehay Brehane-Selasie. 1991. Gender Issues in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.
- Aster Zewdie. 2004. Gender Mainstreaming Guideline in Youth, Sports and Culture Sectors. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press.
- Biniam Yakob. 2005. Analysis of Gender Based 'Kambatta' Proverbs. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (unpublished MA thesis).
- Cuddon, J.A. 1992. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory London: Clays ltd.
- Dorson, R.M. 1972. Folklore and Folk life: An Introduction. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Finnegan, R. 1970. Oral Literature in Africa. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1977. Oral Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Genet Zewdie "Women in Primary and Secondary Education"(Ed) Tsehay Brhane Selasie. Gender Issues in Ethiopia. 1991. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.
- Georges, Robert A. and Michael Own. 1995. Folkloristics: An introduction. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University.
- Melakneh Mengistu. 2005. Map of African Literature. Addis Ababa: Brana Enterprise.
- Ministry of Culture and Information. 1997. Ethiopian Cultural Policy. Addis Ababa: Brehanena Selam Printing Press.
- Miruka, Okumba "Understanding and Teaching Proverbs"(Ed) A. Bukenya, et al. 1994. Understanding Oral Literature. Nairobi: Nairobi University press.

- Ohesaina, C, " Images of Women in African Oral Literature"(Ed) A, Bukenya ,et.al.1994.  
Understanding Oral Literature. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press.
- Okpewho,I. 1992. African Oral Literature. Bloomington and Indiana polis: Indiana University Press.
- Rao, A..S. 2008."Literature and Language Teaching". Addis Ababa: Institute of Language Studies-AAU (Unpublished).
- Rahel Itana.2007. Portrayal of Women in the Novels of Ousmane Sembene and Syprian Ekwensi. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (unpublished MA thesis).
- Richmond, W. "Narrative Folk Poetry"(Ed) Richard Dorson.1972. Folklore and Folk Life: An Introduction .Chicago and London: Chicago University press.
- Richard, M.D. 1972. Folklore and Folk life: An Introduction. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.
- Stergard , L.1996. Gender and Development: A Practical Guide. London: Chatham plc.
- Tyson, L. 1999. Critical Theory Today .London: Garland Publishing.
- Yihenew Jembere. 1996.Generic Classification of Oral Prose Narratives of West Gojjam. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (unpublished MA thesis)
- Yodit Admasu.2007. The portrayal of Women in Selected Novels of Peter Abrahams; Ayikes Armah. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (Unpublished MA thesis).
- Virginia Woolf.1929. A room of one's own. New York: Harcourt Brace.

## **Amharic Sources Translated into English**

- Fekade Azeze 1999. Principles of Oral Literature. Addis Ababa: German International Adult Education Institute.
- Jabitanan Woreda Youth and Sports Office.1998 E.C. Oral literature on Women. A collection of proverbs and oral poems (unpublished).
- Nuria Ibrahim.1988 E.C. Arsi Oromo Proverbs on Women. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (unpublished BA Senior Essay).
- Amhara Region Women's Affairs Office.1977 E.C. "Gender" V 1,No.1,P 64.
- Amhara Region Education Bureau.1994 E.C. "Tigat" No 4, Ps 35-36.
- Amhara Region Youth, Culture and Sports Affairs bureau. 1996 E.C. "Makraz"V1, No. 1, Ps 43-44.
- West Gojjam Zone Finance and Economic Development Department.2000 E.C."Statistical Abstract". V 1, No. 1, Ps 1-5.
- Tadesse Eshete.1980. Amharic Proverbs which Reflect Women's Inferiority.Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University (unpublished BA Senior Essay).

## Appendix I

### Proverbs that have not been analyzed

1. ሞት እናት ይፈራል።  
Death afraid of a mother,
2. የተቀመጠ ማርና ልጃገረድ የማይሆኑት የለም።  
A preserved honey and a girl (virgin) can be any thing.
3. የአዋቂ ሴት ቤት አለው ውበት።  
The house of a wise woman is attractive.
4. ሴት ካልወደደች ቋንጣ አትጠብስም።  
Unless a woman loves, she will not roast *Quanta* (dried meat).
5. ሴትና ወጪት ሲከናከቡ የሻላል።  
A woman and *wochit* look better when they cover their head.
6. ለመካን ሴት እምየ፣ ለገረድ እትየ ብርቃቸው ነው።  
Mother for a sterile woman, madam for a servant is precious.
7. ሚስት ከፈቷት ባዳ፣ ማሽላ ከተቆረጠ አገዳ።  
A divorced wife is *bada* (unrelated) as a cut corn is *ageda*.
8. ሚስቱን ፈትቶ ከአማቱ ቤት ተደበቀ።  
He killed his wife and hid himself in his mother-in-law's house.
9. ከሴት ከመምከር ደግሶ መስከር።  
Preparing a feast and being intoxicated is better than counseling a woman.
10. የወፍ ምስክሯ ድንቢጥ።  
The witness of a bird is *denbit* (very small bird).
11. የሴት ብቻዋን ሂያድ፣ የቁስ አርፋጅ ሁሉም ነገር ወዳጅ።  
A woman who walks alone and a priest who is late are both provocative.
12. የሚነቃነቅ ግንድና የምትስቅ ሴት ልብ ሩቅ ነው።  
The root of a shaking log and the heart of a smiling woman are far.
13. ሴት አማት የመረዘው ኮሶ የነዘነዘው።  
He who has been nagged by a mother-in-law is like one who suffered from tapeworm.

