

THE MAJOR THEMES AND MOTIFS  
OF  
SOUTHERN AGAW FOLKTALES

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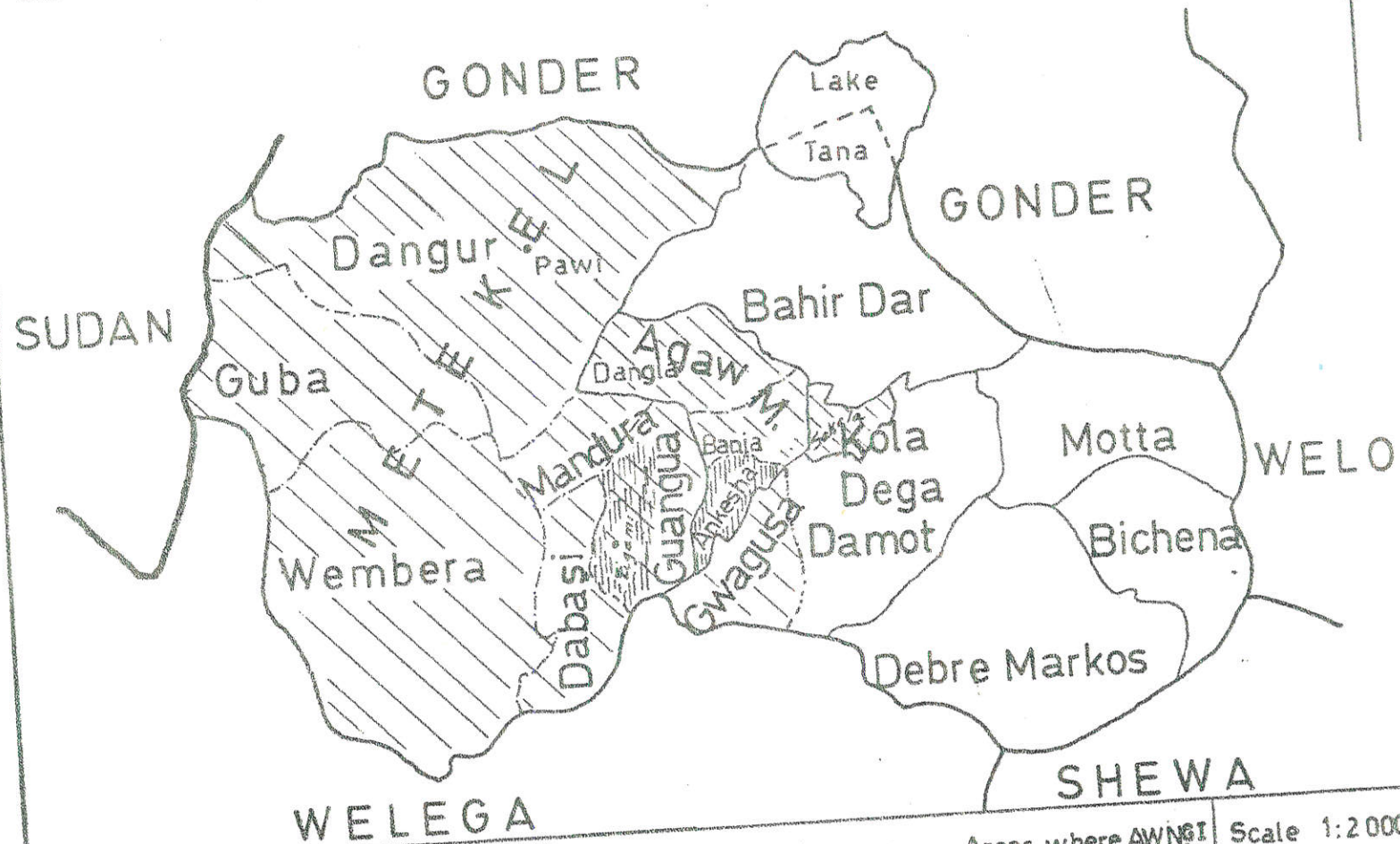
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DECLARATION	

Location of the study area:- North-Western Ethiopia (Gojjam)



**LEGEND**

- International Boundary
- Adm. Region Boundary

- Awraja Boundary
- Wereda Boundary
- The study Area.

Areas where AW/NT is spoken (with some other admixtures.)

Scale 1:2 000 000

Source E.S.A, 1985

ABSTRACT

In a heterogenous society like ours, the dominant culture naturally exerts its influence over the others directly or indirectly. Amharisation has hence drastically affected the numerous nationalities of the country chief amongst whom are the Southern Agaws. As a result of this unchecked process of assimilation which emerged by the end of the 15th - century, their traditional oral treasures and the language are in the process of dying out.

It then becomes imperative that attempts either to revive the language or to record, study and preserve their oral treasures for reasons of historical, cultural and literary significance should be made before they disappear altogether. The purpose of the study was thus to record some of the Southern Agaw folktales and examine their socio-cultural significance through a thematic analysis as well as to determine their major motifs.

The study has three main divisions. The first part which runs from chapter one to chapter three lays the foundation for the study by describing the purpose and the scope of the study, the magnitude of the problem and the Socio-Historical background of the Agaws in general and that of the Southern Agaws in particular. Area of the study, methods of data collection and classification, the definition of terms used and an etymological explanation have also been included here. The second part which constitutes chapters IV and V, deals with a descriptive analysis of the selected tales. In chapter IV, a

brief description of each tale or that of a group of tales as the case may be, is given after which the major themes they embody are pointed out. In chapter V, an attempt has been made to bring forth the major motifs of Southern Agaw folktales. This part has many divisions and subdivisions since the bulk of the work occurs here. The third part, the conclusion, recaptulates the significant themes and motifs observed in the analysis and draws their significance in the Southern Agaw socio-cultural milieu.

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## I. Introduction

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia presents a heterogenous variety of ethnical cultural and linguistic types and has been well styled 'un museo di popoli'<sup>1</sup> to that effect. This description presupposes the existence of numerous nationalities with which the country is populated, each predominantly with its own distinct language, culture, and oral tradition. Consequently, this heterogeneity of culture stresses the need for studying the various treasures of these nationalities such as folklore in the field of literature.

The store of folk experience contributes greatly to deepening our knowledge of humanity. Among other things, it enables us to make available degrees of delight and instruction fundamental to human life. Folk literature is a reservoir of common experience and traditional wisdom as it is permeated with the tragedy and comedy of life. Moreover, the study of folklore reveals the degrees of similarities and differences in ethical, psychological and artistic attitudes of the various nationalities of our country. All the more, "Folklore is not only an echo of the past, but it also gives a fascinating sense of continuity with the present in both pleasure and wisdom"<sup>2</sup>

Cognizant of such values, very few studies have been made so far on the Ethiopian folk literature. To mention but few, there are five

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Spencer Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (London: Frank Cass Co., 1952), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> G.W. Boswell and J.R. Reaver. Fundamentals of Folk Literature (Oosterhout: Anthropological publications, 1962), p. 206.

M.A. dissertations one of which is by a foreigner. Abdul Haji Rama, (some cultural Elements as Reflected in Somali Folktales, 1982), comes up with the conclusion that Somali folklore in general and folktales in particular reveal the nomads' mode of thinking. In the same vein, Shibeshi Lemma (Famine - Inspired Amharic Oral Poetry, 1986), examines some poems gathered from Wollo, Relief and Rehabilitation Centre, and holds that they are the mirrors of the psychological torture and anguish of the drought victims.

In this study, grim reminiscences of the hidden hunger of 1974 are brought forth. Berhanu Matheos (An Analysis of Kambata Proverbs, 1986) underlines the need for studying folk speech in order to understand any society and stresses the essential link between culture and folklore. Further more, Dr. Hailu Araaya, (Amharic Folk Poetry Recreated, 1979), translates some oral poems in a non-word-for-word manner and makes them available to a foreign audience. Cerulli in his (FLGSA, 1922), records specimens of folk literature of the Galla South of Abyssinia in a rather rambling manner. Years later, Desalegne Seyoum (Cerulli's FLGSA: A critical Review, 1985), takes up Cerulli's anthology and reviews it critically. His review underlines the cultural and historical significance of FLGSA in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> - century Ethiopia.

Apart from these, Dr. Fekade Azeze has recently compiled a bibliography of oral literature with a preliminary review in which he enthusiastically stresses the need for studying folklore. He has appended a list of some seventy or eighty senior essays for a B.A. degree in Ethiopian Languages and Literature. His compilation consists of 36 pages of bibliography and 20 pages of review.

In the light of this antiquarian as well as current interest in folklore study, the project has been undertaken with the following objectives in mind. These are:

Firstly, to examine the social and literary significance of Southern Agaw folktales through a thematic analysis,

secondly, to determine the major motifs, and the cultural value of the tales in question. In other words, the study aims at bringing forth the major themes and motifs of SAFT\* and determine the role played by them in the southern Agaw socio-cultural milieu.

#### 1.2. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is supposed to be multi-dimensional. Firstly, it is hoped that it would mirror or reveal the psychological, ethical, artistic attitudes, beliefs and the traditional wisdom of the southern Agaws. Their world view, concept of justice, cultural norms and mode of thinking are hopefully, reflected in the tales as they are the repertoire of folk experience.

Moreover, the study is an attempt to record some of the oral treasures of the southern Agaw, as these treasures are in the process of dying out due to the speedy Amharisation process. Besides, this study will hopefully contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the government with regard to the study of Ethiopian nationalities which aim at popularising and standardising their

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\* Southern Agaw Folk-Tales

oral treasures. As stated in the proclamation providing for the Establishment of the Ethiopian Nationalities Institute, the chief mission of the Institute is thus to:

make studies on the basis of which nationality languages and culture... shall be developed and popularized, and conduct a study on how the history, custom and cultural heritages of the different nationalities shall be collected, carefully recorded used for practical and educational purposes, and on how mutual exchange among cultures... may be developed<sup>4</sup>.

To be more specific, the study contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Ethiopian Languages Academy, whose duties are:

1) To study oral literature at an advanced level since Ethiopian nationality languages that have literature\* and those that do not, have oral literature, and since oral literature provides hints about the history, culture, beliefs, economic and social development of a nationality.

2) To collect, record, study, analyse and translate the oral literature of the various nationalities and enable oral literature to contribute greatly to creative work.

<sup>4</sup> "A proclamation providing for the Establishment of the Institute for the study of Ethiopian Nationalities, No. 236/1983" in Negarit Gazeta no.7 (AA:Bspp, 1983), p. 32.

\* Literature here means written literature.

3) To sift out the good and the bad elements of the oral literature of each nationality and to publish (the results) in a book form side by side with the relevant analysis so that the coming generation is able to satisfactorily know its cultural heritage<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.3 Areas and Scope of the Study

The study has been made in the land of southern Agaws, namely Agaw-midirr and Metekel provinces, Gojjam. Agaw-midirr is inhabited permanently by the Awawa alone. This province according to the old political map is made up of three districts (weredas) namely, Ankishi, Banji and Dangilli.

Metekel is inhabited by many minority groups (numerically) such as shanquilla, shinasha, Oromo, Felasha (Ethiopian Jews), along with the Agaws. The Agaw enclaves in Metekel include Guangua-Mandura, Zigami, Dibati and Belaya-Dangur only. The rest of the province is shared among others. At present, northern Metekel, especially, pawi, is congested with dislocated settlers drawn from the drought-stricken areas of the country.

However, I have chosen Zigami and Ankishi from Metekel and Agaw-midirr respectively, as the chief centres of the study and data collection since the Awawa in these areas are less Amharised and presumably possess an original material. In spite of some

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<sup>5</sup> Fekade Azeze "Oral Literature in Ethiopia," Yekatit Quarterly vol. XIII, no.1 September, 1989), p.27.

dialectal differences, data gathered from the other parts of southern Agaw have selectively been used. Since the more urbanised areas are almost Amharised in many senses, priority has been given to the material from the remotest areas for the sake of originality.

Like any other society, the Awawa of Gojjam possess an invaluable wealth of oral tradition such as riddles, proverbs, funeral dirges, wedding, work and melodic love songs, oral poetry, nursery rhymes, folktales and other popular forms of folklore. However, since folklore is a wide subject, this paper does not intend to be an exhaustive treatment of the southern Agaw folk literature. Apart from touching up on some Awngi and Amharic proverbs for illustration, it is confined to an analysis of sixty folktales.

#### 1.4. Etymological Explanation

A cursory review of most of the studies made on the southern Agaws and their language revealed a number of distortions and confusions as regards the naming of the language, the people, the plural maker and the Adjective marker. Consequently, it becomes imperative that such distortions and confusions which might have been caused due to wrong information or lack of enthusiasm need to be cleared up for the sake of rectification and standardisation.

To begin, with M.L. Bender (Language in Ethiopia, 1976), calls the language 'Awgni'. While Hetzron (The verbal system of southern Agaw, 1969), calls it 'southern Agaw'. Palmer also calls the same language 'Awiya' or 'Agau'. Moreover, Worku Gella confuses the

adjective marker (=ka) with the plural maker. Even worse, he delves into a false analysis trying to derive a linear meaning from the word 'Awiya' as saying Awe = come; ya = son; a blend which means non-native.

To do away with such inconsistencies, an appropriate clarification or explanation based on conventions and the personal knowledge of the researcher as a native speaker of the language is given below:

- (1) Awgni - This word which is used by M.L. Bender to designate the language of southern Agaws has nothing to do with the language nor with the people. It might have been caused due to wrong pronunciation on the part of the informant or wrong reception on the part of the recorder.
- (2) Southern Agaw - This is acceptable on two grounds. First, it designates the language defined as the southernmost of the Agaw languages by Hetzron in his analysis of the verbal system of Agawna. Second it designates the people with reference to their geographic setting. The Agaw people are distributed over four well known settlement areas in the country: Keren (north); Wag-Sequota and Lasta-Lalibella (east), Gondar (north-western) and Gojjam (south).

- (3) Awawa: The word is the plural form of Awi (male) and Awa (female). It refers to those who belong to the Agaw ethnic group by birth. It is here where Worku Gella (The phonology of Awgni 1986), mistakes the adjective marker '-ka' for the plural maker in the word 'Awka'. The suffix '-ka' in Awka does not denote the plurality of the number but the racial identity as in 'Amāxarka' (= Amhara by birth) or 'Galagalka' (= Galla by birth). Their plural form is 'Amāxar\*' and 'Galagal' respectively. And yet, there are border line cases where the plural maker and the adjective marker overlap. For instance, 'Tayka' - denotes plurality and means = sheep, but when used as an adjective 'Tayka' means = foolish.
- (4) Awiya: Palmer uses this word to refer to the language. But then, it simply means the son of an Agaw as in 'Abebeya = The son of Abebe, or Thomasya = The son of Thomas.
- (5) Awnat: This is the right word by which the language of the Gojjam Agaws is designated.
- (6) Agaw: Is the general name for all Agaw groups of scattered pocket-survivals all over the country.

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\* Amāxari - is an Agaw word meaning soldier.

(7) Damot Agaw: The Damot Agaw is another name for the southern Agaws or the Awawa of Gojjam mentioned above. 'Damot' is prefixed to denote the historical past of the area. After all, history attests that Damot was once inhabited by Agaw speaking people. At present the Awngi speaking pockets in Damot are Sekela-Tillili and Gugusa-wonberma.

(8) The Seven House Agaw: It is a re-naming of the Awawa or southern Agaws or the Damot Agaws intended to trace their origin back to the seven ancestors who are said to have led the first wave of migrants, to Agaw-midirr probably in the 6th-century A.D.

#### 1.5. Definition of Terms Used

##### 1.5.1. Folklore

Folktales occur under the broad area of knowledge known as folklore. The definition of folklore itself is so controversial that it becomes essential to establish an operational definition. The controversy over its definition is arrestingly expressed by Stith Thompson as follows:

Although the word folklore is more than a century old, no exact agreement has been reached as to its meaning. The common idea present in all folklore is that of traditions, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record. It involves the dances, songs, tales legends and traditions, the beliefs and superstitions, and the proverbial

sayings of the peoples everywhere. It also includes, studies of customs, of traditional agricultural and domestic practices, types of buildings and utensils and traditional aspects of social organisation. But for these latter aspects, there seems to be a general agreement to consider them when found in a primitive... society, as part of ethnology rather than folklore. This latter division of labour is largely a matter of convenience and is not universally accepted. At least, among literate peoples, all the subjects mentioned above are considered as folklore, since all of them are truly traditional<sup>6</sup>.

María Leach, has also listed twenty-one definitions of the term folklore which are more varied than finger-prints. Here are four of them which can help us to feel the magnitude of the controversy for ourselves<sup>7</sup>.

Folklore or popular knowledge is the accumulated store of what mankind has experienced, learned, and practised, as distinguished from the so called scientific knowledge.

(Aurelio M. Espinosa)

Folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc.. in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogenous unsophisticated people, tied together not only by physical bonds but also by emotional ones, which colour their every day expression, giving it unity and individual distinction.

(María Leach)

<sup>6</sup> María Leach (ed.), Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), p.403.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 393-401.

Folklore is that part of a people's culture which is preserved, consciously or unconsciously, in beliefs and practices, customs and observances of general currency, in myths, legends, and tales of common acceptance and in arts and crafts which express the temper and genius of a group rather than of an individual. Because, it is a repository of popular traditions, and an integral element of the popular "climate", folklore serves as a constant source and frame of reference for more formal literature and art, but it is distinct therefrom in that it is essentially of the people, by the people and for the people.

(Theodore H. Gaster)

In anthropological usage, the term folklore has come to mean myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, verse, and a variety of other forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word... Folklore in all its forms thus defined is obviously related to literature which is written but folklore may never be written even in a literate society, and it may exist in societies which have no form of writing. Like literature, folklore is an art form related to music, the dance, and the graphic and plastic arts but different in the medium of expression which is employed.

(W.R. Bascom)

In spite of the seemingly opposing approaches to the definition of folklore, two points are evident in all of them that folklore denotes the wider social heritage of man while oral literature refers to the verbal heritage of man transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth, like folktales.

### 1.5.2 Folktale

Ruth Finnegan defines the folktale as 'the prose narrative genre' of oral literature. The term folktale as used in English is very inclusive. It has been used, as a general word denoting all kinds of traditional narrative in prose. Folktale forms such as explanatory legends concerned with the origin of social and natural phenomena, supernatural creations, fairy tales and fables all fall under folktales.

This taxonomy is generally well established that the two influential schools of folklore study the Historical-Geographical and Structural approaches also adhere to it. Stith Thompson, for instance classifies legends, myths, fables and people's tales under the 'FOLKTALE'. This is evidenced in published works such as The Folktale, Motif-Index of Folk Literature, and Types of Folklore by Stith Thompson, and Fundamentals of Folk Literature by W.G. Boswell.

Folktale in this paper then, is to be understood as any traditional prose narrative including fables, myths, legends, adventure stories, jocular tales, the stupid man's tales, explanatory tales and traditions with the same meaning as in the Southern Agaw oral literature.

### 1.5.3 Motif

The definition of the term 'motif' is disputable. To begin with, Thompson defines it as:

... the term motif is used very loosely to include any of the elements going into a traditional tale. It must be remembered that, in order to become a real part of tradition, an element must have something that will make people remember and repeat it.<sup>8</sup> (emphass mine).

Thompson stresses that a motif must be an occurrence that is sufficiently striking or amusing to appeal to an audience of listeners. She holds that mother is not a motif but a cruel mother becomes one since she is at least thought to be unusual and more than a common place.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Abrams defines the term motif as, "A frequently recurrent character, incident or concept in folklore or literature."<sup>10</sup> According to Webster's New 20<sup>th</sup> Dictionary, "Motif ... or a main theme or subject matter to be elaborated on or developed"<sup>11</sup>.

From the above three approaches to the definition of the term 'motif', we deduce that it refers to a recurrent, striking and/or memorable element in folk literature. It ranges from the central theme or moral of the tale to such formal elements as plot, action, character, incident, episode, object, conflict and resolution which

8 Ibid. pp. 752-53

9 Ibid.

10 M.H. Abrams. A Glossary of Literary Terms (Newyork; HOLT RENEHART AND WINSTON, 1964), p.53.

11 Noah Webster. New Twentieth century Dictionary of the English Language. (Newyork, simon and schuter, 1979), p.1173.

continually find their place in traditional folktales. Some motifs may be universal and some others particular or local. This distinction is believed to prove whether there is any form of relationship between the tales of, say, a region, a country or the world as a whole.

#### 1.6 Characteristics of Oral Literature

In spite of some border line cases, the following are the most significant traits that characterize oral literature in contradistinction to the written one.<sup>12</sup>

- A. Unscientific world outlook : It manifests a non-scientific outlook since it is based on pure imagination and flourishes in the absence of scientific knowledge.
- B. Volatility: The whole material happens to have the quality of fluidity. That is it changes from time to time, undergoes modifications, and moves from society to society. In effect, it loses its original form through time, space and cultural interaction.
- C. Conformism: For the most part, it aims at preserving and defending the status quo rather than challenge it.
- D. Performance: The most obvious characteristic of oral literature is its oral nature or transmission by word of mouth. It is also based on dramatic presentation and the imaginative interaction of the audience. Moreover, it is not so remote as is the case with written literature.

<sup>12</sup> Based on lecture notes for the course "African Literature I" by Assefa Aregahegne, 1982, AAU.

- E. Commulative creativity: Its creator is mostly anonymous, and so it is stamped with the mark of group genius rather than that of an individual. The subscribers of the Historical-geographical method of folklore study for instance accept the premise that an anonymous composer had created every substantial folklore item at one point in time.
- F. Formal Simplicity: Usually, it is short in form and involves an unsophisticated linear plot and uncomplicated conflict.
- G. Universality: Be it literate or preliterate, there is no society without oral tradition since it is a universal human legacy.
- H. Absence of concrete time and place in the action: The action mostly takes place in an indefinite setting.
- I. Prevalence of trickster animals or characters: In most tales, speaking animals such as apes, dogs and rabbits do prevail in a personified form, usually resulting in the victory of the weak over the strong.
- J. The victory of good over evil: A contest takes place between good and evil, truth and falsehood virtue and vice in which the virtuous ultimately triumphs over the villainous.

Thus, since a folktale shares a range of relationships with the other folklorish items, it is characterized by all or most of the above traits. The southern agaw folktales are also no exception to this general rule.

All the more, volatility has become such a marked trait of folktales all over the world that it has led to the emergence of the Historical-geographical method of folklore study which is interested in the origin, distribution, types and classification of folktales. Stith Thompson in this connection writes that "a folktale travels with great ease from one story-teller to another and passes language boundaries without difficulty"<sup>13</sup>. That is, probably why the midget, witty characters and speaking animals abound Agaw, Jeblawi, Somali and Amharic folktales with slight formal variations in our case.

This attests to the fact that "once a folk tradition or a wonder tale has attained a coherent form, it may travel across continents and oceans"<sup>14</sup>.

As Ethiopia presents a heterogenous variety of ethnical and linguistic types, the folktales people tell around their fires represent a cross current of cultures within the nation. Very few tales, for instance, in this collection have counterparts in the Ethiopian Somali, Amharic and Tigrigna. Most of them, however, bear the mark of strictly local invention, and virtually all of them have been so coloured by the life and custom of the southern Agaws that they have a flavour of their own.

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<sup>13</sup> Stith Thompson, "Folk Literature", Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th ed.), XIX, p.313.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 308.

## II. The Agaw People and Their Setting

As regards the essential link between culture and literature, Ruth Finnegan maintains, "In Africa as elsewhere literature is practised in society. It is obvious that any analysis of African literature must take account of social and historical context, and never more so than in the case of oral literature"<sup>15</sup>. In the light of this cohesive view, a cursory sketch of the people's socio-historical background, language, culture and physical environment is given below in a form of summary to avoid duplication except where additional information is introduced.

### 2.1 The Socio-Historical Background

F-C-Gamst<sup>16</sup> notes that central Ethiopians are preponderantly caucasoides. Whether their language is semitic or cushitic, they show a common range of somatic characteristics. Evidently, the Ethiopian caucasoid is of a medium height with a slender to a medium build. Skin colour ranges from a dark brown to a higher tan with a median about mid-point between the two extremes. The hair is almost always black and varies from kinky to curly. Their lips are thinner, and noses less broader and more prominent than those of Bushmanoids. This description is equally applicable to the somatic characteristics of the Agaw people as well.

Northern, central and north western Ethiopia is inhabited by three major groups: the Amhara, the Tigre and the Agaw who are hardly

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa (Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Gamst, OP. Cit. pp. 11-12.

distinguishable from one another. The Agaw, the Amhara and the Tigre hold themselves to be superior to Negroids and hence do not intermarry with them. Aleka Taye holds that "of all the people of Ethiopia, the main noble groups are... the Amhara, Tigre and Agaw<sup>17</sup>". According to F.C. Gamst, the attitude of the highland Ethiopians toward people who are somatically different from them is one of superiority, and this attitude is reflected in their folktales and epigrammatic proverbs.

