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SUBJET MATTER ANALYSIS OF AMHARIC ORAL LYRIC POETRY IN RAYA

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Subject Matter Analysis of Amharic Oral Lyric Poetry in Raya

By

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**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Traditional oral lyrics in Raya have been part of the life of the society. It has long been common for Rayans to play lyric poems in working, wedding and funeral occasions. It is also very common for itinerary singers to use lyric poems as they entertain people in drinking houses. Through lyrics people in this area have been reflecting their happiness, grief, political notions, working conditions, social comments etc. However, nowadays many influences are directly or indirectly affecting this cultural practice. One among some influences is modernization. People are using tape recorders in weddings and drinking houses. Farming activities are now changing. Extension packages are now replacing the traditional ways of cultivation. Influence of foreign culture through education is also another threat.

As a result of this condition, it becomes very important to study the oral lyrics which have long been used in the area and to preserve them in a way which would be helpful to see the people's thought, feelings, beliefs, hopes and desires as well as their way of living in general through subject matter analysis.

The study has four chapters. In the first chapter, it has been attempted to show the magnitude of the problem, the purpose and method of the study. In the second chapter, an endeavor has been made to give a theoretical framework of studying oral literature. In the third chapter an attempt has been made to give the general background of the Rayan society. In the last chapter, an endeavor has been made to give detailed subject matter analysis of Amharic oral lyric poems. Taking sufficient sample poems, the researcher has made an attempt to discuss subject matter issues in five genres: love, marriage, elegiac, topical and work poetry. At last, conclusions are drawn about the major themes discussed in the analysis. Poems which are not included in the analysis are made part of the appendix in order to preserve them for other interested researchers in the area.

Key to Translation

Consonants

ʃ	sh
ç	ch
ç	ç
β	gn
j	j
-	t
=	<u>ch</u>

Vowels

%	ä
x#	u
x!	i
..	a
x@	e
â	o

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia is home to diverse ethnic groups which have their own histories, cultural experiences and unique traditional values. Over the years, these have been reproduced and transmitted from generation to generation orally by means of their language and oral literature.

Oral literature is believed to be very important to the present time as it was many years ago. People of different social groups are supposed to have a reaction on different social, political, economic and historical events. Oral literature is considered to be an effective instrument through which these different social groups could give vent to their reaction.

As oral literature is most of the time not subjected to censorship, it could reflect the moods, sympathies and oppositions that the bearers of oral literature have experienced towards the prevailing political, social and economic conditions. So studying oral literature can be helpful in giving a profound insight into a given societal creative imagination and living conditions. Writing of such significance of oral literature, Fäkadä (1994: 10) has the following to say:

The history, culture, literature, etc. of the people and society are found in the folktale, oral poetry and various forms of oral literature. These areas are also important sources to the study of the attitudes of the peasants' life, death, work, development, etc. and their responses to man-made and natural disasters. Studying these untapped sources will help one to better understand the society and the people.

Despite its importance, oral literature in Ethiopia has not been studied sufficiently. Although there is a growing interest of research work in the area, there is still a great potential of literature yet unstudied. One of the genres of this area of literature which has not been given due attention is oral poetry. This is evident in that there has been some MA researches done on this genre:

Daniel Legesse (1998) has assessed the impact of the ‘Red Terror’ on society through thematic analysis of oral poems taken from Gondar and Gojjam. He has reflected that these oral poems mirrored the grief, pain and danger the society have experienced.

Besides, Shibeshi Lema (1996) has examined oral poems collected by Relief and Rehabilitation Center in South Wollo. His analysis has come up with results that show the psychological suffering of the drought victims in South Wollo. Also, Hailu Araaya (1979) has made a translation on some oral poems.

Furthermore, Berhanu Gebeyehu (1998) has studied on Islamic oral poetry and has identified the various genres of Islamic oral poetry and their prominent features.

Moreover, Mesfin Messele (2000) has dealt with “Abbawudde” begging poems. In his study, he has identified five genres and shown their thematic issues. Also, he has shown the nature and occasions of “Abbawudde” oral poetry composition and performance.

In addition to MA theses, there have been some BA theses conducted on oral poetry. Ewnet Aragie (Thematic Analysis of Love Poetry, 1986), Yaze Worku (Thematic Analysis of Work poetry in Dembia, 1984), Tadesse Mekonon (An analysis of Wedding Ceremonies and Oral Poems in Dembia, 1986), Balkachew Chernet (An analysis of Funeral poetry in Menz, 1974) are some of the studies to be mentioned.

Though it has now attracted a growing number of researchers, oral poetry in many areas of ethnic groups and different social groups seems to have been not yet investigated.

