

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

Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari*
Lyrics in Gondar

By
Tigist Girma

June, 2010
Addis Ababa

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Foreign
Languages and Literature in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in
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APPROVED BY BOARD OF EXAMINERS

ADVISOR

SIGNATURE

EXAMINER

SIGNATURE

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Abstract

Though studying the folk tradition of people in general and their folk Songs in particular helps to understand their historical, socio-economical and philosophical realities and to preserve the tradition; it was done very little with regard to conducting researches when compared with the wealth of folk tradition of the country.

Thus, in this study, an attempt has been made to explore the Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar. Although it was not well studied, *Azmari* tradition is popular in the area of Gondar and has existed for a long period of time. It is true that the *Azmari* communities found in Gondar area have some distinctive features which differentiate them from the non-*Azmari* society. However, as far as they share the same history, culture, socio-economic, and political realities, the issues raised by *Azmari* lyrics belong to the realities of the people in the area. As a result, the major purpose of this study was exploring those societal realities through identifying the major themes raised by the lyrics and making a thematic analysis. Because it is impossible to separate *Azmari* lyrics from its performance, the description of the performance styles of the lyrics have been provided.

The method employed to conduct this research was a qualitative analysis. The lyrics were collected through a live record made in seven *Azmari* nightclubs found in Gondar town. Furthermore, based on the data obtained from observation, the performance characteristics of the lyrics have been described. Interview and document analysis were also used to describe the backgrounds of *Azmari* tradition.

The analysis part has two major classifications. These are the analysis of the major themes and description of their performance styles. As the analysis of the sample lyrics shows, the major themes raised through *Azmari* lyrics are the themes of praise, criticism, love versus end of relationship, lyrics with encouraging themes of opposite sex relationship, and erotic lyrics. Regarding their performance characteristics, the characteristics of the setting, clothing, musical instruments, dramatic actions and audience participation have been described. Finally, a compiled summary of each section and conclusions drawn from them are presented.

Definitions of words used in the study

The following words are Amharic words used in this study. All of them were italicized throughout the text. Some of the definitions are taken from Amsalu Aklilu's Amharic-English dictionary, while the others are the definitions provided by the researcher.

- 1 *Azmari*: a name given to the traditional singers in Ethiopia who usually Play *masinko*.
- 2 *Masinko*: Ethiopian string musical instrument.
- 3 *Begenä*: variety of harp (Ethiopian)
- 4 *Ezra*: a person in a Bible who praises God by playing *masinko*
- 5 *Likemekuas*: a title given to *Azmaris*
- 6 *Alem achawach*: another title of *Azmaris*, which means entertainer
- 7 *Chat*: leaves with mild narcotic quality
- 8 *Puagmen*: the 13th month in Ethiopian calendar with five and six days once in four years.
- 9 *Balambaras*: Ethiopian title
- 10 *Ras*: Ethiopian title
- 11 *Kegnazmach*: Ethiopian title
- 12 *Koba*: false banana
- 13 *Gunif* - a traditional closing of Gondar
- 14 *Eskista*: traditional dances of Ethiopia

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Definition of words used in the study.....	iii

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction.....	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.2 Objectives of the Study.....	4
1.3 Research Questions.....	4
1.4 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study.....	4
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	6
1.6 Methodology of the Study.....	6
1.6.1 Instrument of Data Collection.....	6
1.6.2 Sampling Procedure.....	8
1.6.3 Data Analysis Procedures.....	9
1.7 Review of Related Studies.....	

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework	10
2.1 The Concept of Folklore.....	10
2.2 Folk Literature	12
2.3 Folk Song.....	14
2.4 Major Themes of Folk song	
2.5 Performance Characteristics of Folk song	
2.5.1 The Oral Performance	
2.5.2 Accompaniments and Audience Participation	

CHAPTER THREE

The Backgrounds of <i>Azmari</i> Tradition	25
3.1. Defining <i>Azmari</i>	25
3.2. Historical Background.....	26
3.2.1. The Origin of <i>Azmari</i>	27
3.2.2. <i>Azmari</i> in an Ancient Setting.....	29
3.3. Places where <i>Azmaris</i> Currently Live.....	33
3.4. Economic, Social and Cultural Features of <i>Azmari</i>	33
3.5. The Secret Language.....	35

CHAPTER FOUR

Major Themes and Performance Styles of <i>Azmari</i> Lyrics in Gondar.....	36
4.1. Major Themes of <i>Azmari</i> Lyrics.....	36
4.1.1 The Theme of Praise	36
4.1.1.1. Praise of Beauty	36
4.1.1.2. Praise of Heros and Heroism.....	41
4.1.1.3. Praise of Places and Ethnic Groups.....	47
4.1.1.4. Praise of Friendship.....	51
4.2.1. The Theme of Criticism.....	53
4.2.1.1. Criticism of Unacceptable Behavior	54
4.2.1.2. Criticisms of Audience's Actions	57
4.2.1.3. Criticisms of the Generation	58
4.3.1. The Theme of Hospitality	
4.4.1 Love versus End of Relationship.....	62
4.5.1. Lyrics with Encouraging Theme of Opposite Sex Relationship	67
4.6.1. Erotic Lyrics	69
4.2. Performance Styles of <i>Azmari</i> Lyrics.....	72
4.2.1. Styles the of Setting.....	73
4.2.2. Styles of Clothing and Instruments	73
4.2.3. Styles of Dramatic Actions	73

4.2.3.1. Dialogue.....	73
4.2.3.2. Traditional <i>Eskista</i>	75
4.2.3.3. Turn taking	75
4.2.3.4. Improvisation.....	76
4.2.4.Styles of Audience Participaticipation.....	78

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusions.....	80
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Bibliography

Appendices

Appendix I Interview Questions (Amharic Version)

Appendix II Interview Questions (English Version)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Even though the tradition of collecting and studying the folk culture of the people in the world began long ago, the term folklore was first used in 1846. The term was mentioned for the first time on the journal known as “*Athenaeum*”. Since then, the body of knowledge, traditions, customs, habits, beliefs, practices, and oral literature of community handed down through generation took a general term known as folklore.(Dorson, 1972)

Folk literature, as Berihanu (1999) states, refers to the verbal art of traditional cultures usually composed orally and transmitted by word of mouth. Folk songs are among the many classifications of folk literature. Sunkuli and Muruka (1990), define the term as a popular country song perpetuated through generations by oral transmission.

In this introductory chapter, six sub-sections are included. These are: statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions, delimitations and limitations, significance and methodology of the study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Folklore incorporates all the social, material and oral culture of a society that are passed from generation to generation. According to Melakneh (2005), folklore involves the dances, songs, tales, legends, proverbs customs, beliefs, ritualistic behavior and other non literary manifestations. “*These are often considered as part of the larger study of ethnology, but they are also the business of the folklorist*”. (Ibid: 14)

As far as folk song is one aspect of folklore, through their folk songs preliterate societies use to preserve tradition, record history, establish moral codes and entertain their audience. Therefore, studying the folk traditions of a certain society in general and its folk songs in particular helps to understand and describe the society's historical, political and socio-economical realities and its consciousness.

Although Ethiopia is rich in folk tradition, it was done very little with respect to conducting researches. Even though attempts have been made by some graduate students to study folk literatures of different ethnic groups, in the country, it is not satisfactory when compared to the wealth of folk tradition of the country. Thus, through conducting a research on the topic "The Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar", an attempt has been made to contribute towards studies that are done on the folk literatures of people in the country.

Azmari tradition is popular at many places of north Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, and in some other parts of Ethiopia too. Especially the area of Gondar, which is believed to be the origin of many *Azmaris*, has rich *Azmari* tradition. In spite of this fact, research has not sufficiently explored this wealth of folk tradition. Therefore, it was hoped that this research has something to contribute towards filling the above mentioned gaps.

As far as the major characteristic of folk literature in general and folk song in particular is its orality, it may change or lost at any point in time. (Melakneh, 2008) However, through studying the folk literature of people in such a way, one can preserve the tradition.

As a result the major concern of this study was collecting and identifying the Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Azmari song is one aspect of folk literature in which the society entertained by and expresses feelings. Beyond entertainment, however, the issues raised by the lyrics have a lot of things to do with the societies historical, cultural, socio-economical, and philosophical realities. Therefore, the general objective of this study was exploring those societal realities through identifying the major themes raised by the lyrics, making a thematic analysis and describing their performance styles.

In more specific terms, the objectives of this study were to:

- Provide backgrounds of *Azmari* tradition
- Identify the major themes raised through the lyrics and analyze
- Describe performance styles of *Azmari* lyrics

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the given objectives, an attempt has been made to answer the following research questions in this study.

1. What is folklore?
2. What is the background of *Azmari* tradition?
3. What are the major themes of *Azmari* lyrics?
4. What are performance styles of *Azmari* lyrics?
5. How is the participation of the audience on the performances?
6. What are musical instruments used for accompaniment?

1.4 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was the study of the Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar. Like other Ethiopian

society, the mentioned area may be rich in other folk traditions too. However, the study will limit its scope to only studying the major themes and performance Styles of *Azmari* lyrics. The reason is that it is the most popular tradition of the area, yet not well studied.

The reason why the researcher selected the town of Gondar is because it is known to be the center of *Azmari* tradition. In fact, there are other places in Gondar zone in which *Azmaris* originally live including the place known as “*Burbuax*”, which is believed to be the root of this tradition. However, in those places, the songs are performed during some occasions and ceremonies that take place. Otherwise, it is not usual to find night clubs established for entertainment purpose. It would have been possible to facilitate interviews with the *Azmaris* at the above mentioned places, to collect the lyrics. However, in order to capture the natural variety of songs and their performance styles, the researcher has limited the scope of the study on *Azmari* nightclubs found in Gondar town.

Coming to the limitations, the researcher has come across difficulties in convincing the informants to give information. There was also difficulty during transcribing the lyrics; because some of the lines were not audible as a result of the over use of the drum in some nightclubs. Another limitation has been in the process of translation. It was no easy task to translate traditional Amharic lyrics in to English without spoiling its original beauty. However, the researcher has solved the first limitation by giving explanations on the purposes and significances of the study. The difficulty in transcription has been simplified through listening to the cassettes again and again and capturing the right words. Regarding the translation of the lyrics, the

researcher has been concentrating on following the central ideas of the lyrics.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways. As folk literature passes from generation to generation by words of mouth, it might change or lost unless documented in such a way. So, the major significance of this study is that through collecting and recording the lyrics, to preserve the traditional *Azmari* lyrics.

On the other hand, this study enables to understand the society's (where the tradition belongs) historical, philosophical and socio-economic realities as well as its consciousness through providing the major themes of the lyrics.

Another significance of this study is that it introduces the tradition for the people who are not aware of its existence. It also initiates modern lyric writers to use this prosperous tradition as a source in their works.

Last but not least, the study can be helpful for other researchers who wish to conduct study on the area.

1.6 Methodology of the Study

The method that has been employed to conduct this study is a qualitative method. In this sub-section, the instruments used for the data collection, sampling procedure and data analysis procedure will be explained.

1.6.1 Instruments of Data Collection

Four data collection instruments have been used to collect the data for this study. These are record, observation, interview and document analysis.

A. Tape Recording

Record was the major tool used for the data collection. All the lyrics have been collected through a live record made for twenty days in all *Azmari* night clubs. The record was made without the consents of *Azmaris* in order to capture the usual variety of the lyrics and not to interrupt the natural flow of the songs.

B .Observation

Observation was another instrument of data collection. The researcher has observed the musical performances being at the occasions. Through this process, the way the audience responds, the setting, the clothing, dramatic performances, and musical instruments used for accompaniment has been studied. The observation was conducted for twenty days being a participant observer in all *Azmari* nightclubs, not to disturb the natural setting.

C. Interview

Another instrument used for collecting the data was interview. It was done with two selected individuals from the *Azmari* community, at *Wegera -Gedebge* and with one individual from the publication office of north Gondar administrative zone. The interviews were conducted by Amharic language. While interviewing, the researcher has taken notes and used a voice recorder with permission of the respondents.

D. Document Analysis

This was also one tool of collecting the data. The documents analyzed were, brochures, a survey study on *Azmari* secret language, a newspaper article, and a television production.

1.6.2 Sampling Procedure

There are around seven *Azmari* nightclubs in Gondar town. Namely: *Balageru*, *Abesha*, *Alemiye sora*, *Gonderwoch*, *Kidist*, *Shiwbey*, and *Burbuaxwoch*. The researcher has tried to explore all the clubs to observe variety of performances and the observation was conducted for twenty days.

In the case of interview, the informants were two individuals from *Azmari* community at *Wegera* woreda, *Gedebge-Deldalit* that is found sixty two kilometers away from the zonal town Gondar. Another individual was from north Gondar zone publication office. The two informants who represented the *Azmari* community were elders chosen based on the knowledge they have concerning the backgrounds of *Azmari* tradition. Another informant from the publication office of north Gondar zone was chosen because he has lived with *Azmari* community, found at *Gondar zuria woreda-Gomenge*, for a long period of time and has good information about their backgrounds.

Regarding the documents used, while searching studies that are done on the subject, the researcher has come across the above mentioned four documents. All of the documents have been used by selecting relevant information that can help to describe the backgrounds of *Azmari* tradition.

On the other hand, lyrics collected through record are selected based on the issues they raise. In other words, after reading the whole data, the most frequently raised themes have been identified and one hundred verses out of two hundred twenty three collections were selected to be analyzed.

1.6.3 Data Analysis Procedure

After selecting the samples, the lyrics have been classified in terms of their themes. Next to this, the translation of the verses from Amharic to English was done. Finally, the translated verses were interpreted and analyzed.

In analyzing the data obtained through observation, the first step was selecting and organizing the notes taken in each night after observing the performance characteristics of *Azmari* lyrics. Then, the organized information were classified in to different sub-sections and described.

The data obtained from interview and document analyses were used in chapter three of this study to describe the backgrounds of *Azmari* tradition. Before describing the data, however, translation of the information from Amharic to English was made. Finally, the translated information were classified in to different sub-sections and discussed.

1.7 Review of Related Literature

The basic objective of having the following discussion is to be aware of with the works of the previous researchers on the area and to identify the unique features of this research.

An attempt has been made to search and review materials which have relatedness with the concern of this research. Apart from few researches

on the lyrical poems of different ethnic groups, it was impossible to find a thesis written on *Azmari* lyrics. However, through continuous search made, the researcher has come across different kinds of studies. Based on their appropriateness, however, only six of them are discussed in this sub-section.