Anthropologists like Gamst and Murdock hold that the Amhara, the Tigre and the Agaw are racially one and so have many common cultural roots inspite of the fact that the first two groups speak a semitic language and the third speaks a cushitic one\*\*. Trimmingham also states that the non-semitic element in Amhara and Tigre is 80%.

Agaw is a generic name given to four (?) well known cushitic speaking groups of people in Ethiopia with a population of over half a million<sup>18</sup>. They are the Bilen (Bagos Agaws) of Keren, Eritrea, the Xamtanga of Wag-Lasta, Wollo, the Awawa of Agaw-midirr-Metekel, Gojjam and the Hebraic peasantry of north western Gondar and its

<sup>17</sup> Grover Hudson and Tekste Negash (trans.) History of the people of Ethiopia by Taye G. Mariam (Uppsala, Uppsala University, 1987), p.25.

\*\* Semitic and Cushitic are subfamilies of the Afroasiatic language families: See Greenberg (1963: 42,65).

<sup>18</sup> This figure stands for the sum total of the Awawa (300,000), the Bilen (50,000), the Xamtanga (50,000), the Hebraic peasantry (30,000) and the other pocket survivals elsewhere. Due to the civil war, no census has been conducted recently in the northern and north western Ethiopia which are inhabited by the Agaws.

environs. Most historians and researchers, however, do not categorize the last group under the Agaw probably on account of their pagan-Hebraic practices<sup>19</sup>.

Before the emergence of such scattered survivals, Agaws were the inhabitants of the northern half of Ethiopia. According to Tadesse Tamrat, the Agaw were the inhabitants of all the country north of the Jerma and east of the Abbay and east and south of the Bashillo river which formed the emerging region of Amhara<sup>20</sup>. They are the most ancient and indigenous people of the country. The Agaws are known to have developed varieties of plants that reached them from South Arabia by diffusion and to have provided the major crops of the Ethiopic agricultural civilization. Moreover, they have also furnished some linguistic characteristics. They supplied the bulk of the population and determined the somatic characteristics of the Abyssinian people. In this connection M.L. Bender maintains:

"I have frequently heard the statement that the Amhara are essentially semitized Agaws... the physical appearances of present day highland plateau Amhara are quite varied, but certainly are in the range of what Amharised Agaws would presumably look like"<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> On this point see Taye Retta, Ethiopian Geographical Journal vol.1 no.1, June 1963, p.24 and Taye G. Mariam, History of the people of Ethiopia (AA. Bsp, 1964 E.C.) p.48.

<sup>20</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (1270-1527) (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.5.

<sup>21</sup> M.L. Bender, "The Origin of Amharic" Journal of the ILS, vol.1 no.1, p. 48.

His argument is so evident that it needs no further inspection. Trimingham further notes that the modern Abyssinian type is the complete fusion of the migrant semitic and the indigenous Agaw<sup>22</sup>.

Though the Agaws are one of the most important people in the history of Ethiopia, their contributions have remained unstudied. The need for the study of the Agaw is thus resentfully noted by Murdock as "The lack of information (on the Agaw and their contributions) is doubly regrettable since all indications point to the Agaw as one of the culturally most creative peoples on the entire continent"<sup>23</sup>. Thus the socio-cultural achievements of the Agaw people both before and during the era of semitic speakers are veiled in obscurity perhaps due to the deliberate intrigues of the Amhara elite.

The Southward movement of the Ethiopic civilization into the territory of the Agaw south of the Tekeze at the close of the second century, marked a cultural contact between the indigenous Agaw and the Ethiopic migrants. This cultural contact which persisted for centuries is said to have given rise to a third culture system \_\_\_\_\_ the Amhara proper via the process of fusion. Gamst **stresses** the reciprocal nature of this process: Christian religion but including

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22 Trimingham Op. cit. p.49.

23 G.P. Murdock, Africa: Its people and Their culture History (Newyork: McGraw-Hill, 1949), p. 182.

many Hebraic Agaw elements, agriculture of South Arabian type, but dominated by crops developed by the Agaw and a semitic language but with strong Agaw characteristics. Though this assimilationist process is said to have lasted for about seven centuries, the Agaw tradition and language were not obliterated. The Agaw retained their language with the blend used as a lingua franca. This attests that the acculturation process was quite incomplete. Trimingham in this regard writes that "the Abyssinians, infact, are the Agaw who had never been dominated by the Axumites, but who had received a second hand heritage from the Axumite fusion of semite and Hamite"<sup>24</sup>. This long cultural contact was thus characterized by the prevalence of a diglossic situation (bilingualism) and ~~stabilized~~ pluralism (arrested fusion).

According to Gamst, near the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Axum lost its sea-routes and coastal towns to persia which meant a decline in trade and crisis in economy. The Beja (northern Hamitic people) invasion resulted in the blockade of Axum with christian states in Nubia. The final blow to the wanning Ethiopic civilization was given by the Agaw reaction to the assimilationist cultural contact. The Agaw reaction to the cultural contact is said to have been caused by the intrusion of the Amhara which provoked a nativistic movement

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<sup>24</sup> Trimingham, Loc. cit.

among the Agaw South of the Tekeze river. Yodit (Guidit) the **Salasha** Agaw queen who ruled probably from 842(?) — 882, was one of the Agaw chiefs who reacted militarily against the Amhara-Tigre power from the ninth century onwards\*\*.

Thus, the decline of Axum brought about a period of Agaw uprising and political control of Ethiopia designated as 'The Zagwe period'. This Agaw rise to power in about 840's (?) meant not only a resurgence of the Agaw south of the Tekeze and a reaction to the seven-century old cultural contact but also an acceleration of the process of the creole impinging on Amharic. That is why scholars like Ullendorff and M.L. Bender maintain that Amharic, bears strong Agaw characteristics.

Consequently, the royal power passed into an Agaw family of Lasta called - Zagwe - who founded their capital at Roha, Lalibella. In spite of all the concerted anti-Zagwe campaigns of the church and the pro- "solomonid" historians, "The Zagwe dynasty of the Lasta Agaw... centered at Roha, Lalibella, formally held power in Abyssinia from 1137-1270"<sup>25</sup>.

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\*\* The controversy over the ethnic identity of Yodit-Guidit is still unresolved. On this point see, Sergew H. Selassie, "The problem of Gudit", Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. X, No. 1, pp. 113-124.

<sup>25</sup> Gamst, Op. cit. p. 14.

However, the particular year 1137, as the year of the Zagwe advent to power is unacceptable since their political ascendancy takes up presumably from the dethronement of the last Axumite king, Delnaad, in about 920. Aleka Taye G. Mariam gives a list of eleven kings from the House of Zagwe along with their respective reigns, and this will throw light on the duration of the dynasty:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Merra Tekle Haimanot	13 years	920-933
Tette Wodem	40 "	933-973
Jan Seyoum	40 "	973-1013
Girma Seyoum	40 "	1013-1053
Yemerhanne Kerstos	40 "	1053-1093
Saint Harbe	40 "	1093-1133
Lalibella	40 "	1133-1173
Ne'akutolab	40 "	1173-1213
Yetebarek (Woldu le Lalibella)	17 "	1213-1230
Moirrare	15 "	1230-1245
Harboy	8 "	1245-1255 (1253?) <sup>26</sup>
	<u>333 years</u>	

<sup>26</sup> Taye G. Mariam, Op. cit. p. 108. There are two conflicting versions or traditions for the duration of the Zagwe dynasty. The commonest one is that it lasted for 333 years until the advent of Yekuno Amlak in 1270. The other one gives it only 133 years (1137-1270).

Of the Zagwe emperors, Lalibella is the best known. He ruled at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> - century. He is best known as the builder of the monolithic rock-hewn churches at the Zagwe capital named after him. He is also according to Trimingham, the first Abyssinian king to establish diplomatic relations with Jerusalem and Egypt after a long isolation from the outer world.

The overthrow of the Zagwe at about 1270, is attributed to both "external" and internal factors. The monastic centers of Axum and Debre-Damo were among the chief agents of the anti-Zagwe political movements on an unscientific grounds of descent claims from Solomon. Some of their venomous preachings against the dynasty in Geez read:

ዐተሃጃዎት ወገገዎት ወተግበሮች ለክርስቲያን ስልጣን ስልጣን  
አዎንታዊ ስልጣን ስልጣን ስልጣን ስልጣን

.....  
The throne was disgraced and given to the non-Solomonid elements namely - the Zagwe.

It is beyond controversy that such views can mislead those people who were neck-deep steeped in unscientific outlook back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Kebre Negast or literally the Glory of kings, was also edited to this end. The book was an ideological instrument by which the emergent dynasty tried to invest an aura of legitimacy, and condemn all sources of resistance to its legendary claims of descent to Solomon. To cite an example, the Geez version of its preface reads:

..... አክሱም ወገን ስልጣን ስልጣን ስልጣን ስልጣን ስልጣን

<sup>27</sup> Gadlä Tekle Häimanot (Addis Ababa, Tinsae Zagubae pp.1946) p.28.

ወገን ስለሰ 3170- ስለ ከገተ ስፈረሰ  
ተወሰኑ ስገ ይገተ<sup>28</sup>

.....  
That book (the Kebra Negast) was published in the era of the Zagwe since it condemns all claims to the throne by the non-solomonid elements.

The internal strife and intrigues for the throne among the Zagwe themselves is also believed to have contributed to the decline of the dynasty since there was no smooth political succession. In contrast, authorities like C. Rossini and sir Wallis Budge hold that the last king of the Zagwe dynasty, Neakutolab, abdicated peacefully in favour of Yekuno Amlak at the instance of Abune Tekle Haimanot<sup>29</sup>. There is also a six-point compromise signed between Neakutola'b and Yekuno Amlak which reinforces the position of Rossini and Wallis Budge<sup>30</sup>.

After the restoration of the so called solomonid dynasty, in 1870, Yekuno Amlak granted one-third of the state revenue to church and this was in force up until the down fall of the Haile Selassie-regime.

28 Quoted in Kasse Kelkay, Bewag-Sequotaw Agewigna Ye Simotchena Ye semmeselotch Meeladawi serreat (Morphology) (unpublished B.A. thesis, AAU, 1972), p.11. from the Geez-German version of Kebra Negast (1905) by J. Roth.

29 Wallis Budge, The Queen of Sheba and her only son Minilik (London, Oxford University Press, 1922), p. xii.

30 See Teklesadik Mekuria, Ye Ethiopia Tarik Ke Yekuno Amlak'eske LibneDengle (Addis Ababa: Bsp, 1966), p.15.

According to Gamst, the Amharisation process emerged by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Until 1527, when moslems invaded Ethiopia, an unacculturated Agaw revolted against this process with a military action. However, the arrival of the portuguese military aid by about 1540, is said to have supplied the Amhara elite with modern arms which was used "to suppress" the Agaw rebellion.

The Agaws are the most ancient people of Ethiopia still unabsorbed by the speedy assimilationist process. Their prolonged contact with the Amhara and the Tigre over a span of many centuries resulted in the emergence of the modern Abyssinian type. Ullendorff maintains, "In any event, it is the amalgam of the Agaw with immigrant semitic elements which has given rise to the main Ethiopic type ethnically as well as linguistically, as it has emerged in historically attested times"<sup>31</sup>. The introduction of modern technology, the spread of urbanisation, and the drive for a homogenous culture and national integration are drastically eroding ethnical sentiments. To day, the Agaws are indistinguishable from their Amhara and Tigre neighbours (except by the retention of their own language) since they exhibit the same physical features and social organisation.

Their cultural aspects are essentially the reflections of their religion and beliefs. The Gojjam-Wollo Agaws are all christians of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and so, their cultural aspects are similar with those of the other christian Ethiopians. But the Bogos

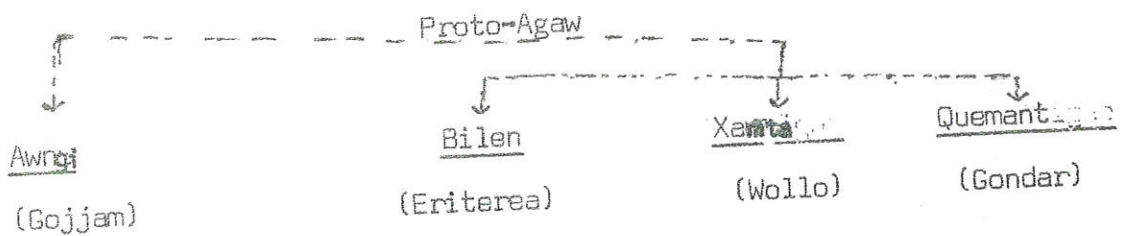
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<sup>31</sup> Edward ullendorff, The Ethiopians: Introduction to country and people (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.132.

of Keren and the Quemant of Gondar whose religion is not christianity, are known to have retained or developed their own culture pertinent to Islam and pagan-Hebraic practices of which the writer knows little or nothing.

## 2.2 The Agaw Language (Agewigna)

Agewigna is subsumed under the Afroasiatic language family. The currently spoken central cushitic (Agewigna) is classified by Appleyard in "The Agaw languages: A comparative Morphological perspective" as follows:\*



These varieties are said to be mutually unintelligible and hence descriptively almost independent. According to Hetzron, "The Agaw language was once spoken in a very large area in the northern half of Ethiopia but was gradually superseded by semitic languages: Amharic and Tigrigna. The once continuous Agaw areas are split into small islands that have escaped so far semitisation"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> R-Hetzron, the verbal system of southern Agaw (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). p. 2.

\* See proceedings of the eighth intl. conf. On Ethiopian Studies 1984, p. 377.

However, since the fusion between the Amhara and the Agaws was characterized by cultural pluralism and the diglossic situation, "the Amharic language is semitic but has strong Agaw characteristics"<sup>33</sup>. Ullendorff contends that Amharic is built on a substratum of cushotic or more specifically - Agaw since Amharic presumably developed in a situation of imposition on Agaw speakers<sup>34</sup>.

This semitic fusion with the indigenous Agaw eventually resulted in the creation of a lingua franca or a creole (proto-Amharic) based on cushotic syntax (verb-final) and semitic lexicon which according to Bender became the dominant language of Ethiopia by the accidents of history.

One may wonder how and why the semitic languages-Amharic and Tigrigna - prevailed over Agawigna gradually in central and the northern half of Ethiopia. One of the major reasons is certainly the migration of the Agaws from Lasta to the various parts of the country which resulted in the creation of isolated and island-like settlement areas in which either Amharic speakers or Tigrigna speakers are predominant. For instance, "The invasion of Gudit led to the migration of Agaw tribes amongst them, the Bilen, who now live in the Keren district, near the river Anseba, and still speak an Agaw language"<sup>35</sup>. The Damot Agaws of Lasta went hunting for elephants and buffaloes, tamed the land and settled there.

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34 Ibid.

35 Trimmingham op. cit. p. 57.

Moreover, the concerted anti-Zagwe campaign of the so-called Solomonid dynasty proponed by the 'sycophants' of the church such as Abune Tekle Haimanot and Yesus-Moa, is a case in point. In complicity with Yekuno Amlak, these monks, for instance, are said to have preached against the language and the people thus:

ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ  
ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ<sup>36</sup>

It is the demon who taught the Agaws their language;  
All the more, the Agaws are both wicked and powerful.

such preachings prejudiced easily those simple minds at a time when everything in Ge'ez was supposed to be divine like bandlets of righteousness. Apparently, those preachers were veiled political figures.

Even further, the present day spread of urbanization and its irresistible influence of bringing together diverse ethnic groups, the fact that the medium of instruction from kindergarten classes to the elementary school is Amharic, and the tendency of the urbanite Agaw to pick up Amharic rather than his mother tongue are also exerting vivid influences on the Agaw languages in and around keren, Gondar, Agaw-midirr-Metekel and Wag-seqota. All the more, most Agaws do not seem to worry about the future of their language.

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<sup>36</sup> Kasse Kelkay Op.cit. p.10. He further notes that a book called Mesehafa Re'etu which bears this quotation is available in the treasury of St. Harbe.



Taye G. Mariam's view implies that this area was an uninhabited virgin land of plenty abounded in honey and wild games before the arrival of the seven brothers. Taye's view is in harmony with what legend has but slightly differs from Tadesse Tamirat's position who holds that the Agaw from Lasta arriving in Agaw-midirr, drove out people who were called Shanquilla (= Nilotic) by them<sup>39</sup>. Today, the Shanquilla are confined to pocket enclaves on the Ethio-Sudan frontiers extending probably from Achafar to westernmost of Zigami.

What follows is the list of the seven brothers who led the first wave of migrants after whom the areas in Agaw midirr and Metekel are named:

<u>Awngi. name</u>	<u>Amharic name</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Ankishi	Ankesha	province
Azini	Azena	sub district
Banji	Banja	District
Chari	Chara	sub district
Kwakuri	Kwakura	sub district
Mitikili Zigami	Metekel Zigem	Adm. region District

According to Taye Retta, the second wave of migrants under five leaders came to Agaw-midirr after noticing the protection from attack and the comfort that the first wave enjoyed. The leaders were:

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<sup>39</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, Op. cit. p.27.

<u>Awngi name</u>	<u>Amharic name</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Temxwi	Temhua	subdistrict
Chajii	Chaja	subdistrict
Qunzine	Konzena	subdistrict
Yengussi	Yengussa	subdistrict
Dangilli	Dangilla	province

The population of southern Agaws is roughly about 268,258<sup>40</sup> and their extent goes beyond the administrative boundary of Metekel and Agaw midirr. The figure however is acceptable with reservations since it doesn't include the upper Kwakura and Dangilla Agaws who have been almost 'Amharised' but speak Amharic with an Agaw bent and intonation. At home and among themselves, they use Awngi which is similar to the Agaw languages in the other parts of Ethiopia, though modified as a result of a long period of isolation.

In the distant past, there was a sporadic clash between the Awawa and the neighbouring Amhara. The distant memories of such conflicts and their resolution are reflected in oral literature. For instance the couplet:

ገ ስፋ ነገ ስፍጥ ጌጌ ስገ ቀገ ጠጠ

አገግና ጎጥኑ ተገናኝኑ ጠጠ

Gone are the grim days  
When Agaw and Damot were enemies  
That they now feast together in peace!

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<sup>40</sup> Central Statistical Office, Statistical Bulletin (June 1985), pp. 98-9.

marks the end of the conflict and its celebration with festivities. There are also a couple of poems reminiscent of the confrontation between the Agaws and the Tigre at Kubar in which the Agaws emerged victorious: አቦቢቷሁጊ ትገሪ\*

ቢላሽ ዳክ ገገሪ

.....  
ዕፈኒ ቢሪቷ በፍ ገሽገሽግ  
ትገሪ ጊያፋ ተሂ ከፍረ ገቢሪግ\*

The Agaws were favourites of the court to whom important secrets were confided. Because they were presumed to be very secretive and shrewd. To that effect, there is an Amharic saying which runs:

አገፍ ዳቡ ዘጠኝ

ሰጋገተን አኑር አገጥን አጣፀተኝ

The Agaw has nine hearts (thoughts)  
But revealed to me one and kept the eight

to explain their secretiveness or shrewdness which is deemed to be a positive element of a person's character in highland and central Ethiopia. Another Amharic saying has it with reference to the people of Shewa:

ሽፃፍ ያስጥ ወጪ ወስጥ

.....

The shewans and the termits go inwards to explain their shrewdness and introvert behavior, as was the case with Minilk II.

\* I owe these couplets to my friend Ayenew Bekalu.

Cognizant of their calibre and determination, the neighbouring Amhara and the other imitative ethnic groups refer to the Agaws as:

አገፁ ያገለግል ስይዘፍነው አይቀርም

Whatever An Agaw intends to do, he would by no means reveal it out.

and, አገፁ ሲሰለጥን አጥፊ ያሰለፍናል

If an Agaw is enlightened, he would outsmart the Amhara. Such views are presumably based on a long period of observation.

As mentioned in section 1.4 above, the Southern Agaws are also called Sebat-Bet-Agaw (The seven-House Agaw) to represent the seven Agaw brothers who led the first wave of migrants. The southern Agaws are all christians of the Ethiopian orthodox church. In matters of religion they are fanatical. They never allow a moslem to live in their area, and no moslem is welcome to live in Ankasha, even to-date, except under a pseudonym. One who doesn't wear 'matab' (cord of christians) is referred to as 'Islam' to connote irreligiousness. They have old but unfading religious and secular festivals. They hold themselves to be superior to the handicrafts men and the Baria. As a result, they do not intermarry with black smiths, weavers, tanners and potters an account of "impurity of blood and the brokenness of bone". Chastity is the cardinal virtue of the bride in the society. Marriage engagement is pre-arranged only with the consent of parents and elders. Customarily, the marriage age of the female is 9 years

while that of the male is 15-16 years. Unless the girl could marry before 15 years of age at the latest, she would be humiliated by the community for being ~~ቅጥ-ቅር~~ \_\_\_\_\_ the uncourted or the unsuited. Dowry is given in the form of cattle and cash (equal from each side), a harnessed horse and a fire arm depending, of course, on the economic status of the in-laws. Bridal feast is held in an open-air under a tent-like shelter called 'Dass' in the company of relatives and acquaintances from all directions. Marriage between a couple within seven generations is forbidden and polygamy or polyandry is virtually ruled out.

Their cultural recreation involves fencing, ~~ቅጥ-ቅር~~ horse-racing 'Gugs', 'Genna' swimming, leap-frog, hunting and wrestling which are the most favourite seasonal games among adults and youngsters. Gugs is a tremendously exciting game and exclusive to Ethiopia. It combines horse-racing with a war-fare like drill with a shield and shaft between two riders at a time. Genna derives from an ancient Greek word meaning birth. Both the stick and the ball are carved from the roots or branches of hard wood such as 'wayra' (African olivo) and ketkita (Dodonea-viscosa). It is a rough and tough game some what similar to the European hockey. Gugs and Genna are seen at their best between christmas and Easter.

Moreover, they have many traditional recreational songs and dances some of which are:

- A. Monni-Monana - a love song between a boy and a girl or a man and a woman directed towards mutual flirtation.
- B. Aymolo Worke/- A chorus song chanted by a mobile group of youngsters holding zongeru\* in the evenings of Good Friday as they roam from house to house through out the night.
- C. Amalmal Gume - A chorus song by the peasant folk who attend and drive a red-handed thief to a public square.
- D. Morawi - A praise song for a departed campaigner wishful of his victorious return.
- E. Ewawa - A love song in which a deep affection for the beloved is expressed.
- F. Lulla - A group song involving a variety of themes.
- G. Kassimbo- A jerky dance performed by a group of people holding a mirror, a comb and an umbrella high up towards their face.

Flute, drum (dingariti), and a one-string fiddle-the Masinko-are among their best known traditional musical instruments. They have also a form of social get-together called 'Mahber' named after their favourite saints, angels or immaculate Mary held every month. 'Bere Mahber' (Association for oxen), an inter-communal association for hunting thieves, and 'Fersegna-Mahber' (Association for horsemen)-held every month, are also the variants of their Mahber celebrated with festivities.

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\* A shaft studded with tendril-like black and white strips.

They live in grass-covered wooden houses and in houses covered with sabsan metal products (korkoro) plastered with mud. Their hair style and traditional costumes are similar to those of the other highland orthodox christian Ethiopians. But the female folk do not like plaiting their hair.

Women are usually confined to such menial but respectable tasks as needle work, spinning, and wicker-work. Their position in the community rests on the quality of their wicker-work, cookery, brewing, and spinning.

Their ornaments include cotton fabrics like embroidered dresses worn with prismatic belts and 'Netala' (toga), and bracelets, necklaces, rings, ear-rings, albo (a string of silver beads worn round ankles), and Erban ( a string of silver shillings hanging down the abdomen from the neck. The status of male is determined by his industry, horsemanship, hunting talent, swimming skill, wealth, bravery and public influence.

The Awawa of Gojjam are predominantly sedentary agriculturalists. They produce almost all types of agricultural products. Cereal crops, oil seeds, pulses, vegetables and fruits. They also raise beasts of burden and draught animals. Sheep, cattle, goats, and chicken are the chief sources of meat. The staple food is 'injera and wot' while beer, honey-mead, and local araki are the traditional drinks.