One among these is the Rayan oral poetry. As any society does, people in Raya have a treasure of oral literatures which are thought to be built through day to day experience of their life. Among these treasures is oral lyric poetry.

In this area, Teklehymanot (1988) has conducted a research on thematic analysis of war poems and identified that these poems have been used to praise “Gaz” warriors and to motivate people to be involved in war. However, the present study is different from his work. It has been formulated to investigate what Rayans think, feel, and experience through their oral lyric poetry in work, love, marriage, sorrow, and in different current affairs.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

1.2.1. General Objectives of the Study

The study aims at examining the Amharic oral lyric poetry of Rayan society. It also intends to describe the nature of their performance, and composition of oral lyric poetry. Also, it aims to investigate their beliefs, feelings, artistic reactions to different incidents in their area.

1.2.2. Specific Objectives of the Study

The study aims:

1. to collect Amharic oral lyric poems in Raya.
2. to classify the collected poems according to their subject matter and context.
3. to identify the subject matter raised in the poems.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study is considered to have contribution on preserving oral lyric poetry which could give an insight in the experience and artistic imagination of the Rayans. It is also the researcher's conviction that the study will increase to the growing body of knowledge on national oral lyric poetry and oral literature in general. Finally, related fields such as Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology and Ethiopian languages could use the resource to pursue further studies in the area.

1.4. Delimitation of the Study

It is difficult to cover the whole Raya society in the study. It is, therefore, necessary to select a representative area, and in this context, Qobbo, and Alamata wärädas have been selected for the study.

Qobbo has been selected as one of the study areas for it represents places of Raya under the Amhara Regional State. It is also convenient for transportation as it is near the other study area, Alamata.

Alamata is also taken as part of the study area for the oral lyric poetry collected would be representative to the rest of the places of Raya under the Tigray Regional State.

Although there could obviously be a huge source of oral literature in Raya, the study has only focused on Amharic oral lyric poetry because it has not been possible to exhaustively study all the oral genres.

While collecting Amharic oral lyric poems, the hot weather, the short time, and difficulties in searching out and arranging informants have made the collection of the poems painstaking work.

Furthermore, translating the poems from Amharic to English has not been easy; translated poems are likely to lose their original local beauty, depth, rhythm, and sounds.

1.6. Methodology of the Study

1.6.1. Sample of the Study

The study has involved known local singers and/or composers of oral lyric poetry as key informants from the study areas. Besides, it has included some elders who are assumed to have experiences of the cultural, social, and economic practices in the area and who could give

sufficient data with regard to the meaning, cultural and social background of the oral lyric poetry gathered. Purposive sampling has been employed to select these informants (both women and men).

1.6.2. Data Collection Methods and Procedures

In order to collect the Amharic oral lyric poems, the researcher spent forty six days in the study areas. He employed interview and group discussion in order to collect information on the context, performance and meaning of oral lyric poetry collected. Before commencing the actual recording of the data, the researcher met some acquaintances from his hometown, Alamata and asked them to assist him in collecting oral lyric poems and in identifying other people who could offer him information on context, performance and meaning of oral lyric poetry. Besides, he inquired them to identify people who could sing and/or compose oral lyric poetry.

Through this process, the sample has been made to include persons from different places such as Ṭimuga, Qobbo and Alamata. In addition to this, it was made to consist of people of different socio-economic status, religion, sex, age, education.

In general, the sample was made to comprise ten people in collecting oral lyric poems played in the area. Also twelve persons were involved in two group discussions and gave information about the context, meaning and the nature of performance of oral lyric poems collected. Also, interviews were made with three singers who could compose and play poems and with four elders who could give the context of the poems.

In addition to the group discussions and interviews, the researcher made a participant observation on one “tāj bet” (a house where people drink local beer) where a popular “mäsänqo” player took part. He visited this drinking house for two times. He was able to collect poems and to closely see the nature of their performance and context. This has actually served as complementary information for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the poems.

Through these people who assisted the researcher in collecting and giving information about the poems and the observation he has made, it has been possible to record one hundred forty one Amharic oral lyric poems.

Out of these, only eighty three representative poems have been analyzed in terms of subject matter. The rest which are considered to have similar subject matter with the poems analyzed are included in the appendix part.

1.6.3. Methods of Analysis and Interpretation

After collecting the poems, the researcher made an effort to classify them into five genres based on their subject matter and context. Then he proceeded to translate them into English. He also examined the notes taken during the group discussion, interviews, and observation to identify the subject matter of the poems.