14. ሴትና ፈረስ የሰጡትን ይቀምስ።  
A woman and a horse taste only what they are given.
15. ተድረው ቢመለሱ የውሃ መንገድ ረሱ።  
She forgot they way to the stream after her marriage.
16. ሴት ካልዋሸች ባልዋን ትወዳለች።  
Unless a woman lies, she loves her husband.
17. ሁሉ አማረሽን ገበያ አታውጧት።  
Don't take the all trader to the market.
18. እንስራዋን ጥላ ወንዝ ወረደች።  
She went to the stream to fetch water without having her pot.
19. ትለብሰው የላት ትከናነበው አማራት።  
She does not have any clothes to wear but she wishes one to cover her head.
20. አዲስ ሚስት የመገጫ ክዳን ትሰፋለች።  
A new wife stitches a cover for a mortar.
21. የሴት ልጅ ልብ ከከንፈሯ ላይ ነው።  
The heart of a woman is on her lip.
22. የቆጡን አወርድ ብላ የብብቷን ጣለች።  
She lost something in her hand while trying to grasp at a distance.
23. የአንድን ሴት ልብ ከማወቅ አንድ ባታሊዮን ጦር መምራት ይሻላል።  
Commanding one brigade army is easier than understanding the heart of a woman.
24. የሴት ፀባይ የትኩስ ገንፎ ያህል ነው።  
The behavior of a woman is like a hot porridge.
25. ሴት ብትወልድ መቼም ሴት ነው።  
If a female gives birth, obviously the child will have a female characteristics.
26. ሴትና ስፌት በሩቅ ሲያዩት ያምር።  
Women and hand oven material look attractive at a distance.
27. ያባበለሽ ሁሉ ላያገባሽ ከባልሽ አትባባሽ።

Don't quarrel to your husband for that all those who are persuading you will not marry you.

28. የበሬ ሳቢ የሴት አሳቢ ይስጥህ።

Let God reward you with an active ox and a considerate woman.

29. የመንታ እናት ተንጋላ ትሞት።

A mother of the twines dies lying on her back.

30. በሴትና በውሃ የማይርስ የለም።

There is no one who does not get wet (be satisfied with) a woman and water.

31. የራሷ አርባት የሰው ታማስላለች።

She stirs somebody else's food while her own is burnt.

32. ይብላኝ ለወለደሽ ያገባሽስ ይፈታሻል።

Sorry for your parents, but one who marries you will divorce you.

33. ሸርደም ሸርደም ብትሄድ ጎርደም ጎርደም መጣች።

When *sherdem*, *Sherdem* goes, *gordem*, *gordem* comes.

34. ስትፈጭ የነበረች ማንንለል አቃታት።

She who was grinding a grain is unable to purify one.

35. ለፍቅር ብቀርባት ለጠብ አረገዘች።

I approached her for love but she conceived for quarrel.

36. የሴት ወፍራም እንጂ ታላቅ የለውም።

A woman can be fat but not great.

37. የሴት መልካ እጅዋን ታጥባ እንኩ ስትል።

The beauty of a woman is seen when she provides food with her washed hands.

38. ሴትና እሳት ጥጋብ ያበዛል።

Women and fire are arrogant.

39. ምጡን እርሺው ልጁን አንሺው።

Forget the suffering of the labour and pick up the child.

40. አይንዋን በአይንዋ አየች።

She saw her eyes in her own eyes (gave birth).

## Appendix 2

### List of Informants

| No | Name                | Age | Qualification     | Occupation   | Current Address       |
|----|---------------------|-----|-------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1  | Ato ayalneh Mehretu | 44  | BA in English     | Public Relations Department Head at Amhara State Credit and Saving Enterprise  | Bahir DAR             |
| 2  | Ato Bitew Hlina     | 40  | BA in English     | Head of Documentation Center at Amhara State Culture and Tourism Bureau  | Bahir Dar             |
| 3  | Ato Girma Engidaw   | 35  | BA in English     | Cultural values, Institutional Studies and Utilization work process coordinator at West Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Department | Bahir Dar             |
| 4  | Ato Mastewal Wubetu | 44  | MA in TEAM        | Lecturer at Bahir Dar University   | Bahir Dar             |
| 5  | Ato Kindu Mersh     | 50  | BA in English     | Promotion Department Head at Amhara Women's Affairs Office   | Bahir Dar             |
| 6  | Ato Alamerew Yimenu | 38  | BA in Mathematics | Budget Preparation Officer at Amhara State Finance and Economic Development Bureau   | Bahir Dar             |
| 7  | Ato Bantayehu Genet | 52  | Grade 8 complete  | Ex-Soldier   | Yilmana Denssa Woreda |
| 8  | Ato Kasahun Merid   | 60  | Literate          | Farmer   | Gonji Kolela Woreda   |
| 9  | Ato Leykun Abeje    | 65  | Diploma           | Retired Teacher  | Finoteselam           |
| 10 | W/ro Meselech Belay | 35  | Diploma           | Teacher  | South Achefer         |

## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that, this thesis is my work and that courses of materials used for this work have been acknowledged.

Name Yaregal Emrie

Signature [Handwritten Signature]

Date 25-06-09