Tesfay Mesele (2007), in a thesis entitled “*Subject Matter Analyses of Amharic Oral Poetry in Raya*”, explains one of the occasions that enables to watch how oral lyric poetries sound is ‘*Tela bet*’ and ‘*Tej bet*’ on market days. According to him, in those days, people spend time entertaining. Furthermore, the researcher states that weeding ceremonies, farms and rituals are among the occasions in which oral lyric performance takes place.

The same writer explains that among the issues which are raised by traditional lyric poetry is love stories, marriage issues, politics and poems that appreciate hard work are the major ones. Coming to the instruments used and the performance, dancing, drumming and stamping the feet in a regular rhythm are mentioned to be observed in Raya oral lyric performance.

Another researcher Alebachew Merka (2007), on his MA thesis entitled “*Socio- Economic and Political issues in Waghimra Oral Poetry*”, states that oral poetry in Waghimra Society can be seen from socio-economic perspective. As he says, the way the communities express their emotions towards the contemporary incidents occurring in the social, economic, and political and other happening tell something about the society.

While stating the issues raised by the oral poetry, the researcher mentions famine, politics, hope, role of the mother, and marriage. He

also explains that these are used in different contexts such as battle fields, funeral, and memorial celebrations.

“በመሸታ ቤት የሚዜሙ ‘ፀያፍ’ የዘፈን ግጥሞች ጥናት በአዲስ አበባ” (1985) is a BA thesis written by Kaleab Assefa. According to the writer, the core objective of this study, since the creators of the lyrics are anonymous, is to collect and preserve them for the next generation. Based on this objective, the researcher has provided lyrics that are collected from bars in ‘*Kasanchis*’ area and has tried to categorize them in terms of their theme. He finally ends up presenting the discussions with the audience, which was obtained through interview. However, the sub -categories in which the lyrics are contained refer to the major category – taboo lyrics. Finally, the researcher concludes that many respondents among the audience like and appreciate the themes of the lyrics and the performers too.

On the other hand, Engidaw on the regional newspaper “Lisan” (ለሳን), has written the article entitled “ኢንዛታው” ያልተዘመለት ዜመና” In this brief article, the writer begins telling the readers that *Weynareb Got* (ወይናረብ ጐጥ) which is found in Gondar Zuria Wereda is the place of *Azmaris*. He also narrates that ‘*Azmaris*’ have their own secrete language originated long ago in which they used and use to protect themselves while performing in towns. As a result, we find “*Enzataw*” standing for “*Azmari*”.

The writer also states that “*Azmaris*’ improve their ability of playing ‘*Masinko*’ through continuous training. According to the writer, the issues raised by the ‘*Azmaris*’ are wide- ranging. Their lyrics may praise people and their audiences and in other times they criticize the rule and rulers.

Generally, the concern of the writer in this short article was to introduce nature and function of ‘*Azmari*’ tradition and to appreciate their deeds. Finally, the writer ends up pointing out that in the long run, there will be no decedents of this tradition because of some social and economical changes occurring.

Another researcher Mulaw Alebel (2002), on the study entitled “በሰሜን ጎንደር አስተዳደር ዞን በአዝማሪ ቋንቋ ላይ የተደረገ የዳሰሳ ጥናት” defines the term *Azmari* and explains the origin of *Azmari* tradition. He also lists down original places of *Azmari* which are found in north Gondar administrative Zone. Beyond the above mentioned explanations, the writer focuses on exploring the nature of the secret language of *Azmari* known as *Enzatigna* (ኢንታትኛ). Finally, he tries to deal with the economic, social and cultural functions of the language.

Furthermore, Getu Temesgen on a television production (1998), with a title “በርቧክሰ - የአለም አጫዋች መንደር” explains about the life of *Azmari* referring back to history and observing their current situation by visiting the place known as ‘*Burbuax*’ in which a significant number of *Azmari* in North Gondar zone live. He narrates the role of *Azmari* in ancient time and tries to mention the existence of *Azmari*’s secret language. Moreover, Getu states that *Azmaris* sing praising the historical places of Gondar and appreciates their knowledge of history. Finally, he winds up the program presenting elders opinion on that the tradition may not have descendants because of some social and economic factors.

Despite the common concern, which is the study of folk lyrics, all the studies discussed are different from this research in many ways. Tesfaye Mesele’s thesis (2007) was mainly concerned with presenting and

analyzing the themes of the lyrics in Raya society. Another thesis by Alebachew Merka also focuses on the socio-economic and political functions of lyrics in Waghimra society. An article and a TV production, in spite of providing some issues the lyrics raise, are mainly concerned in introducing and appreciating *Azmari* tradition. Mulaw's study focuses on the nature of the secret language of *Azmari* community known as “*Enzatigna*”. The study by Kaleab, however, concentrates on making a thematic analysis but limiting its scope to only taboo elements in the lyrics.

As a result, the major focus of this research entitled ‘*Major Themes and Performance Styles of Azmari Lyrics in Gondar*’ is on categorizing the collected lyrics in terms of their themes and analyzing them. Unlike other studies discussed here, this research incorporates the description of major performance Styles of *Azmari* lyrics.

The aim of discussing these studies is to give a brief insight in how related studies have been organized and to explain how this research differs from the rest.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to provide theoretical framework in order to establish the theoretical base for the present study. Accordingly, the concepts of folklore, folk literature, folk song, major themes of folk song and performance characteristics of folk song will be presented.

2.1 The Concept of Folklore

Folklore is a general term used to refer to the activities of people including their material and social cultures as well as their literature that have passed through generations.

Sunkuli and Muruka (1990), for instance, define folklore as the social, material and oral culture of a community handed down through generations.

As Abrams (1981:66), on the other hand, states:

Folklore is the collective name applied to verbal, material and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth rather than in a written form...It includes among other things, legends, superstition, songs...and tales. .

Elaborating the point discussed by the above mentioned scholars, Maria Leach (1950) explains that folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs etc. Melakneh (2008:4) also adds *“The common idea inherent in folklore is that*

of traditions and oral treasures handed down from the past.” He further describes the term as it denotes the wider social heritage of mankind. (Ibid, 2005)

Folklore is an integral and vital part of our daily lives. According to Georges and Jones (1995:1), “*As we interact with each other on-a daily bases,*” they say, “*we continuously express what we know, think, believe and feel.*” For them, we do so often in symbolic ways by singing and making music, for example, by uttering proverbial expression and by dancing. As they explain, thus, we can identify these activities individually or collectively as folklore.

Dundes's (1965:6, 12) explanation of folklore goes in line with that of Leach (1950). According to him, folklore is defined as “*people's manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs,...myths, legends, tales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, deaths,greetings, etc.*”

Having said this much about the definition of the term folklore, it would be important to explain some of its common classifications. These are material culture, oral literature and social folk customs. According to Melakneh (2008), material culture is one aspect of folklore. As he explains, material culture includes construction designs, relics, food preparation, furniture, fashioning tools and so on. He further elaborates that archaeologists try to understand past human societies by studying the material culture they have left behind.

Social folk custom, which is the second classification of folklore, can constitute group interactions, observances, birth rituals, burial ceremonies and religious festivals. All the above activities, therefore, are

mentioned as cultural ways in which a group maintains and passes on a shared way of life. The same author adds that every group bound together by common interests and purposes possess a body of traditions which may be called its folklore.

Folk literature, the third categorization of folklore, refers to the traditional wisdom of the broad masses usually where the art of writing has not been invented. Melakneh (Ibid) explains folk literature as it consists of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas etc.

Similarly, Dorson (1972) elaborates the classified items as follows. As he puts, social folk custom emphasizes group interactions rather than individual performances. Oral folklore incorporates spoken, sung, and voiced forms of traditional utterance. Material culture refers to visible rather than oral aspects.

2.2 Folk Literature

The term folk literature is often interchangeably used with oral literature, and is one aspect of folklore. Okpewho (1992) emphasizes that traditional literature, orature, and folk literature are all used to refer to oral literature. For him, folk literature takes creators of this literature as the folk, by which frequently meant- common, uneducated, mostly in villages or rural areas. As a result, folk literature is explained as unrepresentative of performers who live in cities and towns. In contrary to Okpewho's (Ibid) explanation, Dundes (1965) asserts that folk literature is orally transmitted literature found wherever, among primitive isolated or civilized marginal cultures, urban or rural societies, dominant or subordinate groups. For the sake of consistency, however, the term folk literature will be used throughout this study. Folk literature

incorporates prose and verse narratives, songs, proverbs, tales, riddles, myths and so on, as written literature does.

Berhanu (1999:11) defines folk literature as follows: “*oral literature refers to verbal art of traditional cultures usually composed orally and transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth.*” Melakneh (2005:12) also adds, “*Folk literature is the verbal heritage of mankind transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth*”.

It is also true that a study of folk literature of a certain society is important to understand the socio-economic, cultural, and historical backgrounds of a given society. As a result, the role played by folk literature is so significant and wide-ranging. (Anderzejewski, 1985) Fekade (1991), while discussing the issue, explains that since various kinds of folk literature which are verbal wealth of any society reflect the way individuals and groups have been behaving and behave, it is appropriate to collect and record them by any means. He also adds that studying oral literature enables to understand psychological status of people under study. In other words, it enables to know what people are thinking, and their likes and dislikes indirectly. The same writer also states that folk literature is helpful to prepare course materials for school children and to use some elements of it as a source for the development of written literature.

The significance of conducting studies on folk literature has been stated necessary and essential to understand the social values of the society by Berhanu (1999). He adds that doing research on folk literature is helpful to preserve the verbal wealth of non-literate societies. He further elaborates, “*Oral literature is the basis of written literature of every society. It is the soil in which written literature germinates*”.

Folk literature has its own characteristics that enable it to be identified from the written one. As a result, the basic features of folk literature are discussed by the scholars as follows.

According to Melakneh (2005:13), folk literature is characterized by *“...anonymity, formal simplicity, universality, absence of concrete setting in the story ... the victory of good over evil/weak over strong, and seasonality.”* He also adds that unlike written literature, it is preserved in memory.

On the other hand, Berhanu (1999) explains that folk literature can be characterized by variation. In this case, the performer may introduce variation in wording, structure and content. According to Birhanu (Ibid), audience participation in which the audiences present during the occasions is another feature of folk literature. The same author also points out that they arise from and are used in the context of various social occasions.

2.3 Folk Song

Based on the discussions made in the above section, it is possible to generalize that folksong is a genre of folk literature. It remains important to deal with some obvious elements of folksong in order to understand the next section of the study which deals with the folk songs of Gondar *Azmari*. As a result, under this sub-section, it is aimed to define the term and to discuss the common themes, and performance characteristics of folksong.

Sunkuli and Muruka (1999) define the term as a popular country song perpetuated through generations by oral transmission. Leach (1950), on the other hand, states that folk song comprises the poetry and music of

groups whose literature is perpetuated not by writing and print but through oral tradition. As she explains, "*folksong is part of folk culture*" (p: 1032). Finnegan (1977), also, asserts that the term song' is often used interchangeably with 'poem' in the sense of a lyric. As Finnegan (Ibid) explains, poems with many diverse functions occur in this sung form; love lyrics, psalms and hymns, songs to accompany dancing and drinking, etc.

The verses found in folksong are called lyric poetry. According to Berhanu (1999), the word lyric derives from Greek 'lyre'. In ancient Greek the lyric was a song accompanied by a lyre. In the same way, Finnegan (1970) asserts that lyric is original form of a poem in a musical setting. Sunkuli and Muruka (1990), also, explain that lyric is a brief poem meant for singing. They further state lyric to be a poem or song expressing strong personal feelings, performed privately or in public. Finnegan (1977:6) claims, "*Lyric poetry, in the general sense of a (relatively) short non- narrative poem that is sung.*"

2.4 Major Themes of Folk Song

Folksong has been written and performed portraying different themes. There are songs with religious themes, love songs and silly songs. Folksongs portray the good life and narrate hardship. Finnegan (1970) seems to agree with the above explanation indicating that folksongs reflect wide-ranging themes. Furthermore, folksongs in some communities are forwarded to comment on the rulers, the audience and to praise the same subjects. Good examples for this explanation are *Azmari* lyrics in Ethiopia.

Okpewho (1995), on the other hand, claims that the following issues are among the major themes raised in the African folk songs. Lyrics with

theme of love which emphasize the feeling of affection or tenderness towards a person or a thing are among the major themes. Praise songs are sentiments fundamentally based in a feeling of admiration of a person or an object. On the other hand, songs with criticizing themes embody a great deal of critical spirits. There are also lyrics with themes of war and death in most African oral literatures.

Most often, the songs were obtained through oral tradition rather than in a written form. This is one basic characteristic of folksong which it shares with other kinds of oral literature. It is also wise to understand that most of the features that are explained to be for oral literature can surely operate for the folksong too. Accordingly, improvisation or volatility, performance, audience participation and instrumental accompaniments are among the basic features of folksong. [Melakneh: 2005 and Berhanu: 1999].

2.5 Characteristics of Folk Song

2.5.1 The Oral performance

The study of performance has become one of the most exciting and rewarding developments in the study of oral literature in recent years. (Okpewho, 1992) The main means of performance of oral poetry as Finnegan (1977) states are through the singing, intoning, and spoken voice. On the other hand, Okpewho (1992) explains that oral literature is fundamentally literature conveyed by word of mouth. This implies that there must be a certain appeal not only in what the performer is saying, but in the way it is said. However, performances vary from one from the other, based on such factors as the nature of the occasion, the setting, and whether or not any musical accompaniments are used.

According to Fekade (1989), performing folk art has dramatic features. Since music, dance and drama are interrelated things by nature; the performance of folksong can incorporate dialogue and dance. Performance, thus, can be said one aspect of folksong. As it has been said previously, lyrics are basically designed to be sung and performed. As a result, there are some performance characteristics which are discussed by the scholars. Leach (1950), explains that folksong is an art in which the average member of the group participates. Finnegan (1970), narrowing the scope to African folk lyrics, adds that in some cases, the singers take turn in leading or answer each other's song. In other cases, there is response of some kind between soloist and chorus.

2.5.2 Accompaniments and Audience Participation

Accompaniments during the oral performances include the accompaniments of voice by the chorus or audience, clapping of hands, musical instruments and dancing. Okpewho (1992) asserts that many oral artists in Africa perform alone, but many are accompanied by one or more persons who provide support. He further explains that in some cases, no musical instruments played and no help from the audience. In other cases; there may be accompaniments by musical instruments. Especially in the case of African oral performances, drum, horn and flute are commonly used to accompany the oral performances.

Regarding the instruments used for accompaniment during the performances, it may vary with the culture. For instance, drum is common in West and South Africa while *Masinko* and lyre are used in Ethiopia.