With the aid of these notes, it has been possible to substantiate the analysis of the poems. Furthermore, the first draft of the analysis was discussed with a number of persons familiar with the Rayan society and its customs. To participate fully in the world of oral lyric poetry, we must understand how the poets used the different expressions of objects, and concepts in their environment as a means of conveying more than what is actually said or literally meant. Various details, words, concepts and events have been verified. Symbols, analogies and different types of figurative speeches were touched upon as a part of explanation to the subject matter raised.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In chapter one, an attempt has been made to discuss on the statement of the problem, objectives, significance and methodology of the study. The discussion has focused mainly on describing what has motivated the researcher to study oral lyric poetry in Raya. It also explains how he has proceeded to conducting the research and what benefit the research would bring out. In this chapter, a discussion will be made on features, performance and composition, and social significance of oral poetry in general. Besides, there will be a discussion on features of oral lyric poetry which is the major concern of the study.

2.1. Features of Oral Poetry

Oral Poetry, one of the major genres of oral literature, has some distinctive features. As it is a verbal art, it is delivered by word of mouth in a context where the poet and the audience actively interact. This interaction is one of the features of oral poetry.

The poet performs before a given audience in different instances where the audience has a considerable role in the success of making the performance meaningful. In a book on African Oral Literature, Okpewho (1992:57) suggests, “An audience is the only context within which an oral performance makes any sense.”

For Okpewho (1992:57), performance instances where there is no audience face to face with the poet to listen and to attest the performance is hardly an oral performance. For example, shepherds and cattle herders who entertain themselves with songs and flute when they are alone in the long hours of work are barely considered oral performers.

Yet, according to Alembi (2002: 35), even such instances can be considered as oral performances as long as they help the performer produce oral poetry. He remarks that, in such cases, the audience could be in the mind of the performer. The performer could be “singing to an absent

lover”, “preparing to go to war”, or “addressing a deity”. Yet the audience, be it “physically present or present in the mind of an artist”, plays a great role in producing oral poetry.

The next feature of oral poetry is its dynamic nature. Although some kinds of chants such as divination poetry and dynastic poetry are believed to have a fixed text, oral poetry is generally liable to changes when played or recited in different occasions of performance.

Alembi (2002: 36) notes that oral poetry is dynamic for it “has no fixed length of performance”. He further explains that poets decide the length of their performance and their poems based on the contexts of their surrounding such as the audience’s interest. In addition to interest, the poet’s skill of composing poetry is an important factor, which contributes to the inevitable dynamic nature of oral poetry. Okpewho (1992: 45) makes the following points in this regard:

One could go further and say that variation or manipulation of the material is a standard ingredient in the performance of oral literature and that the audience is more likely to be impressed by a performer who shows some resourcefulness with the text of a chant or song than by one who simply recites his lines mechanically.

The third important feature is an accompaniment. As is stated in Finnegan (1970:265), accompaniment has “many different forms, depending, among other things, on the geographical area and its resources, on the genius of the particular people, and on the different genres within a single culture”. She notes that there are some songs which have clapping and/ or dancing as accompaniments and some others which have different types of instrumental accompaniment.

Similarly, Okpewho (1992:46-47) observes that, during performance, movements of different parts of the body such as the face, the hands or any other parts are used as accompaniments so that they could play a role in making the performance appealing.

In different instances of performances, there are instruments such as sticks, jingles, harp, drums, spears, shields, rattles, and flutes, which could be used in combination of songs as a means of

producing impression for the audience and the poet as well. (Alembi: 2002: 36, Finnegan: 2000: 209-210, 228).

Fourthly, poetic devices are important features, which could be helpful to make oral poetry easy and interesting. These devices are repetition, rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, piling and association, tonality, ideophones, imagery, digression, allusion, and symbolism (Alembi, 2002: 37, Okpewho: 1992: 71-104).

Finally, training is another feature of oral poetry. It demands the oral poet to learn how to compose or recite oral poems in different occasions. Oral poets generally learn these skills through observation and doing in different occasions of performance such as working, drinking, wedding and cattle herding (Alembi, 2002: 37).

So far I have attempted to discuss the nature of oral poetry. I have tried to show that oral poetry, in addition to its dynamic nature, demands the interaction of a poet and an audience and, for the poet, an informal training of composing and reciting. I have also tried to show that oral poetry contains features such as poetic devices and accompaniments, which could help to add an appealing power for a performance one intends to have. Now I am going to discuss the nature of its composition and performance.

2.2. Composition and Performance

For some scholars, oral poetry is believed to have no specific composer. They consider that the authorship of a given piece of oral poetry is the community as a whole in which it is played or recited (Babalola 1966, Olajubu 1977:3 as quoted in Alembi 2002: 40).