The topography of the area ranges from the average lowland plateaux to the volcanic peaks of Dega weather. One can find the

Belaya-Dangur and Wombera mountain chains in the south west. Volcanic peaks like Asam selasse, Abu Gumbinni, Fudi and Zirixi stand west of the main road to Dangilla. Big rivers such as Ayou, Kulanti, Fesami, Dambushta, Ardi and Guder flow gently all the year round. There are also lakes like Zingini (Zengene club), and Şerbabar. Şerbabar is located West of Agaw Gimjabet. Under this sea, people say, bulls bellow, cocks crow and coffee is pruned. Legend has it that a village was overflown with water once in the distant past .

The climate combines the three climatic zones known as Dega (2,300 to 3,300 mts.) Woina Dega (1,500 to 2,300 mts) and Kolla (500 to 1500 mts.) above sea level. Due to this favourable climate, such plants as kerero, sessa, koma, dokma juniper, Kosso, ecalyptus, bamboo, reeds and accacia are abundant in the jungles of Gelawdeos, Gishawi, Gimbiñi and the Kolla zones of Metekel. The physical setting of the area is therefore characterized by the prevalence of fauna and flora natural to the three ecological zones.

To sum up, all folk customs, conventions, social etiquette and traditions are similar with those of the other Ethiopian orthodox christians. There is no any marked cultural boundary between the southern Agaws and their Amhara neighbours. What Gamst observes as regards the cultural congruence among the highland Ethiopians has a strong bearing. "Retention of the Agaw languages does provide a rather weak social boundary that distinguishes this group (the Agaw)

from their Amhara and Tigre neighbours who are not markedly distinct from them in any other way.<sup>41</sup>

#### 2.4 Awngi (Southern Agewigna)

Hetzron notes that the once continuous Agaw areas have been split into small islands due to the semitisation process. These split islands have evolved different varieties one of which is Awngi. It is spoken by the Southern Agaws in Agaw-midirr and Metekel. This language is closer to French and Tigrigna in its phonology-velar fricative (X), voiced palatal nasal (ng), and plosive speech sounds (Q) abound it.

The most original Awngi is heard as one goes further into the rural areas unlike the Awngi spoken in the urban areas which has been affected by Amharic in many senses. Dropping Awngi words and substituting them for newly borne Amharic words is spreading like bush fire. Since the tribal feeling of Awawa is very low, it is a common practice for an Agaw family to pick-up Amharic and Awngi simultaneously. The language doesn't have a writing system, and so, it is used at home, markets, mass gatherings and court of elders.

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41 Gamst, Loc., cit.

There are minor dialectal differences between the Awngi of Agaw-midirr and that of Metekel, which of course, do not affect mutual intelligibility. These differences are mostly phonological and morphological as can be seen from the following illustration<sup>42</sup>.

A. Phonological

<u>Agaw-midirr</u>	<u>Metekel</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Kale	Kella	He can
Weddel	Wadel	Huge

B. Morphological

Wufchaye	Safiti	Tuesday
Erkut	Ksari	Yoke etc.

One other dialect which is remote to Southern Agaw is Kufel. In the comparison of 100 basic word items between Awngi and Kufel, Tekabe Birru and Zenna Adal reached the following agreement<sup>43</sup>.

with Awngi.....	78%
with Quemant.....	40%
with Xamta.....	38%
with Bilen.....	31%

This shows that Awngi is closer to Kufel than are Bilen, Quemant and Xamta. To sum up, Southern Agaw should be sufficiently recorded or standardized before it disappears altogether.

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<sup>42</sup> Mekonnen Nana, "Ye Awngi Qesal" (unpublished B.A. thesis AAU, 1979 E.C.), p.11.

<sup>43</sup> Tequabe Birru and Zenna Adal, "The Kufel people and their Language" report prepared by R.W. Cowley, Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. IX, No.2 (HSIU, IES, 1971), p.101.

### III Methods and Procedures

#### 3.1 Method of Data Collection

The idea of taking up this project was conceived two years back in the summer of 1988-89. In order to determine whether the project would be workable or not, a preliminary survey regarding its feasibility and the attitude of the people of the study area had to be conducted through a pre-field contact. This informal survey proved to be promising, dependable and encouraging right from the beginning.

Subsequently, a preliminary reading in the field of folklore was taken up so as to get acquainted with the theory of folk literature in general and that of folktales in particular. The preliminary reading was further augmented by reviewing and scanning seminar papers and articles on folk-lore though they were of a very general nature. This was followed by the selection of a broader area of study which underwent a slight modification and was eventually formulated into the specific topic — The major Themes and Motifs of Southern Agaw Folktales (SAFT).

In the summer of 1989, field work was taken up. The first week of Nehasse was spent in establishing rapport with the concerned people and preparing the ground for data collection. But, contrary to their promises during the pre-field contact, they all became suspicious of the whole scheme and my mission for apparently no reasons. However their reluctance was overcome through insistence, little money and meagre invitations they were offered.

During my stay with them for over eight weeks, I have witnessed that there is no such thing as a professional story-teller but tradition bearer in this society. What most of the presumably knowledgeable elders know proved to be more of a legendary history than oral literature. According to Finnegan, "story-telling is usually practised by non-professionals... though some individuals are clearly regarded as more expert than others... it tends to be a popular rather than a specialist art"<sup>44</sup>.

Consequently, it was necessary to screen and hire some informants each of whom told as many tales as he could remember. Both men and women can tell tales though men above forty outnumbered the female story-tellers.

To begin with, a personal interview was arranged with an elder aged ninety, on the people, their socio-historical background and their cultural aspects. This was followed by listening to some tale-tellers on a trial and error basis without recording or noting down their stories. After this type of rehearsal, the name, age, profession, his or her vernacular and, when and where each of them had heard the tales for the first time were recorded. The last two questions were extremely helpful in determining whether a particular tale is an indigenous or a borrowed one since the society is bilingual. The fact that most of the informants speak southern Agaw validates the probable originality of the tales though the attempt to trace the origin of a given tale is quite futile.

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<sup>44</sup> Ruth Finnegan, Limba stories and story-telling (Oxford, Clarendon press, 1987), discusses the role of the story teller.

Most of the tales were then recorded in cassettes for the sake of authenticity inside a closed room to avoid the crowd and extraneous sound. The recording process took many days as the informants had to attend their private business for almost all the day. Later on, the recorded tales were transliterated into **AWngf!**. The problem cropping up during this process was the short coming of the Amharic alphabet to represent some of the speech sounds in Southern Agaw (**AWngf!**). For instance, southern Agaw speech sounds such as **nŋ** (voiced palatal nasal as in **ŋaŋ**= bone), **q** (voiceless plosive-as in **Qunzi**=disease), **X**(voiceless velar fricative - as in **caxa**=bird), and **X̄**(voiced velar fricative - as in **soxeta** = eight), are missing in the Amharic alphabet. However, the problem was surmounted by employing adhoc symbols to represent these speech sounds. Re-reading, correcting hastily written tales and choosing a popular one in the case of variant versions was carried out in the evenings. In November, the work of translating the selected tales into English was **taken up**. Eventhough tales are said to be short and simple in their form, it can not be said that full justice has been done to their translation. According to Nida, "There is no absolute correspondence between any two languages because no two languages are identical"<sup>45</sup>. The fact that the researcher is a native speaker of southern Agaw and familiar with their culture, has helped him to grasp the concept and render it into English as faithfully as possible.

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<sup>45</sup> E.A. Nida "principles of correspondence" in a hand out for the course "Literary Translation" in the academic year 1988-89.

Any way, a dynamic translation has been used in order to maintain the local charm and flavour of the tales. Where there is no direct equivalence between the source language (= southern Agaw) and the target language (= English), the word in the source language is retained with explanatory notes.

### 3.2 Method of Classification

The selection and translation of the tales was followed by a descriptive analysis and interpretation. The bases of folktale classification are quite varied. For instance, folklorists like Finnegan and Stith Thompson classify tales as Dilemma Tales, Animal Tales, Fairy Tales, Jokes and Anecdotes, and Ordinary Tales. The popular basis of folktale classification, however, has been by content. Hence, I have classified the selected tales on the basis of their major themes and motifs. Even then, the thematic categorization may seem to be quite arbitrary since a single tale may lend itself to many related and overlapping themes.

For instance, if we consider story no.2, in which a monkey, a lion and an ape interact, the possible thematic interpretations of the story may be (a) Ingratiating is fatal  
(b) presumption and/or overconfidence is catastrophic  
(c) wit pays more than might does. But wit being the dominant theme of this story, it has been taken under wit and wisdom. Wherever a single tale bears two or more overlapping themes, the same

tale has been also treated under different categories. In the light of this, the following themes have been identified among the corpus of the selected tales:

- (1) Wit and Wisdom
- (2) Didactic Themes
- (3) Escape from the Dull Routine
- (4) Etiological/ Explanatory
- (5) Morality
- (6) Human Injustice Vis - a - vis Justice
- (7) Psychological Attitude
- (8) Marriage and the Influence of Women.

The second basis of classification is the frequency of motifs within the framework of Stith Thompson's folk-tale motif index. Consequently, the tales that share a certain feature or features in common are included in the same category. However, wherever a single tale bears two or more motifs, it has been treated under different categories since strict adherence to only one classification proved to be unreliable. Accordingly, the following major motifs are evidenced among the tales in question:

- (1) The Wise and the Foolish
- (2) Trait of Character
- (3) Deception
- (4) Marvels
- (5) Humour

- (6) Chance and Fate
- (7) Mythological Motifs
- (8) Rewards and Retributions
- (9) Unnatural Cruelty
- (10) Sex
- (11) Speaking Animals
- (12) Tests

The selected tales are numbered sequentially, and reference has been made to these numbers in the process of analysis. After the analysis, the conclusion thereof has been drawn. All the tales selected for the study are entered in the appendix in their English version.

### 3.3. Pronunciation Key

As mentioned above, all the tales in this collection have been translated into English. But there are some words in the source language which do not have a direct formal equivalent in the target language. Such words are retained with explanatory foot notes. Therefore, the following pronunciation key is given for the convenience of the reader.

- Ḫ = Voiced velar fricative as in SoḪeta = eight  
X = Voiceless velar fricative as in Xuna = woman  
Q = Voiceless plosive as in Qipi = Quite!  
ṅ = Voiced palatal nasal as in ngari = head  
Ṣ = Lax fricative as in Ṣari = fence

#### IV. Thematic Analysis of the Tales

##### 4.1 Wit and Wisdom

Since the border line between wit and wisdom is at times liable to be confused, it becomes imperative to provide a simple operational dictionary definition. Thus, wit is to be understood as the ability to perceive unexpected connections between ideas, things, situations, and express them in a brief, clever and sharp way<sup>46</sup> which usually evokes laughter. Wisdom, less philosophically, applies to a broader category of accumulated folk experience across the ages. The tales under this section are therefore, relatively speaking, prone to witticism in the narrow sense of the term.

In the Southern Agaw society, child upbringing and harmonization aim at cultivating the mental and physical capabilities of the children. A stupid or an inefficient person, be it in his wit or might is referred to as 'jilaya', meaning 'son of an idiot'. This presupposes that a person in this society is required to sharpen his wits and intelligence from early childhood through his/her life time in order to cope with the concrete realities of life and to uphold his social prestige.

Ingenuity, wit and expediency are thus the most cherished and admired qualities of a person in this society so much so that every parent or guardian sweats to instill them in the mind of his children.

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<sup>46</sup> Jess Stein (ed.), The Random House Dictionary (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), p.1020.

The cultivation of these capabilities, however, is not exclusive to children and the young generation alone. All the more, elders, adults and women are required to develop and sharpen their wit and the power of tackling a problem. Among other things, wit and wisdom are instrumental to the arbitration of disputes by elders. Women can lull or cool down the burning rage of their husbands by means of witty and expedient responses. Adults are also supposed to win over their combatants in litigations and daily confrontations with the help of wit and intelligence where might and influence fail.

To this end, there are a number of Southern Agaw folktales told in the guise of speaking-animals and fictitious or allegorical characters. To begin with, a dwarf nick-named 'Teka Afjela' in story no.1, always outwits his stout brothers inspite of his short physical stature. Through wit and ingenuity, he manages to secure a lot of invaluable goods, a sackful of flour, a harnessed horse and a gun successively. To the contrary, his naive brothers who take his words for granted, are faced with a series of losses ranging from the slaughter of all their cattle, and the burning down of their huts to ultimately drowning themselves in the sea. Apparently, the people in the market who disperse leaving their goods, the people in the outlandish place who exchange a sackful of edible flour for a sackful of ash, and the rider who loses his horse and gun to 'Tekaafjela' are all equally outwitted by the dwarf on account of their passivity and credulity.

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In story no.2, a midget nick-named 'Dinquali' - outsmarts his brothers in an intentional test arranged by their mother. As a result of this, he inherits, a larger portion of his parents' fortune. The tale shows that parents prefer thrifty and wise children to the foolish and self-indulgent ones. In story no.3, in which three wild animals interact, wit triumphs over might and presumption. The monstrous lion is easily fooled by the cunning ape at two levels: Firstly, he consents to load stone in his paws to combat his rival in the pool. Secondly, he is easily goaded into diving down the deep pool being unable to distinguish between himself and his own image in the water. Moreover, the ingratiating monkey is defeated by the cunning ape as her first suggestion recoils upon herself. Apparently, the audience is expected to imitate the role of the wise ape rather than that of the lion or the monkey.

In story no.4, in which a hyena a dog and a donkey consort together, we at first witness the miscarriage of justice as the hyena breaks his promise and devours the donkey. But then, it is a trickster tale in which a dog outwits two hyenas who are his potential enemies. Thus the dog consumes the donkey's heart and defends himself by arguing that a donkey owns no heart which is traditionally considered as an organ of thinking. Furthermore, the same dog blinds the ambitious hyena with thorns under the cover of applying mascara on his eyes. Then, the dog guides the blind hyena to a threshing floor where the latter was stabbed and killed by the farmers. In story

no.5, a witty wife outsmarts her naive husband. The wife is baffled when her old husband who was supposed to have been dead drops across, but then she hides her new husband in the rear room. Later on, upon recognising her old husband's blindness in the left eye, she intentionally covers his right eye, as if to sympathize, and to make him imagine what the world would have looked like if he had lost both the eyes. In the mean time, the new husband collapses on the threshold of the door while trying to escape out. When the old husband asks her about the violent bang, the expedient wife retorts that a neighbour who was coming to visit him had bumped against the door unfortunately. She thus outwits him twice. Had it not been for her expediency and cleverness, both her new husband and she herself would have been endangered.

In story no.6, there is a curious wife \_\_\_ curious because her behavior is at least thought to be strange. since a priest's wife as a rule, is never supposed to commit adultery. The innocent priest who was serving porridge rushes back to church upon hearing his wife's false conjecture that a devil has slipped into their house as a result of his own failure to carry out the daily Holy Mass (Kedase).

Tale no. 9, relates to the probable denial of expectations and the way out in such circumstances. The Agaw who visits the Shanquilla's house in the hope to get something to bite is denied of his expectations. A much trusted cow naturally gives birth to its off-spring. If it gives birth to a crow, then the crow symbolizes the unexpected. In

this proverbial expression, a much trusted cow represents the Shanquilla who disappoints his friend. The hungry Agaw in this story is unfortunately invited to dine the unsanctified dish of the Shanquilla which constitutes snakes and rats. But then the christian Agaw declines the invitation tactfully and wisely. If he had offended his host with humiliation, the cruel Shanquilla could have killed him. Thus the role of wit and softer tongue in solving a challenge is stressed in this tale.

In story no. 10, two pupils bet to each other as they were going to a village. The first pupil boasts that he can court a married woman if he wished to. But the second pupil bets that it is impossible to do so. At dusk, they reach a certain home and beg for shelter and some scraps of bread. A humble lady, lets them in and gives them food and drink. As they were drinking beer sitting near the fire-place, the first pupil blubbers intentionally pretending that the smoke was teasing his eyes. Then, he was taken to another room far from the fire-place. At midnight, however, he once again blubbers for the second time. The husband, then asks him as to what antidote he used to apply on his eyes to soothe the pain. The pupil replies that his mother used to apply breast milk on it. When the wife approaches him to apply the breast milk on his eyes upon the request of the unwary husband, the rogue somehow manages to realize his wicked ambitions.

In story no. 11 a determined paramour saves the life of her lover through her ingenuity. The husband proper who was awaiting the **sweet** hour of revenge, traps his rival accidentally in a stable at night. Unfortunately, however, the husband was without a knife or any other sharp weapon. His eagerness to mutilate, his rivals' **genital** organ was therefore foiled. Then he asks his wife for a knife. **But** she pretends not to find one around deliberately. When the **impatient** husband rushes to the kitchen in search of a knife after warning **his** wife to keep watch on the lover, she tactfully lets him off, replacing a he-goat in his stead.

In story, no. 12, there are three characters: a credulous husband, an ingenious wife and an infatuated paramour. In this story, a handsome man falls in love at first sight with a married woman. **One day,** the two lovers devise a means of actualising or materializing their love. Hence the woman advises the man to visit her in the disguise of a sister-in-law. He then visits her in a woman's dress shorn of his beard and mustache. The credulous husband welcomes him only as a sister-in-law as per the instruction of his wife. Within a week, their dream becomes a reality following the husband's permission of **his** wife to pass over night with her "much longed sister". Later on, when the masculinity of the so called sister in-law was disclosed, the wife once again outwits her husband by cooking a false story that all **the** men in the market have been transformed into women and vice versa.

All the tales discussed above, enforce the view that wit is more rewarding than might and conventional innocence. Might is of course not entirely rejected but is relegated to a secondary position as it does not pay as much as wit does. The challenges of life can be overcome with the help of wit, expediency and ingenuity.

By implication, passive acceptance, naked credulity and presumption are discouraged. Thus a person's mode of thinking should cope with the concrete realities of life that face mankind in his struggle for survival and excellence over others through the agency of wit and intelligence. Such views are reinforced by their proverbial expressions such as the following:

- "The silent is not favoured even by his mother".
- "Little wit is preferable to much might".
- "Pumpkin and gourd are of a different nature".
- "A pumpkin could be pierced with a needle".
- "A tree for a yoke can be felled in the compound of a fool".

Thus, rescue from danger, material acquisition, solving a challenge and success in life are all attributed to wit and wisdom. It seems that the ancient dictum 'Might is right' is negated for the better in Agaw society.

#### 4.2 Didactic Themes

In folktales, we find speaking animals, allegorical and fictitious characters whose actions symbolize the virtues and vices of man in the real world as is evident in the remarks of Finnegan:

... What is often involved in the animal stories is a comment even a satire on human society and behavior: In a sense, when the narrator speaks the actions and characters of animals, they are also presenting human faults and virtues somewhat removed and detached from reality through being presented in the guise of animals but nevertheless, with an indirect relation to observed human action<sup>47</sup>.

A couple of tales in this collection also involve a range of didactic comments on human behavior and society some of which are given below:

#### 4.2.1 Stubbornness

Obstinacy is presumably a universal problem in human behavior which often leads to a catastrophic end. The obstinate woman in tale no.13, once again relapses into her old behavior of acting by opposites. When one day they were returning home from a distant place, the husband inadvertently forgets the old formula of addressing his wife by opposites and reverts to calling spade a spade sort of address whereupon the stubborn wife begins to act by opposites. Before crossing the torrential river, she declines to obey her husband's warning not to put her feet where the water was foaming, and hence falls into the water. Even after she fell into the water, he entreats her to get hold of the grass whereas she gets hold of the intangible foam and is carried away by the strong currents. An

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<sup>47</sup> Ruth Finnegan, Op. Cit. p.351.

Agaw proverb goes "Jijibe nani finchei" = The foam for the grass, to characterize an obstinate person's behavior.

#### 4.2.2 Ambitiousness

Man is naturally ambitious, and has a curious mind fond of inquisition and adventure. Thus, ambition is the propeller of progress and betterment. But then, it is also dangerous once it exceeds its limit or dies out completely in man. What is suggested in story no. 14, relates to this theme. Had the children of the aging rat accepted their father's proposal \_\_\_ the task of fetching soil from Gondar and coffin from Shewa for his burial \_\_\_ they would have been devoured by crows and snakes. On the other hand, if the father had not proposed so, he would have died without kindling grand ambitions in his children. The desire to be recalled posthumously is what matters most from the point of view of the father. It also appears to be the father's desire to test the rationality of his children. Ambition in the sense of necessity is most welcome within its natural confines, but excessive ambition is neither necessary nor desirable.

In story no.15, the same issue is brought forth rather poignantly. A donkey is appointed head of the cattle but envies his subjects for their horns. He then rationalizes that it was quite paradoxical for the boss to be devoid of horns while his subordinates do own them'. Resolved to buy horns, he thus sets on a journey. On the way, he meets a man who loads and drives him homeward. As they were heading

for home, the farmer lashes the donkey so heavily that its ears get severed'. In the end, he ironically returns home having lost his ears. The proverb has it that "she who went in the hope to get her hair plaited, came back shorn of it" to mark the double loss that results from ambitiousness. The moral of the tale has a strong bearing upon the over ambitious humanity.

#### 4.2.3 Tolerance vis-a-vis Intolerance

In our social and personal life, there are tolerable and intolerable matters. The fruit of tolerance and patience is sweet enough while that of intolerance is more often bitter and sour. In tale nos. 16 and 17, the two extremes are juxtaposed. The campaigner who returns home, in story no. 16, is too hasty to take time and exhaustively examine the case of his wife's pregnancy. He instead, takes the words of his servant for granted and resolves to commit suicide. Though the choice between his pride and the dishonour brought upon him by the rumours of his wife's pregnancy collides in his mind, he in the end favours suicide before clearing up the rumour.

To the contrary, tale no.17 presents a tolerant husband who is rewarded by his tolerance. His wife who used to make him miserable by her disobedience, becomes eventually reclaimed following his dismissal of the journey to Gondar by validating his friends epigrammatic advice. The value of mutual understanding, the importance of re-examining first impressions and tolerance in married life are markedly stressed in the stories.

#### 4.2.4. Gross Imitation

Gross imitation has almost always proved to be fatal and regrettable. Whatever is to be imitated should first be examined in the light of its pros and cons. In tale no. 18, a honey seller imitates the hide seller. If one drops a hide on the ground, no significant loss is caused. But if one drops a gourdful of honey on the ground, not only does its container break but also the honey itself is spoiled as it gets mixed with dust and dirt.

The worst loss is attested in story no. 19 in which an ape ventures to imitate a scribe. An ape is a small monkey which is fond of playing hide - and - seek with man. In this story, we have a scribe writing scriptures on a parchment sitting under a big tree. When the scribe leaves for lunch, the ape descends from the tree and scribbles and discolours his work. Subsequently, the angry scribe digs her grave by pretending to sever his neck with a sharp knife. He thus disappears into the bush leaving the knife under that tree. As usual, the ape once again descends from the tree and commits suicide trying to file the sharpened knife over her neck like the scribe. Thus gross imitation and unbridled curiosity in human behavior are prone to loss and destruction.

#### 4.2.5 Credulity

Credulity as a consequential flaw in man's decision or judgement probably dates back to the neo-classical period in imaginative

literature. It is the bane of family and social life. If one is not critical of what he hears, and remains hesitant of sifting it out, he is likely to be caught up in a nasty derangement of friendship, family and social relationship. The consequences of credulity range from the deterioration of one's reputation to committing suicide and homicide. That is what we witness in story nos. 20, 21, and 22.

In tale no. 20, a wicked servant who plays upon a credulous husband becomes the cause of family disintegration. He pours some hot water over the bed sheets of the couple when they were sound asleep. On the morrow, he comes back from the public square with a message from the husband but conveys it to the wife offensively as, "you' urinary vessel, be ready as I am to come with guests'". Then, he returns to the square without the knowledge of the wife and tells the husband that she has disobeyed, and insulted him for being a urinary vessel. The angry husband rushes back home and shoots down the innocent wife without inquisition. In the same story, this servant also becomes the cause of the feud between the in-laws still by exploiting the credulity of both sides.

But since the monks and nuns are other-worldly, all their efforts are geared towards inheriting the kingdom of God at the cost of their suffering in the temporal world. And so, the monks and nuns in this story, who accept the scoundrel's bluffing that he has proved his sainthood, burn themselves by igniting their own huts. In tale no. 21, a malicious pupil cheats both the wife and her husband. Firstly, the

naive wife hands him out her dress and her husband's suit ~~after~~ the cheat told her that the clothings of her dead parents had worn out. On hearing this, the husband realizes that she has been cheated and rides away to hunt the cheat but ironically loses his horse to the same cheat. The secret behind the pupil's success is the credulity of the couple. The wife with no hesitation admits his "divine" origin. The husband also gives him the horse in pledge without the slightest disbelief. In tale no.22, once again, a servant cheats three members of a family \_\_\_ the father, the mother, and the daughter. On the occasion of his introduction to the family, the servant coins three different names \_\_\_ I am, He Himself, and My father \_\_\_ and introduces himself to the father, the mother and the daughter, respectively, at different times with these three different names. Eventually, when the pregnancy of the daughter remained no more a secret, the servant defames the father for having committed incest which is regarded as a taboo in the society. When the elders were subsequently examining the case, they had to interrogate the father, the mother, and the daughter \_\_\_ who replied, 'I am', 'He himself', and My father - respectively to their questions. Though by all these answers they meant to refer to the servant, they ironically stand in favour of the rogue.