Finnegan (1970:271), states:

It is common, for instance, to find some types of songs regularly without accompaniment, others with just clapping and/or dancing, and others again with many different kinds of instrumental accompaniment.

It is true that in most performances of oral literature, an audience is involved. According to Finnegan (1970), folksong in Africa involves cooperation. Beyond the accompaniment by instruments and dancing, there is an emphasis both on performance and audience participation.

However, as Finnegan (1977) explains, there are occasions of performances in which an audience is either not present, or significant. Okpewho (1992), states that an oral performance truly exists where there is an audience. As a result, Okpewho (Ibid) explains, the audience has its own roles to play in most cases. The audience shows its approval of the creative act of the narrator, and gives him full encouragement as he builds his scenes. The audience also participates effectively in dramatizing predicaments in which characters find themselves. Many observations and comments made by member of the audience have the tendency to force the performer to expand the text of the story by incorporating their ideas and even their phrases.

Finnegan (Ibid) further elaborates that unlike the general pattern of western European folksongs, the individual singer does not tend to stand out in a dominant position as against the passive audience, and instead the audience participates.

According to Finnegan, folksong in Africa involves cooperation. Beyond the accompaniment by instruments and dancing, there is an emphasis both on performance and audience participation.

2.5.3 Improvisation

Improvisation is the major issue that should be raised while discussing about performance characteristics of folksong. Like other elements of oral literature, innovation with regard to the content, form and structure of the lyrics is something which is common. Sunkuli and Muruka (1990) define the term as *“Innovation involving the variation of wording, structure, characters etc, of an existing narrative or song by a performer to suite his/her immediate audience and purpose.”* On the other hand, the same authors state that it is the act of composing and performing spontaneously and without prior preparation.

Melakneh (2005) calls the concept volatility. For him, the whole material happens to have fluidity or loss of originality through temporal, spatial and cultural interactions. Berhanu (1990), also, states that variation and verbal variability can be observed during the performances of folk song.

Finnegan (1970) strengthens the above discussion explaining that the leader of the song adds new verses arising from the basic themes. According to her explanation, unless there are definite reasons for retaining original words, it seems generally rare for songs to be repeated exactly from performance to performance-there is always a scope of some variation. As Finnegan (Ibid) says, in African improvisation, things are not totally impromptu. *“In describing the process of their creativity”* says she, *“we can more suitably speak of artistic inspiration coupled with studied technique than of ‘improvisation’.”*

Folk music entertains, tells or supports a story and is transmitted from generation to generation orally. According to Sunkuli and Muruka (1990), the purposes served by the oral literature material includes

entertainment, record of history, satire, moral instruction, dissemination of religious beliefs etc.

Kipury (1983,) on his part, states that songs and poetry are essential parts of life in many communities. Elaborating his explanation, he adds that, in societies where traditional customs are strongly adhered to; there are certain rituals that are accompanied by songs. In conclusion, kupury ties up, whatever function they serve; songs and poetry embody people's philosophy, beliefs, values and sometimes their historical development

CHAPTER THREE

The Background of *Azmari* Tradition

Like other traditional practices, the *Azmari* tradition has also passed through different historical developments. In this chapter, the meaning of the term *Azmari* and the background of *Azmari* tradition will be provided. Furthermore, places where ‘*Azmaris*’ currently live, their historical background, economical, social and cultural features and their secret language will be discussed. The information that are included in this chapter are obtained through reading some written documents, interviewing the elders from *Azmari* community, by visiting the village known as *Deldalit* near *Gedebge* of *Wegera*, and by interviewing concerned individuals in Gondar town and by referring a television production on *Azmari* tradition.

3.1. The concept of *Azmari*

Before discussing the nature of *Azmari* tradition, it is helpful to define the term *Azmari*. Tekle Desta’s Amharic dictionary, as stated by Mulaw (2002), defines the term as; “አዘመረ፣ ጮኸ፣ ፎከረ...” means “sang; shouted...” and “የሚያዘግር፣ ዘፋኝ፣ ባለማሲንፎ፣ ባለክራር፣ ...” - “the one who sings, singer, the one who plays Masinko and the one who plays lyre...”

On the other hand, in the context of the Bible, *ዘመረ* (sang) has equivalent meaning with praising God (*አመሰግኑ*). Both the above explanations show the literary meaning of the word *Azmari*. In our case, *Azmari* can be defined as the singer who performs in the public by playing *Masenko*.

Though there is a possibility to use the term *Azmari* based on the above established agreement, the owners of the tradition have their own

argument. According to *Likemekuas* Assefa 75 years old *Azmari* at Wegera-Gedebge, *Alem achawach* is the most appropriate name than any other names. As the informant puts, the reason is that *Azmaris* are gifted in entertaining and creating pleasure among the higher and lower classes. Another informant also adds that *Azmari*, *Like Mekuas*, and *Alem Achawach* are all the names that refer to the tradition owners. But, they like to call themselves, *Alem Achawach*. In relation to this point, on a television production (1998) by Getu Temesgen, the art owners assert that they are ‘*Alem Achawachs*’. However, many modern *Azmaris* in the towns and some others at villages accept the name *Azmari* with its Biblical meaning. As a result, the writer of this paper will use the term *Azmari* through the whole thesis.

3.2. Historical Background

Studying the history of a certain group or people enables to understand its development and current situation. Based on this argument, in this section of the paper, two sub-sections entitled ‘The origin of *Azmari*’ and ‘*Azmari* in an ancient setting’ are included. Before dealing with the next sections, however, it is good to have a brief overview of Gondar town.

According to the periodical entitled “*ጎንደርን በወፍ በረር እንቃኛት*” (*A brief overview of Gondar town*, 2002), Gondar got its name during the arrival of two brothers known as ‘ወይኔ’ and ‘ሰይኔ’ from the then Tigray province, *Endarta Awraja*. It is believed that when the two brothers quarrel, the elders gathered together and one of them said to the younger brother “*አንተስ ቢሆን ምናል ከሱ ጎን እደር።*”- “*forgive your brother and be his companion*”. Since then, that small village got its current name – Gondar.

King Fasiledes, who moved from *Gomenge (Denkez)*, founded Gondar in 1628 E.C and built his palace. Then onwards, for two hundred

consecutive years, Gondar was the capital of Ethiopia during the reign of fourteen kings.

Including the reign of Fasiledes, seventy five consecutive years in which *Tsadiku Yohannes* and *Eyasu* reigned were known to be the golden age of Gondar. This was because of relative peace, security and encouragement of art and Literature. In direct contrast to this, the dark age of Gondar is known to be during the reign of King *Teklehaymanot*, when the king reigned and over thrown for six times. The time was the begging of the *Zemene Mesafint* in which the country suffered from non-stop war and conflict being scrambled by the so called *Mesafints*.

Coming to the recent image of Gondar, it is the capital of North Gondar Zone. The altitude of the zone ranges from 1500-4620 feet above sea level, with the highest pick of *Ras Dashen*. 10% of the zone's climate coverage is *dega*, 34.9% *woynadega*, 47% kola, and only 2.1% - *wurch*. According to the 2002 census, North Gondar stands first with 2,570,765 of total population. It is also the widest of all zones in Amhara region with the width of 48, 621, 28 sq.km. In terms of language, Amharic is both native and official language of the people.

3.2.1. The Origin of Azmari

Concerning the origin of *Azmari*, stories have been told from different perspectives and in varied forms. However, the oral narrations revolve around the following four myths that are discussed under this section.

The first myth story narrates:

Once upon a time, God decides his beloved mother Virgin Marry to die. However, she explained that death is so fearful. Her son did not leave his mother being frightened; rather, he

*invited Ezra with his ‘Masinko’ and David with ‘Begenä’
(Harp) and made her go without feeling death’s cruel pain.*

To express this situation, it was said:

እዝራ በመሰንቆ ዳዊት በበገና እያጫወቷት፤

ሳትሰማው ሄደች ያን መላክ ሞት ፤

ትሙት እንጂ እኛ ምን እንበላት ፤

ደም የሚመልሰው ልጇ ከገደላት።

What a painless death she died;

Entertained by Ezra’s masinko and David’s harp;

Let her die, but what shall we say,

The lord is the one, who let her go,

Can breathe life in to blood.

In relation to the above mythology, *Azmaris* believe that during that time, virgin Marry blessed Ezra saying “May all the people listen to you with a greatest pleasure where ever you go!” As a result, *Azmaris* explain, that they are allowed to get anywhere they like and perform the art. Based on the above reasoning, *Azmaris* believe that they are the children or descendants of Ezra. Mulaw (2002), sums up, during the ancient time, *Azmaris* were only limited on praising God. However, as time passes on, the trend changed and they begun to use their art for the sake of worldly use.

Another myth states that during the reign of King Solomon in Jerusalem, the people of Israel refused to see his two sons who were born from the Ethiopian queen, in their province. The reason was that the sons resemble their father and it was difficult for the public to know the real king. Accordingly, the two sons of the king and many other elder sons of the Israelis were sent to Ethiopia through Eritrea and settled in the area of *Lasta-North Wollo* province. Among those settlers, Ezra’s elder son was

found. The consequence was, thus, the children and grand children of this man have been distributed everywhere in the country and became to be known as *Azmaris*.

The third myth explains *Azmaris* were part of *Negede Gafat* whom migrated from *Eskindiria* to Ethiopia.

The fourth and the last narrative assert that *Azmaris* were Artists who gave up church education because of different reasons during the time of St. Yared.

In conclusion, almost all oral narratives approve that during the time church and government were the two sides of a coin, the art of *Azmari* shifted from church usage to the palace. Mulaw (2002) gives good example of this. As he explains, king Lalibela of Lasta was known for appreciating other worldly wisdoms including *Azmari* art beyond the religious activities of the time. As a result, *Azmaris* got chance to develop the art.

Though it seems difficult to provide direct and evident explanations about the origin of *Azmari* tradition, it seems possible to conclude that the art of *Azmari* began long ago in Ethiopia and still exists.

3.2.2. *Azmari* in an Ancient Setting

As it has been explained in the previous section, *Azmari* tradition has its root in ancient history of Ethiopia. For this reason, it is wise to deal with the ancient practices of *Azmari* and the social functions of their lyrics in order to have a clear picture of this tradition.

During the ancient time, *Azmaris* used to perform the art on occasions like wedding ceremonies, funerals, get-togethers of the common people and the higher class and at the war fields. Concerning the occasions where *Azmaris* have been performing, Getu (1998) states that *Azmaris* who were living in ancient *Burbuax* were performing the art in the palace of *Guzara* which was found nearby. Later on, when the center of government shifted from *Guzara* to *Gondar*, many *Azmaris* moved to *Gondar* in order to perform the art in the castle of *Fasiledes*. In relation to the above point, the role of *Azmari* in influencing the activities of the rulers and the authorities was so significant. The then government officials including the king were also known to have private *Azmaris* whom move to the battle fields with them.

Through their lyrics, *Azmaris* used to provoke fun and praise their audience. Because of this, people wanted them to take part in every occasion they prepare. In this respect, it is possible to say that the role played by *Azmaris* has been equivalent with that of cassette and DVD players in our home.

Another role of *Azmari* lyrics during the ancient time was on initiating both the officials/authorities and the public to take an action. As Engidaw (2001) puts, during the *Zemene Mesafint*, *Azmaris* have motivated the public to violate against the rule through their lyrics:

ወገራ አሳላፊ ደንቢያ እንጀራ ጣይ

ተበላህ ጎንደራ አትነሳም ወይ?

The people of Wegera and Dembia

Feed the enemy of Gondarians,

Then, what are you waiting for

You better fight against this rule.

In another occasion, the private *Azmari* of *Ras Gugsa Wole* known as *Kegnazmach Misganaw* took a role of a commander during the war between *Dejazmach Ayalew* and *Ras Gugsa Wole*. The fight was planed to be on Tuesday, but *Kgnazmach Misganaw (Azmari)* sung the following lyric and the war took place on Monday evening:

ይዋል ይደር ማለት አሁን ለምንድን ነው፤

ጠላት እና ኮሶን ጭልጥ ጭልጥ ነው።

Why say let us fight the other day

It is good to have a duty

Accomplished early.

On the other hand, *Azmaris* have been playing the role of the ombudsman for those who had no voice. To support the point with an example, according to the story told by the informants from *Azmari* community, *Dejach Wube* of *Semen* built *Deresge Mariam* Church using the public labor. After the completion of the church, he began to build a huge fence around the pick known as *Yejib Terara*. During this time, observing the suffering of the people under *Wube's* rule, one *Azmari* known as *Hylemariam* got on the occasion prepared by *Wube* and said:

ተርቦ ተጠምቶ ደህ የሰራው፤

የላይ ቤት አይሆንም የጅብ ተራራው።

The fence built by the expense of poor manpower,

Shall never account for good.

According to the story teller, after listening to these verses, *Wube* decided to give up his plan.

Another and the prior role of *Azmari* lyrics was praising God. They have been singing a lot to thank and praise their creator. For instance:-

ተመስገን አንተ ተመስገን ለዚህ ያደረሰክን፤

ጨለማውን ወስደህ ብርሃን ለሰጠኸን፤

እንደዚጋኸን ብትቀር ፤

ማን ይከፍተን ነበር።

“Be praised lord!

For what you’ve done to us,

You took the misery and gave hope to us,

You are the one who kill;

And heal!”

Most importantly, *Azmaris* have been playing the role of the media in the ancient setting. They were the one who inform the king what the public said and vice versa. That was why both the common people and the rulers of the time were eager to listen to the lyrics in order to hear the news (*አዝማሪ ምን አለ?*). For example when *Azmaris* expose the death of the king and the queen to the public:-

እንግዲህ መቁጠሪያ እንግዲህ ዳዊት፤

አባ ደልል ሰኞ ንግስት ዕሮብ ጧት፤

ሞሰቡ ዝንጉርጉር እንጀራው ዳጉሳ፤

ሞቱ በኃይማኖት ዘውዲቱና ጉግሳ።

“The king died on Monday

And the queen, Wednesday

Both were faithful

For what they believe in”

Beyond all the roles they have been playing through their lyrics, *Azmaris* were usually performing the art in order to gain a sort of reward. Accordingly, there were various types of rewards in the form of gifts and payments. The gifts include cattle, weapons, clothing, ornaments and money. It was also usual to be given honor name by their masters.

As it has been discussed above, in ancient times, *Azmaris* were performing the art almost in all places where the public gathered. The themes and purposes of the lyrics also ranged from praise to criticism. Furthermore, during the times where there was no press, they were serving as a media.