Yet, these views are considered wrong. Though the specific poet may not be known, any piece of poetry is obviously believed to have a composer (Alembi, 2002: 40). These poets are considered to have undergone a process of training before they try to compose and perform in front of a given audience.

Lord (1960: 32-33) makes the above point of discussion clear. He suggests, "There is an unconscious process of assimilating formulas a young singer has to go through before he

becomes a singer. As a boy he attends different performances made by different singers. There he begins to learn and assimilate the formula.” He further points out the process of learning as follows:

For a considerable time, he will listen to his elders with more attention to the lines and phrases. He will pick them up from any singer whom he hears. As he practices singing by himself he realizes the need for them and he uses them, sometimes adjusting them more or less consciously to his own needs, sometimes unconsciously twisting them. They are not sacred, but they are useful. In this way he acquires the formula of his elders and establishes his own formula habits. He is doing what all singers before him have done” (Lord: 34).

Similarly, it is observed that there are different occasions in which a performer could learn to compose and deliver his/ her song. One of such occasions is boys’ initiation. For example, during the nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth centuries, at initiation ceremonies, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, producing poems in praise of oneself and reciting them publicly when one comes out from seclusion was mandatory for the Sotho-speaking boys (Finnegan: 1970: 139-140).

Another similar occasion of composing is wedding ceremonies. Finnegan (2000: 140) reports, “Weddings too are very widely regarded as another stock situation in which praises are not only possible but required, for the bride or bridegroom is lauded in praises which include references to the fame of their family and its ancestors”.

Ceremonial and public occasions such as “the victories by the chiefs, the advent of distinguished visitors, or at the installation of a new chief” were accompanied by praise recitations (Finnegan: 1970: 141). So these occasions could be considered as opportunities for performers to compose poems.

Furthermore, the occasions of funerals or remembrance ceremonies of death are opportunities for poetry (or, elegiac poetry) compositions. As Finnegan (2000: 148,165) points out, although the occasions on which the laments or dirges are delivered are different, they are prepared and

delivered to celebrate death. They are used as a means of praising the dead person and as a way of expressing the general links between the past and present, the living and the dead.

Finnegan (1970: 200:148) further notes that, in such occasions, women are more likely to be involved in delivering poetry than males. She argues, “The fact that these songs often involve wailing, sobbing, and weeping makes them particularly suitable for women ...Also common are laments sung by women, sometimes led by one soloist, and often accompanied by dancing or drumming.”

Besides, in Akan tradition, dirges were obligatory for Akan girls. They were anticipated to “master the traditional themes and language so that they can compose dirges though they were free to exercise their individual tasks and express their own sentiments” (Finnegan 1970: 166).

War, hunting, and work were other usual occasions for composing poems. As indicated by Finnegan (1970: 211, 222, 231), at the time of departure, returning home, or during battle, warriors compose or recite poems in expressing their exploits and celebrating their victory, or challenging their enemy. During agricultural work such as maize threshing, farmers compose and play them in songs so that they could avoid boredom, co-ordinate and lighten their agricultural labor. During hunting, hunters could praise themselves with poems when they find their hunting successful, that is, when they have an outstanding kill. Besides, they compose or recite poems in solitary situations or during dangerous occasions.

From the above discussion, one can observe that performance and occasions of performance are fundamental means of oral poetry compositions, recitations and understanding the meaning of a given piece of oral poetry.

2.3. Social Significance of Oral Poetry

So far in the above discussion, I have tried to show how a poet comes to learn to compose and the different occasions or instances of performances, which help or demand a performer to practice, compose or recite oral poems. Now I am going to discuss the social functions of oral poetry.

Different scholars who have conducted research on oral poetry believe that oral poetry has many functions. One of the functions is entertainment. As indicated by Okpewho (1992: 106), people use oral literature (or oral poetry) so that they can relieve themselves of “various pressures and tensions both physically and mentally”. During their work, they play the poems and motivate themselves and avoid boredom.

Besides, oral poetry can be used as a means of relaxation after a day’s work. Okpewho (1992: 107) describes this as follows:

Oral literature provides relief after the day’s work is over. In many of African communities, it is common to find families (whether immediate or extended) gathered together in the open compound at night, especially during periods of moonlight. Young ones are even fond of straying far from their own homesteads to congregate at convenient or familiar spots in the village with their friends. In these random gatherings, various types of oral literature are practiced in a more or less lighthearted vein.