The irredeemable flaw, however, is traced back to the occasion of the introduction \_\_\_ i.e., their failure to question how a single person could bear three different names. This credulity and passivity on the part of the family, brought about a bad reflection upon the social value of the father.

#### 4.2.6 Foolishness

Unlike wit, ingenuity and expediency, foolishness is also one of the most hated traits of human personality among the Agaw. For them, a foolish person is supposed to be good for nothing and is referred to as 'Kemi' -- meaning animal or a laughing - stock. If one is outsmarted or cheated, he is regarded as foolish. Further, if one deviates from the conventional norm or comes below the expectations of his community, he is also thought to be foolish. Likewise, if one aspires for whatever he does not deserve, he is deemed to be foolish.

In story no.23, we have a foolish husband who travels as far as Gondar to ask a diviner about the name of his newly born child. Moreover, his presumption that the name might have been hidden in the straw when he bumped against stone, and further, his passivity when the diviner sarcastically whispered in his ears that the name was "Ridiculous!", make him still more laughable. His visit to the diviner is probably tolerable since diviners were supposed to be knowledgeable in those days, but not his presumption that the name might be found under the straw. In story no.24, the foolish husband is faced with a great loss -- the life of his wife. At first, the wife seems to be more foolish than her husband for suggesting so long a travel to get a tooth-pick, and for informing the pupil the presence of a chicken at her home. However, the husband eventually proves to be more foolish than his wife. Not only does he use a

pestle to kill flies but also fails to anticipate the consequence of striking his wife on the chest with a pestle.

Story no. 25 involves a stupid couple who commit a series of blunders. Their foolish acts emanate from misconceptions. For one thing, they do not understand the figurative meaning of words. For instance, by Crack - the mother meant - dandruff affected skin, by swinging - milking, and by clothing - the price of the hide. But they literally take crack - for cracks of the earth, swinging - for the to-and-fro movement, and clothing - for putting on the damp hide. For another, they don't distinguish between phenomena which bear resemblance on the surface. The wife, for instance, takes foaming water for boiling water and thus strews flour over the former. Even worse, both of them jump into the torrential river just to retrieve a handful of flour. The tale has a slight religious touch related to curse and failure. In this society, the belief is that if one is laid under a curse, he is unlikely to succeed in life. Thus, foolishness damages family, economy, social reputation and even risks life. The tales in this section are strong indictments of human folly.

#### 4.2.7 Greed

The Agaw are famous for their hospitality, humility, consideration, charity and mutual respect. Hence greed, miserliness, gluttony, and negligence of the poor are taken as signs of disrespect. A greedy person in this society is symbolized by a hyena which eats alone and to the bone marrow in spite of the bounty of nature.

They believe that caring and sharing breeds abundance while greed leads to deprivation. What is witnessed in tale no. 26, directly relates to the latter aspect. The brothers in this story who steal an ox from their neighbours through the instrumentality of their dwarf brother, afterwards neglect him. They throw him the lung or the offal which is meant for cats and puppies, as a result of which the neglected dwarf discloses the theft of the ox in the village by shouting at the top of his voice, and then manages to collect all the best quality flesh upon their dispersal.

#### 4.3.0 Escape from the Dull Routine

A couple of folktales in this collection deal with escapist tendencies. Such tendencies could take many forms some of which are fantasy, adventure, indulgence, mystery and humour, leading to pure entertainment.

The adventurous plump in tale no.27, performs actions which are hardly credible. For instance, his ability to fling the daughter, to kill all the beasts inspite of his short physical stature, and his fear of the blind hyena are incredible. Moreover, his intentional distortion of the message to the wife, his cruel manner of breaking the bad news to her parents, and the dragging of the poor nun, all of which culminate in the loss of many lives can be called a sort of cruel adventure. More surprisingly, his demand for a jarful of wiley and a sieveful of flies is also beyond human reason. What is witnessed in story no.28 is more of a strange fantasy. All the details in this tale border on a miracle. For instance, the campaigner telescopes a

cow at Gondar through the hole of a needle standing on the top of a tong. When he calls his dead cow by name, the cow miraculously regains its original form. Cobwebs prove to be stronger than leather straps. Chickens are used in threshing the 'teff' instead of cattle. These and the other details in the story are, all the more, the products of a fanciful mind. Perhaps, such tales may serve their creators as the means of ego-reassurance mechanism.

The series of incidents in story no. 29, from the beginning to the end, cannot be accounted for in realistic terms. Here, there are one-hundred heads of cows. Due to the presence of a single cow in the herd, the other ninety-nine cows refrain from dropping dung. People do not consume the flesh of this cow after she was slaughtered for being a scourge. Even more, the pieces of stone thrown at the vulture trying to snatch the flesh from the man kill a number of people. And when the farmer drops the hide of this cow on the market ground, snakes swarm out. Once again the pieces of stone thrown at these snakes result in many casualties. In the end, the tanner, who was trying to immerse this hide gets ~~drowned~~ along with it. It is a mysterious story as it cannot be fully understood; or less strictly defies explanation.

Humour implies the ability to perceive the ludicrous and the comical in human life with the power to provoke laughter by remarks showing verbal felicity. In story no. 30, the patient's reply who was being ironed with a glowing tong provokes laughter. Since the pain was unbearable, he discharges some wind. But when he was asked why,

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he had done so, he thus retorts that it is natural to remove property when one's house is set on fire. Likewise, the beehive-thief in story no. 31, lulls the owner of the beehive by his verbal felicity. When the owner asked the thief what the hell he was doing up the tree, he retorts that he was heading towards Heaven. Since his reply aroused amusement, the red-handed thief was set free. There are two good-humoured elders in story no. 32, who make fun of each other. The bald man's head is associated with a smooth sloping stone on which cotton is scraped, while the other's grey hair is associated with lint cotton. When the bald man asked the grey-haired man where he was going with lint cotton, the latter retorts wittily that he was going in search of a flat stone on which cotton is scraped.

The farmer in story no. 33 also deserts his bed and sleeps underneath the bed for fear of additional charges. Though he had already paid the rent, he feels insecure. Moreover, he entreats the couple in the bed above him who are lost in the reverie of love if they could locate his lost donkey.

#### 4.4.0. Etiological/ Eplanatory

Etiological tales are concerned with the genesis of natural and social phenomena. They attempt to answer man's perennial questions related to the coming into existence of man, plants, animals and the universe as a whole. In order to satisfy his ethno-centric curiosity,

man has created thousands of creation myths. However, such creation myths are not confined only to providing "That is why it is so" type of explanation but also impose or imply moral sanctions as evidenced in story nos. 34,35,36 and 37.

Story no. 34 is concerned with the causes which led to the decrease of potato production in Agaw-midirr and its environs. The quantity and quality of potato in Agaw-midirr, as per the tale, has been on the decrease due to maltreatment. Potato, personified, reveals itself in a dream, and leaves for Shewa because of the improper care and injustice done to it. The moral lesson is thus apparent. Story no.35 explains why mule is destined to eternal sterility. Unlike the other beasts of burden, mule doesn't produce its offspring. This is not because of biological abnormalities but due to external causes. That is, it was laid under a curse owing to its ill-manner manifested in the banging of the gate of the house of God. The tale further reinforces the religious view that the accursed are liable to fail in life, thus warning against transgression, and promiscuity. In story no. 36, a couple of themes seem to be overlapping -- omnipotence of God, negligence of the poor by the rich, the moral stamina of the poor brother, etc. On close observation, however, the tale is an explanatory one since it traces the origin of divorce in Agaw-midirr back to this particular incident. The moral lesson in the tale is that one should be true to his words like the poor brother whose promise to God remains unbroken in the story. The Agaws say "Rather lose one's child than break a promise". Story no. 37 is an explanatory

tale tracing the origin of "tekerchem"\* . According to the traditional custom, it is the woman that should have moved to the man's house. But here, paradoxically, it is the man who moves to the woman's house \_\_\_ and hence the beginning of "tekerchem". Tekerchem, nowadays is a derogatory term for whoever marries unceremoniously.

#### 4.5.0. Morality

Morality tales deal with moral questions of duty, right and wrong with a view to preserving the conventional codes of behavior and the statusquo. Any member of the society is under the obligation to behave and live upto the expectations of his society. Obedience, gratitude, faithfulness, and observance of the widely accepted social etiquette are among the ideal moral codes cherished by the Southern Agaws. Deviation from such standards of behavior is believed to be a threat to the maintenance of society and the cultivation of good manners.

Story no. 38 enforces the worth of gratitude be it to man or to God. A father whose ox has been stolen vows umbrellas and curtains to a number of churches if they granted him his stolen ox. Upon realizing that the amount of money put in pledge to the churches was much more than the estimated price of the lost ox, his son suggests boycotting the search. Then the father retorts that once he finds

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\* Unceremonious marriage in which the man moves to the woman's house to cohabit.

back his lost ox, he wouldn't spare even a coin for them. This sort of ingratitude is supposed to make one untrustworthy in his community.

Once again, the theme of ingratitude is reinforced in story no. 39. Customarily, acquaintances, neighbours and relatives pay a visit to a nursing mother to congratulate her. In return, the nursing mother is supposed to be grateful and indebted to the visitors. Ironically, the nursing tigress in this story, traps and devours her visitors one by one except the ape. It is apparent that the tigress which symbolizes ungrateful people is criticized for immorality. Modesty is also no less important than gratitude. Though it doesn't always pay, self-restraint is deemed to be an indispensable quality of a person's character in this society. In story no. 40, a guest who has been hosted to a certain family, behaves much against the conventional norms. Customarily, the husband is head of the family, and so, enjoys many chauvinistic privileges. For instance, it is the husband who hands out 'barqui'<sup>\*</sup> to the wife and others before dinning proper begins. It is he who washes hands first both before and after meal except in the presence of elders and other respectable guests. It is he who decides on the **major** issues of the family in consultation with his wife. But the guest in this story, tries to assume the role of the husband. The intolerant husband then gives him a severe blow and throws him into the darkness of the night for his immodesty. In story no. 41, there are a newly wedded bride and

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\* A slice of blessed bread handed to the wife and others before dinning proper, by a husband or any other senior citizen (male)

bridegroom who are overpowered by self-restraint inspite of the hammering hunger. Neither the bride nor the bridegroom release their feelings formally due to the strong influence of a conservative society upon their upbringing. Amazingly, the action of the couple in this story is still hailed as being justifiable.

Conjugal infidelity, is perhaps, one of the most unparadonable sins in the Southern Agaw society. The wife is supposed to be extremely faithful and loyal to her husband. Divorce, revenge and murder are the possible punitive measures awaiting an infidel wife.

In story no. 42, an infidel wife is divorced without any show of tolerance . We also witness that the conscience of the guilty are always insecure and restless. The hidden lover in the basket, flings off startled by a self-imposed terror in the same story for fear of being exposed. In like manner, the insecurity of sinners, self-disclosure of guilt and denial of expectations on the part of the wife are evidenced in story no. 43. The mischievous wife is exposed when the husband signals upwards with his face to refer to God. Then, the lover upstairs discloses the presence of a second man who shared the meat with him. Thus, the wife who was trying hard to divert her husband's attention is self-exposed.

In story no. 44, we have three pairs of characters, the first of which is allegorical: Truth & Falsehood, Water & Fire and Snake & Lion. Falsehood is the antagonist in the story. To begin with, the Lion devours a fat cow which was their common possession. This action

serves as a spring board for the subsequent machinations of Falsehood against all the other characters. Thus, Falsehood, instigates the snake to sting the Lion, convinces Fire to destroy snake, persuades water to destroy Fire and ultimately ignores water and befriends Truth. Later on, both Truth and Falsehood drive the cattle to the top of a mountain as water can't run uphill. After dividing the cattle between themselves equally, there remains a horned bull. Then Falsehood rejects Truth's suggestion to draw lots. Instead Falsehood suggests to arrange a race in which both of them will take part on condition that the winner takes the bull. In a moment, Falsehood starts the race without informing Truth about it, but had his stomach ripped up by the same horned bull on his way. In the end, the bull as well as all the other cattle were possessed by Truth. Thus, the moral of the tale is that malice, villainy and spiteful machination recoil upon the villain while virtue and honesty are ever rewarding.

Tale no. 45, is a simple morality tale on child upbringing. It enforces the lesson that children should not have an access to every affair. After all, they cannot distinguish between fire and water, and are unsparing in their actions. The mischief of the wife who hid her paramour with porridge under a basket is disclosed by the innocent child. The child meant only to indicate the presence of porridge under the over-turned basket. He knows nothing about fidelity or infidelity. The medical warning "keep out of the reach of children!" has a strong bearing upon this theme. Frailty of women and the organic link between crime and retribution are the related themes of tale no. 46. The

The criminal is the infidel wife and the crime is her adultery with a social outcast. She is humiliated in public. She is segregated by the society and is ultimately divorced. The tale inculcates a moral lesson by emphasizing the negative effect of adultery on family and society. The theme of story no. 47 is also one of morality. A reckless woman who has consumed all the seeds which symbolize perpetuation is conditionally forgiven. As seed and perpetuation are inseparable, the theme has a very deep implication for farmers. A rigorous punishment on women who do not protect seed is suggested.

In story no. 48, a vindictive husband revenges the paramour of his wife by severing his head incognito. Besides that, he throws his adulteress wife down the gorge along with her beheaded lover. Story no. 49 is more than a simple morality tale. It rather boards on a satire on the superficiality of church and its proponents. The father-confessor and his subject are strangely enough caught up in adultery. The butt of satire here is the father-confessor who breaks the commandments of God as clergy men are never supposed to commit adultery. The husband thus mutilates the adulterer's tongue with a sharp razor.

Tale nos. 50 and 51 enforce the lesson of the golden mean and the avoidance of extremes. The guests who exceed the normal limit of food consumption in tale no. 50, face such despicable consequences as urinating in a sitting posture unnatural to the male. One of them, even farts to his own humiliation. These are the self-inflicted effects of oversatiety. An Agaw proverb says, "Simitic Empl Qunzi" meaning over-

satiety is a malady. All the more, in story no. 51, a defiant donkey who insists on braying since he was satiated with the abundant blades of grass faces a grave consequence. Thus, overlooking the dog's advice, the donkey brays again and again at night near a jungle. Hearing the sound, a hyena appears and devours him. Though the tale is told in the guise of an animal story, it is a strong warning against defiance and extreme behavior. The tales under this section moralize the worth and value of gratitude, modesty, virtue, self-restraint and moderation in one's personal and social life.

#### 4.6.0. Human Injustice vis-a-vis Justice

The proverb, "To err is human; to forgive divine", is well known among the Southern Agaws. This presupposes man's fallibility and occasional inability to administer justice properly. Nowadays, miscarriage of justice has been aggravated by corruption, money-power, nepotism and subjective ends.

In story no. 52, miscarriage of justice is witnessed as a result of the influence of might. The selfish lion and his accomplices - all carnivorous -- commit a naked injustice to the innocent donkey. They at first agree to confess and repent their sins as their hunting venture brought no prey for three days. First the lion confesses that he had once trapped and eaten a bull which was an awful sin according to him. Next, the leopard confesses that he had caught and eaten a wandering got, a sin which he himself described to be a dreadful one. Thirdly, the hyena

also confesses that once he had stolen into a village and caught a chicken. However all these were not considered to be sins at all by the rest of the animals.

Lastly, the donkey confesses that he had once nibbled blades of grass and rested for a while when his master stopped for a chat with a friend. This donkey, who nibbled blades of grass, which was quite natural to him, was condemned and devoured for being the cause of their misery quite ironically. Thus the victory of the unjust and the influential over the defenceless is witnessed contrary to human reason and legal logic though such happenings do seem to be the order of the day in the human society. The dominant theme of story no. 53 is the deliverance of justice from miscarriage through confessions. Here, the individual who confesses his crime appears to be more genuine than public opinion or the state apparatus. As the murder story was heard by the local governor, he calls an 'Afrsata'\* to solve the riddle of murder. The Afrsata ends up with the arrest of two suspects on the charge of murder who were to be punished by hanging. Fortunately, however, the criminal proper (the confessor) who was one among the crowd darts forward and changes the whole trend through his confession. Had it not been for his confession and purity of conscience, the two suspects would have been hanged for an offence they had not committed. Tale no. 54 shows that justice can be affected by subjective ends. In this, story

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\* The traditional Ethiopian institution of crime investigation.

two widows dispute over the severed male genital organ. The role of the nun who drops across should have been to solve the problem in favour of one or both of them. Instead, the nun herself becomes the third disputant and claimant.

#### 4.7. Psychological Attitude

Ullendorff notes that the "Ethiopians themselves refer to all the original inhabitants of their country collectively as Agaws"<sup>48</sup>. This attests to the historical fact that the Agaws are the indigenous people of the country with whom the immigrant semitic underwent a cultural fusion which ultimately resulted in the rise of the modern Abyssinian type. The attitude of the Southern Agaws towards people who are racially, somatically and culturally different from them is one of superiority. This view is equally held by the Amhara. For instance, both groups overlook the Shanquilla or the Baria (Nilotic group), the Moslems, and the other minority groups. The Agaws hold themselves to be superior, industrious, humane, forgiving and hospitable. Such attitudes are reflected in their folk literature one of which is the folktale.

In story no. 55, the first two steps of the creation or the genesis of mankind, are disqualified. The first figurine of clay moulded and overbaked by God represents the Negroid race or the Shanquilla and their

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<sup>48</sup> Ullendorff, Loc. Cit.

variants. The second figurine which was underfired symbolizes the 'Ferenj: '\*. The third figurine which is neither overbaked nor underfired (= Kaydama) or golden-brown represents the Ethiopian proper. This tale reflects that they hold themselves to be superior to the other ethnic groups. Their tribal attitude and reaction to external intruders are brought forth in story no. 55. Whereas all the others had beheaded all the intruders, one person fails to meet his pledge of beheading the Galla sheltered in his home on the eve of Maskal\*\*. He, instead, slaughters a ram and produces its blood for evidence at the Damara (= bonfire) ceremony. However, he justifies later on his failure to meet the pledge confessing that his dependent had already become the father of his grandson. When this was disclosed only on the christening ceremony of the child, the kins men forgive him. Hence, the grand father's humanity, the reaction of the folk against intruders and their conditional forgiveness towards others are exhibited humanely in this story.

A lazy man among the Agaws is associated with a donkey which they call 'dexuari'. Tale no. 56 gives the impression that Agaws are industrious. The lazy wife who visits the witch-doctor to seek a

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\* An Agaw word for the white folk

\*\* The Finding of the True Cross (An annual holiday which falls on 17th of Meskerem in Ethiopia).

solution for their pressing poverty is instructed to produce a genital hair untainted with wind. In spite of her exhaustive attempt, she fails to find one. In the end the witch-doctor drives home the point that industry or labour is the only solution for poverty. However, witchcraft, magic and divination are occasionally practised both by the Agaws as well as the neighbouring Amhara. Tadesse's view that the Awka of Gojjam are highly esteemed<sup>49</sup> is in conformity with the psychological and social attitude of the neighbouring ethnic groups towards the Agaws.

#### 4.8. Marriage and the Influence of Women

Marriage in the Southern Agaw society is encouraged at least for the following reasons:

- a) For the pure pleasure of parents
- b) To establish a bond between the in-laws
- c) To bear children and to eventually enable the young

to lead an independent life. But then, one should marry an ideal woman or man or never at all. Therefore, a close assessment of the concerned partners is conducted in advance before engagement. In married life, though the husband is said to be head of the family, the wife too has the power to influence her husband in many ways. The will-power of wives is so strong that they trigger off the courage and

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<sup>49</sup> Tadesse Mengistu, "The Noun Phrase in Awngi" (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, AAU, 1984), P. 2.

determination of their husbands for the better. Polygamy in Agaw society is virtually forbidden or else it would sprout rancours between the co-wives and their relatives.

Story nos. 58, 59 and 60 deal with such values related to marriage and women. In story no. 58, a bachelor who wants to get wedded sweats to suit an ideal match but to no avail. The reason behind his failure was the fact that worthy women in his area & nearby had already been engaged or married as the demand for their hand was great. This tale apart from moralizing on marrying a worthy woman, initiates the women-folk to strive for worthiness. Story no. 59, reflects the irresistible will-power of ladies. The wife triggers off the courage and determination of her coward husband, who goes now hunting more often than not. Unhappy about his unheroic status in the community, she sardonically satirizes him in the guise of a mare. Consequently, he sets out for a jungle and fortunately returns with a prey, thus restoring his social value in the community. The polarity between valour and cowardic the will-power of women and the worth of determination are contrasted in the story. Tale no. 60, throws light on the notoriety of co-wives as reflected in the defamation between the snail and the mouse. The mouse showers her abuse on the snail to denote her clumsiness. In return, the snail refers the mouse to be rodent since it naturally gnaws at granary. Apparently, their primary mission of mourning over the death of their husband is takenover by such stinging effects of polygamy.

To sum up the chapter, the triumph and the misfortune of all the characters in the tales discussed represent the fate of the virtuous and the villainous in contradistinction. At the root of their triumphs and misfortunes, there is a meaningful and penetrating wisdom which is the product of folk experience across the ages. The role played by folktales in the Southern Agaw socio-cultural milieu appears to be dualistic: It combines instruction with entertainment, and moralizing with social satire. Most of the tales enforce the lesson of sharpening wits and the cultivation of capabilities for pragmatic ends. Apart from satisfying man's ethnocentric curiosity, they also strive to harmonize the young generation into the statusquo. Wrapped up in the tales are the attitude of the Agaws towards the other ethnic groups and intruders, their concept of justice, leadership, morality, cosmology and world view. The tales are thus, the repertoire of the Southern Agaw socio-cultural values, beliefs and sentiments.

## V. The Major Motifs

### 5.0. An Introductory Sketch

As indicated elsewhere in this study, motif applies to a recurrent, striking or amusing character, concept or incident in lore or imaginative literature. According to Stith Thompson, (Motif-Index of Folk Literature), there are about nineteen motifs<sup>50</sup> under each of which several constituents appear. What follows is the list of these categories with a randomly selected component parts. The list provides a broader frame-work within which the selected tales would be analyzed.

A. MYTHOLOGICAL: Such motifs are concerned with the genesis of social and natural phenomena. They provide an explanation for the origin of the physical world and its inhabitants. Some of the component parts are:

A610, creation of the universe by creator

A1473, origin of slavery

A1689.11, why one people is superior in power...

B. ANIMALS: Talking animals representing good and evil, might and wit, the just and the unjust occur under this section such headings as:

B221.1, kingdom of monkeys

B210.2, Talking animals

B801, Elephants in folktale... fall under 'B'.

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<sup>50</sup> Bernth Lindfors (ed.), Forms of Folklore in Africa (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 275-281.

C. TABOO: This refers to acts which religion or custom regards as forbidden examples:

C221.1.1.5, Eating pork

C230, Eating at a certain time

D. MAGIC: Magic deals with the transformation of one thing or person from one state of existence into another, such as:

D191, Transformation of man to serpent

D193, Transformation of man to tortoise

D698, God has power to transform Himself...

E. THE DEAD: This category relates to the haunting of the spirit of a dead person appearing to somebody still alive in dreams or fantasy as in the following examples:

E1, person comes to life

E293.1(b), ghost appears to apple stealers, stares at them until they drop apples and flee.

F. MARVELS: These denote something that causes great surprise and astonishment through extraordinary adventures and occurrences. Here are three examples:

F812.4, Speaking forest

F964, Extraordinary behavior of wind

F986, Extraordinary occurrence concerned with fishing.

G. OGRES: An ogre is a cruel man-eating gaint (usually in fairy-tales) at the mention of whom children tremble with fear. examples are:

G77, Husband eats wife

G312, Cannibal ogre



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G312, Cannibal ogre

G402.1., pursuit of bird leads to ogre's house

G512.9.1, ogre killed by helpful dogs...

H. TESTS: Tests are trying examinations to find one's quality, valour, calibre, knowledge, skill, power or moral stamina. Examples:

H900, Tasks imposed

H111, Identification by garment

H927.1., Tasks as a trial of prowess of mortals by gods

H411.1., Fear test: staying in a haunted house where corpse drops piecemeal down chimney...

J. THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH: The two extremes \_\_\_ wisdom and folly are juxtaposed here. On the one hand, wisdom constitutes: expediency, ingenuity, wit and other related qualities. On the other, folly is characterized by stupidity, idiocy, naivety, gross imitation, want of common sense, misconception and the like. Some examples of this sort are:

J2470, Metaphors literally interpreted

J2071, Three foolish wishes

J1851.1.1, Numskull throws money to frogs so that they can count it.

J1510, The Cheater cheated

J2413, Foolish imitation by animal

J512, Animal should not try to change his nature

J514, One should not be too greedy

J652, Inattention to warning

J1260, Repartee based on church or clergy

K. DECEPTION: It relates to an act of misleading or playing a trick on somebody on purpose, even to the extent of seducing one into believing something that is false. In such cases, the deceiver usually emerges victorious. Observe the following constituents:

K0., Contest won by deception

K364, partner misappropriates common goods

K500 escape from death or danger by deception

K1821, Disguise by changing bodily appearance

K1868, deception by pretending sleep

K1550, Husband outwits adulterers wife and paramour

K2211.0.2., Treacherous younger brother outwits his elders

K1875, Deception by sham blood.

M. ORDAINING THE FUTURE: This has to do with forecasting events in advance in a way that is likely to happen.

M341, Death prophesied, and

M430, Curse on persons, are but two examples.

N. CHANCE AND FATE: This category combines the rewards of chance with a power looked upon as controlling all events in such a way that can not be resisted. Examples:

N650, Life saved by accident

N531, Treasure discovered through dream

N553.2, Unlucky encounter causes treasure seekers to talk and thus lose treasure

Q. REWARDS, PUNISHMENTS: This combination presupposes recompense for good deeds and retribution for crime. By their very nature, they

are moralistic since they uphold the wise codes of behavior and mercilessly discourage malbehavior. The contrast can best be seen from the following examples:

Q281, Ingratitude punished

Q411, Death as punishment

Q325, Disobedience punished

Q 41, Politeness rewarded

Q1.1, God (saints) in disguise reward hospitality and punish inhospitality.

S. UNNATURAL CRUELTY: This refers to strange types of cruelty such as parricide and homicide along with the other barbaric acts of characters in folktales. Such examples are:

S12, Cruel mother

S22, Parricide

S62, Cruel husband

S133, Murder by beheading

S100, Revolting murder or mutilations

S301, Children abandoned...

T. SEX: Sexual activity and everything connected with it (marriage, adultery, divorce, birth) is included under 'sex'.

T371, The boy who had never seen a woman

T587, Birth of twins

T111.1., Marriage of a mortal and a goddess can be cited as examples in this class of motifs.

V. RELIGION: The various constituents which occur under this category are stamped with religious and moralistic views which are

mostly other-worldly. The two examples are:

V510, Religious Visions

V511.1, Vision of Heaven

W. TRAITS OF CHARACTER: This is a compact category pertaining to the distinguishing traits of a person's character \_\_\_ both bad and good. They are the manifestations of a person's behavior detectable in his or her social interaction. Here are the main ones:

W10, Kindness

W117, Boastfulness

W125, Gluttony

W137, Curiosity

W154, Ingratitude

W181, Jealousy.

To these can be added, laziness, ambitiousness, credulity and obstinacy.

X. HUMOUR: It is a sense of amusement arising from the juxtaposition of incongruent elements, characters, or situations like the following:

X143.1., Lame man is taken on hunt on a stretcher

X424, The devil in the cemetery

X753, A youth promising to marry an old maid if she will sit all night on the roof.

Z. MISCELLANEOUS: As the name indicates, this group is a union of some motifs which cannot be classed separately, probably on account of their rarity. It includes:

Z16, Tales ending with a question

Z71.5, Formulistic number: seven

Z71.1, Formulistic number: three

This lay-out hopefully provides the broader framework for the motif-wise analysis of the selected tales but not in the same sequence just to avoid re-numbering the tales.

### 5.1 The Wise and the Foolish

The contrast between wisdom and folly, apart from furnishing the dramatic conflict for the development of the stories also enhances the didactic-moralistic instillation process. Wit, ingenuity, and expediency which are the component parts of wisdom, abound the southern Agaw folk-tales. Wise and witty characters are juxtaposed with the foolish ones. In the encounter, the witty ones emerge victorious while their foolish counterparts suffer misfortune.

#### 5.1.1. Treacherous younger brother outwits his elders

In story no.1, a dwarf named 'Tekaa fjela' manages to secure a good deal of material wealth than do his naive brothers. A sackful of flour from an outlandish place, a lot of invaluable goods from the market and a harnessed horse with a gun are some examples of his newly acquired possessions. Moreover, a midget nick-named 'Denquali' in story no.2, outsmarts his elder brothers in an intentional test arranged by their aging mother. In effect, he inherits a larger portion of his parents' fortunes by virtue of his wit. This proves that parents prefer thrifty and wise children to the foolish and self-indulgent ones.

#### 5.1.2. Repartee based on animals, clergy, men and women

In story, no.3, a small Ethiopian monkey (Tota) outwits the presumptuous lion and goads him into diving down into the narrow deep

pool from which he could not come out. The same ape also triumphs over the ingratiating monkey by virtue of her cunningness. In story no. 4, the defenceless dog convinces the foolish hyena that it is impossible to dart a heart from a donkey. Even further, he blinds another hyena who is fond of looking handsome with mascara: Thus, the dog guides this blind hyena to a threshing floor where it was stabbed and killed by the farmers. Thus the dog triumphs over his potential enemies through ingenuity. In story no.5, an expedient wife spares the life of her paramour through a swift perception which otherwise could have been endangered. The priest's wife in story no.6, also helps her gasping paramour to escape the danger by exploiting the religious sentiments of her husband.

A malicious but ingenious pupil in story no.7, tricks a considerate house wife. When she considered his entreaty to roast the linseeds, she meant to help him. But for the pupil it was just a means of extending his sojourn there till dusk. After the arrival of her husband later, the same pupil discloses the presence of a certain man in the rear room much against the expectations of the wife. After a while, when the angry husband begins to wrangle with the hidden man, the tricky pupil grabs all the food and slips out. In story no. 8, two "clever" thieves succeed in stealing two oxen safely from a naive farmer. Further, an Agaw peasant escapes the probable danger of being murdered by the cruel Shanquilla through wit in story no.9. If he had offended the Shanquilla untactfully, he would have probably been

murdered. The rogue in story no. 10, wins the bet by mere pretension and by exploiting the sympathetic behavior of the hosts. Upon the husband's inquiry, the rogue prescribes breast-milk for his eye-sore, and when the wife goes to treat him, he somehow manages to sleep with her. In another story (no.11), a clever wife saves the genital organ of her paramour from being severed. Her pretext for not finding a knife around makes the husband to go for the knife himself. Thus when the husband himself goes in search of a knife, she releases her paramour replacing him by a he-goat. In story no. 12, a clever but an infidel wife plays upon the innocence and credulity of her husband. Her husband is seduced into believing that the disguised paramour were the sister-in-law. Even worse, he easily permits his wife to pass nights after nights with the so-called sister -in-law. Thus in all the tales considered above, the hide and - seek drama between the wise and the foolish recurs, thereby, unfolding the intrinsic consequences of wisdom and folly.

### 5.1.3. Disastrous Imitation, by a Person or animal

Gross imitation without trial and error or without sifting the pros and cons of something to be imitated, is destructive even to the point of risking one's life. If not always, it is mostly fatal.

The honey seller in story no.18, loses his property, and wastes his time trying to blindly imitate the hide seller. When the hide seller drops the hide on the ground, the honey seller also drops a gourdful of honey on the ground to his dismay. Worse than this one,

an imitative ape severs her neck venturing to imitate the scribe who pretended to file a sharp knife over his neck deliberately. The disadvantage of gross imitation is thus made evident in both cases.

5.1.4 A Ridiculous father visits a diviner in Gondar to ask about the name of his newly born child

In story no. 23, a ridiculous father travels quite long a distance just to get his baby named. Further more, his passivity when the sarcastic diviner scornfully whispered in his ears that the name of the child was "Ridiculous!" makes him a numskull. More laughably, he also sweats in vain to find the name of his son in the straw which slipped his memory during a bump.

5.1.5 A Foolish couple become the butt of ridicule and subject to banishment and fatality

There are two absurd characters in story no.24. Their intention to travel a long distance in search of ~~tooth~~pick, the wife's disclosure to the rogue of the presence of chicken at her home, and the husband's attempt to kill a fly on his wife's chest with a pestle ~~border~~ on an act of idiocy.

5.1.6 Metaphors literally interpreted

Once again, a couple who misconceive the figurative meaning of words and expressions suffer misfortune in story no. 25. For one thing, they apply butter on the cracks of the ground instead of applying it on their dandruff-affected skin. For another, they kill the cow by swinging it to and fro, misunderstanding the figurative meaning of

the word swinging, which meant milking. The wife also fails to distinguish between foaming water and boiling water.

5.1.7. Greed breeds deprivation

The greedy brothers in story no. 26 are outwitted by their neglected brother who ultimately comes into possession of all the best quality flesh. If they had shared the beef with him without negligence, they wouldn't have been deprived of it at last.

5.1.8. Donkey is devoured by hyena due to his inattention to warning

The donkey in story no. 51, ignores the persistent warning of his friend \_\_ the dog \_\_ not to bray near a jungle in the dead of the night and so, falls prey to a hungry hyena.

5.2.0. Traits of character

One poignant comment after another recurs in the Southern Agaw folk-tales. These comments on human behavior are in the guise of animals, fictitious and allegorical characters. Most of them appear to be based on observed human behavior, and intended to satirize human folly and behavioral flaws.

5.2.1. A stubborn woman who gets hold of the foam rather than the grass is carried away by water

The comment in story no.13, is directed against obstinacy. The stubborn wife who defies her husband's advice acts by opposites. While they were crossing a torrential river she puts her feet where the water was foaming, and gets hold of the foam instead of the grass much against

her husband's advice. Consequently, she is carried away by the gushing water.

5.2.2. An Aging rat kindles a grand ambition in his young children

Story no. 14, reminds one of the cardinal importance of honour but implies the consequences of excessive ambition. The old rat's aspiration for a grand burial and a post-mortem fame is no bad. But, had his children consented to the idea of going to Gondar and Shewa in order to fetch the coffin and the soil for his burial, they could have been devoured by snakes and crows.

5.2.3 An Ambitious donkey who aspired for horns loses even his ears

The pitiable boss donkey in story no.15, who is appointed chief of the cattle goes to a market in order to buy horns. Ironically, however, he loses even his ears due to the heavy lashes he received from a farmer who loaded and drove him homeward when they met accidentally on their way to their respective destinations.

5.2.4. The Intolerant campaigner commits suicide

Story no.16, emphasizes the worth of patience and tolerance. 'patience is a virtue' as the proverb goes. In this story, a hasty campaigner returning home impatiently commits suicide upon hearing his wife's pregnancy in his absence. If he had thought over it for a little longer, his decision could have been different. His intellect seems to have been overpowered by jealousy and a sense of honour.

5.2.5. A Man who validates advice is rewarded by it

Contrary to the intolerant campaigner in story no.16, the man in story no.17, tolerates the disobedience of his wife by validating the epigrammatic advice of his friend -- "The top of a granary is nearer than Gondar". Convinced by his friend's advice, the husband who was heading for Gondar to seek a solution to her disobedience dismisses his plan. Eventually, his disobedient wife becomes a considerate lady, too.

5.2.6. A credulous husband murders his innocent wife

One of the most destructive traits of human behavior is credulity. Credulous characters or protagonists in imaginative literature have almost always been the victims of fatality. For instance, Othello, smothers the innocent Desdemona because of his credulity but commits suicide in an unbearable repentance.

In like manner, the credulous husband in story no.20, murders his wife taking for granted the venomous words of the wicked servant.

5.2.7 A Malicious servant plays a prank upon a credulous family by coining three different names

The sort of credulity evidenced in story no. 22 seems to be incredible at all. It appears as if the father, the mother and the daughter were all inherently credulous. Otherwise, the servant couldn't have been able to deceive the family as well as the inquisitors by coining three different names for himself. This in the end brings about a bad reflection upon the social value of the father as he is defamed for having committed incest.

### 5.3 Deception

Deception presupposes the interaction of at least two characters one of whom is presumably cleverer than the other. The two parties usually exhibit diametrically opposed traits. The unwary may be hospitable, credulous, naive uncritical and sympathetic though all these qualities are not equally harmful. On the other hand, the deceivers may be malicious, selfish, scoundrel, and vindictive. The means of deceiving the unwary varies from disguising one's bodily appearance to exploiting his/her innocent nature.

#### 5.3.1. Deception by pretension

In story no. 9, it is through pretension that the student but in fact a complete rogue wins the bet. He pretends that he is suffering from an optic inflammation upon which the host lady is fooled into dripping breastmilk on his eyes and falls prey to his premeditated plan. He would have failed to win the bet if the hosts were cold-hearted and shrewd.

#### 5.3.2. Deception by disguising bodily appearance

A paramour outwits the husband by disguising his external bodily appearance and features of masculinity. He thus visits his beloved only as a sister-in-law in disguise of a woman's dress, shorn of his beard and moustache. Moreover, it is by disguising his bodily appearance in the manner of a church - school pupil that the husband beheads his wife's paramour in story no. 48.

#### 5.3.3. Deception by malice

The cheat in story no. 21, deceives both the wife and her husband. Firstly, he convinces the wife that he is from the sky where the souls of the dead live together. The naive wife whose parents had already

died, then entreats him to take clothing for them. Then she gives him her new dress and her husband's suit with which he ran away. Subsequently, the husband who upon hearing this story rides to retrieve their clothes, catches up with the cheat but fails to recognize him. As a result, he asks the same cheat if he had seen a man with a bundle of clothes. The cheat retorts that he has seen one crossing down the rift. Then the husband leaves his horse with the cheat and goes down the rift in search of the person but ironically loses his horse to the very person he was hunting for!

#### 5.4.0. Marvels

Marvels or grotesque episodes defy explanation since they are all extra-ordinary occurrences.

#### 5.4.1. A Dead cow comes back to life again...

In story no. 28, entitled 'Agriy', almost all the episodes connected with the dead cow and the adventures of its owner are grotesque. Observe the following incidents:

- The owner of the lost cow stands on the top of a tong
- Then, he telescopes his cow through the hole of a **needle** and realises that his enemies were scrambling for its flesh at Gondar
- The dead cow regains her original form as he calls her by name
- The handful of 'teff' he brought from Gondar is sown on a big plot which was ploughed with seventy pairs of oxen!
- From this plot alone, seventy heaps of 'teff' were harvested
- During threshing, chickens prove stronger than oxen

- During hauling, cobwebs prove stronger than leather straps... all the incidents are thus fantastic and incongruous. But, at the same time, they compel the reader to appreciate the imaginative flight of the creator of the tale.

#### 5.4.2. A cow-as a scourge on the herd

A mysterious cow in story no. 29, never drops dung which is natural to her. All the more, the presence of this cow in the herd restrains the other cattle from dropping dung. It was only after this cow was identified and slaughtered that the rest of the cows begin dropping dung. Even after it was slaughtered, the hide of this cow causes a loss of life and produces a swarm of snakes. All these strange occurrences could be regarded as marvels since they do not comply with human reasoning.

#### 5.5. Humour

##### 5.5.1. Perceptive characters arouse laughter

The joker's reply in story no. 30, provokes laughter because of the way he tackles the question. As he was undergoing a severe treatment with a glowing tong, he discharges little pieces since the pain was unbearable. When asked why he had done so, he retorts that it was natural for a person to remove his property when his home is set on fire. In story no. 31, and no.32, it is also the verbal felicity of the characters that arouses humour. The red-handed behive thief up the tree in tale no. 31, retorts to the angry owner that he was heading towards Heaven, and was not there to steal the behive. The two old men make fun of each other associating baldness with a flat stone. and grey-hair with lint cotton. Thus, when the bald man asked the grey-haired man where he was going

with cotton on his head, the latter retorts that he was going in search of a flat stone on which cotton is traditionally scraped /

5.5.2. An Innocent farmer entreats a couple to locate his lost donkey

There are two incidents which may arouse laughter in story no.33. The first one is the donkey owner's leaving his bed for which he had already paid and then sleeping under it for fear of being charged more. The second one is his belief that the couple on the bed above him could actually see the world from horizon to horizon, and so, might help him by locating his lost donkey wherever it may be. In fact, the couple purported to see the world from horizon to horizon only in the reverie of their love.

5.6. Chance and Fate

The decisiveness of chance and fatalism is a deep-rooted belief in a traditional devout society like ours. Whatever happens, be it a reward or punishment, it is ascribed to fate and the will of god.

5.6.1. A poor but faithful brother escapes death by chance

In story no. 36, a poor brother who is versed in the language of all creatures under the sun escapes death by chance. He at first resolves to die after teaching this language to his insistent wife. But later on, he changes his mind on overhearing the discussion between the stray dog and the watch dog outside. The hungry stray dog suggests that divorce is preferable to self-inflicted death. The arrival of the stray dog, the man's overhearing of the discussion between these dogs are both chance events.

5.6.2. A Fateful hunter marries a prosperous widow

A poor hunter whose livelihood depended on hunting was one day sheltered in the verendah of a prosperous widow when it was raining heavily. In the mean time, his hounds hunt down a devil which was slipping out of the widows' home. Being grateful to him, she marries this man and they live ever happily on the fortunes of the seven dead husbands.

5.6.3. Two suspects convicted of murder are set free by chance

The two suspects in story no. 53, were first convicted of murder and were awaiting their fateful hour. But then, the accidental confession of the criminal from among the crowd surprisingly spares their lives. If he had not by chance confessed his crime, the two suspects would have been hanged for an offence they had not committed. Of course, in this story, the sudden play of the conscience in the mind of the real culprit played the decisive role in saving the lives of the suspected two. But from the point of view of the suspects, it was sheer chance that brought the man there and made him confess his guilt thereby saving their lives.

5.6.4. A Husband unintentionally sits on the basket under which a startled paramour is hidden

In story no. 42,, the unwary husband unintentionally sits on a basket under which the bald paramour was hidden. In story no. 45, the husband still unintentionally perches on the basket under which the paramour with porridge was hidden. The merchant of Karkar in story no. 46, also sits on the basket under which the startled paramour was hidden. In each case,

the husbands' sitting on the basket and the subsequent disclosure of the women's infidelity are both chance events.

5.7. Mythological Motifs:

Such motifs are preponderantly concerned with the origin of social and natural phenomena or the assignment of a cause for an occurrence.

5.7.1 Why the quantity and quality of potato production decreased in the land of Agaw (Awaxua)

As witnessed in story no.34, the quantity and quality of potato produced in Awaxua was once extremely high. Eventually, however, there came a considerable decrease both in its quantity and quality because of the ill-treatment it met with. As a result of this, potato left Agaw midirr for Shewa.

5.7.2. Why mule is subjected to eternal barrenness

Unlike the other beasts of burden, such as donkeys, horses and camels, mule doesn't reproduce its offspring since it was laid under a curse by God for her ill-manners. She is said to have banged the gate of God's house out of sheer oversatiety..

5.7.3. The origin of divorce in Awaxuwa

The origin of divorce in this society is traced back to the date and the event in story no. 36. The husband in this story had resolved to meet his seemingly fated death after teaching the language of all animals to his insistent wife. But, on hearing the stray dog's suggestion to divorce her rather than embrace death, he does the former. This incident is said to have commenced the tradition of divorce in Agaw society.

5.7.4 The origin of 'tekerchem' (unceremonious marriage)

Before the occurrence of the event in story no. 31, unceremonious marriage in this society was unknown. What is more, the tradition dictates the woman to move to the husband's house after marriage and not vice versa. But since the incident in story no.37, the convention of tekerchem has been established in this society though it is practised more often than not.

5.7.5 Why some people are black, others white, and still others golden-brown

The origin of black, white and golden-brown colours is attributed to the variation in the degree of temperature at which God fired the figurine of clay from which mankind was supposedly created. Accordingly, the overfired ones became Negroid, the underfired ones white men, and those who were neither overfired nor underfired became Ethiopians.

5.8. Rewards, Punshiments

5.8.1. Validation of advice rewarded

Attention to advice is rewarded in our every day life as evidenced in story nos. 17 and 29. The husband in story no. 17, cancels his journey, and thus saves money, time and energy.

Similarly, the owner of the mysterious cow in story no. 29, manages to ward off the scourge through his friend's advice. By dividing the herd into two groups to the last two cows consecutively, he identifies the cow which never drops dung. Hence, he slaughters it, and then the other 99 cows begin to drop dung normally.

5.8.2. Malbehavior punished

Since gluttony and greed are regarded as signs of immorality, they are subjected to punishment. In story no. 27, the adventurous plump who tries to lick a piece of cheese on his abdomen dies of stomach burst. The mule in story no. 35, is doomed to eternal curse for her malbehavior. Moreover, the immodest guest who deviates from the conventional code of conduct in story no. 40, is also dismissed out of the house for his immodesty.

5.8.3. The Infidelity of women punished

One of the most unparadonable sins in this society is the infidelity of women. In story nos. 42 and 43, the adultress wives are punished. The punishment, of course, ranges from flogging to divorce and / or death. In story no. 46, the merchant of karkar exposes his infidel wife to public humiliation by forcing her to carry her lover and do rounds in the market to her embarrassment.

5.8.4. Virtue rewarded, vice punished

In story no.44, virtue ultimately triumphs over vice. The arrogant lion who first devours the cow which was their common possession, is stung by the snake. Falsehood, who causes the destruction of all the characters — the lion, fire, water and the snake, step by step, finally tries to deceive truth as well. But then, Falsehood had its belly ripped up by the bull for which he was racing. In the end, truth succeeds in possessing all the cattle because of its virtue.

5.9. Unnatural Cruelty

5.9.1. A vindictive husband beheads his wife's paramour

In story no. 48, a bitter revenge is exacted on a paramour when he was sound asleep. The husband beheads his rival incognito upon discovering that the paramour was, for sure, committing adultery with his wife.

5.9.2. A vindictive husband mutilates the father-confessor's tongue

In the same vein, the husband in story no. 49, mutilates the so-called father-confessor's tongue for committing adultery with his wife. Moreover, the lover of a certain lady in story no. 53, murders the other lover of the same lady cruelly.

5.9.3. The Community beheads many intruders (the Galla migrants)

More than five centuries ago, the southern Agaws are legendarily known to have beheaded almost all the Galla intruders on the eve of Maskal as evidenced in story no. 56.

5.10. Sex

5.10.1. The marriage seeker (wooer) fails to court a worthy wife

The bachelor in story no. 58, fails to court a worthy girl inspite of his exhaustive search. The reason behind his failure was that worthy women were either engaged or married. They were not of the cheap sort available everywhere.

5.10.2. The will-power of women is irresistible

Though the male is virtually the head of family, women too exert a very strong influence upon their husbands. Thus the cowardly husband

in story no. 59, rises to the status of a hero in the community because of his wife's constant encouragement. This man who used to go hunting more often than not, returns with three shanqillas (=preys) within a single day. His determination emanates from his wife's sardonic song against his cowardice.

### 5.10.3. Polygamy and rancour

The Agaw society is a monogamous one. According to the dictates of their religion \_\_ orthodox christianity \_\_ the southern Agaws forbid polygamy but allow a tolerable degree of concubinage. Because, it often results in rancours, constant nagging and disruption of peace in the family. As reflected in story no.60, the two co-wives \_\_ the snail and the mouse \_\_ are shamelessly caught up in a nasty defamation contest forgetting to mourn over the death of their husband.

### 5.11. Speaking Animals

Owing to the fact that animals do not speak in the sense that human beings do, their strange acts are regarded as folklore motifs.

#### 5.11.1 Wild animals

In story no. 3, an inter-animal discussion on shoe-making and related issues take place. In the discussion, a lion, a monkey and an ape exchange views. In story no.4, a dog and two hyenas discuss about beauty and the anatomy of a donkey in which case the dog outwits both of them. In story no. 39, an antelope, an ape, a nursing tigress and others are engaged in a group discussion and, dialogue. All the more, there are four animals in story no. 52 \_\_ lion, leopard, hyena and donkey \_\_ who confess their sins turn by turn, following their unfruitful hunting venture.

### 5.11.2. Domestic animals

There is a dialogue between the boss donkey and a certain farmer in story no.15. A dead cow in story no. 28 responds to her master when he called her by name. A dialogue between the watch dog and the stray dog takes place in story no. 36, about the fate of the former's master and the possible alternatives. A defiant donkey and a far-sighted dog in story no. 51, argue about the pros and cons of braying at night near a jungle.

### 5.11.3. Rodents and creepers

In story no. 14, the father rat and his children exchange views on the former's proposal and the challenges the children are faced with.

The mouse and the snail abuse to each other with sardonic words in story no. 60.