3.3. Current Realities of *Azmari* Tradition

It is believed that *Azmaris* are found in different parts of Ethiopia with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, North Gondar and North Wollo (Lasta area) are mentioned to be the origins of *Azmaris*. Since the concern of this study is explaining the major themes and performance characteristics of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar town, in this particular section, places which are found in North Gondar administrative zone for being the residence of *Azmari* community will be discussed.

As Mulaw (2002) puts it, there are 3,365 *Azmaris* that are living in North Gondar administrative zone. Currently, *Azmari* families are found in many *woredas* and districts around Gondar town. These include *Gondar Zuria Woreda – Burbuax* and *sheha Gomenge* with a significant number and in *Wegera – Tiwa Giyorgis, Guntir Abo* and *Gedebge*. There are also few *Azmairi* families at *Dembia*, west *Belesa* and *Alefa Woredas*. Furthermore, few *Azmari* families have given up the art and engaged on other occupations are found in Gondar town.

3.4. Economic, Social and Cultural Status of *Azmari*

Like other societies in their surrounding, the economic base of *Azmari* community is agriculture. Another source of money for *Azmari* community is performing folksong. In spite of the payment that they gain by performing at their villages, many *Azmaris* move from villages to towns (especially to Gondar town) in order to get better payment. As a

result, they perform the art at the night clubs established for this purpose.

Concerning the social features of *Azmari*, they usually live gathering at one area of villages. As it has been mentioned in the previous sections, they perform the art where the rest community gathers for various ceremonies and happenings. Apart from singing in such occasions, they perform the art in a daily bases when they gather to drink coffee or get around fire in the evening. (Getu: 1998) Furthermore, as Engidaw says, they make trainings beginning from the mid night. With respect to marriage relationship, *Azmaris* establish the relationship within their community. The reason is that when they move from villages to towns they need a partner who supports them in performing and getting better payment.

In terms of culture, there is no visible difference with the culture of the rest society living around. The way they explain their feelings, their clothing, their language and other cultural features remain the same with that of the non-*Azmari* society. However, there are some differences in terms of work culture. They are not fully engaged in cultivating their land. They rather rent it or leave it not ploughed. This is because of their focus on moving to the towns and getting a better payment.

As a result of their movement from their villages to Gondar town and later to Addis Ababa, they have a chance to be exposed to new technologies and current happenings. Not only this *Azmaris* also have produced their work of art in the form of record and are known to be famous singers of the country. Unlike the rest society of their surrounding they have a chance to promote themselves going to abroad. However, the major issue which was underlined by all informants is that

the *Azmari* tradition may not have descendants in the long run, because of the social and cultural changes occurring.

3.5. The Secret Language

Although *Azmaris* are native Amharic speakers, they have their own secret language known as ኢንዛቲጎኛ (Enzatigna). Apart from its disorganized features and lack of rule, the language is used to communicate each other by the *Azmaris*. They try to clarify that the language was invented a long time ago in order to protect the *Azmari* community from any sort of accident aimed by people in the audience. Although the language is mainly spoken among the *Azmari* community, there are many individuals who understand the secret language because of their social interaction with the *Azmari* community.

According to Mulaw (2002), the language is invented by mixing Amharic words with other meaningless words in Amharic language. He further explains that this language is not the mother tongue of the community, rather the purpose of its existence is to serve as a secret language. As he explains, the language is significant in that it enables *Azmaris* to communicate each other even in very difficult situations without the consent of non-speakers.

On a television production by Getu Temesgen (1998), elders of the *Azmari* community speak to each other using the secret language. Engidaw (2001), on the other hand provides some sentences of the language with their Amharic meaning. For instance:

ኢንዛታው

Azmari

ቲካቡን ዘውጠው።

Play the Masinko.

እንቁርቁር ፎኛ።

Please have a coffee.

The major concern of this chapter was dealing with the nature of *Azmari* tradition. The next chapter will deal with explaining the major themes and performance characteristics of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar town.

CHAPTER FOUR

Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the major themes and performance styles of *Azmari* lyrics. More specifically, there are two major categories in which the discussion focuses__ major themes and performance styles. In the first major category, there are six sub categories. In the second major category, five sub classifications have been made. Consequently, the selected lyrics are interpreted and analyzed in each classification they suit.

4.1. Major Themes of *Azmari* Lyrics

The analysis of the lyrics collected through field work shows that the *Azmari* lyrics touch upon a number of themes. Though the themes are varied, most frequently heard *Azmari* lyrics in Gondar *Azmari* nightclubs revolve around the following major themes. There are lyrics with themes of praise, criticism, love, hospitality, lyrics with theme of encouraging opposite sex relationship and eroticism.

4.1.1. Lyrics Reflecting the Theme of Praise

Azmari lyrics are basically engaged on praising. Using their lyrics, they praise and appreciate beauty, heroes and heroism, places and ethnic groups and friendship.

4.1.1.1. Praise of Beauty

For *Azmaris*, beauty has varied colors and can be seen from different perspectives. When they perform in the night clubs, they devote a lot of

time and effort to praise the beauty of people in the audience. The main purpose here is, to gain awards from the addressees.

For instance, in the following few lyrics, *Azmaris* praise complexion. To praise an audience with a brighter color, the following couplets are used.

*ከወደዱም አይቀር ይወዳሉ ቀይ፣
እንደአላማ ሰንደቅ ከሩቅ የሚታይ።*
*A fair complexion is lovable,
For it attracts from a long distance
Like a flag of a nation.*

*ቅላቷ የሚመስለው የወርቅ ዱቄት፣
ለዚህች ልጅ ብሎ ባልተሰራ ሞት።*
*Her complexion is tan like gold,
It would be so joyful;
If she was immortal.*

The first lyric associates brightness with attractiveness. It claims that having a brighter complexion is being lucky in order to outshine among the people with a dark complexion. The second lyric, on the other hand, relates brightness with a valuable mineral (gold) and asserts that it is such a dreadful event a person with a bright complexion to die. Both the given lyrics, therefore, generalize that having a brighter complexion is a good criterion for remaining lovable.

As far as the collection of the audience matters, *Azmaris* do not let their lyrics to only praise those with a brighter complexion. Rather, with a recognizable attempt to balance, they praise people with a dark complexion.

*በረ ጠይም ጠይም ጠይም አትወደዱ፣
ጠይም ወድጄ ነው የጠፋኝ መንገዱ።*

*Dark brown has a magical complexion,
 Once you fall in love with it,
 You can't recover soon.*
*ሰው ሁሉ ሞኝ ነው ለቀይ ይበለጣል፤
 ይኸ ጠያይሙ ፍቅሩ ያሳብዳል።*
*Fair complexion is fool's gold,
 A dark brown one has incredible attraction*

In both the given lyrics, having a dark complexion is presented as being the owner of a magnetic power. As per the themes of the lyrics, the one who loves a person with a dark color suffers a lot from this magical attraction.

On the other hand, Azmaris use the following lyrics in order to praise a lady's attractive look.

*ጥርሷ የመሰለው ያልተመሠ ሰፍ፤
 ሰጠችኝ በሽታ የሚያንሰፈስፍ።*
*Her teeth are like a raw sunflower seeds,
 They have a controlling power.*

*ግንባሯን በናየው ስብራት የለው፤
 ደሙን ከጉንጭዋ ላይ ምን አፈሰሰው?*
*Her complexion is flawless;
 In an incredible manner.*

*ሴቶች የሚሸክሙት ውሃ በንስራ ነው፤
 አንቺን የደም ገንቦ ያሸክመሽ ማነው?*
*Your look is attractive,
 You have flawless complexion.*

All the lyrics express, in a poetic manner, a lady's attractive look is worth than anything she owns. As far as the lyrics are concerned, beauty is not

only a matter of complexion. Rather, it is a combination of attractive look and body posture. In the following lyrics, one can observe that good posture is one measure of beauty.

አልንቀለቀልም እኔ አልገባም እኔዳ፤

ሸንጡ የሚመስለው የሰላሌን ሜዳ።

His waste-line is as long as selalies field;

One can easily fall in love with his slim posture.

ከሸሚዙ ተርፎ ይታያል አንገቱ፤

መጣ ወንድማችን ዘረ መኳንንቱ።

His long neck captures eyes;

Here comes our brother,

Who has a blood line from nobilities.

The above two lyrics describe that a young man with a good physical appearance is the one who has a tall slender figure. It is obvious that a slender young man can have a waist and neck like that of a sportsman. Therefore, as far as the lyrics are concerned, these appearances of a youngman are good qualities to be praised.

Despite the above separately mentioned criteria's of beauty, *Azmaris* praise ladies whom they think meet much of their criterions of beauty.

ከውስኪም አምቦውሃ ይጨመርለታል፤

ከውሃም አረንጓዴ ይገፈፍለታል፤

ከሰንዴም እኔንክርዳድ ይለቀምለታል፤

አሁን ለቆንጆዬ ምን ይወጣለታል?

Unlike a pond with an algae,

And a wheat with a tares,

Her look has no defect.

እንጨት ስበሩላት ውሃ ቅዱላት፤
 አካለ መልካም ናት እንደ እንግሊዝ ሴት፤
 ምንጣፏ ስጋዳ ትራሷ ዳዊት፤
 አቡኑም ይላሉ ኑና እንባርካት፤
 የባለአባት ልጅ ናት የባለንብረት፤
 ከድንጋይ ላይ ውሃ የፈለቀላት፤
 ከባህር ላይ እሳት የነደደላት፤
 ማህፀኑ መልካም ናት የቆንጆዬ ናት፡፡

*She is as slim as British ladies
 Her blood-line is from nobilities
 Both people and non-living creatures,
 Serve her order.
 Not only her, who is blessed,
 But also her mother.*

The first lyric explains that a lady's beauty is perfect by taking for grant other imperfect things (like, water in a pond and wheat with tare). In the second case, it has been explained that being a very beautiful girl gives a status of a noblewoman. Furthermore, the lyric narrates that a lady's nobility, as a result of her beauty, enables her to practice miracle and superstitious deeds which is extremely exaggerated. As it has been noted at the last line of the second lyric, not only the beautiful girl that gains praise, but also the mother who brought her up.

According to *Azmaris*, good conduct is another quality of a person which deserves praise.

የብልኮ መንገድ ኩል ይነስነስበት፤
 የአዘዞ መንገድ ኩል ይነስነስበት፤
 የፒያሳ መንገድ ኩል ይነስነስበት፤
 ይህ አመለ ሸጋ ይመላለስበት፡፡

*Let the roads of Buluko, Azezo and Piazza
Decorated with a red carpet
For the honor of this youngster,
With a good conduct.*

*አመለ መልካም ናት ክትት ያለ ሀሞትዋ፤
ትምጣብኝ ያፔ ልጅ የሴት አመቤትዋ።
She is a girl with a good conduct;
That is what I admire about her.*

*እውቀት የምትሻ የወለዱ እእንደሆን፤
መልካም ጠባይ ያላት የወለዱ እእንደሆን፤
ታመጣለች አማች ብረት መዝጊያ የሚሆን።
A lady with a good conduct,
And courage to learn,
Attracts a respected husband.*

In the first two lyrics, polite behavior is given high value. The first lyric claims that a person who has good behavior deserves possible respect and praise. Moreover, in the third case, a girl's good conduct has been considered as a criterion for having a good husband.

In summary, both internal and external beauties of a person are given attention and praised by *Azmaris*.

4.1.1.2. Praise of Heroes and Heroism

Heroes and heroism have great place in the songs of the *Azmari*. They devote a lot of time in praising national heroes and their heroic deeds. Even though the story of the heroes took place a long time ago, through glorification of the past (portraying popular heroes and their deeds in impressive ways), *Azmaris* narrate the incredible adventures of past heroes. Let us see the following lyrics:

ደብቆታል መሰል ሶማ በረሃው፤

እንቢ ያለው ጉበዝ የታል ሽፈራው።

I wish to see Shiferaw;

A resistant hero,

The one who lost in ‘soma’ dessert.

ያልተማረ ምሁር ክትት ያለ ሀሞቱ ፤

ነበር አሉኝ ጎንደር ወንድ አንድ ለእናቱ።

There was a hero in Gondar;

With scholarly and courageous nature,

Who was a lonely son of his mother.

የአሉላ ይግዛው ልጅ ደምሴ አባ ውቃው፤

ግጠም ጠመንጃውን አርቆ ሰቅሏት፤

የሚያወርዳት ጠፋ የሚደርስባት።

Demissie Aba Wukaw,

Alula Yigzaw’s son,

Was an incredible hero,

With no descendants till now.

What makes those different personalities share a common name hero is their patriotic deed. In the history of Ethiopia, all of them had strong feelings of love, respect and duty towards their country. In case of the first one, the singer praises Shiferaw’s resistance towards the then oppressors. The second one praises Tewodros the II’s confidence and way of thinking explaining that he is not the only son for his mother, but for his country too. The same fact has been explained in the third lyrics too. Demissie Aba Wukaw (Alula’s son) was a hero who has no real descendants.

In spite of appreciating many national heroes, *Azmaris* pay greatest attention to praise Tewodros the II of Ethiopia. Tewodros was a visionary king. Though he was sacrificed without fully accomplishing it, his vision was building a united Ethiopia. As a result, *Azmaris* produce a number of lyrics to praise this visionary hero and his sacred mission.

ታጠቅ ብሎ ፈረስ ካሣ ብሎ ስም፣

አርብ አርብ ይሸበራል እእየሩሳሌም፡፡

*The name Kassa with a horse 'Tatek' alone,
Frightens the rule
In Jerusalem.*

የኔማ ቴዲዬ እኔኔ ልበለው፣

እናቴም ስትወልደው ልበሙሉ ነው፡፡

*Let me praise his name;
So Tewodros was courageous,
From the very start he joined the world.*

ሴቶቹ ወይዛዝርት ወንዶቹ ደንሳ፣

አባታቸው ቴዲ ለነፍሱ የማይሣሣ፣

የመቅደላው ጀግና የቋራው አንበሳ፣

ዘላለም ይወሳል ያ መይሣው ካሳ፡፡

*Praise for a courageous hero Kassa!
He who is the hero of Mekdela,
And the lion of Quara.
The father of those proud ladies,
And gentlemen.*

Directly or indirectly, all the above lyrics assert that Tewodros was a supremely confident hero. As it has been described in the second, and

third lyrics, for instance, he did not feel frightened to die (scarify himself) for what he believe in. In these lyrics, Tewodros's deeds are presented as a formula of heroism. That is why, *Azmaris*, through their many lyrics wish this generation to have a kind of confidence that Tewodros had.