During these occasions, both the performer and the audience get the chance of relaxing themselves. “The minds of both performer and audience are relieved of various problems that have been pressing on them throughout the day. Some problems are of course stubborn and will not easily go away, but the entertainment at least provides a temporary respite” (Okpewho: 1992: 108-109).

The singer, on such occasions, provides an opportunity for himself to get his problems out and lighten his burden. Besides, he/she gives an opportunity for the audience thus making it possible for the latter to release their emotions and to create “social harmony and emotionally balanced citizenry”. In other cases, according to Okpewho (1992: 109), the release is more openly demonstrated as the artist pours out his or her grievances directly in song”.

The second function is that oral literature (or, oral poetry) serves a given society as a whole or individually to express its outlooks about itself or about the world. It is to be noted that a society or individual people come to observe and develop a common interest about the world or about themselves, so through a piece of oral literature (or oral poetry) they protect these common interests and outlooks. Okpewho (1992: 110) indicates it as, “To protect this common interests, they often tend to develop and circulate pieces of oral information (whether in songs or in

stories) that will help them feel a certain sense of security in the face of other contending groups within the society”.

Besides, oral poetry could be used as a means of expressing nationalistic views and standpoint. Okpewho (1992: 111) reports “The sense of rivalry is even keener between communities. Here oral literature serves the purpose of asserting patriotic or nationalistic feelings”.

The third function of oral literature (or oral poetry) is that it helps generations to learn about their or their ancestors’ way of living, their identity –their culture and about how to acquire these ways of life, as oral literature houses the various ways of living or cultural elements. Okpewho (1992: 115) writes:

So how is it possible for the citizens of a society to acquire, on a general or collective basis, information concerning themselves: who they are, their origins and connections, and the peculiar ways of living and behaving that identify them as a people and that must be preserved for the sake of cultural continuity? Obviously, such information is contained in the various forms of oral literature practiced in the society –songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles, and so on –which are delivered either privately (e.g., mother to child, artist to apprentice) or publicly (e.g. in moonlight entertainment or in open performances by skilled artists). Through these media the younger member of the society absorbs the ideas that will guide them through life and the older ones are constantly reminded of the rules and ideals that must be kept alive for the benefit of those coming behind them.

The fourth function is that it plays a role of recording the historical practices of states and state heads. It also helps as propaganda in convincing a given audience. According to Finnegan (1970: 141), praise poetry is used to record the “praise names, victories, characteristics, and exploits (or expected exploits) or chiefs.

Similarly, Okpewho (1992: 199), citing the practices of leaders such as Sunjata and Chaka and their bards as an example, reports, “One of the most acknowledged uses of oral literature is in recording the historical experience of a people, both the rulers and the ruled.”

Finnegan (1970: 141) reports, “Praise poetry is also a vehicle for recording of history as viewed by the poets.” It is believed to be an instrument in recording “the great deeds and characters of earlier heroes which are commemorated rather than their mere names or ancestry, and national glories are thus recounted and relived”.

Furthermore, oral poetry is used as an instrument of propaganda. Evidence is the practices of chiefs in making their ruled accept the right to the position is theirs. Finnegan (1970:142) observes, "As so often with panegyric, the recitation to the praises of the chief and his ancestors served to point out to the listeners the chief's right to the position he held both through his decent from those predecessors whose great deeds were commemorated and though his own qualities so glowingly and solemnly depicted in the poetry."

Finally, oral poetry has also a function of satisfying the desire or maintaining one's fame in a given community. Finnegan (1970:141) points this out as follows: "This desire for fame and praise was something considered relevant not only in life but after death: a man's memory was kept alive in his praises."

To sum up, oral poetry has been used as a means of entertaining oneself, expressing outlooks and critical comments. It also helps to maintain social harmony, record historical practices, propagate political views and pressure others. Maintaining one's fame through life time and after death is also one such function.

2.4. Lyric Poetry

In the above discussion, I have tried to show the social function of oral poetry in general. Let us now turn to issues related to lyric poetry, as it is the major concern of the paper.

Lyric poetry, one of the genres of oral poetry, is composed to be sung. As indicated by different scholars, it is almost always accompanied by singing in different occasions (Barnet, 1985: 451, Finnegan, 1970: 241, Gordon, 1978: 464).

As indicated in Finnegan (1970: 241-242), lyric is believed to be played in different contexts. It is played when one is in a battlefield. Besides, it is common to see lyrics played during birth, initiation, betrothal and wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, funeral and memorial celebrations are occasions for playing lyrics.