### 5.12. Tests

#### 5.12.1 A Midget passes a series of tests

In story no. 2, the mother arranges a series of tests to find out which one of her children was wiser. Unlike his fat-headed elders, the midget outsmarts all his brothers and ineffect, becomes the winner of the larger portion of his parents' fortune.

#### 5.12.2 An Old rat imposes a task on his children

An aging rat imposes a challenge on his young children to see whether they were given to passive acceptance or not. Fortunately, they convince their father that his proposition was risky to enact. Hence, their father was satisfied with their rationalization since he meant only to remind them of the rewards of a critical faculty.

## VI. Summary and Conclusion

An analysis of some sixty southern Agaw folktales has revealed a certain number of recurring themes and motifs. Though these recurrent themes and motifs appear to be unconnected on the surface, they in actual fact do reveal a string of closely inter-related cultural elements which shape and characterize the life and the world view of the southern Agaws.

The first distinct impression we get from the moral of the tales in the main is that the southern Agaws are conservative orthodox christians in religion and sedentary agriculturalists in occupation. This combines the socio-economic framework or the basis of value orientation with their spiritual values upon which the behavioral patterns of the southern Agaws are formed and operate.

The tales under wit and wisdom reinforce the general world view of pragmatism and the necessity for ingenuity and expediency. The concrete realities of practical life in their daily activities and encounters dictate that all members of the society - young and old alike \_\_\_ be at the desired state of mind and body in order to cope with or even excel over the challenges of life. It appears that wit is given preference over might as revealed in the analysis. Thus rescue from danger, material acquisition, solving a challenge, the triumph over one's combatant and success in life in general are attributed to intelligence rather than presumption or might. The tales under didacticism are also poignant comments on human behavior. They indict the imperfections and vanities of all human beings. Such undesirable personality traits as obstinacy, ambitiousness, intolerance, gross imitation, excessive curiosity, credulity

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foolishness and greed are all bitingly criticized. All these fatal flaws in one's judgement, decision or behavior originate from within rather than from without, and their destructive effect is near universal and long-standing in imaginative literature.

A certain number of escape mechanisms are revealed in the tales under escape from the dull routine. They range from jocular and humorous episodes to the grotesque and the incredible ones which transcend reality. Such themes are meant to arouse pure entertainment, and thus, they satisfy the creative urge of man when the muse of imaginative creativity is filled with elation.

The education of the young is probably one of the most crucial concerns of the tale-tellers in this society. Explanatory tales, apart from satisfying their curiosity with regard to the origin of social and natural phenomena, do instruct the young about the social etiquette by implying certain moral sanctions. All the more, the tales on wit and wisdom, justice, marriage and psychological attitude do convey a lesson or instruct the audience in one way or another. More specifically, the morality tales of the southern Agaws are the psychological mirrors of their norms and moral-principles. Their world view, social norms, ethical and psychological attitude and religious creed are all wrapped up in these tales. The wise codes of conduct such as gratitude, self-restraint, modesty, fidelity and maintenance of the golden mean are thus the cherished modes of human behavior in this society.

Advocacy for a proper administration of justice is also stressed. The maintenance and miscarriage of justice are juxtaposed to strike the

balance between justice and injustice. Justice is thus a necessary precondition for the maintenance of the statusquo and the avoidance of disillusionment in God. The tales under attitude are both informative and psychological. Firstly, they reflect the attitude of the Agaw towards intruders which is one of reaction and suspicion, and how they hold themselves in the face of races who are somatically different from them. Secondly, these tales reveal that the southern Agaws are presumably humane, forgiving, industrious and rebellious if need be. The tales which occur under marriage and women show that the society is virtually monogamous. The primary goal of marriage is the perpetuation of society, economic amalgamation and the establishment of bonds between the in-laws though the sheer pleasure at the wedding ceremony precedes them. It appears that Agaw women are more ingenious than their men folk. Their will-power is also so strong that it instigates the husband to act much against his desire or intention. The ultimate objective of the tale-tellers appears to be educating, controlling, harmonizing the young into the statusquo and arousing merriment.

More over, the major motifs of southern Agaw folktales appear to be the following:

Under Mythology, the origin of divorce, 'tekerchem' and the reasons behind the sterility of mule and the decrease of potato production are given. Under Animals, we have speaking animals such as wild beasts, domestic animals and insect-rodents. Under Marvels grotesque episodes, mystery, adventure and fantasy which are strange and inconceivable in the realm of

reality take place. Under Tests, a mother imposes tasks on her children in which case the younger one outsmarts the older ones. With regard to the Wise and the Foolish, the wise always wins over the foolish and the presumptuous through wit. The victory of the weak over the strong is recurrent. Under Deception, deception by disguising bodily appearance, pretension and an attempt to win a contest by deception are revealed. Besides Chance and Fate, evidently cause a lucky encounter of a poor hunter with a prosperous widow. All the wise codes of conduct are rewarded while malbehavior and immorality are mercilessly punished. Under Unnatural cruelty, murder by beheading and revolting mutilations are witnessed. Such internal behavioral flaws of character as overconfidence, ambition, credulity, obstinacy, greed, and intolerance do recur but are extremely interdicted. Under Humour, witty retorts between characters intended to arouse laughter are exhibited.

On the whole, the southern Agaw folktale motifs are in the main concerned with; mythology, wisdom and folly, animals, marvels, chance and fate, tests, rewards and punishments, cruel revenge, humour, and the fatal behavioral flaws. Besides, taboos such as eating unsanctified dish (creepers, heppers, pork, etc.), incest and adultery are strongly condemned. Religious views such as faith in God, the illusion of inheriting Heaven and the omnipotence of God are reinforced directly or indirectly. Evidently, motifs related to magic, divination, the dead and ogres are less frequent or almost non-existent.

To sum up, the significance of southern Agaw folktales appears to be dual: The social significance lies in its pragmatic role of

cultivating the mental and physical capabilities of the young, reminding members of the society of wise codes of conduct, and the harmonization of the young into the statusquo. Over and above, they drive home the need for proper social behavior by holding up or eulogising the conformists and scorning the non-conformists who deviate from the socially accepted norms.

The role played by these tales in reinforcing group identity in a pluralistic culture like ours is also of a paramount importance as the southern Agaws are enclaved by many other ethnic groups such as the Amhara, the shanquilla, and the shinasha, especially in Metekel, and less so in Agaw-midirr. Moreover, the tales satisfy the ethnocentric curiosity of the folk with myths which are generated to explain the physical world and its inhabitants.

Though most of these tales are didactic, their literary significance is not to be overlooked. They provide a wishful fantasy through which man is momentarily distracted from the dull routine. After all, it is natural for man to be lifted above his narrow confines, say, through genital-anal humour, jocular anecdotes or pure fantasy. Apart from providing a wishful fantasy, they also arouse merriment which forms part of the cultural recreation. The southern Agaw folktales are thus the genuine repertoire of the Agaw socio-cultural norms, and values, world view, cosmology, concept of justice, psychological, ethical and artistic attitudes which characterize a devout aristocratic agrarian society.

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Appendix (Tales)

1. The Seven Brothers

There was a family of seven children. One of the children was nicknamed 'Tekafjela' to refer to his dwarf stature. One day, during a wedding season, seven of them planned to steal the cattle of the villagers. And so, they left for a distant village where a wedding ceremony was to take place. Some of them joined the dancers to lull the people while the others slipped out for theft unnoticed.

Back from the theft, they divided the cows among themselves. Unfortunately, a horned and troublesome cow fell in the share of the dwarf. Later on, his brothers wanted to get rid of the cow and so suggested that it should be slaughtered so that order in the herd would be restored. Eventhough, the dwarf declined their suggestion, they slaughtered his cow when he was away. Upon hearing this, the dwarf came back and pleaded his brothers, at least, to dry the hide for him which they did promptly.

Subsequently, the dwarf made a drum from the hide and went to a market where he climbed up a big tree and began drumming it aloud to frighten and disperse the people there. Alarmed at this unusual incident, the people dispersed leaving their goods in the market place. Tekafjela, then descended from the tree and amassed a great deal of wealth and went back home. Upon discovering this, his brothers wondered how he could manage to secure that much wealth and asked him all about it. He then replied:

I sliced the hide into a lot of pieces and traded it for this wealth. To your surprise, 'I have left a lot of wealth in the market unable to carry all!' Fooled by his answer, his brothers instantly slaughtered all their cows, dried the hides and rushed to the market in the hope to trade their pieces of hide for precious wealth. But they were instead ridiculed and humiliated in the market. Understanding the prank played upon them by their brother, they set his house on fire at night when he was asleep. He, however, managed to escape through a

small hole. Next morning, he appeared and told his brothers, "Brothers, I don't mind your burning of my house, but I now beg you to fill my sack with the ash." Soon, they filled his sacks with the ash and fastened and loaded them for him. He then left for a distant place with these sacks of ash and was hosted in a certain house. Before bed time, he warned his hosts not to touch the sacks since they were filled with the king's jewels. On the morrow, he threatened his hosts to accuse them of stealing the king's jewels and replacing them for ash. The startled hosts entreated him not to accuse them of such a charge and bribed him with a sackful of white flour. He then returned to his village happily to the utter astonishment of his brothers. He once again told his brothers that there was a place where a handful of flour is traded for a handful of ash. On hearing this, his brothers hurriedly burnt down their huts and rushed to that village loading many sacks of ash on their pack-animals. When the people of the village came to know about their intent, they humiliated and drove them out of their locality.

Once again, the angry brothers resolved to kill Tekafjela who always outwits them. Then they caught him, tied his feet and hands together, locked him up in a behive and started for the sea. After a while, they reached a threshing floor where they were invited to serve some food by a farmer. Then, they left their brother in the behive on the road side and went to the threshing floor. In the mean time, a rider who was passing by, saw the behive moving and inquired, "who is there?" Tekafjela answered, "I am a candidate going for an appointment." The rider continued, "If so, you must not creep in a behive. Instead, I will give you my horse and my gun." Then the rider gave him his horse and his gun, and locked up himself in the behive. In a moment his brothers, who were unaware of the trick, came back and carried the behive to the shore of a sea where they threw it and returned home satisfied. To their utter surprise, however, they found their brother coming back to the village on a horse, and with a gun in his hand. Then they asked him how he could escape the death and instead got the horse and the gun. He once again told them that the sea bed to which they had thrown him was abounded

in horses and guns. Now all his brothers got themselves drowned in the sea in the hope of getting horses and guns, while the clever dwarf lived happily ever after by playing upon their foolishness.

## 2. The Midget

There were four brothers one of whom was a midget but wise. His name was 'Dinquali' meaning a midget. One day, their aging mother intentionally told all of them to fetch potato from the farm in the compound. In a moment, all of them came back home and gave their mother what they had brought. The mother discovered that three of them had brought the unedible aerial part while the midget had brought the edible potato from the underground.

The mother, then, praised the midget and ridiculed the rest giving a full explanation of their demerits. For the second time, she told them to fetch maize from the corn fields. Once again, all of them went back to the corn plantation. Soon after, the midget came back with the maize proper from the aerial part while his brothers brought the roots. Now again, she praised Dinquali but was sorry for her three other children. Consequently, Dinquali became the favourite of his parents for whom, the larger portion of the their fortune was reserved.

## 3. A Lion, a Monkey and an Ape

Once upon a time, a lion, a monkey and an ape (tota) lived together in harmony. Amongst them, the lion was feared by the rest for his strength. The ape was distinguished for her wits and cunningness. But the monkey was devoid of both qualities. One day, the monkey went to visit the ill lion and suggested that he should wear shoes rather than walk bare-footed. "who can make one for me?" he asked. "The ape is very skillful in shoe-making," retorted the monkey.

Subsequently, the lion called for the ape and inquired her whether she could make shoes or not. The ape responded that she could provided that she ~~got~~ a monkey's skin \_\_\_\_\_ which is the raw material for that. Instantly, the lion gave an urgent order that the monkey be killed, skinned, and its skin be given to the shoe-maker (the ape). This was materialized within no time. The cunning ape then immersed the monkey's skin in a very deep and narrow pool. In the evening, she came back to the lion and complained that she couldn't take out the skin due to the presence of a monstrous animal in the pool, who told himself to be mightier than the lion. Boastfully enough, the lion rushed to the pool with a view to crushing the monster and thereby to help the ape take out the skin. Before he sprang, however, the ape advised the lion to load as many pieces of stone as he could around his four legs and paws in order to subdue his combatant. The lion then agreed and loaded a lot of stone in his paws. In a while, he threw himself into the pool only to play "hide-and-seek" with his own image. The more he tried to pull himself out, the weaker he grew due to the heavy gravitational force. In the end, he died of starvation and suffocation there. By virtue of her wit, the ape thus defeated the mighty lion and the ingratiating monkey.

#### 4. The Union of Animals

A hyena, a dog and a donkey set up a union. Once upon a time, all of them left for a market to sell what they had and buy what they needed. As they reached the sentry box, the hyena dropped behind purporting to guard the gate, and told the rest to come back on time. After marketing, the dog returned in due time while the donkey delayed. When this donkey appeared last, the hyena asked him why he was so late. The donkey answered that he had some trading to do. Then the hyena forced the donkey to wrestle with him conditionally. The condition was that, if the hyena defeated the donkey, the hyena would help the latter to stand up, and if the donkey defeated the hyena, the former would help the latter to stand up. Then the wrestling resumed. In the first round, the donkey defeated

the hyena and so helped him to stand up. But in the second round, the hyena defeated the donkey after which he killed and devoured him, of course, reserving the heart for his wife. Afterwards, the hyena made the dog carry the donkey's heart, and both of them headed for home. When they reached their village, the hyena asked the dog for the heart of the donkey. But the dog ran off with it saying, "If the donkey had had a heart, he wouldn't have wrestled with a hyena!"

On his way, the witty dog came face to face with another hyena who immediately asked him, "Mr. dog, I wonder why your eyelashes are so seductive." The dog retorted, "It is because I have applied mascara on them." "Would you mind applying mascara on my eyes?" the hyena continued. The dog then agreed and began piercing the hyena's eyes with pointed thorns and blinded him. Afterwards, the dog guided the blind hyena to a floor where farmers were threshing cucumber. Hearing a human voice, "what voice do I hear?" asked the hyena. "well, it is the voice of hyenas feasting on a dead horse", said the dog. Then the dog led the hyena to the threshing floor and disappeared exposing it to the farmers who stabbed and killed him.

##### 5. The One-eyed Campaigner

A certain campaigner spent a long time at a war front and returned home retired as a veteran. In his sojourn in the campaign, he had lost one of his eyes and so become a one-eyed man. In the meantime, his wife, being under the impression that her old husband had died in the war, got wedded to another person. This old husband returned to his village unexpectedly and knocked on the door of his house to the astonishment of his wife who upon recognizing his voice hid her new husband in the rear room (tekda). In a moment, she flung open the door, kissed her longing husband and chatted all sorts of things.

Towards evening, the embarrassed wife covered her husband's right eye with her hands and fondly said, "My dear, you have already lost

your left eye. What would have become of you, if you had lost the second one, too?" Mean while, the hidden husband collapsed on the threshold of door while trying to escape out. "What is it?" asked the old husband upon hearing the violent bang. "Nothing!" He is our neighbour who was coming to congratulate you upon your return." She replied. Then, the old husband welcomed him and they exchanged warm greetings. For the rest of the evening, the co-husbands drank and ate together, and so the secret remained undisclosed.

#### 6. The Priest's Wife

A priest had an infidel wife. She loved another man much against the norm. Her paramour used to visit her in the mornings when the priest leaves for church. One morning, the priest returned home earlier than usual and found his wife cooking porridge. The paramour who had come earlier than the priest was also sleeping in the bed. When the porridge was ready, the couple began serving it. This time, she was passing backwards a hot porridge to her lover in the bed with a big spoon. Irritated by the hot porridge dripping on his tongue, the lover was creeping up and down under the blanket afraid of making any overt noise. Then, the priest wanted to know what was creeping in the bed and asked his wife about it. "To day, I suppose," said the wife, "since you have not carried out the regular Holy Mass, a devil must have crept into our bed." Taking her words for granted, the priest soon-rushed back to the church while the lover slipped out safely.

#### 7. The Tricky Pupil

One evening, a pupil went to a village to beg for a slice of bread. When he was crossing from hut to hut, he accidentally saw a man hidden in between two granaries in one of the huts. The pupil then, deliberately went to that hut and begged, "For the sake of Mary!"\* upon which the lady

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\* The traditional begging formula.

gave him unroasted linseeds. He then entreated this lady to roast the linseeds for him intentionally. Considering his problem, the lady ignited fire and put the pan over the stove. But then, the linseeds on the hot pan jumped over and strewed all over the surrounding. If she tried to cover them up, the tricky pupil would purposely forbid her. When both of them were picking up the linseeds one-by-one, the husband who dropped across laughed at their foolishness.

Now it was time for supper. The lady first drew water for the husband's hands. But the pupil would pretend to help the husband wash his hands. When she wanted to draw the 'Mossab' (tray), he would also pretend to show his helpfulness. When she wanted to pour beer, he would try to pour it for her. Every time, the pupil went to the kitchen under the cover of helping the lady, he threatened the hidden man to tell or reveal his presence. The hidden man pleaded the pupil not to expose him and helped him carry each item. However, the pupil told the husband that somebody was hidden between the granaries before the supper was over. All of a sudden, the husband shot an angry glance at his wife and broke open the kitchen. There, he came face to face with that man and began to wrangle with him. The tricky pupil, in the mean time, grabbed all the food and slipped out.

#### 8. Two Thieves

There were two witty thieves. One day, they met on their way to a market, each with his own article for sale. The first thief's article was pieces of dung while that of the second thief was a sackful of ash. They had chats about their articles and fluctuation of price and all that. The first one told that his article was butter and that he wanted to buy teff. The second one told that his articles was 'teff' and that he wanted to buy butter. Since the article of one was demanded by the other, they exchanged their articles and went back home. Reaching home, each laughed at the discovery that he was cheated by the other.

Some weeks later, they once again met in the same market and vowed to steal jointly. Accordingly, they went for stealing oxen on their way home just for trail. Then they saw a farmer ploughing in a farm with a pair of oxen. In a moment, they hid in the bushes and cried out continuously "That is a wonder!" "That is a wonder!". The farmer hurried to the bushes to witness the "wonder" leaving his oxen in the farm. Then they slipped out from the bushes and stole one ox. When the farmer came back, he found only an ox with the yoke. He then went back in search of his lost ox. Once again, the thieves reappeared, and drove the second ox, too. In such a way, they managed to steal both the oxen, and proved that their joint venture would work out pretty well for the future.

#### 9. A Much Trusted Cow May Give Birth to a Crow

Once upon a time, famine spread in south western Agawmidirr-Zigami. A certain Agaw who was hungry went to a shanquilla's home in search of food. Unfortunately, however, famine had also spread in the community of the shanquilla. As a result, the shanquilla who had cooked creeping and hoping creatures invited the Agaw to dine with him. But the Agaw declined his invitation as "No, thank you, it is too hot to eat. Let it get a little colder." The offended shanquilla asked again, "what made you think of that?" The Agaw answered that he thought they would get reconciled eventually. By so doing, the Agaw avoided eating the unsanctified dish of the shanquilla prohibited in christianity. Thus, ingenuity and spiritual stamine are helpful when man is faced with the unexpected?

#### 10. The Bet Between Two Pupils

Customarily, church school pupils depend on scraps of bread and cereal crops for their livelihood. One evening, two pupils were going to a near-by village to beg for scraps and cereals. On their way, one of them said, "If I want, I can make a married woman sleep with me, do you bet?" The second one retorted, "I bet you can never do so, NEVER!" Then they betted twenty shillings and rushed to the village and kindly asked for

food and shelter. The hosts hospitably let them enter and take a seat near a smoking fire. They also provided them with "Injera" and beer.

Before bed time, the first pupil began to blubber out covering his eyes with his hands complaining that the smoke was teasing his eyes. Then, the host took him to another room and helped him to sleep on a dais. This pupil once again began to blare up for the same reason at midnight. Hearing this, the husband asked him, "How did you use to minimize this pain?" The pupil answered, "whenever I suffered from such inflammation, my mother used to drip some breast milk on my eyes." So, the naive husband told his wife to go and drip some breast milk on the pupil's eyes. She then obeyed her husband and went to the room where the pupil was sleeping. As she neared him, he pulled her towards him and somehow managed to sleep with her. After the game was over, he recited some punnic poems in praise of God thereby declaring to his friend that he had won the bet.

#### 11. A Wise Paramour

There lived an adultress wife who had an affair with her neighbour. Eventually, the rumour reached the ears of her husband. After clearing the rumour, the husband was longing for an opportune time to exact the revenge on his rival.

One day, the paramour came to the man's house and hid himself in the stable without noticing the husband who was hidden on the other side of the wall. When the night fell and all were asleep, the husband who was awaiting the hour of revenge entered the stable silently and gripped the lover's genital organ. And then, he called out his wife and asked her for a knife. Nonetheless, she deliberately replied that she couldn't find one around. Impatiently, the husband told her to replace him and rushed to the kitchen. Meanwhile, she replaced the genital organ of her lover for that of a he-goat and helped him to escape. Then, the husband came back and chopped up the he-goat's organ unwittingly. Upon discovering this, he started pondering over it unable to resolve the riddle.

On the morrow, brushing aside all what had happened the previous night, he instructed his wife to prepare sauce (wot) and "Injera" and invited all his neighbours for lunch. Among the invited guests was the very person who had escaped the danger of the previous night. After the feast was over, this man is said to have expressed his sardonic gratitude as, "God bless you for giving us such unexpected feast!" "Do it again and again!"

## 12. A Paramour in Dress

A handsome man and a married woman once fell in love. But due to lack of an opportune time and place, a long time passed before they could realize their infatuation. One day, the infatuated man inquired the woman how and where they could meet. After thinking over it, she advised him to visit her in a woman's dress disguising all his masculine characteristics. In order to exploit this flicker of hope, the man went to woman's house shorn of his beard and mustache, of course, dressed like a woman.

On his arrival, he received an enthusiastic welcome only as a "sister-in-law" since the wife had informed her husband about her "sister's" visit in advance. At bed time, the wife requested her husband to allow her to pass over the night with her much "longed sister." The unwary husband allowed her happily, and this went on for over a week. At the weekend, the wife had to go to a market. She then told her husband to take care of the so called sister-in-law. The husband wanted to exploit this opportunity as he had a hidden desire to make love with "her". After the departure of the wife, a fierce struggle between the husband and the paramour took place during which the masculinity of the latter got disclosed. Anyway, the lover outdid the husband in dexterity and flung off to the street leading to the market. After a while, he met his beloved on her way back home and told her all about the encounter. After a tremor of fear she heaved, "Thanks God that your life is spared. As for me, don't worry, I know how to cool him down", and started off. In

the mean time, sitting in his compound, the enraged husband was calculating how to castigate his infidel wife. On the other hand, the tricky wife entered her house rushing and crying aloud putting her hands on her head as a sign of astonishment. Confused with this, the husband asked her, "what is wrong you bitch"? "what makes you so surprised and horribly weep?" "Never have I witnessed such a strange occurrence in my life. Believe it or not, to day all men in the market were transformed into women and vice versa!" she replied in sobs.

"Oh! good gracious!" joined the husband, "your sister was also transformed into masculinity this morning, and she disappeared probably ashamed of that!"

"What about you?" she asked pretending her anxiety. "I am alright, and you?" he inquired.

"And so am I." She replied happily. In this way, she outsmarted her credulous husband, and so her mischief remained undisclosed.

### 13. The Obstinate Women

There was a man who had a wife who constantly made him miserable. She was quite stubborn and always did things by opposites. For instance, if he asked for meat, he would get cabbage. If he asked for injera with wot, he would get injera with milk. If he asked for beer, he would get araki. So, he was very miserable as his wife wanted things the other way round. One day, he discussed the problem with his friend. His friend advised him to ask her for opposites to overcome the behavioral problem of his wife. That is, when he wanted injera with wot, he would ask for injera with milk, when he wanted meet, he would ask for cabbage... This was the way things were with the husband for a long time.

One day, they had been to a far away place in order to attend a funeral. When they were returning home, a heavy rain came up and rained

very hard since it was the rainy season. When the couple came to a river, the river was in flood and the bridge was carried away. The swirling water carried small trees and bushes along and overflowed its banks. The husband waded in the water where it was shallow. He proved that the current was very strong and came out on the other side. Therefore, he advised his wife not to put her foot where the water was foaming. But the stubborn lady put her foot there and consequently fell into the water. Then the husband warned her to get hold of the grass around. But she answered, "No, I would rather get hold of the foam," as a result of which she was carried away by the strong currents. Despite the villagers exhaustive search for her upstream and downstream, she was not to be found anywhere.