Characters of warrior and resistance have been considered as the major features of heroism in *Azmari* lyrics. To illustrate this with examples, the heroes that refused to surrender are praised in the following ways.

ከበላይ ዘለቀ ከተሰቀለው፣

ይሻላል ሽፈራው ሶማ የቀረው።

*Better to be lost in 'soma' like Shiferaw;
Than to hung in public like Belay Zeleke.*

ጣሊያን ቢመጣ እራሱን ተላጭቶ፣

እንቢ አለ ቴዲዬ ሹርባ ተሰርቶ።

*Though the bold Italians forced him,
Tewodros, with a plaited hair,
Refused to surrender.*

ከአባጅፍር አገር ጅማ ተወልጄ፣

ከሚኒልክ አገር ሸዋ ተወልጄ፣

ከአስፋውወሰን አገር ወሎ ተወልጄ፣

ከበላዬ አገር ጎጃም ተወልጄ፣

ከዮሐንስ አገር ትግራይ ተወልጄ

ከአፄ ቴዎድሮስ አገር ጎንደር ተወልጄ፣

በኒጋ በጠባ ይታሰራል እኔ።

*I belong to,
Shoa of Minilik,*

*Wollo of Asfawosen ,
Gojjam of Belay ,
Tigray of Yohannis,
Gondar of Tewodros,
I'm such a resistant!*

Even though Belay Zeleke is considered to be a great hero of the country, through the first lyric, *Azmaris* claim that it is worth to remain resistant like Shiferaw who lost in a desert known as 'Soma', than to surrender. In the second case, Tewodros's resistance to the British forces has been appreciated. However, as far as the lyric is concerned, every colonizer is symbolized by Italians and patriot Ethiopians by Tewodros. This shows that a place Tewodros has in the history of Ethiopia. In the last lyric, taking for grant the mentioned heroes, the singer appreciates refusal towards unfair treatments. In all the above lyrics, glorification of the past by compairing past situations with the status quo of this generation has been observed.

Another feature of heroism, as indicated in the lyrics, is showing a warrior's character.

*አጨደው ከመረው ወቃው በጎራዴ፣
ሰሜን አርማጭሆ ወልቃይት ጠገዴ።
People at Semien Armachiho,
Wolkayit and Tegede,
Harvest, pile and thresh the enemy;
By their swords.*

*ባረ አገራ ጎንደር ሰሜን ጃንአሞራ፣
ለጠገበው ጥይት ለራበው እስገጃራ።
What a brave judgment!
People at 'Janamora',*

*Feed hungry men,
And kill wicked ones.*

*ስማቸው ያስፈራል እእንኳን ጥይት ጮሆ፣
አንበሳው ጎንደራ ስሜን አርማጭሆ።
Let alone their might,
The name itself is frightening;
Of that hero Armachiho people.*

In all the above lyrics, different kinds of weapons like sword, bullets, pistol and rifle are mentioned to be mandatory materials that heroes should own. In other words, being supported by these weapons, heroes punish enemy. What creates admiration in these lyrics, however, is *Azmaris* association of the acts of defeating the enemy with the obvious process of farming. For instance, in the first lyric, farming activities like harvesting, pilling and threshing are used to show in how heroes at *Janamora* and *Wolkayit* fight against their enemy. In the third lyric, on the other hand, pistol and rifle are associated with plough and thresh collector, respectively. This shows, as far as the society where the heroes belong is agrarian, killing the enemy is as easy as that of farming. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned in the third lyric, the above listed places i.e., *Janamora*, *Armachicho*, *Wolkayit* and *Tegede* are known to be places where resistant society lives. As a result, *Azmaris* praise this society's heroic deeds using a number of lyrics.

To sum up, in Gondar *Azmari* nightclubs, it is usual to listen to the above mentioned and many other lyrics that praise heroes and heroism. It is also evident that lyrics produced to praise heroes have the tone of glorifying the past.

4.1.1.3. Praise of Places and Ethnic Groups

Some places found in Ethiopia, especially those which have remarkable history, are praised by *Azmari* lyrics. Moreover, ethnic groups that are thought to be the symbol of love, heroism and beauty get praises from the *Azmaris*. In the following lyric, six places are mentioned based on their historical backgrounds.

ትግራይን አልሰጥሽ ያሄ ዮሐንስ ነው፤
በጎንደር አትምጪ እሱ የቴዲ ነው፤
ጎጃምን አትንኪ እሱም የበላይ ነው፤
ወሎንም አትመኝ የነራሰ አሊ ነው፤
በሐረር አትምጪ የራስ መኮንን ነው፤
ጅማንም አትይ የነአባ ጅፋር ነው፤
አልቤ ላይ ቁጭ በይ ያንቺ ስፍራ እዚያው ነው፡፡

*Don't wish to have Tigray,
It is Yohannes's province
Neither Gojjam nor Wollo,
For they are Belay's and Ali's
Don't wish Ras Mekonnen's Hara;
And Aba Jifar's Jimma.
I gave you my heart:
That it is the only province,
You can own!*

As it has been noted in the above lyric, all the mentioned provinces of the country are praised because of their heroes. People put in association with the mentioned places are known to be kings and administrators that have remarkable heroic deeds in the history of Ethiopia. Therefore, the above mentioned associations indicate that the places deserve respect and praise for they are the origin of those heroes. Besides

praising places in association to their heroes, there are lyrics that praise places for different qualities they have. In the following two lyrics, for instance, the places are praised for being the centers of tourist attraction.

የውጭ አገር ቱሪስት የሚጎበኝሽ፤

አባይ በጣና ላይ የሚፈስብሽ፤

ውቢቷ ባህርዳር ዘጌ እንደምነሽ?

Bahir Dar is a beautiful town;

With incredible nature of Abay and Tana,

That makes it a tourist center.

ብርቅዬ እእንሰሳት የሚገኙበሽ፤

ሬድ ፎክስ ጭላዳ አይቤክስም አለሽ፤

ጃንተክል ዋርካችን ፋሲል ነው ግንብሽ፤

ባታ ፀበልሽ፤

ቀና በለው ቢያዩት ገነት ተራራሽ፤

የዚህ ሁሉ አገር ጎንደር እንዴት ነሽ?

Gondar is such a gifted place,

Known for ‘Jantekel’ tree and Fasil castle.

Has red fox, Chilada and Ibex,

And a holly water of ‘Beta’

With a heavenly nature of Genet mountain.

As it has been stated previously, the reasons for praising the two places in the given lyrics are their tourist attractions. In the first lyric, the natural gifts (Abay and Tana) are explained to be the key factors for making Bahir Dar attractive and lovable town. In case of the second one, natural and historical wealth of Gondar has been listed to show in how the town is both naturally and historically significant.

Besides a number of praise lyrics about Gondar in general, there are some specific areas of Gondar that are given greater attention by *Azmaris* than other places. As a result, it is common for audiences to listen to praise lyrics about the following areas of Gondar much frequently.

ባረ አገራ ጎንደር ሰሜን ጃንአሞራ፣

ለጠገበው ጥይት ለራበው እንጂራ።

What a brave judgment!

People at ‘Janamora’, feed hungry men

And kill wicked ones.

አጨደው ከመረው ወቃው በጎራዴ፣

ሰሜን አርማጭሆ ወልቃይት ጠገዴ።

People at Semien Armachiho,

Wolkayit and Tegede,

Harvest, pile and thresh the enemy;

By their swords.

ባረ አገራ ጎንደር ወልቃይት ጠገዴ፣

ማረሻው ምንሽር መጎልጎያው ትንዴ፣

ሲያበጥረው ያድራል እንደማሳው ስንዴ።

Wolkayit and Tegede has hero society

With pistols and rifles

That pile and spike the enemy

The mentioned places in the above given lyrics, *Wolkayit*, *Tegede*, *Janamora* and *Armachiho* are usually considered to be the places of resistant and hero society. Therefore, as all the above lyrics assert, *Azmaris* produce several praise lyrics concerning those places.

Beyond praise lyrics about places, there are many others that are sung to praise some qualities of different ethnic groups. It is also possible to observe *Azmari*'s association of each ethnic group with different qualities they think the groups have. In the following lyrics, all ethnic groups are praised for different reasons.

የተሞናሞነው የተሞናሞነው ፣

ያ ሰው ጎንደራ ነው።

He who has attractive posture

Is the man from Gondar.

ይኸውና መጣ እኔያለ እጥፍ ዘርጋ፣

ወሎዬ ከሆነ ቀኝ እኔጃን ልዘርጋ።

Better to surrender than suffer,

If this handsome guy is from Wollo.

እኔ እወደዋለሁ ጎንደራነቴን፣

ደግነት ቅንነት ያስተማረኝን።

I am proud of belonging to Gondorians,

For they are kind and optimist,

And made me so.

Through the first three lyrics, *Azmaris* attach the people of Gondar and Wollo with beauty and lovable characteristics, respectively. In the first and second cases, the beautiful nature of people from Wollo and Gondar are appreciated. In the third case, kindness has been attached with Gondar people. It has been claimed that having a blood relation with Gondorians, fills a heart of a person with proud.

To sum up, *Azmari* lyrics praise historical places and places with natural attractions. However, they give more emphasis for some places in Wollo, Gondar, and Gojjam. Specially, they pay greater attention to praise Gondar and some places around it. On the other hand, there are praise lyrics for ethnic groups that are identified, by *Azmaris*, to be the symbols of heroism, love, beauty and kindness.

4.1.1.4. Praise of Friendship

Friendship has a great place in the world of *Azmaris*. For them, a good friend is worth than anything else a person can have. To explain that a good friend is worth than money and other precious things, the following lyrics are used.

ገንዘብ ምን አባቱ አይሆንም ወዳጅ፣

ቢከፋም ቢለማም ሰው ይሻላል እንጂ

A good friend is worth than money.

ቢራ ብትጋብዝኝ ነገ አላፊ ነው፣

ወይን ብትጋብዝኝ ነገ አላፊ ነው፣

ቆይልኝ ወንድሜ የማትገኘው።

Friendship is something worth,

Than any invitation,

And precious thing you can give me.

It is obvious that money is a very important thing to determine a person's life in many ways. So, People all over the world work day and night in order to make money. They rob and kill each other for the sake of money. It is also known that in the nightclubs, people spend time drinking and inviting each other beer and other alcohols besides enjoying by *Azmaris* performance. However, in the above two lyrics, friendship has been

explained to have a great place than any enjoyable drinks and even than money.

Furthermore, *Azmaris* praise any scarification which is paid for the sake of friendship.

*ካራዳ ልጅ ጋር አብረው ቢሰደዱ
ቢያገኝም ያበላል ቢያጣም ያዝናል ሆዱ
'Arada' friend is such a good friend;
He shares with friends,
Both pleasant and unpleasant situations.*

*እእንደአይን እእንደጆሮ እእንደእእግር እእንደእእጅ፣
ወዳጅ ማለት አብሮ ሲባዝን ነው እእንጂ፡፡
Like a person's body parts,
Friends should feel each other's pain.*

To begin with, in the context of the years around 1950's in Addis Ababa, 'Arada' refers to a person who drinks and enjoys with his friends. A person with this quality-Arada, shares everything he owns with beloved friends, feels pity for people who are under unpleasant situations and even fights for the well being of his friends. As a result, *Azmaris* praise an act of sharing both good and bad situations in life, by associating with *Arada's* character. Like the first one, in the second lyric presented above, the act of sharing both pleasant and unpleasant conditions in life with a friend has been appreciated.

Moreover, in order to appreciate friends enjoying together in the nightclubs, *Azmaris* use the following lyrics.

*የሰው ሁሉ ፍቅር ግምገት እስከወር ነው
ግፋ-ቢል አመት ነው፤
የነዚህ የሦስቱ እስከዘላለም ነው፡፡*

*These days love has no longevity;
But these friends have eternal love.*

*አቀማመጣቸው ፎርማቸው አንድ ነው፤
እነዚህ ሁለቱን ሚሊዮቸው ማነው?
No one can inter fear between them
Because they know each other well.*

In all the above cases, *Azmaris* appreciate the way people are enjoying with their friends wishing longevity for their friendship.

To summarize, in Gondar *Azmari* night clubs, it is usual to listen to praise lyrics about good friends and friendship.

4.2.1. The Theme of Criticism

Like they have a lot of praise songs to appreciate good things, *Azmaris* do not hesitate to criticize people. Using their lyrics, they forward criticisms towards the generation, bad behaviors of people, and reactions of their audiences.

4.2.1.1. Criticism of Unacceptable Behavior

There are always patterns of behavior that every society set up as standard behavior. In our society, also, there are some sets of behavior that are put as standard. Unless individuals or groups of people behave up to those standards of behavior, they might be considered as they have unacceptable or deviant behavior. As far as *Azmaris* are parts of the society, thus, they transparently criticize people for behaving in unacceptable manner.

*የሴት አመልና ሽሮ ወጥ አንድ ነው፤
ግንፍል ግንፍል ሲል ማባበሉ እዳ ነው፡፡*

*Ladies have the same character
With 'shirowot'.
Both can boil over suddenly.*

*ከቤቱ ቁጭ ብለሽ እያበሳጨሽው፤
ሲወጣ ሲገባ እእያነዘነዘሽው፤
ከቢራ አሣልፈሽ ሲጋራ አስጀመርሽው፡፡
You were such an aggressive,
You are the one
Who made him a loser.*

As it has been noted in the above two lyrics, aggressive behavior of a woman has been criticized for being unacceptable. The way the first lyric relates an aggressive behavior of a woman with the characteristic of 'shiro wot' shows that it is a very difficult task to tolerate women's' aggressive behavior. The fact is that both men and women may behave aggressively. However, as it was indicated in the second lyric, a woman can cause harm up on the life of a man for behaving aggressively.

Another sort of behavior, which is criticized for being unacceptable, is an act of having more than one lover at a time or cheating over love relationship.

*የሱ ገንዘብ ያንቺ መሆኑን ታታውቂያለሽ፤
ስርቅ አርገሽ ለሠው ለምን ትሠጫለሽ?
You have to be loyal for your promises;
Why you go over your lover?*

*አትበል ቆርጠጥ ቆርጠጥ እደጫማ ቀዳጅ፤
አጥብቀው ተያዙት ይበቃል አንድ ወዳጅ፡፡*

*Don't be restless,
Like a busy business man
One real lover is worth than many.*

*እእሷን በሃምስበት የሳምክ እእንደው ሌላ፣
እእሷን ባቀፍክበት ያቀፍክ እእንደው ሌላ፣
ቁምጥምጥ ያድርግህ ቅዱስ ላሊበላ።*

*May St. Lalibela
Cut your body in to pieces
If you would cheat over your lover.*

All the above lyrics claim that establishing more than one love relationship is unacceptable behavior. However, it makes them easy for understanding to deal with the lyrics in separate classifications. In the first and fourth lyrics, there is a serious tone of criticism that blames both female and male lovers for cheating over their relationships. In all cases, it has been underlined that ‘one to one’ is the best policy. The second and third lyrics, also, appreciate one to one principle but with a lighter tone.