Even in agricultural and pastoral activities where there may not be instruments to accompany the

song, or an audience to respond, it is common to see cattle herders, shepherds, or workers at a farm, playing lyric poems using their voice. Barnet (1985: 453) observes, “In work songs... where there is no audience, the singers sing for themselves, participating rather than performing ...they really be singing about the way they feel inside. Since they can’t say it to nobody [sic], they sing a song about the way they feel inside”.

Lyric poetry, which is played in these various occasions, deals with different topics. Finnegan (1970: 247, 252-254) notes that lyrics discuss issues of “ love, wives, husbands, marriage, animals, chiefs, this year’s tax, the latest football match, a recent intrigue, the plight of a cripple dependent on his family, an amusing incident, a friend’s treachery or an enemy’s vices, the relationship between variety in the human and natural world –and so on”.

In marriage, lyrics include topics such as how it is attractive, or how it is difficult or absurd (Finnegan: 252, 254). They, for example, address appreciations, wishes of making a marital relationship with a beloved woman, or it may raise topics of premarital and marital conflicts, and partings.

Though lyrics, especially African lyrics, often deal with human issues, (Finnegan: 252), people engaged in pastoral and agricultural activities often play lyrics in praises of their “individual beasts”. Finnegan (1970: 251) observes, “Among pastoral peoples, songs are often composed and sung in praise of individual beasts. Cattle come to mean far more to their owners than mere economic sustenance are accepted as emotional and evocative topics for deeply felt expression”.

In addition to the above features, lyrics have distinctive forms. To begin with, they are believed to be brief. Observing the nature of Somali lyrics, Finnegan (1970: 254) states that lyrics are “characterized by extreme brevity –it usually consists of only two lines”. Similarly, Gordon (1978: 464) notes that lyrics are “...frequently brief, melodic poems in which the writer [composer] is expressing an emotion aroused by some scene or occasion.”

Furthermore, they are mostly antiphonal. They are played in the form of interaction of performers and audience. According to Finnegan (1970: 270-271), a composition of songs in

societies where writing is not a culture involves “co-operation, particularly where there is an accompaniment by chorus, instruments, or dancing, and where, as so often in African lyrics, there is an emphasis both on performance and participation by the audience.”

Within this antiphonal nature of lyrics, there are various patterns with regard to performers. Finnegan (1970: 259) observes, “Sometimes, for instance, there is more than one cantor; two or even three may interchange verses with each other as well as with the accompanying chorus. In other special musical types, the singers take turns in leading the singing, or to answer each other’s song”.

In this form of lyric poetry performance –antiphonal – the soloist plays an important role in deciding the nature of the poems. Finnegan (1970: 259) asserts, “It is he [the cantor] who decides on the song, and when it should start and end.”

Finnegan (1970: 259) also notes that it is for the cantor even to introduce the different important theme of the song “in contrast to the part of the chorus, which is more or less fixed. In other cases, the soloist has complete scope to improvise his part of the verse as he chooses”.

In the above aspects of performance, there is one frequent form of playing lyric poems. This is a form of repeating “two phrases between soloist and chorus” which is called “call and response” (Finnegan, 1970: 259).

Still, there are individual singers in some occasions of playing lyrics. Finnegan (1970: 262) notes, “Certain types of songs such as lullabies and sometimes love and herding songs –always tends to be sung by individuals.”

In general, oral lyric poetry has distinctive features such as brevity, musical accompaniment, and participation of audience. It also has a characteristic feature in that it is performed in different contexts reflecting different topics.

CHAPTER THREE

RAYANS, THEIR PERFORMANCE AND COMPOSITION OF ORAL LYRIC POETRY

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to introduce the Rayans with regard to their location, their socio-economic activities, socio-cultural practices and linguistic background which are relevant to the study. Discussion on performance and composition of oral lyric poetry of these people will also be made. But extended discussions on their location, socio-economic activities, socio-cultural practices and linguistic background would be beyond the scope of this study. Yet, I would like to suggest that they are readily available in senior essays at Addis Ababa University, some of which can be found in the reference list at the end of this thesis.

3.1. Rayans

Through different systems of government to the present, the people in Raya have experienced a re-shifting of localities to neighboring administrative states. Due to this, there is no political location of this area. Yet, based on their cultural patterns and their psychological make up, it is believed that Raya covers the area extending from Ala Wuha in North Wällo to Wajjarat in Tigray. It is surrounded by Lasta and Wag Awrajas in the West, Yäju in the south, Endärta in the north and Afar Regional State in the East (Moges Belay, 2005:11).

The Rayan society has an agriculture based economy. The majority of the population lives in rural areas, practicing a mix of livestock and crop farming for subsistence. Besides, cultivating and harvesting so many crops and having lots of cattle are considered as a mark of status and pride.