#### 14. The Quest for Fame

There was an old mouse who was blessed with many children. One day, he fell ill and remained in bed for a long a time. On the eve of his death, he sent for all his children to come together and surround his bed so that he could pronounce his benediction and propose his will. After that, he willed all his property to his children and in the end said:

"My beloved children, you must not bury me in an ordinary manner. Instead, you will have to bring the soil from Gondar and the coffin from shewa." His children were all puzzled about it and looked at one another not knowing what to do.

Soon after, the elder son rose and spoke in melancholy: "our dear father, we wish we could do everything in our power for your lasting fame. But, don't you think that the creeping creatures on the earth and the flying crows in the sky would devour us during our trips to and from shewa or Gondar?".

"There you are!" retorted the father. "You see, I don't mean it at all. I was simply proposing this in order that posterity might posthumously recall my aspiration with wonder!"

This way, the aging father kindled grand ambitions in the heart of his young children.

#### 15. The Boss Donkey

Once upon a time, a donkey was appointed head of the cattle. He observed that his subjects \_\_ the cattle \_\_ had enviable pointed horns of which he was devoid. One day he resented, "It is paradoxical that my subjects possess horns while, I, their boss do not." Then, he resolved to buy horns and left for a market. On his way, however, he came face to face with a gasping man carrying a sack of grain on his shoulder. After exchanging the usual greetings, the man asked where Mr. donkey was running to. The donkey, honestly replied that he was running to a market in order to buy horns. The cunning man then promised to guide this donkey to a place where horns were cheaply available, loaded his grain on it and drove him homeward. On their way home, the donkey just lay flat and couldn't move an inch any more despite the heavy lashes since he was tired. While the man was lashing the donkey over and over, both the donkey's ears got chopped up. The ambitious donkey who had gone to acquire horns, paradoxically lost his ears. Thus an old proverb goes, "she who went in the hope to get her hair plaited, came back short of it."

#### 16. Haste Makes Waste

A Hasty man once hired a servant named Gabre before his departure to a war front. After spending a long time at the war front, he was on his way back home. On his way back, he was thinking of his wife, his servant, and his future. Since he was too hasty, he called out his servant, by name 'Gabre! Gabre!' standing just on the other side of the river miles away

from his home. Gabre responded standing on the opposite side of the river, too.

"How do you do? and how is my beloved wife?" asked the man. "Thanks God, as for our health, we are alright except that your wife has conceived. The last information dismayed the returning husband.

"By whom did she conceive?" he inquired indignantly. "Well, it is rumoured that she has conceived of me, but I contend that it is unfounded."

In a fit of depression and intolerance, he threw himself into the gushing river and breathed his last.

#### 17. The Top of a Granary is Nearer than Gondar!

A Husband had a disobedient wife. She made him miserable for many a time. If he wanted bread and asked for it, she would tell him that it was on the top of a granary. If he asked for water or beer she would tell him that it was in the jar instead of fetching it herself. Intolerant of her disobedience, he one day set on a journey to Gondar to seek a solution for this problem. On his way, he met his old acquaintance who after exchanging the usual greetings, asked him where he was rushing. The man answered that he was rushing to Gondar to seek a solution.

"What is your problem? can I be of any help to you?" asked his friend. Then, the man explained that it was related to the malbehavior of his wife and told him everything in detail. The friend, then, remarked, "I suppose, the top of a granary is nearer than Gondar!" "so you had better go back home." Then it is said, the man cancelled his journey and returned home to tolerate, and reclaim his wife from disobedience gradually.

### 18. The Hide and the Honey Sellers

Saturday is the official marketing day in Ethiopia. One Saturday morning, two men were heading straight for a market. One of them was carrying a large hide on his shoulder, and the other a gourdful of honey on his head. They had a long chat on their way to the market. Upon reaching the market, the one carrying the hide dropped it on the ground as it was natural to it. Imitating the first man, the honey seller also dropped his gourd on the ground. Consequently, the gourd broke and the honey spread over the dirty ground to the dismay of the honey seller. The hide seller asked the honey seller why he had done so. The honey seller answered, "I meant to do as you did". Since then the folk say "Ayo bux derbani narge bux derbuxa." This then, is a warning against blind imitation.

### 19. The Scribe and the Ape

A scribe used to write scriptures on a parchment with quill under a big juniper tree. There was a small monkey called 'Tota' on the branches of that tree. This Tota used to follow the day-to-day activities of the scribe. One day the scribe went home for lunch leaving his material and stationery under the same tree. Following his departure, the Tota descended from the tree and spoiled the scriptures. When he came back, his scriptures had been scribbled and discoloured by the ape which climbed up a tree upon seeing his advance to her. When he was flinging his fingers in anger, she all the more made fun of him by imitating his actions. This made him rather more angry as a result of which he devised a mechanism to take a revenge on the ape. Then, he sharpened a knife and filed it over his neck as if to sever it. After that, he left the sharpened knife there and disappeared into the bushes intentionally. The ape then descended from the tree to repeat the scribe's action. Thus trying to file the sharp knife over her neck like the scribe, she severed her head from her body.

20. The Wicked Servant

A servant who was fond of odd things was hired to a rich family. One night, he poured a little warm water on the bed sheets of the couple while they were sound asleep. Though baffled and each suspicious of the other, it was believed to be urine. On the morrow, the husband left for a public square escorted by the servant holding a gun. At noon, the husband sent for his wife to prepare food for the expected guests. But the rogue conveyed the message in such away that it offends the wife. The wife, however offended, did not respond. But, the servant immediately slipped out and rushed back to the square as if he were sent to the husband.

He then told the husband that his wife had insulted him in connection with the urine in the presence of his colleagues. Infuriated with this humiliation, he rushed back home and shot down his wife without any inquisition. Subsequently, her relatives came to attend her funeral. But while the dirge was going, on the wicked servant as a soloist said:

An nisse aqashtuni, an nisse aqashtuni

Taxuxsa besata kantalama xiyniy

If I were her brother, If I were her brother,  
I would uncover her body and see what happened to her.

On hearing this cryptic dirge, most of her relatives wanted to uncover the corpse and see how she had died. But the relatives of the husband would not allow them, and so, a bloody conflict which took many lives ensued. In the mean time, the wicked servant escaped to a monastery where monks and nuns were living. There he built a small hut wherein he found a deep well later on. After covering it with pieces of stone, he entered the protected well and entreated the nuns to set his hut on fire. But when the nuns objected to his entreaty, he himself put fire to his hut and hid in the well under the hut. When the hut was completely burnt down, he jumped out boasting that he had acquired sainthood within a short

time. The other-worldly nuns who had spent a long time in the monastery, then put fire to their huts and burnt themselves alive hoping to achieve sainthood like the rogue.

### 21. The Cheat

There lived a malicious pupil. Once he went to a certain village to beg for a slice of bread. In one of the houses, a lady asked him where he had come from. He replied that he had come from the sky where the dead live together. This time "Excuse me, do you know my parents living there?" she asked earnestly. "For sure, I know them very well, but it is pitiable that their clothing has worn out", he answered cunningly. She wept for a while and entreated him to take some clothing for them. After that, she handed him her dress and her husband's suit in the hope that he would convey them to her parents. He happily departed "pledging to discharge" this responsibility.

Later on, the husband arrived and heard all what had happened. Realizing that she has been cheated, he rode to the direction where the cheat had gone. After a short ride, he caught up with the cheat and unwittingly asked him if he had come across a person with a luggage. The very person who was being hunted answered, "Oh! yes, I have seen this man crossing the ridge down the rift. But the place, I guess, is not convenient for riding." Then, the anxious husband requested, "would you mind looking after my horse for a moment?" The rogue instantly agreed to look after the horse but rode away before the man returned. In the end, the cheated husband returned home with a heavy heart and told his wife that he had also sent the horse to the parents in the sky lest they should walk to church.

### 22. The Servant's Calculation

Agal Degu had a beautiful daughter for whom bachelors were racing. He one day hired a new servant whose duty was to collect fire wood and

to look after the cattle. The family then wanted the servant to introduce himself to them one by one. One day, the servant told the husband that his name was "Ani" \_\_\_ I am. Next time, he told the wife that his name was "Ña" \_\_\_ He Himself. Lastly, he told the daughter that his name was "Yetalla" \_\_\_ My Father. In spite of these variations, the family blindly accepted what he told them for granted.

After half a year, the servant who had impregnated the daughter began to ponder over her pregnancy and the way out. Not knowing what to do, he strolled down the public square where people were talking about people. One of the people remarked that Degu was a man of good demeanour. Then, the servant interrupted him and shouted, "How dare you talk like that?" "Is not Degu a deviationist who has impregnated his own daughter?" surprised to hear this, some of them rushed to Degu's home to clear the rumour. Then, they found Degu in his garden and inquired him if he could tell them who had impregnated his daughter. "Ani" 'I am' he answered. Next, they directed the same question to his wife who also answered "Ñagu" ---- 'He himself.' With more surprise, they asked the daughter who also answered "Yitala" \_\_\_ 'My father.' Now, the servant's calculation has worked out pretty well! so, this mischievous servant saved himself at the expense of Degu's social value through his deceitful introduction. Thus taking things at their surface value passively may often be disastrous!.

### 23. The Ridiculous!

A certain foolish farmer had a sterile wife. His childlessness worried him so much so that he even thought of divorcing her. In course of time, however, a child was borne to them. But when they had to christen the child, they couldn't think of a suitable name for him. As a result, he left for Gondar to ask a diviner about it. Then the diviner threw some seeds on the divining board and said, "I have got the name." He leaned forward and whispered, "Ridiculous!" in the ears of the farmer. Then he advised the farmer to learn it by heart.

So, the farmer ran homeward memorizing "Ridiculous!" Ridiculous!"  
"Ridiculous..."

On his way, he bumped against an obstacle (stone) and so, the name of the child slipped his memory. He then began to sift through the straw, the grass, the hay and overturned every stone, with his stick. As he was dislocating everything in search of the "lost" name, a person from the village came by and asked him what he was doing. He explained everything. The man shook his head and remarked, "It is ridiculous!"

"Really? THAT is the name! he said with amazement, "Oh! thank you indeed!" Then he went home where his wife was waiting for him. "well," his wife asked, "what is it?" "I got it from the diviner. But I had dropped it on the way during a bump. While I was looking for it, somebody came by and told me that it was "Ridiculous!"

#### 24. The Foolish Couple

A wife who had cooked chicken for lunch, awaited the coming of her husband. On his arrival, she suggested that they should get tooth-pick before serving the chicken. Therefore, she journeyed to a distant place in search of the tooth-pick. As they were going along, a certain pupil came behind the wife who was staggering, and began to converse with her. "Are your parents alive?" she asked him first just to break the ice. The pupil replied that they were dead. Then, she warned him in the following words:

"Look! in case you go to yonder village (pointing to her home), don't touch the sauce in the cooking-pan at my house, Okay?" He replied, "O.K. I will never go there." she then moved fast to catch up with her husband.

In a moment, the pupil crossed that village, reached the house of that lady and consumed all the chicken and disappeared. When long after

the couple returned with the tooth-pick, they found only an empty pan being hovered by flies. Then they declared an all out attack on the flies and killed most of them wherever they were found. At last, a fly which was bothering them quite for a long time, sat on the chest of the wife. The wife immediately attracted the attention of her husband and beckoned him to kill it. The husband, out of foolish enthusiasm, struck his wife with pestle, but alas! instead of killing the fly, he killed his wife.

#### 25. The Cow That Died of Swinging

A Daughter and the son-in-law once appealed to the mother that they were suffering from dandruff. The mother then gave them some butter to be applied on the cracks of skin. On their way back home, however, they applied the butter on the cracks of the ground and came back to tell the mother that they had expended it. The mother once again gave them a milk-cow to make use of its milk by swinging (=milking). But they mistook milking for physically swinging and killed the cow by swinging it back and forth. Once again they reported that the cow had died in the process of swinging. The mother still patiently advised them to flay the cow and spend the hide on clothing. After flaying the cow, the husband put on the damp hide which got stuck to his body. This problem was also reported to the mother. Further still, the mother told her daughter to immerse the hide in a river in order to detach it from her husband's body. The husband was also immersed in the river with the stuck hide.

Intolerant of the series of blunders that they had committed, the mother afterwards cursed and banished them from that locality.

Consequently, the couple left for another place carrying flour for their provision. As they were crossing a big river over a bridge, the foolish wife strewed the flour over the foaming water thinking that it was boiling. And when the currents carried away the flour, she jumped into the river to retrieve it. The husband also jumped into the gushing river and hence both of them were drowned.

26. The Greedy Brothers

There were four children in a certain family. One of them was so small that his size stood at a vanishing point and yet he was very wise. One day, they planned to steal an ox from the neighbouring village through the instrumentality of this dwarf. The dwarf, accordingly, drove out the ox from the barn without being noticed by the herdsman on duty. Immediately, his stout brothers slaughtered the ox in a nearby jungle.

However, the best part of the flesh was kept for themselves while the lung which is considered to be an offal was thrown to the chief actor of the theft-drama much against his expectation. Infuriated with their negligence, he thought over how to secure the best quality beef. So, he went to a village with the lung and climbed up a tree. He then shouted at the top of his voice disclosing the whereabouts of the stolen ox. Startled at the disclosure of their crime, his brothers scattered away. Then, he happily descended from the tree and collected all the best quality flesh and left for home. Thus, they say, 'Greed breeds deprivation'.

27. Demblebetch (The Plump?)

A plump named 'Demblebetch' lived in the land of Awawa. Since he was a sort of foundling, he lived under the protection of a certain family of "cannibals". In course of time, however, the family had detected signs of maliciousness in him and so wanted to do away with him. To this effect, the mother one day, before leaving for a market, told her daughter to strangle the plump and cook sauce. Having overheard this instruction, the plump became conscious of and alert to the daughter's subsequent activities. Then, when she was trying to grip him by the neck, he flung her into a barrel of boiling water and escaped out. When the mother came back from the market, she heard all about it and began chasing the plump with the help of dogs and wild beasts. But since the plump had climbed up a tree with a lot of

pieces of stone in his hands, he killed all the beasts one by one except a blind hyena. Next morning, he entreated a by-passing farmer to drive away the blind hyena so that he could descend from the tree. Then, he went along with this farmer to a threshing floor to become his servant.

One day, this farmer who was threshing 'teff' sent for his wife to send him 'abzi' (a fattened bread) and beer. However, the messenger (the plump), conveyed the message to the wife distortedly that her husband would like her to:

- (a) paint the floor of the house with linseeds,
- (b) sever the legs of all calves and, of course,
- (c) send him abzi and beer.

On his way to the threshing floor with the abzi and beer, he consumed them all and then painted the left-overs of the bread with the pieces of chicken and gave it to the farmer. Unaware of his mischief, the farmer spent the day boiling with indignation. At dusk, he went to the barn near his home and called out his wife to release the calves so that he could milk the cows before night falls. To his great shock, she answered that she had severed the legs of all the calves pursuant to his instruction through the plump. He then rushed to his home the floor of which had already been painted with the slippery linseeds. Trying to grip his wife, he lay flat on the slippery floor and shot her dead in a fit of fury.

Still unaware of his villainy, this farmer once again sent this rogue to the in-laws to break the news of their daughter's death. But the plump instead told them that their daughter had given birth to a child. Overjoyed with the news, the parents hurried to visit their daughter with butter, milk and porridge. When they reached an overflowing river, the plump took all the items from their hands under the cover of safety and crossed the bridge first telling them to follow him. But hardly had they reached the other end of the bridge when he disclosed the death of their daughter. Startled at the shocking

news, they all collapsed over the torrential river and were carried away. After all these, the rogue sat happily to eat what he had snatched from them. While he was eating alone, there appeared a rider whom the plump invited to rest and eat with him. As the naive rider sat down, the plump mounted on the horse and went out of sight riding so fast. After a long ride, he reached an outlandish place where he met a nun. He entreated this nun to look after his horse for a moment. She then took the horse and tied it to her legs as there was no any pole nor pillar to which it would be tied. All of a sudden, this rogue called the horse by name as a result of which it killed the poor nun by dragging her on the ground. He then took her corpse to the surrounding village and hid it in the bushes. Later on, he threatened to accuse the villagers for killing the nun. The innocent villagers pleaded with him not to accuse them of murder and promised to bribe him with whatever he liked.

He then proposed his preference as "I want nothing else but a sieveful of flies and a jarful of whey." The villagers hurriedly gave him these items all of which he consumed ravenously. In the end, while trying to lick a piece of cheese that fell over his bulged stomach, he died of a burst in the stomach (detonation).

#### 28. Agriy (Name of a Cow)

A man spent most of his life in a campaign. When he returned from the war front, he learnt that his cow named 'Agriy' had been stolen. He searched for it everywhere in the locality but it was not to be found. In the end, when he desperately, stood on the top of a tong and telescoped his cow through the whole of a needle, he realized that his enemies were scrambling for it at Gondar! Annoyed and fond of retrieving his cow, he rushed to Gondar and called her by name, "Agriy;" "Agriy;" to which she responded and recovered to its original form. On his way back, he loaded little 'teff' amid her hair. The plot on which this 'teff' was to be sown was so large

that seventy pairs of oxen were used to plough it, and seventy heaps of teff were harvested from it. All the more, a number of oxen died of strain in the process of threshing. When it came to hauling the yield, many donkeys died of being overburdened, and the straps were all broken into pieces, and, cobwebs were used to fasten the load. When he reached home, he told his wife to brew beer in a small pot and invited many guests to a feast! The guests who attended the feast were all satiated.

When the feast was over, he boasted of killing a gazelle in the distant forest with grass or 'wajigra'\* and fired. Then he went along the foot prints of the bullet and saw that he had actually hit the target. All the more, he found pepper and honey in the horn of his prey. He once again told his wife to brew a barrel of mead and cook sauce. Subsequently, he offered another big feast with which all the guests got drunk and quarrelled with one another.

#### 29. The Mysterious Cow

A certain farmer had one hundred cows. In spite of their large number, they wouldn't drop dung. This resulted in the shortage of fuel and organic fertilisers. The farmer then discussed this problem with his friend. The latter advised him to divide the cows into two equal groups and see what happens. Accordingly, the farmer divided his cows into two groups and found that the first fifty cows had dropped dung at that particular night while the other fifty showed no development.

He once again divided the second group into two. Now again, the first group dropped dung while the second didn't show any change. This division went on and on down to the last two cows whose ratio was one-to-one. In the end, he could identify the cow which was a scourge to the herd.

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\* An out-dated gun which is loaded with one bullet at a time.

Consequently, the farmer slaughtered this cow and so the scourge was warded off. But still, when the farmer was going to a river to throw her flesh, a vulture snatched away the flesh from him. Furthermore, when this farmer was throwing and throwing stone at the vultures, he in the process killed many people instead of the vultures. In the mean time, a dog stole in and ran off with the rest of the flesh. Then the farmer returned home with the hide which he later dried and took to a market in order to sell it. But then, a number of snakes swarmed out and overrode the area when he dropped it on the market ground. Once again, when the people in the market started throwing stone at the snakes, many people were killed while no single snake was injured. In the mean while, a tanner stole the hide unnoticed and carried it to a big sea to immerse it but got himself drowned. That is how, the story goes about the mysterious cow.

### 30. The Joker's Reply

There was a famous man whose humour amused every villager. Once a swelling bulged out on the waist of this joker, and this caused a painful inflammation to him. To heal this wound, local herbs were applied and medical treatment was sought but to no avail.

Not knowing what to do, his friends, one day, asked him "How can we help you cure from this swelling?" He replied, "As for me, it would be healed only if it is ironed with a glowing metal." According to his suggestion, his friends glowed a pointed piece of metal (wesfe) and ironed the swelling over and over again with it. In the mean time, the man discharged some ~~wind~~, as the pain was unbearable. Surprised at this, his friends inquired him why he had done such a despicable thing while he was undertreatment. He then cunningly retorted, "I think, it is natural to remove property when one's house is set on fire!"

### 31. The Beehive-thief

Bee-keeping is one the most wide spread economic activities in the southern Agaw society. In order to trap the migratory swarm of

bees, the bee-keeper suspends a well-scented beehive in between the branches of big trees.

One day, a certain farmer suspended such a beehive from a tree and went back home. After a week or so, the owner came back to see whether his beehive had trapped migratory bees or not. In the mean time, a thief who had climbed up that tree to steal the beehive was caught red-handed. Then, the owner blared at him, "what the hell are you doing up there!" But the thief cunningly answered, "oh! sir, I am ascending towards the kingdom of God, and not here to steal your beehive, okay?" Then, the owner burst into laughter as a result of which the thief escaped any severe punishment.

### 32. Two Witty Elders

There were two good-humoured elders. Once upon a time, both of them set on a journey to a distant place simultaneously to opposite directions. The journey took almost half their age and so they had grown older. One of them had lost almost all his hair and had more to wash and less to comb while the other one had all his black hair turned grey. When they met at a certain juncture, the grey-haired man asked the old man, "Man, where are you going with a flat stone?" to make fun of his baldness. The bald man in return retorted, "I am going to a place where lint cotton is sold!" And thus, the result was one-to-one, and both of them laughed at the other's swift perceptive sense of humour.

### 33. The Lost Donkey and the World

Once a man went to a market loading grain on his donkey. After selling the grain, he entered a tavern to have a bottle of wine leaving his donkey in the compound. When he came back from the tavern, his donkey was lost. He searched for it but it was not to be found. After many ups and downs, he came to the village and rented a lodging since it was getting darker. This lodging was so decorated with exquisite carpets and bed clothes that he thought the owner would charge him

more money than he had already paid. Afraid of this, he jumped out of the bed and slept on the floor underneath the bed.

Forgetful of the first lodger, the owner later on gave the same bed for another couple (husband and wife). The couple, who were unaware of the man underneath their bed, were chatting over many trifles before sleeping. Thus, the husband was asking his wife what is it? and what is that? sort of questions caressing almost all parts of her body.

Lastly, he asked her, "what do you visualize whenever you see me?". And she answered, "Whenever I see you, I see or visualize all the world ~~from~~ horizon to horizon." After hearing all their conversations, the man underneath their bed entreated, "Gentle couple, would you mind locating my donkey?" At first this caused a tremor of fear in the couple. But later on, when he told them his story, they all burst into laughter. He then was provided with some money both from the couple and the owner of the lodging.

#### 34. Potato's Adieu

In the good old days, when the fertility of the soil was very high, potato production in Agaw-midirr used to be abundant. Cattle, pet animals and the people walked over it without the least concern for its utility. Disappointed with this ill-treatment, potato decided to desert Agaw-midirr and so, it revealed itself in dreams to the consumers as:

Dekda chi Awaxuwa  
Dekda chi Awaxuwa  
Kaytuxax shewaxuwa

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Adieu! the land of Awawa  
I am leaving you for shewa.

Since then, the quantity and quality of potato production in Agaw-midirr is said to have decreased considerably.

35. The Curse on Mule

Before time immemorial, the house of God was built in the proximity of Earth, a little over our head. One day, a mule which was oversatiated with the abundant blades of grass banged the house of God aback with its rear legs. Annoyed with her ill manner, God laid her under a curse as:

"May your womb not bear fruit!"

Thenceforth, He moved His house upwards to the top of the sky. Due to this eternal curse, mule does not reproduce its offspring unlike the other beasts of burden.

36. The Two Brothers

There were two brothers. One of them was rich while the other one was poor. One day, the rich brother took a purgative for tapeworm and was strolling up and down as prescribed for such patients. The poor brother also strolled together with his rich brother. Even when the rich brother slept in the open-air, the poor brother also slept tying his cloth with that of his brother. At about noon, however, the rich brother who had woke up earlier untied the knot and went home to serve the overspiced chicken to facilitate the emptying of his bowels. When the poor brother woke up later, he found that his brother had let him down. Disappointed with this, he resolved to "kill" God for improving him. Then, he went out of his village in search of God.

Subsequently, God met this person in the guise of a man and asked him what he was looking for. The poor brother replied that he was looking for God with a view to killing Him. "What is the driving force behind your resolve?" asked God. "Because, He has made me the butt of ridicule and humiliation" he answered.

"O.K., what do you want to be endowed with now?" "wealth or a universal language?" repeated God. The poor brother preferred the latter, and so, he was taught a universal language but on condition

that he would not teach it to anyone else failing which he risked death.