Moreover, *Azmaris* forward criticism towards deviant behavior of people using their lyrics as instruments.

*ጥመቂ ያሏት እእንደው በርሜል ሙሉ አተላ፣
ጋግሪ ያሏት እእንደው ሞሠብ ሙሉ እእንኩሮ፣
ሚስትን ያገባችት እእኔ ነኝ ዘንድሮ።*

*She has no household skills;
I'm a victim of a wife,
Who is good for nothing.*

ወይን በኮካ ካለመደች ሴት፤

ድስትና ምጎጎ በል ደህና ሰንብት።

Once a woman became drunker,

She lost her household skill.

እቅፍ ድግፍ አርጎ አቅፎ እእንደመለመን፤

እስቲ ስጭኝ ይላል እእንደናቱ ጎመን።

It is such an offence

To directly ask a lover

To have sex with her.

In a culture oriented societies like ours, it is something obvious that one criterion to have a husband is to be good in household activities. Based on the established agreement on how a wife should act in a house, the first two lyrics forward criticisms towards ladies deviant behavior. Furthermore, in the third lyric, there is a criticism towards inappropriate directness by stating that a man should deal about sexual affairs with his lover in a polite and procedural manner.

To sum up, through their lyrics, *Azmaris* forward criticisms towards behaviors which are thought to be unacceptable in the society.

4.2.1.2. Criticism of Audience's Actions

As far as *Azmaris* make live performance, in front of a small group, they have a chance of watching their audience's reactions than artists at concerts in front of large audience. As a result, they do not hesitate to forward criticizing lyrics in the middle of their performances. As it has been discussed in the previous sub-section, having more than one love partner is among unacceptable behaviors. Therefore, based on their observation, *Azmaris* forward criticizing lyrics towards people in the audience.

□ፈ እእናንተ ልጆች በጣም ታምራላችሁ፤
 ታዲያ ምን ያደርጋል ሁለት ለአንድ ናችሁ፤
It was very nice of youngsters
If you were one to one.

የሁላችን ወንድም እግዚር ይወድሃል፤
 ከዚህ አንድ ጠፍቶ አንተ ትርፍ ይዘሃል።
You are such a lucky man,
In the middle of lonely people,
You've got many lovers.

ሰው ሁሉ ከጎኑ አንድ ቆንጆ ሲያጣ፤
 የኛ ወንድማችን ሦስቱን ይዞ መጣ።
He is dealing with three ladies,
While some are lonely.

The above lyrics, especially the last two, seem to forward a sort of appreciation for a person's action. However, in an ironic expression, they comment on a person's multi-sexual behavior. To prove the above argument, it would be helpful to refer to Azmaris attitude in the previous sub-section, concerning the above mentioned behavior.

Moreover, when Azmaris come across inattentive audience, they forward their criticism in the following way.

ቆንጆ እእህት ያላችሁ ያዙ በጥንቃቄ፤
 ገልብጦ እእንዳይገባ ሽጋው ወንደላጤ።
Take care that you has beautiful sister,
The one in neighboring group is looking for her.

□ረ ወንድማችን ዛሬስ ምን ነካህ፣

እኔ እእየዘፈንኩኝ ቶክ ታብዛለህ።

*What is wrong with you man
You chat while I'm singling?*

የኔማ ጌትዬ መጥፎ አመል አለህ፣

እኔ እየተጫወትኩ ትጀነጅናለህ።

*It is such a bad part of you;
Chatting with ladies,
During a performance.*

In every kind of performances, presenters need to concentrate in order to do their works successfully. The same is true with *Azmaris*. Accordingly, they have criticizing lyrics for those people who steal their attention while they are performing. In the first lyric, for example, a male audience who tried to open discussion with a girl in a neighboring group has been criticized for his inattentive character. Also, in the second and third lyrics, while performing, any sort of discussion or speech is forbidden.

Generally, by forwarding criticizing lyrics towards audience's action in a specific setting, *Azmaris* make an attempt to encourage their audiences enjoy and engage themselves in the performances.

4.2.1.3. Criticism of the Generation

Apart from producing a number of lyrics to praise, *Azmaris* use their lyrics to criticize the generation. To begin with, to criticize addiction of the youth by 'chat' and alcohol, they use the following lyrics.

ጫቱን ቅሞ ቅሞ የወለደው ልጅ፣

ቧንቧ አልጠጣም አለ ሐይለንድ ነው እንጂ።

*He was addicted by 'chat'
And he made his child so.*

መሸታታቤት ማደር ከለመደች ሴት፤

ደስትና ምጎጎ በል ደህና ሰንበት።

Women were active in households,

They have begun to drink in night clubs.

What a funny time!

In both cases, deviant behaviors of this generation are criticized. To explain the deviant activities of this generation by comparing with the past in that it was not normal for a lady to drink in night clubs and for a youngster to be addicted by ‘chat’. So, the singers forward their comments on these widely observed activities of the generation.

Furthermore, nostalgia that incorporates thoughts about happy times in the past, which is often mixed with the wish to be back in the past, is another major issue that the lyrics raise. For instance, they forward criticizing lyrics towards the short life history of love and good neighborhood among this generation.

የአባቶቻችን ጎረቤት እንብላ እንግባ ወደ ቤት፤

የዛሬ ዘመን ጎረቤት ጧትና ማታ ፍርድ ቤት።

Neighbors in the times of our fathers,

Love each other.

These day’s neighbors

Quarrel day and night.

የዛሬ ዘመን ፍቅር እድሜ፤

አምስት ቀን ናት እንደ ጳጉሜ፤

መች ተስተካክሎ ይተኛል፤

ሸርተት እያለ ይገኛል።

*This day's love is short aged;
Like the month of 'puagmen',
Relationships have no longevity.*

As it has been noted in the above discussion, the two given lyrics criticize lack of longevity of good neighborhood and love among people of this generation by comparing with *puagmen's* (ጳጉሜ - the 13th month in Ethiopian calendar, with five or six days) few days.

It is, also, true that *Azmaris* have criticizing lyrics for this generation's weak moral to perform heroic activities.

*ቋራ ላይ ተወልዶ ፒያሳ ያደገው፣
ስሜን ተራራ ላይ ሄዶ የነገሰው፣
እባክህ ቴዲዬ ለዚህ ቀሪ ትውልድ ሱሪህን አውሰው።*
*He who was born at Quara,
And brought up in piazza,
Crowned at Semien Mountains,
What if he shares for this generation
A heroic spirit of him.*

*በደመና ዚሪ ባየር ተወርዋሪ፣
ማነው የሚያጠልቃት የቴዲዬን ሱሪ።*
*Tedi was an incredible hero,
Too difficult to have a person like him,
In this generation.*

In both cases, having Tewodros's trousers is symbolized by being his descendants. As a result, through this symbolism, *Azmaris* criticize the generation's lack of moral and confidence.

Summing up, apart from several praise lyrics sung in Gondar *Azmari* night clubs, there are many lyrics that mainly criticize unacceptable behavior of people, audience's reaction during the performances and criticisms towards this generation. These impressions usually originate from the thought that appreciates the past situations.

4.3.1 The Theme of Hospitality

Friendly and generous behavior towards visitors and guests, which is intended to make them welcome, is one character of *Azmaris* that can be observed. Apart from entertaining their audience by presenting their songs and traditional *Eskistas*, they usually show hospitality through presenting lyrics that are intended to make the guests feel at home.

ተምሮ መጨነቅ ማሰብ ምን ያደርጋል፤

አሚወዱት ጋራ ኢንጆይ ያስፈልጋል።

It is not worth an educated person to worry,

But sometimes good,

To enjoy with friends.

በጣም ቆንጆ ነሽ በጣም ታምራያለሽ፤

ታዲያ ምን ያደርጋል ድብርት አበዛሽ።

Whatever an attractive look you have,

It is an empty barrel

Without a boyfriend to enjoy with.

የኔማ እእህቶች ምን ያፈዛችኋል፤

ቻርጁን የጨረሰ ኖክያ መስላችኋል።

What is wrong with you grows?

Why are you so depressed?

Like a charge empty battery,

Of a cell phone.

As noted in the first and second lyrics above, literacy and beauty are mentioned to be good qualities of a girl. However, it is claimed that both qualities of a lady should not prevent her from enjoying and having fun with friends. The third description of passive character of audiences surprises a little bit. Passive youngsters, in this case, are compared with a charge empty battery of a cell phone. This shows Azmaris attempt to create relaxation upon the passive audiences. In general, as far as they devote a lot of efforts to produce lyrics that can create pleasure upon their visitors, hospitality can be considered one major theme of Azmari lyrics.

4.4.1. Love versus End of Relationship

Love and end of love relationship are other major issues in which *Azmari* lyrics concentrate on. According to their lyrics, love has many colors. Some people who are in love may feel happier than ever and some others may be put in an unpleasant situation. Furthermore, hidden love is another feature of love experience. There are also some consequences mentioned as a result of end of love relationship. All the above mentioned situations are incorporated in and are among the major issues raised by the lyrics.

In the following two lyrics, love is explained as a magical feeling with no boundary.

አገሩ ጉራንጉር ስፍራው የወንበዴ፣

ስንቱን አገር አልፎ አንቺን አለ ሆይ።

*Though you belong to other place
I loved you with all my heart.*

*ያገሬን ልጅ ትቺ የሰው አገር ሳድን፣
ቀረሁ እንዳከሳሁ ጐኔም ሳይደነድን።
Though there are beautiful ladies
Where I belong,
I fell in love with a one in a far distance.*

People wish to have their beloved ones to be besides them every time. It might, also, be argued that it is preferable to establish love relationship with a person from the same cultural background to understand each other's language in the process. Unfortunately, love is something which cannot be planned. As a result, a person can fall in love with another person many miles away. This is what was described in the above two couplets.

Love makes careless people who are in love towards every comment from other people concerning their relationship.

*እእኔስ አንቺን አንቺን የልጅነቴን፣
ፍቅር ዕንደ ሀ ሁ ያስቆጠርሽኝን፣
አሚተኛም ይማ ይኪድ በጉልበቴ፣
አሽሟጣጭም ያሽሟጥ ይኪድ በጅማቴ፣
ሣይታማ አይቀርም ሰው በሰውነቴ።
Whatever people gossip,
Can't prevent me from loving you.*

*ምንድነው እእዬዬ አንደ መንፈቅ ልጅ፣
ሀመሜን ሰው ሰምቶት እሞታለሁ እንጂ።*

*Better to make it official
Than worrying about a hidden love.*

*አሙን አሙንና ወቀጡን እንደገብስ፤
ይተውን የለም ዎይ የልባቸው ሲደርስ።
Public opinion shouldn't worry us
It is human to interfere,
In others business.*

The narrator, in the first case, shows his strong feeling towards his lover. Moreover, he asserts that he doesn't care for any sort of gossip concerning his love relationship with a girl by pointing out that it is human to comment on others' private affairs. The second one, also, states the nonsense nature of gossip. In the third case, a lover decides to let his love known officially.

Another issue which *Azmaris* raise in relation to love relationship is the might of love. It has been explained that love has a power that makes every human beings under control.

*ምንም ዶክተር ቢሆን የሚያድን ሕይወት፤
ምን ገበሬ ቢሆን የሚያበላ እንሸት፤
ምን መምህር ቢሆን የእውቀት አባት፤
ምን ወታደር ቢሆን ተኩሶ የማይስት፤
የማይረታው የለም ፍቅርና ሞት ።
Though he is a doctor who cures,
A farmer who feeds,
A teacher who shapes mind
A soldier with a good ability
They all fall in love someday.*

All the mentioned professionals are given great value in that they have their own influences up on the life of the society. As it was stated at the last line, however, love has an incredible power to win all of them. This shows that love is mighty.

Hidden love is another feature of love relationship. The following lyrics try to show the test of hidden love.

ምን ያሉቱ ናቸው መናጢ ምቀኛ፤

ግጥም አርገው ዘጉት በሩን በመጫኛ፤

እንኳን በመጫኛ ይዘጉት በብረት፤

እንገናኛለን ከትምህርት ቤት።

Whatever they do to make a fence

Between us,

They can't prevent us

From meeting at school.

የቆላ ማሽላ መጅ ያደቀቀው፤

ነገም ነይ ዛሬም ነይ ባልሽ ካለወቀው።

What if we make love

All the time your husband leaves.

በከንቱ ነውንጂ በኔ ላይ መፍረድ፤

የተሠረቀ ነው ሁሉም የሚወድ።

I am not the only one to be accused

Everybody likes to have a hidden love affair.

The major issue raised in all the lyrics is that love cannot be controlled and nobody can stop the relationship between lovers for they can go through it in a hidden way. In the first case, it has been pointed out that

whatever the girl's parents do to prevent their daughter from meeting with her lover, there are other alternatives for doing it. In the second lyric, her lover appreciates a married woman to be his concubine. In the final case, a lover states confidently that to have hidden love relationship is everybody's wish.

Finally, there are lyrics that indicate situations at the end of love relationship.

*የፋገረ ነገር የጠፋበት መላ፤
እንዴት ይለያያል ሰው ሳይጠላ፡፡
It is very dreadful event
To depart from the one you love.*

*ጦርነት ታታወጀ ጥዩሽ መሄዴ ነው፤
አደራ የሚባለው እእንዴት ላለው ሰው ነው፤
በከንቱ ነውንጂ አደራ ያልኩሽ፤
ማን ይተውልኛል እእንደኔ ያየሽ፡፡
I am moving for a battle;
But couldn't find a real person,
To take care of you.*

In the first case, it has been stated that a person's departure from the one who loves makes him hopeless. In the second lyric, one can observe that a husband's suffering who is going to a battle field when he decides to leave his wife.

In summary, love and end of love relationship or departure are among the major themes which are raised in *Azmari* lyrics.

4.5.1. Lyrics with Encouraging Theme of Opposite- Sex Relationship

During the stay in *Azmari* night clubs, the researcher has observed *Azmaris'* attempt to appreciate opposite sex relationship, using their lyrics. One way of doing this is by producing lyrics that encourage male and female audience, who are enjoying together, to think over love relationship.