For the good of their cattle, the health of their family, and for successful harvest, they usually depend on two dominant religions and the now less practiced traditional beliefs. At this time,

both Islam and Orthodox Christianity are the dominant religions, which are believed to have the dual qualities of offering comfort, especially in times of uncertainty, and of explaining why events happen the way they do. The religious practices found in Islam and those found in Orthodox Christianity do not, however, overlap. They are appropriate in their own right. The two belief systems provide their own explanations of events in terms of Allah's will, or God's will. Both of them consider the promise of a fair judgment and possible reward in the afterlife based on their doctrine.

Though people in these two religions have different religious beliefs, they usually are known to have close social interactions. Respecting their religious differences, they usually co-operate in their agricultural activities and share their happiness and adversaries. During weddings, even during religious festivals such as epiphany, they enjoy the ceremony with different traditional songs and games.

In addition to these two dominant religions, there have been some traditional rituals, which usually call for social gathering in Raya. Though, through pressures from administration, now, the practice of these rituals is declining, people in Raya have practiced them as a way of appeasing angry spirits, exorcising spirits from a victim, or praying for rain, health, rearing children and welfare of their cattle.

These rituals include celebrations for “Zaar”, “Dubärtti”, “Wädajja” and “Tufta”. In the celebrating “Zaar”, there are special people who could sing and drum to allure and appease the “Zaar” spirit. Through the performance of this ritual, it is believed that the spirit would be contented and appeased. In “Dubärtti” selected women would make a special song, which carry messages to Allah/God. In “Wädajja” “qalichas”, Muslim devotees, and their followers, mostly male elders, pray for the welfare of the cattle, and for the property of the people who prepared the ceremony. Besides, it has been used as a way of predicting if a military expedition would be successful. Similarly, “Tufta” has been used by old people (males) to pray for health and wealth. (Mogäs Bälay, 2005: 11).

In addition to these belief systems, it is obvious that language is one of the means of social

interaction in different social gatherings: at home, at work, or at weddings, and other different traditional and religious festivals.

Amharic is one of the languages dominantly used as a native tongue in villages such as Ulaga , Engoyä Mäda, Butana Märkata, Qotqote, Qalla Harär, Maräw Gora, Chuchan Amba, Mägalä, Warobucho, Amäd Agär, Rama, Zobul, Bädäna Loko, Qobbo, Balla, Gobiya, Wajja etc. Besides, Amharic has been used as a second language in the rest of the Raya environs by virtue of its long standing status as a national language. Surprisingly enough, Amharic is even used as a language of their poems during their Tigrigna songs.

Rayan Tigrigna dialect is spoken as a native tongue in the majority of Alamata, Chärchär and other environs of Raya found in Tigray.

In addition to these dominant languages, there is Oromiffa as a mother tongue in places such as Kukufto, Gabatä, Warabayä, Ebo, Där'äyta, Dodota, Dayu, Gädära, Boran, Gända Ararsä, Gända Abära, etc.

3.2. Performance and Composition of Oral Lyric poetry in Raya

Understanding the context and nature of performance and composition of oral lyric poetry in Raya, as is true for any African oral literature, is believed to be paramount important precondition to decipher its meaning and purpose.

In order to appreciate and understand the meaning of a given oral lyric poetry in Raya, it is important to be exposed to the different occasions of oral lyric poetry performance and compositions. One of the occasions that could be helpful to be aware of how oral lyric poems sound and how the oral performance brings the text to have full life is “tälla bet” and “tej bet” in market days. People from the countryside come to market centers such as Alamata, Timuga, and Qobbo to sell and buy cereals, cows, goats, sheep, etc. In those days, country men and people in the town spend their extra time, after the market, in “täj bet” or “tälla bet”.

Those occasions are good opportunities for a “mäsänqo” (a musical instrument similar to violin) player to compose or/ and play oral lyric poetry and make rewards of money or drink from his potential members of the audience in the täj or tälla bet. Besides, it is common for members of the audience to compose poems and dictate the singer to play their poems. They dictate the Azmari saying “biläh bäl” which means “play the poems I give you just as I do”. One can see such audiences doing this turn by turn composing and playing different oral lyric poems which are related to their work, sorrow, love, marriage, and different topical issues such as corruption.