Back home, he told his wife that God had taught him the language of all creatures under the sun. She insisted on being taught his language. But he refused her request on account of the strict condition under which he was taught the language. "If you don't teach me, I will divorce you!" she threatened. But then, the husband unflinchingly decided to teach her and die. This conversation between the nagging wife and her husband was overheard by the dogs. One day, he slaughtered a bull to celebrate his forthcoming death. The family dog was gnawing at the left-over bones when a stray dog came by and desired to share it with the former. But the dog refused to share it with the latter and gave his reason thus: "My lord is going to die in the near future, and there would be no more beef. Therefore, I will have to be economical!" Then, the stray dog suggested, "why should he risk his life!?" why not divorce his wife and marry another one?" "And as for the bull, he can always buy another!" Now, the man who overheard all this, dismissed his first scheme altogether, divorced his wife and married another. This is how, as they say, the practice of divorce came into being in our society.

### 37. The Poor Man's Appeal to God

There was a poor man who spent most of his life in penury. One day, fed up of such a life, he appealed to God to liberate him from poverty. In response to his appeal, God then gave him the following directive:

"Get a snow-white rod and insert it in the waste matter of animals. The particular animal whose waste matter gets stuck to the white rod would be the harbinger of your fortune." Then the man tried the white rod with every waste matter on a trial and error basis, but to no avail. In the end, he desperately inserted the rod in the waste matter of a hound and saw a flicker of hope in that. As a result, he bred hounds and his livelihood depended on hunting.

During a rainy season, while returning from hunting, he took refuge with his dogs at the verandah of a certain house whose owner was a prosperous widow who had lost seven husbands. Upon hearing the noise outside, the demon who is traditionally believed to sleep with widows ran out of the house but was hunted down by these dogs. Afterwards, the widow, being thus grateful to this man, married him and they lived happily on the fortunes of the seven husbands. Thenceforth, men began moving to women's house much against the long-standing tradition. This, they say, was the origin of 'Tekerchem' or unceremonious marriage in this society.

### 38. The Father's Vow

Once upon a time, a certain farmer's ox was stolen by thieves. In the early morning, the farmer together with his son explored all the areas to which his ox might have been possibly taken. In this venture, both of them crossed long distances and came across many churches. Wherever the farmer saw churches, he vowed them umbrellas, carpets and curtains if they helped him regain his ox.

The son who had been weighing in his mind the amount put in pledge against the actual price of the ox asked his father, "Father, the value put in pledge is much more than the price of our lost ox. If so, why should we waste our time and energy?" Then the father replied "oh! my dear son, don't be foolish. First, let them help me to regain my ox; after that I won't spare even a coin for them all!"

### 39. The Nursing Tigress

Long ago, a tigress gave birth to a cub upon which all animals came together and arranged a visit to the nursing tigress at their convenience. First, a 'dik-dik' visited the tigress but was trapped by it. Next, the antelope visited the tigress and was subjected to the same fate. Most animals who visited the tigress according to schedule, were all trapped and devoured. At last, the well-informed ape went to the tigress, stood on the fringes of the cave, and said:

"Congratulations! Mrs. tigress, is it a he or she?" The tigress then responded, "Thank you! come in please! why don't you come in?"

"No thank you" said the ape, "after all, the foot prints indicate that no one has managed to escape from your cave."

"Wont you at least kiss me?" insisted the tigress. "I kiss you in the air!" answered the ape making a bilabial sound like 'Empa'. The tigress then shot forth her paws toward the ape as if to do an exercise but the cunning ape incidentally flung off saying that somebody was calling her out.

#### 40. An Immodest Guest

There lived an itinerant person who used to wander from place to place. One day, he went to a village towards dusk and entreated to be hosted in one of the houses. The wife kindly hosted and provided him with some dinner. When the husband arrived later, she called the household for supper, and the guest was also invited to dine with them.

But then this guest tried to undermine the role of the husband. For instance, when water for hands was brought, he would try to wash first. When 'barqi' was to be sliced, he would try to slice it as if he were a husband.

Intolerant of his immodesty, the husband gripped him by the neck and they began to wrangle and wrestle. After a while, the husband who was tottering told his wife to remove the utensils, the dish and the water from the saloon.

"What is it? are you going to yield up?" she reprimanded. He then angrily replied, "what else do you expect? to stand all through the night for a scandal you created?" Afterwards, the guest was severely beaten, humiliated and thrown out of the house for his immodesty.

#### 41. The Bride and the Bridegroom

A newly wedded couple once went to their farm not long after their honeymoon. Before their departure, the bride had stocked some four pieces

of injera on the top of a granary. When they came back from work, both of them were hungry and tired. But then the bridegroom restrained from asking his wife for food thinking that she might nourish low opinions about him. The bride also suppressed her hunger lest he should consider her immodest.

Mean while, their hunger had grown into an unbearable degree. So, the bride folded and took a piece of 'injera' with her when she went to fetch water from a river. Next the husband also went to the grazing field with another piece of 'injera' from the top of the granary. At night, they had a chat over their prospect, love, parents and so forth: Lastly, she raised a point related to the demonic spirits in that locality and said, "what strange spirits do you have here in your country?" you see, I had stocked four pieces of 'injera' in the morning but I couldn't find two of them now." The bridegroom, who had witnessed every thing said, "No, no!, It is not the spirits who stole the two pieces of injera. so far as I know, one of them went to the river and the other to the grazing field:!"

#### 42. The Bald Paramour

A Bald man had an affair with an adulteress wife. Since they were strongly in love with each other, she used to give him a great deal of grain from the granary without the knowledge of her husband.

One day, when they were having some food, the husband dropped across. Hearing his voice from afar, the man hid under an overturned basket on which the husband sat without any serious intention. Then, the husband jokingly said: "My bald, I am going to dance upon you", pointing to the genital organ of his wife. On hearing this "threat", the hidden bald man sprang out of the basket like a fierce animal and ran off flinging the unwary husband on to the floor thinking that the intimidation was directed against him. Since then, nagging took precedence over love in the family and eventually led to divorce.

43. The Faint-hearted Paramour

An adulteress wife had two paramours. One one occasion, the husband bought meat on credit and sent it home. Ato about noon, the husband dropped across when she was eating some meat with her two lovers. But before his arrival, one of them hid upstairs while the other one hid between the rear walls since they had heard his voice from afar.

When the husband entered and sat for lunch, she brought lunch with a fresh meat. Unaware of the whole mischief, he went on eating his luch. In the mean while, the embarrassed wife asked, "How can we afford to pay what we owe to the butcher?" just to divert his attention. Then the husband, beckoning upwards replied, "He knows," meaning thereby God knows. The lover who was hidden upstairs then complained, "No! I am not the only one who ate the meat. The one between the rear walls has also eaten!" This way, he exposed the woman's mischief out of sheer faint-heartedness.

44. Truth, Falsehood, Fire, Water, Snake and Lion

Once, Truth, Falsehood, Fire, Water, Snake and Lion lived together. They went one day to hunt and found many cows. Afterwards, they decided to divide the cows so that each of them received his share. In the mean time, however, the Lion had devoured the fattest cow.

Then, Falsehood went to the snake and said, "you have the power to destroy the Lion. How dare he take the fattest cow for himself?" The snake convinced with what Falsehood said, killed the Lion by stinging it. Next, Falsehood went to Fire and said, "Destroy the snake before he destroys us all! you see, he has destroyed even the mighty lion". Then, Fire threw itself at the snake and burnt it. Once again, Falsehood went to water and said, "The snake is dead. Now you have the power to destroy Fire. If you do so, we can take all the cattle." Water then killed Fire and lastly, Truth and Falsehood alone remained. Then Falsehood ment to Truth and said, "Now Fire is dead. Water has killed him but water does not deserve to share with us. So, let us take the cattle into the mountains." Water saw them going up and tried to pursue them but he found that he couldn't run uphill.

When they arrived at a resting place in the mountain, Falsehood turned to Truth and said, "Now let us share the cattle equally between us." Then they divided the cattle into two. But a horned bull remained. They once again discussed how to share that horned bull and Truth suggested, "Let us draw a lot and let the winning side take the bull". But Falsehood disagreed to this for fear of losing it altogether and instead suggested to arrange a race and give the bull to whoever wins. Truth agreed to this proposal. However, Falsehood began the race ahead of time without informing Truth about it but had his stomach ripped up by the same horned bull before reaching the finishing line. Hence, Truth came into possession of all the cattle in the end!

#### 45. Child and Porridge

There was an adulteress wife. She had a paramour who used to slip into her house whenever her husband was away. One day when this paramour was eating porridge, the husband dropped across him. The startled wife hid her lover in a basket along with the porridge.

After the husband took a seat, the child cried, "porridge!" "porridge!" pointing to the overturned basket under which the lover was hidden. Without any serious intention, the husband removed the basket but saw a man with porridge. The frightened lover then sprang up and flung out of the door, pouring the hot porridge over the husband. Thus the mischief of the wife was disclosed by the innocent child.

#### 46. The Merchant of Karkar

A merchant used to travel long distances across karkar through Metama. He had an exceptionally beautiful wife. During his long stay at Karkar, she was practising adultery with a shabby social outcast. This outcast who was in love with the lady used to sing:

Karkar gesenassa  
Ni meka yegusawsa...

May the merchant of karkar  
Not return to his home!

thus wishing to remain the sole owner of the house and the lady.

However, the longing husband one day returned home from karkar, having bought a new dagger and versed in Amharic. As he entered his home, he kissed and hugged his wife and sat on the basket under which the startled outcast was hidden. Since his arrival was accidental, the wife didn't know what to do with her lover, and was mechanically making coffee. Meanwhile, the merchant uttered a threat glowing and brandishing his dagger just to amuse his own feelings as:

ለገተ ሸተሌ ለገተ ሸተሌ  
ጠፍ ለገርፍ ዛሬ

you, dagger! My dagger!

you shall have a prey to devour:

upon hearing this threat, the shabby lover who was hidden in the basket got drenched with a thrill of fear and shouted "oh! dear sir! Let me disclose the whole story rather than die. I didn't come myself, It is the woman herself who seduced me into sleeping with her." Then the husband in fury uncovered the basket and dragged the outcast thus forcing him to disclose what they had been doing. After hearing everything from him, he forced her to carry this outcast in a basket and round the market in public view. Some of her friends then asked her "what for are you carrying the outcast?" she then replied, "I am doing so in order to inherit Heaven!". The husband who had overheard her reply lashed her face and forced her to repeat the following words continually! "He is my lover! He is my husband, He was my lover..."

This way, he castigated his infidel wife. Afterwards, she was treated a little more than a leper in the society.

#### 47. The Seed-eating Wife

A farmer had a reckless wife. Having prepared his plot, he sent for his wife to come with 'teff' seeds immediately. But she came and told her husband that she had consumed all the seeds. The angry husband, all of a sudden, locked her up in a beehive and rushed in search of a trench to throw her down there. On his way, people who met him by chance

asked him why he was rushing so fast and what he was carrying in the beehive. He then replied, "I am rushing in search of trench. Locked up in the beehive is my reckless wife who consumed all the seeds."

"What are you going to do with her now?" the people exclaimed. "I am going to throw her down in some trench" answered he. "Why don't you sow cucumber or linseeds instead?" they suggested. "That was also my suggestion" the wife in the beehive joined them.

After that, those travellers sat down, negotiated and sent them back home. Thenceforth, she vowed to become a responsible house wife.

#### 48. The Vindictive Husband

A Husband lived in the in-law's house in the form 'tekerchem (un-ceremoniously married). Since his wife was an adulteress one, she used to have an affair with somebody else. Aware of her double game, he one day intentionally told her that he was to leave for a distant place for over a week, and so, departed.

However, he came back at dusk in disguise clothed like a pupil and begged for a slice of bread and shelter. Fortunately, he was hosted there for the night. By coincidence, her paramour was also flirting with her at that particular night.

At midnight, when they were sound asleep, the husband slipped into the bed room and severed his rival's head. At cock crow, she saw that her lover's head had been severed and asked the "pupil" whether the man had a head or not. The pupil replied, "yes, indeed!, he had!." Then she entreated him, "If the crime is disclosed, both of us would be accused of murder. Therefore, do help me throw it down the trench." When, both of them went to the trench together, he suddenly flung down his adulteress wife along with her beheaded lover. Back home, he showed the severed head of the lover to his friends in secrecy. When later her parents asked him **about her, he** cunningly answered " Well, she was in love with somebody, and so, she might have eloped with him!"

49. The Father-confessor's Tongue

There was a father-confessor who used to supervise the spiritual life of a certain family. One day, the wife fell ill and couldn't recover within a short time. Therefore, the father-confessor had to visit her frequently thereby giving his blessings and hearing her confessions

Strangely enough, he had been seduced by her charm and so had a love affair with her. Upon hearing this, the husband resolved to prove it and take a revenge upon him. So before the arrival of the father-confessor, he shifted his wife to another room, and he himself slept in her old bed room dressed just like his wife. In the morning, the father-confessor arrived earlier as usual and entered the old bed room, unaware of the changes that had taken place. After making the disguised husband kiss the cross, he lay down on the bed. Then, the husband asked eagerly "your tongue! your tongue!" as if fond of being kissed. Hoping to kiss his "lover", the father confessor protruded his tongue but had it chopped up with a sharp razor. Afterwards, the husband revealed himself and expressed his satisfaction over the revenge thus taken on the so-called father-confessor.

50. The Feast and After

They say, there lived a prosperous man who used to offer a big feast to the community on some occasions. On one occasion, this man invited so many guests to the feast that his compound became congested with the crowd of people. Eventhen, each guest had his fill and every one was oversatiated. Consequently, they were unable to stand up, and so, were forced to urinate in a sitting posture.

One of them wanted to urinate and asked for a bed pan. Although he was given he bedpan, he wouldn't urinate. Noticing his restraint, his friends asked him why he was not urinating. But he wouldn't respond. Then they snatched the bedpan from him and tried to urinate. But then, one of them discharged wind simultaneously. Hearing the sound of the discharge, the former one remarked, "That is why I restrained myself from urinating! Thus, the saying goes, "Even honey loses its taste, if it exceeds the normal limit."

51. The Price of Defiance

A donkey and a dog used to consort together. They used to cross long distances occasionally. One day, night fell before they could reach their village. Then, they decided to pass the night in a near by jungle. The dog was very hungry since he didn't have any prey, and so, he slept with low spirits. But since the donkey had nibbled the blades of grass around, he felt like braying out of sheer oversatiety. Then, he consulted the dog about it. The dog objected to it since that might invite grave consequences. But the donkey once again insisted on braying and brayed once. Then he asked for a second bray. However, the dog earnestly warned the donkey, "My friend, your first bray is a hint to your presence here, and the second will bring an end to your life. You have already defied my advice... It is up to you!" In spite of the dog's advice, the donkey brayed once more.

In a moment, Mr. hyena appeared and devoured the donkey while the hungry dog ran off with some left-overs of the donkey's flesh.

52. Animals Go Hunting

A Lion, a leopard, a hyena and a donkey once went to hunt. Their hunting venture brought no prey for three successive days, and all of them were hungry. "How can this thing have happened?" they asked over and over. "Some of us or one of us must have sinned, else, God wouldn't have done this to us," one of them said. "perhaps, we should confess our sins," the other one added. Then all of them agreed to confess their sins, and the lion began: "Oh! yes, I have committed an awful sin. Once I found a young bull near a village, trapped and ate him." The other animals looked at the lion whom they all feared for his strength and cruelty. They shook their heads, and protested "No, no," "That is not sin at all!"

Then, the leopard cleared its throat and continued: "yes, I have committed a dreadful sin. When I was in the valley, I found a goat that had wandered from the herd and ate him." The other animals looked at the leopard whose hunting talents they all admired and protested: "No, no, that is not sin!"

The hyena was the third to speak:

"Oh, I have also committed a terrible sin. Once, I stole into the village and caught a chicken which I carried away and ate." "No, no," the animals said with amusement, "That is not sin!"

Lastly, the donkey spoke in his turn:

"Once when my master was driving me along the road, he met a friend, and stopped to talk with him. While they were talking, I went to the edge of the road and nibbled a few blades of grass and slept for a moment since I was tired."

The other animals looked at the donkey, whom no one feared or admired. There was a dead silence among the animals. Then, they all shook their heads as if sadly and said:

"That is a sin! yes, a terrible sin. You are the cause of all our misery!"

And so, the lion, the leopard and the hyena all carnivores turned upon the donkey and devoured him.

### 53. The Lover's Confession

Long ago, two friends had a love affair with the same lady, one ignorant of her affair with the other. However, she fell in love only with one of them. Eventually, the neglected one grew suspicious of the lady and his friend. One day, the beloved one who was worried about his friend's suspicion asked his lover, "My dear, our secret is likely to be disclosed. What shall we do to keep it in secrecy?"

"Why don't you kill him before he kills you?" she replied. Triggered by her satanic persuasion, he one day murdered his friend. The murder story somehow reached the ears of the local governor and an Afrsta\* was called to solve the riddle of this murder. The Afrsata lasted for seven days at the end of which two suspects were arrested and were sentenced to capital punishment. Before the execution, however, there came a voice from among the crowd requesting the governor to give him a chance to speak. He was then allowed and went on to unfold the mystery.\*

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\* The traditional Ethiopian institution of crime investigation.

"Honourable Governor,  
And my kinsmen,

I have a crime to confess and a criminal to expose. I don't want to sin four times."

Firstly, I am the one who sinned with the lady

Secondly, I am the one who murdered the deceased upon  
her instigation

Thirdly, I can't tolerate the execution of these  
men for an offence they have not committed.

Therefore, I request the governor to release the two suspects and bring the sinful lady before the law."

After an awful silence, the suspects were set free while the lady was caught together with the confessor (her accomplice). Then, the public began deliberating over the sort of punishment she should deserve. Some suggested beheading her head and bury her by the road side. Others suggested nailing her feet and hands alive to a tree. Finally, the latter punishment was executed in public.

#### 54. The Judgement of the Nun

There lived two widows. One day, as they were strolling down a street, they found a severed male genital organ and disputed over it. While the widows were wrangling, a nun dropped across and asked them what the cause of their dispute was. They told the nun that the cause of their dispute was the claim for the said genital organ.

Then, the nun thought for a while and gave her judgement that they should take a testicle each and stop wrangling. But the widows simultaneously reacted that their dispute was not over the testicles but over the rod. Then, articulately the nun repeated, "My daughters, if you wish you can take a testicle each, but the rod is my prayer-stick=no-more!"

### 55. The Genesis of Humanity

At the genesis of creation, God planned to create Man in his own image. To begin with, He moulded a figurine of clay and fired it. When it was taken out of the fire, it came black due to overbaking. God made a second figurine of clay and fired it for a shorter time. This time it came from the fire yellowish-white since it was underfired. Finally, God fired a third figurine which came out golden-brown \_\_\_ that is the colour of an Ethiopian proper. He pronounced this to be perfect and the culmination of His endeavor.

### 56. The Maskal\* Pledge

There was a period known as the Galla migration in the history of Ethiopia which does not go earlier than the 15th-century. During this period, the Galla who migrated from the south had crossed the Agaw territory in north-western Ethiopia. Since they outnumbered the Agaws, they settled there for a long time in the form of 'teseri' (a forcible parasitic soldier). This parasitic situation provoked the Agaw to arrange a secretive onslaught on the Galla soldiers. To this end, the Agaws pledged to behead each soldier on the eve of Maskal and produce the blood for evidence at the ~~Damarra~~ (bonfire) ceremony.

Pursuant to this, all except one person met their pledge. The person who didn't behead the soldier at his own home, also produced a sham blood pretending to have severed the 'teseri'. The secret behind his failure, however, was that the dependent soldier at his home had already impregnated the farmer's daughter, and so, had become his unofficial son-in-law. This remained between the man and his wife till the christening ceremony.

On the 40th-day of the birth of the child, the grand father invited all his relatives and kinsmen to a big feast on the occasion of the christening of his grandson. At the close of the feast, he stood up and addressed his guests:

"Honourable Elders and Kinsmen,

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\* An annual Ethiopian holiday which falls on the 17th of Maskeram.

"I feel highly honoured to have your company on this occasion. I stand before you, however, not to boast of my generosity but to confess my sin and beg for your mercy." After a momentary silence, one of the elders said, "what is the matter?" we may forgive you, son? Let us hear it."

Then the host continued:

"It is to be recalled that we had pledged to behead each parasitic Galla at our homes on the eve of Maskal some weeks ago. But then, I was not true to my words. The blood which I produced at the 'Damara' was that of a ram, not of a soldier. I couldn't do that because, the soldier at my home had become the father of the baby whose christening took place just to day. My conscience revolted against beheading my son-in-law, though he is unofficial. That is my sin and I am at your mercy."

The guests, his kins men and colleagues were all amazed to hear this story and a dead silence ensued. However, soon after, each proposed his own suggestion turn by turn. And in the end, the guests in chorus declared that he was forgiven with a touch of resentment.

#### 57. The Lazy Wife's Venture

There was a farmer whose wife was extremely lazy. They had a number of cattle and a lot of cereal crops. Through time, the number of their cattle dwindled and their harvest grew more and more meagre. In effect, they were gradually getting poorer and poorer.

The wife one day suggested that they should visit a witch-doctor and seek a solution. But the husband dismissed her opinion stressing that the cause of their poverty was nothing else but her laziness. But then, the wife stubbornly visited the witch doctor and appealed to bless their property and hint ways of getting richer.

After opening his magic book and muttering some incantations, the witch doctor said, "Ha, the solution is at your disposal." "would you let me know, sir?" she pleaded.

"yes", he said and told her to produce a genital hair untainted with wind which was the first precondition for the solution. The lady exhausted all her energy and patience searching for this kind of hair but to no avail. After half a year, she reported to the witch doctor that she couldn't find such a hair. He then replied, "you, see, to ask for the impossible is to invite misery upon oneself" Go and work hard. That is the only solution."

#### 58. The Marriage Seeker

A certain bachelor who was fed up of bachelorhood, intended to break with his single life and began to seek a worthy wife. In spite of his exhaustive search, he failed to get an ideal woman.

In the second round, he consulted his friend all about it. His friend asked him what kind of woman he would like to marry. He then, answered that he would like to marry a worthy woman. His friend took time to find out such a woman. But his attempt proved to be less promising still. Wherever he went, he was told that such women were already either engaged or married. Long after, he told his friend that a worthy woman is a rarity. For one thing, worthy women are either engaged or married. For another, it is impossible to snatch them from their husbands!

#### 59. A Woman's Instigation

There was a coward man who went hunting more often than not. Even in a season when hunting is seen at its best, he would spend his leisure in his compound. His wife was, consequently, unhappy about his unheroic status in the community. In order to trigger off his courage, she one day sang the following song as she was driving her mare named - kesetch - to the stable.

Kasetch feressa,

Eni kwacha katiti

Kiwi kwacha katiti

Badme kwacha kwacheti

Kasetch the mare, Kasetch my mare  
who doesn't go hunting for an elephant  
Nor a buffalo  
Grazes the grass and destroys the compound.

Irritated by his wife's sardonic song, he resolved to go hunting to face whatever may come. On the morrow, he went to a jungle and sought for a prey. After many ups and downs, he came face to face with a Shanquilla (Nilotic), who captivated and dangled him upside down. As he was being dangled, the man snatched away a huge dagger from the Shanquilla's girdle and ripped open his stomach. Then, the Shanquilla fell prey to the man! On his way back home, he also met another Shanquilla with his wife and murdered them both.

Having killed three Shanquillas, he at last restored his social status in the community as well as in the heart of his wife.

#### 60. The Co-wives' Fued

A Rat had two envious co-wives. One of them was a mouse and the other one a snail. Customarily, they are known as 'goban'. Since the rat was the bread winner of the family, he one day went to the corn fields to collect some grain. Then he found a sack filled and fastened with some thing. Thinking that the sack was filled with grain or corn... he carried it home as soon as he could. When he reached home and unfastened the sack, he discovered that it was filled with castor plant beans!

The disappointed rat was idly sitting when an eagle whisked him up and disappeared into the branches of a tree. Now came the time for the co-wives to lament over the unheroic death of their husband. And thus, the mouse started first:

Eya Kwarkwarxi, Eya Kwarakwarxi,  
Surre misaxula kerywi

---

\* The hostility between the Agaws and the Shanquilla is evident even today.

What up sets me is nothing but  
His death before wearing trousers (=unheroic death).

The mouse momentarily forgets her husband and turns against  
the snail:

Enguganisi, Enguganisi,  
Wani tambkama Esenui xasi!

.....  
Creeping and creeping,  
I wonder if the snail could attend the funeral!

just to explain the snail's clumsiness.  
So now, the snail responded thus:


Lebu enanx̄ esnei, Lebu enanx̄ tamne,  
Entastay mergei bensay

.....  
Don't worry Mrs. mouse, don't worry,  
We shall reach timely  
We shall come slowly  
But are not going to prod a granary/ \_\_\_\_\_ just to make  
a slyly comment that the mouse is rodent.

DECLARATION

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

Name: MELAKNEH MENGISTU

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Date of Submission: June 1990