የማነህ ሸበላ የማነህ ቁመታም፤

አንተ ለዚች ልጅ ትመቻለህ በጣም።

You have a tall slender posture,

And you fit with a girl,

Beside you.

በአማርኛ ውሃ በትግርኛ ማይ፤

ይቺን ልጅ ያገኘ መንግስተ ሰማይ።

By any means,

It is a heavenly thing to share life,

With this incredible lady.

ምንኛ ደስ ይላል የኩያ ጨዋታ፤ታ

የእኔ እእመቤት ሲላት አቤት የኔ ጌታ። ታ

Lovers in the same age

Can understand each other's feelings.

In all the above cases, an attempt of encouragement has been made through describing the beauty of both male and female partners and by recommending love relationship for each other.

Moreover, best friends and relatives are also invited to have a love affair with each other.

የአገራችን ታታቦት ስሙ ብዙ ነው፤
 ከቅርብ ከተገኘ ዝም ብሎ መሃም ነው።
*It is not a sin
 To kiss a beautiful girl.
 Thou you are intimate friends.*

ያልረባ ዝምድና እየተቆጠረ፤
 ይህን መሃይ ከንፈር ብቻውን አደረ።
*Kinship is not worth than love;
 Why you let these beautiful lips,
 For others.*

ጥርሷን ፀጉሯን አይኗን፤
 አንገቷን ከንፈሯን ዳሌዋን አይና፤
 አፍርስ አፍርስ አለኝ ያንን ሁሉ ዝምድና።
*Even a blood relative can wish,
 To have a love relationship with her
 Because of her beautiful look.*

All the above lyrics encourage relatives to present a love relationship proposal for each other, ignoring their old story. This shows the theme of non-conformity towards the norms of the society that forbids sexual relationship among blood relatives.

Some people may join the night clubs to enjoy with their friends of the same sex and some others alone. In this case, using their lyrics, Azmaris appreciate a lonely boy or girl to look for a boy or girl friend in the night club.

የኔማ ቆንጆዬ የደስ ደስ አለሽ፤
 ታዲያ ምን ያደርጋል ቦይፍሬንድ የለሽ።

*Whatever an attractive look you have,
It is an empty barrel,
Without a boyfriend to enjoy with.*

In all the above contexts, Azmaris produce lyrics that encourage opposite sex relationships.

4.6.1. Erotic Lyrics

Erotic Lyrics are Lyrics containing senses and descriptions that are intended to make people sexually excited. In the following lyrics Azmaris try to capture their audiences' feelings using lyrics with erotic theme.

*ጤነኛ ይመስላል ይኼ ሁሉ ሰው፣
ሌሊት ሌሊት ያብዳል በየመኝታው።
All the ladies and gentlemen here,
Are going to be crazy
When they make love.*

*አጭር ናት አጭር ናት አጭር ናት ቀጫጫ፣
አርገበገበችው ተጣብቃ እንደሙጫ።
She is such a sex-pot,
Though she is thin,
And skinny.*

*የዋሃ መስሎሻል ቁመቱ ቢያጥር፣
ከወገቡ በታች አለው መዘውር፣
እንኳን አንችንና ያስነሳል ሞተር።
Don't overlook at him,
Because he is short.
He has a sexual energy
Which surprises you.*

In all the three cases, there is an explanation of people's sexual life. In the first case, it has been explained that everybody is crazy about having sexual intercourse. In the second case, the girl was described as being a sexpot. It has been claimed that she has a lot of sexual energy, though she is physically small. In the third description of a man's sexual behavior, there is an expansion of his extraordinary sexual energy.

Another way of presenting the erotic description is through explaining women's sexual ability during the intercourse.

*የኢትዮጵያ ሴቶች ውድድር ሄዱና፣
 ሰላሌና ጎጃም አለፉ ፈተና፣
 ሰላሌዎች በሞተር ጎጃሞች ባንቲና፣
 ጎንደሮችም ቢሆን እድለኞች ናቸው፣
 አንቲና ባይሆንም ክራቫት አላቸው፣
 እባካችሁ ወንዶች ከላይ አድርጓቸው።*

*In the beauty contest,
 Between Ethiopian ladies,
 Those who are from Selale and Gojjam won.
 Selales with their engine,
 And Gojjams with antenna.
 Gondorians are also lucky
 They have an organ with a tie;
 Let them take the upper position.*

*የሴቶች ሁሉ መብት ቆይቷል ከተስፋፋ፣
 ይኼ ዴሞክራሲ ቆይቷል ከተስፋፋ፣
 አንፂም በሱ ግፊ እሱም በዚያ ይገፋ።*

*Women's equality is respected
Now days;
Let them participate equally
While making love.*

Both the above lyrics appreciate women's' equal participation during sexual intercourse. In the first case, the writer of this study couldn't reason out in how antenna and motor (engine) are associated with a woman's sex organ. However, it is clearly understood that, by a quality description of each lady's sex organ that represent different provinces of Ethiopia, it tells for men that they should allow the upper position for a woman from Gondar while making love. The second one also claims that it is the right of a woman to actively participate in the sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, in the following dialogue of a male and a female *Azmaris*, there is a description of sizes of both male and female sex organs.

*መቀጫ ጠራቢሽ ያለልክ ሆነና፣
የት አባቴ ላግባው የኔን ዘነዘና፣
የሚቻል ከሆነ ዶክተር አማክሪና፣
ያስተካክሉልሽ በቀዶ ጥገና።*
*You have a sex organ with abnormal size;
That it couldn't fit with mine.
Why don't you make a plastic surgery?*

*አዩልኝ ስሙልኝ ይሄንን ስም አጥፊ፣
ምሥሥው ቢቀጥን ቤቴን አለው ሰፊ።*
*Why you blame me for your own defect?
It is your sex organ which is abnormal;
Mine is quite normal.*

The male claims that his sex partner's sex organ is wide. On the other hand, the female asserts that it is not her sex organ that has abnormal size, but the man's is too small. To sum up, many erotic lyrics with taboo elements are usually used to create sexual excitements upon the audience's in *Azmari* night clubs of Gondar town. Through examining the lyrics with the issue of eroticism, which are being popularized in almost all *Azmari* nightclubs, one can notice *Azmaris* non-conformity towards the culture of the society which forbids uttering taboo expressions in public.

4.2. Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics

Unlike other musical performances that are made at concert levels, *Azmaris* have unique performance characteristics. This involves the dramatic actions in which the dialogue between male and female *Azmaris* and variety of dances take place. There are also other features of drama, i.e. turn taking and improvisation. Audience's involvement in the performances is also another feature of the performances. Apart from the above mentioned unique features, in this section of the paper, an attempt has been made to provide a brief overview of the characteristics of setting, clothing and instruments used during the performances.

4.2.1. Styles of the Setting

The performances usually take place in small size rooms at the center of the town (piazza area). At the get of the houses, there are small roofs made up of grass to indicate that the houses are *Azmari* night clubs. The inner parts of the rooms are decorated by deem lights and traditional pictures. It is also usual to observe a big sized picture of Tewodros the II of Ethiopia almost in all night clubs. At some places, samples of traditional tools are put on shelves prepared for this purpose. In most

cases, the seats are installed in a full circle position in order to enable *Azmaris* perform standing in the middle. Concerning the drinks, mainly beer and other alcoholic drinks are served with a considerable amount of addition on the normal prices.

The performances often start from 2:30 – 3:00 in the night and end at 9:00 or 10:00 local times. However, at some occasions, the end of the concerts might be extended to 11:00 (local time) in the late evening.

4.2.2. Styles of Clothing and Instruments

During the performances, female *Azmaris* wear traditional dresses of Gondar- *gunif*, while males wear traditionally woven shirts. Concerning the instruments used for accompaniment, *Masinko* (which is played by a male *Azmari*,) takes the significant place. It is almost impossible to have any sort of performance without the accompaniment of *Masinko*. Drum is another instrument used. There is usually a person who hits a drum in a continuous manner sitting at the corners of the houses. In rare cases, however, there is a use of accordion, a modern musical instrument which is played by moving the ends of a box in and out while pressing the keys.

4.2.3. Styles of Dramatic Actions

Many of the activities take place during the performances have dramatic features. These include, dancing, dialogue, and turn taking and improvisation.

4.2.3.1. Dialogue

The dialogues took place between a male and a female *Azmaris* and between members of an audience and both *Azmaris*. In most cases, the lyrics that are used in dialogues are humorous and erotic lyrics. There are also lyrics forwarded by members of the audience in order to

comment *Azmaris*. To illustrate the first point with an example, let us see the following dialogue took place between two *Azmaris*.

ወንድ፡ ሙቀጫ ጠራቢሽ ያለልክ ሆነና፤

የት አባቴ ላግባው የኔን ዘነዘና፤

የሚቻል ከሆነ ዶክተር አማክሪና፤

ያስተካክሉልሽ በቀዶ ጥገና።

*Male Azmari: You have a bulky sex organ,
That it couldn't fit with mine.
Why don't you make a plastic surgery?*

ሴቷ፡ እዩልኝ ስሙልኝ ይሄንን ስም አጥፊ፤

ምሥሥው ቢቀጥን ቤቴን አለው ሰፊ።

*Female Azmari: Why you blame me for your own defect?
It is your sex organ which is abnormal
Mine is quite normal!*

As shown in the above example, through dialogues, *Azmaris* try to create sexual excitements and capture the audience's attention.

Another type of dialogue is the one that takes place between the members of an audience and *Azmaris*.

ታዳሚ፡ ምን አስገጠገጠህ የሰው አሳየህ፤

ያንተዋን ሽፋፋ ወደ ምን ጥለህ።

*Audience: why do you forget yours
With a deformed leg
And look at other ladies.*

*አዝማራ፡ አሻግራ እያየሁ የሰውን አይናማ፤
አስወስዳት ነበር የኔዋን ገርዳማ።*

*Azmari: Looking at other's beauty,
I was in a position
To lose mine with deformed leg,*

*ታዳሚ፡ እሷን ቆንጆ ነች ቁመናዋ ያማረ፤
ያንተ እግር አለ እንጂ የተወናገረ።*

*Audience: She is beautiful with a slim posture,
That is your leg which is deformed,
But not hers*

*አዝማራ፡ ያንተ እናት አባትስ ምንኛ ተጉላለ፤
አንተን ከማሳደግ ኮባ በተከለ።*

*Azmari: Sorry for your parents,
For they wasted their time,
It was worth to plant Koba
Than bringing you up.*

The dialogue between *Azmaris* and members of the audience continues in this way and ends somewhere when one party gives up.

4.2.3.2. Traditional *Eskista*

Traditional *Eskista* (dance) is another dramatic activity that takes place in the performances. Based on the bits they are singing, *Azmaris* show variety of traditional *Eskistas* mainly that of Gondar, Gojjam, Wello, and Agaw. Apart from accompanying the by clapping hands, people in the audience also involve themselves in the *Eskistas*.

At this moment, almost everyone in the audience participates without worrying about their dance skills. This is one feature which makes *Azmari* nightclubs similar with the modern ones.

4.2.3.3. Turn Taking

Turn taking is one aspect of drama. In the case of *Azmaris* performance, be it in a dialogue form or not, the performers take turns. For instance, whatever the theme of the lyric is, the female doesn't interfere with the male while singing. Rather, she waits till he finishes his part. Indeed, the same thing applies while the female sings.

ወንዱ፡ መልኳን አሳምራ እንደ ወሎ ፈረሰ፤

አንደኛ ክፍል ናት እስከ ዛሬ ድረስ።

Male Azmari: she is beautiful

In a way an empty barrel,

Decorated with colors is.

That she is uneducated.

ሴቷ፡ እኔማ ሳገባህ ዶክተር ነህ ብዬ ነው፤

እኔማ ሳገባህ ሹፌር ነህ ብዬ ነው፤

ለካስ ያንተ ስራ «እንዲች እንዲች» ነው።

Female Azmari: I thought you were a doctor,

I thought you were a driver,

What a sorrowful chance I had!

Of marrying you,

That your job is playing Masinko.

As it has been illustrated in the above example, the female responds after listening to the lyric sung by the male. As far as *Azmaris* sing in couplets (male and female), they follow the above mentioned procedure of turn taking not only in case of dialogue but also in other songs too.

4.2.3.4. Improvisation

According to the definition of Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners (2007), improvisation is an act of doing something without

preparing first, often because the situation does not allow you to prepare. Performers improvise or invent words or musical notes without preparing or learning them before. In case of the performances of *Azmari* lyrics, improvisation is a usual activity which is done by the singers. For instance let us look at the following improvised lyric.

የኢትዮጵያ ሴቶች ውድድር ሄዱና፣
ሰላለኤና ጎጃም አለፉ ፈተና፣
ሰላለኞች በሞተር ጎጃሞች ባንቲና፣
ጎንደሮችም ቢሆን እድለኞች ናቸው፣
አንቲና ባይሆንም ክራቫት አላቸው፣
እባካችሁ ወንዶች ከላይ አድርጓቸው።

*Original: In the beauty contest,
Between Ethiopian ladies,
Those who are from Selale and Gojjam won.
Selales with their engine
And Gojjams with an antenna
Gondorians are also lucky
They have an organ with a tie
Let them take the upper position.*

የኢትዮጵያ ሴቶች ውድድር ሄዱና፣
ሰላለኤና ጎጃም አለፉ ፈተና፣
ሰላለኞች በሞተር ጎጃሞች ባንቲና፣
ምን ያደርግልኛል ያንቺ ባለ አንቲና፣
ከፍተሽ አዳምጭበት ሬዲዬ ፋና፣
ጎንደሮችም ቢሆን እድለኞች ናቸው፣
አንቲና ባይሆንም ክራቫት አላቸው፣
እባካችሁ ወንዶች ከላይ አድርጓቸው።

Improvised: In a beauty contest

*Between Ethiopian ladies
Those from Selale and Gojjam won
Selales with their engine
And Gojjams with antenna
What shall I do with your antenna?
You better use it,
To listen to Radio Fana.*

**ባማሪኛ ውሀ በትግርኛ ማይ፣
እቺን ልጅ ያገኘ መንግስተ ሰማይ።**

Original: water is *wuha* in Amharic,
And *mayi* in Tigrigna;
By any means,
A person having this lady is lucky!

**ባማርኛ ውሀ፣
በኦሮምኛ ቢሻን፣
በትግርኛ ማይ ፣
እቺን ልጅ ያገኘ መንግስተ ሰማይ።**

Improvised: water is *wuha* in Amharic,
Bishan in Affan Oromo,
And *mayi* in Tigrigna;
By any means,
A person having this lady is lucky!

Both the above lyrics are sung in the same night club, at different nights, by the same *Azmari*. As far as the researcher understands, the first lyric seems more original than the second one. To reason out, in the first case, the singer continues explaining the sexual abilities of women representing each places mentioned. However, in the second case, it is not such a difficult task to identify that it is the improvised one. The

reason is that the inclusion of the line about Radio Fana, which is a new view as a result of the begging of Radio Fana transmission in Gondar town. In the next lyrics, the improvised line is underlined.

4.2.4. Styles of Audience Participation

In the performance of Azmari lyrics, the role of the audience is so significant. As it has been explained previously, the audience accompanies the songs by clapping hands and by involving themselves into the dances. The involvement of the audience can also be expressed through dialogues made with the *Azmaris*. Furthermore, lyrics with varied themes are produced and given by members of the audience to be sung by *Azmaris*. Another sort of audience participation is serving as a chorus in some songs which needs chorus.

ድንገት ሳላስበዉ ዉጥን ሳይኖረኝ፤ (2x)

የሚያስለቅስ ፍቅር በድንገት ያዘኝ፤ (2x)

እያንሰፈሰፈ የሚያስለቅሰኝ ፤ (2x)

ፍቅር እንደሆነ ጠቢብ ነገረኝ ፤ (2x)

መንገደኛዉ ልቤ -አይ ልቤ፤ (2x)

መንገደኛ ወዶ- አይ ወዶ፤ (2x)

ከማላዉቀዉ አገር- አይ አገር፤ (2x)

ተሻገረ ማዶ- አይ ማዶ፤ (2x)

I fell in love, suddenly (2x)

Love that makes me weep (2x)

It is love -the wise man told me (2x)

Love that makes me sob (2x)

O! My wandering heart-o! My heart (2x)

Loved a wanderer;

And lost somewhere - somewhere (2x)

In a far distance- far away (2x)

All the underlined phrases above are sung by the audience twice. *Azmaris* sing only the first parts of the lines of the verses and leave the part for the audience. In such cases, the audience plays the role of the chorus. Most importantly, the audience much frequently awards money to the *Azmaris* who created excitements upon them.

In summary, the performance characteristics of *Azmari* songs are dramatic features including dialogue, turn taking, improvisation and dancing. The audience's multi dimensional participation, which is one characteristic of the performance of folk songs, also makes the performance characteristics of the lyrics unique when compared with other sorts of musical performances.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusions

As it has been noted in the first chapter of this study, through studying the folk literature of people, one can preserve its tradition. Moreover, studying the folk literature of people helps to understand the socio-economic, historical, and philosophical realities as well as the consciousness of that society as a whole.

The major concern of this study was to analyze the Major Themes and Performance Styles of *Azmari* Lyrics in Gondar. Though there are several myth stories, which are told by *Azmari* community concerning their origin, it remains difficult to provide direct and evident explanation about the origin of *Azmari* tradition. However, based on their historical development, it is possible to conclude that *Azmari* tradition has existed for a long time in the history of Ethiopia.

In an ancient setting, *Azmaris* used to praise God using the art. As time passes on, however, they have begun to use the art for the sake of worldly purpose. *Azmaris* had been performing almost in all places where the public gathers. Moreover, they had strong relationships with the then kings and authorities of the Fasiledes castle and used to perform the art at the battle fields too. During those times, when the history of the country was dominated by war, *Azmaris* have contributed a lot towards appreciating the warriors through producing lyrics that praise heroism. More importantly, during the times where there was no press, they have served the role of the media.

Currently, *Azmaris* who perform in Gondar nightclubs raise almost every possible issue through their lyrics. The major themes which are raised by the lyrics are the themes of praise, criticism, love versus departure,

hospitality, lyrics with theme of opposite sex relationship and erotic lyrics.

The praise of beauty is among the major themes of praise. *Azmaris* produce several lyrics praising both internal and external beauties of people. Heroes and heroism are also other issues praised through the lyrics. *Azmaris* praise popular heroes of the country and their heroic deeds. However, they devote special attention to praise Tewodros the second of Ethiopia. The praise of historical places and ethnic groups are also among the major themes of praise. Though the lyrics are concerned in praising places in Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo and Shoa, more emphasis is given for praising Gondar and Gondorians. The *Azmaris* also praise any sort of sacrifice that is paid for the sake of friendship.

Apart from several praising lyrics, there are many lyrics that mainly criticize unacceptable behavior of people, audience's reactions during the performances and criticisms towards this generation. By forwarding criticisms towards sets of behavior which are thought to be unacceptable in the society, *Azmaris* play the role of moral agent (guard).

Love and end of love relationship or departure are among the major themes which *Azmari* lyrics raise. More specifically, hidden love is another aspect of love relationship which has been indicated in line with falling in love. There are also consequences mentioned through the lyrics as a result of end of love relationship.

Erotic lyrics, lyrics containing senses and descriptions that are intended to make people sexually aroused are other focal points in which *Azmari*. Lyrics concentrate. As a result, through explaining people's sexual ability and describing the sizes of both male and female sex organs in humorous ways, *Azmaris* try to entertain their audience.

Azmari lyrics have unique features of performance when compared with other musical performances. Dramatic actions involving dialogue, dance, turn taking and improvisation are among the issues that make this performance unique. There is also a significant participation of the audience unlike other sorts of musical performances.

In conclusion, through examining the major themes embodied in to *Azmari* lyrics, it was possible to have some insights of their (the society's where *Azmaris* belong) historical, cultural, socio-economical, and philosophical realities as well as their consciousness. In exploring the themes that praise heroism, one can clearly identify that the history of the society where *Azmaris* belong was dominated by war. For instance, in praise lyrics of the heroes and their heroic deeds as well as in praise lyrics of places and ethnic groups, *Azmaris* attach each and every quality of people and places with their stories which are closely related to resistance and patriotism. To this end, the themes of these lyrics manifest glorification of the past in that the past issues are presented as if they are much worth than the situation at present. As a result, the philosophical realities of the society can be said that it is compiled in to one folder-glorification of the past.

However, it does not mean that the philosophical realities of that society only revolve around the same issue. Through making a close analysis of the lyrics, it is possible to understand that they give priority for good friendship and true love than any other precious thing in the world. In this sense, the status of friendship in the past has been explained as an example for the present harsh trends of the generation towards friendship. Hospitality is also another major concern of *Azmari* lyrics, which originates from the culture of the people of the country.

Like many Ethiopian societies, the society where the tradition belongs, has based its economy on agriculture. This fact was manifested through lyrics that attach the heroic deeds of people with the obvious process of farming. Regarding the social issues, it has been clearly shown that the society owes greatest respects to their identity. This was shown through frequent praising of Tewodros the second of Ethiopia (who belongs to Gondar) and the many lyrics that present Gondar and Gondorians as admirable and wonderful.

Furthermore, the cultural backgrounds in which the society was made up have been shown through encouraging sets of behavior which are thought to be acceptable and through criticizing those which are not. However, examining lyrics with erotic themes that allow extra ordinary transparency towards sexual issues enables to understand *Azmaris* non-conformity towards the norm of the society by uttering taboo words and expressions in public. This is, however, an attempt to capture their audience's attention by presenting sensitive issues in the public.

Last but not least, *Azmari's* composition of the lyrics replacing the previous expressions by those which refer to some technological advancements and latest news tell something about their sharp consciousness towards the issues.

The major concern of *Azmari* lyrics performance in the night clubs is entertainment. People gather from the town and sometimes from other places of the country in order to watch the performances and entertain themselves. As far as audience has a greater chance to participate in the performances than in any other kinds of nightclubs, it allows wide range of entertainment.

Intentionally or unintentionally through the performance of their lyrics, *Azmaris* are contributing a lot in terms of recording history, teaching morality and in contradiction to teaching morality, in appreciating an extra ordinary transparency towards sexual issues. The intentional purpose of *Azmaris*, however, is to use the art as a means of generating income.

To sum up, as far as the tradition has been serving a lot of purposes and is still serving, a close study of the lyrics helps to understand the socio-economic, historical, philosophical backgrounds and current realities of the society. Unfortunately, as a result of negative attitude of the society towards *Azmaris* (though it has shown some improvements) *and* because of the expansion of modern education *Azmaris* are giving up the art to engage themselves on other occupations. Therefore, to benefit from its existence, this prosperous tradition should be given appropriate respect and should be studied very carefully.

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Appendix I

የቃለ መጠይቅ ቅጽ

መግለጫ

ውድ መላሾች፣ ይህ ቃለ መጠይቅ የተዘጋጀው “የጎንደር አዝማሪ ግጥሞች ዋነኛ ጭብጦችና የአከዋውን ስልቶች” ለተሰኘ ጥናት መረጃን ለማሰባሰብ ታስቦ ሲሆን የጥናቱ አቅራቢ በአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ፣ የቋንቋዎች ጥናት ተቋም የውጭ ቋንቋዎችና ስነ ጽሁፍ ት/ት ክፍል በስነ ፅሁፍ የሁለተኛ ድግሪ ተማሪ ናቸው። የዚህ ጥናት ዋና አላማ የአዝማሪ ግጥሞችን ማሰባሰብ፣ ጭብጣቸውን መተንተን እንዲሁም የአከዋውን ስልታቸውን ማጥናት ሲሆን ከዚህ ቃለ ምልልስ የሚገኙ ውጤቶችም በእርግጠኝነት ለጥናቱ ስኬት ጉልህ ሚና ይጫወታሉ። ስለሆነም፣ ለሚቀርቡልዎት ጥያቄዎች እውነተኛና ቀጥተኛ ምላሽ በመስጠት ይተባበሩ ዘንድ በትህትና ይጠየቃሉ። በቅድሚያ አመሰግናለሁ!

1. ስም
2. የትውልድ ዘመን
3. ስራ
4. ስለአዝማሪ አመጣጥ የሚያውቁትን ሊነግሩኝ ይችላሉ?
5. አንዳንዶች “አዝማሪዎች” ይሏቸዋል፣ ሌሎች “አለም አጫዋቾች” የተቀሩት ደግሞ “ዘፋኞች” ይሏቸዋል። ለመሆኑ በአዝማሪዎቹ በራሳቸው ተቀባይነት ያገኘው ስያሜ የትኛው ነው? ለምን?
6. አዝማሪ ለመሆን የሚያስፈልጉ መስፈርቶች ይኖሩ ይሆን? ከአዝማሪ ቤተሰብ የተገኙ ልጆች ሁሉ ተተኪ ከሆኑ የድምጽ ተሰጥኦ የሌላቸው እንዴት ሊሆኑ ነው?
7. አዝማሪዎች የራሳቸው የሆነ የሚስጥር መግባቢያ ቋንቋ እንዳላቸው ሲነገር ስምቻለሁ። እውነት ነው? እባክዎትን ስለዚህ ጉዳይ ዘርዘር አድርገው ያጫውቱኝ።
8. በአሁኑ ወቅት አዝማሪዎች የሚኖሩባቸውን ቦታዎች ይጥቀሱልኝ።
9. ለመሆኑ የአዝማሪወች የኢኮኖሚ መሰረት ምንድን ነው? በምን ይተዳደራሉ?

10. በኢትዮጵያ አያሌ ጦርነቶች መደረጋቸው ይታወቃል። ለመሆኑ በነዚያ ጦርነቶች ላይ የአዝማሪዎች ሚና ምን ነበር?
11. በአዝማሪዎችና በጥንት ግዜ በፋሲለደስ ቤተመንግስት በነበሩ ነገስታትና ሹማምንት መካከል የነበረው ግንኙነት ምን ይመስል ነበር?
የግጥማቸው ዋና ማጠንጠኛስ ምን ነበር ከነገስታቱ የሚበረከት ሽልማትስ ነበር?
12. ከምሽት ክለሶች ውጭ፣ አዝማሪዎች በምን አይነት ቦታዎች ይዘፍናሉ? ከታዳሚዎች የሚበረከት ስጦታስ ይኖራል?
13. ከመጀመሪያው ጀምሮ የአዝማሪ ሙዚቃን ለማጀብ የሚያገለግሉ የመዚቃ መሳሪያዎች ምን ምን ናቸው?
14. ብዙ ግዜ አዝማሪዎች ማንኛውንም ሙዚቃ ከመጫወታቸው በፊት በዘለለኛ ቅኝት - “ክበር ተመስገን የኛ ጌታ ከጧት አንስቶ እስከማታ...” ብለው ይጀምራሉ። ይህ ለምን ሆነ? የራሱ የሆነ ምክንያት ይኖረው ይሆን?

በድጋሚ አመሰግናለሁ!

Appendix II

Interview Questions

Introduction

Dear respondents, this interview is prepared to collect information for the study entitled “Major Themes and Performance Characteristics of ‘Azmari’ Lyric in Gondar town”. The researcher is a postgraduate student in Addis Ababa University, Institute of Language studies in the department of foreign Language and Literature. The respondents are selected elders from ‘Azmari’ community and concerned individuals from tourism and culture office. The core objectives of this study are to collect Azmari lyrics, observe their performance characteristics and explain its nature. Therefore, the results that are going to be obtained from this interview will be helpful for the success of this study. So, you are kindly requested to answer all the questions honestly and directly. Thank you!

1. Name
2. Age
3. Occupation
4. Can you please tell me about the origin of ‘Azmari’?
5. Some people call them *Azmaris*, some others call them ‘Alem Achawach’ (አለም አጫዋች), and still others call them ‘singers’. Which one is acceptable by the ‘Azmaris’ themselves? Why?
6. What are the criterias to be ‘Azmari’? Are all the grown ups from Azmar family going to be decendents? If so, what about those who are not naturally gifted?
7. I have heared that ‘Azmaris’ have their own secret language. Is that true? Please tell me about it.
8. Where do ‘Azmaris’ currently live?
9. What is their economic base?

10. What was the role of 'Azmaris' during the wars took place in the area?
11. How was the relationship between 'Azmaris' and the then rulers of Fasiledes castle? What were the major themes of the lyrics during that time? Was there any reward or gift from the listeners?
12. Where do 'Azmaris' perform outside night clubs? Is there any reward from the audience?
13. What are the original musical instruments used for accompaniment during the performances?
14. Most of the time, performers begin with 'Zelesegna' – (ዘለሰኛ) - “ክበር ተመስገን የኛ ጌታ ከጧት አንስቶ እስከ ማታ፡...” before playing any song. What is the reason behind?

Thank you!

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university. And, all sources of materials used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged.

Name _____

Signature _____

Place _____

Date of Submission _____

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Name _____

Signature _____

Place _____

Date _____