Through this instance of oral lyric poetry performance and composition, one can see that different genres of oral lyric poems could be composed and taken as a proof for people who grossly generalize on the nature of Ethiopian oral poetry. As Finnegan (1970: 97-98), quoting Chadwicks iii (1940: 525), has indicated Ethiopian oral poetry is considered to be uniform:

For instance, one of the characteristic results of the professional free-lance poets (azmaris) in Ethiopia was that poets were found everywhere, from the courts to the poorer houses, to the roads, or to public gatherings, commenting on their audiences or on local events, a kind of gazette chantate in their reflection of contemporary public opinion. Their persons were sacrosanct and they were received honorably everywhere. In the opinion of the Chadwicks it was this which to a large extent led to the uniformity of Ethiopian poetry.

However, looking at the above instance of the nature of performance and composition of oral lyric poetry, one can refute Chadwicks’ generalization.

Another occasion of performance and lyric poetry composition is the ceremony of weddings. Wedding ceremonies in Raya are days of merriment between family, kinsmen, kinswomen, neighbors and friends of both bride and groom. They are performed in both of the groom’s and the bride’s families. Prior to wedding ceremony, neighbors, close relatives, and friends will be gathered so as to help the bride’s or the groom’s family in preparing local drinks, food, and other things. During this preparation, they play oral lyric poems which raise different topics based on their interest. During the day of the marital union, invited people will eat, drink, sing and dance for the bride and for the groom. In the bride’s and the groom’s houses, both women and men

play poems through different forms of songs and accompaniments such as hand clapping, drumming and traditional dancing. Men play different forms of songs when going to the bride's house and when taking the bride to the groom's house.

Besides, it is common for "mäsanqo" (a violin like instrument) players to join the ceremony so that they could make money through praising different people who are invited and so that they enjoy drinks, food and the merriment in the ceremony. They take this chance to praise, comment and raise different ideas through their oral lyric poems.

The third occasion of performance and composition of oral lyric poetry is during farming activities. During busy seasons, it is common for Rayan farmers to work along with their whole family or with other people in their neighbor. They usually work in "wäbära", a customary practice of working together in weeding or harvesting seasons. During these seasons, the farmers play oral lyric poetry so that they could avoid boredom and motivate themselves and their colleagues to be fully involved in the farming activities. Commenting lazy farmers, self-praising, praising lovers or spouses, and animals are very common practices of work songs. Besides, it is a frequent practice for individual farmers to sing and play oral lyric poems during the time when they engage in tilling their land, keeping their sorghum from birds or herding their cattle.

Ritual songs likewise are occasions for lyric performance and composition. Songs performed at healing rituals (zaar) call for performance and composition of oral lyric poetry. The diagnostic procedure can take several forms. Socially important people to the patient are invited. These include kinswomen, neighbors, and other fellow members. Both free-lance poets ("mesnqo" player) and other known traditional singers are also invited to participate in the "zaar" performance during which people intend to free a "zaar" patient from his suffering. People often use drumming and dance to compliment the words of the songs.

Furthermore, oral lyrics are composed and/or played during the time when sorghum and maize are partially ripe, that is, soft to eat and when sweet cane of sorghum locally known as "tinqish" is full-grown. During such occasions, young boys from different villages, at night, will be gathered in special stall of cows where there is cow dung and where this cow dung is

comfortable to wrestle. Besides, these young men from different villages usually go away to a sandy dry river for wrestling. In such occasions they play different forms of songs, usually “hota” songs, to call out young men to the wrestling place, to overcome the burden of the tiresome journey and to derive pleasure from their songs. Yet the contents of poems could be of different topics.

Finally, holidays are occasions for composing and/or playing lyrics. For example, during epiphany ceremony, which takes place on the 11th and 12th day of January in Ethiopian calendar women as well as men wear special clothing and ornaments for the celebration. The celebration of this ceremony usually takes place throughout the occasion that the ark is carried from the ceremonial station to the church. Escorting the ark, throughout their way to the church, different groups of people play oral lyric poems in the different kinds of traditional songs. Though the very purpose of singing is to accompany the ark, and to show due respect, and homage to it, the content of the lyrics played during such occasions may not be of religious. Dancing, drumming, stamping the feet in a regular rhythm, hand clapping, clashing sticks are common accompaniment of the songs.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBJECT MATTER ANALYSIS OF AMHARIC ORAL LYRIC POETRY IN RAYA

In the previous chapter, an attempt has been made to provide the general background information of the study area. Also, there has been an endeavor to explain the nature of performance and composition of oral lyric poetry. In this chapter, there will be an extended discussion on subject matter of oral lyric poetry in Raya. Yet, considering the long tradition of Raya and the bulk of its lyric poetry, it would be possible to say that the lyric remains relatively unexplored. To bridge this gap, based on the collected lyrics, and their subject matter and context, this study makes an attempt to classify them into five genres: love poetry, marriage poetry, elegiac poetry, topical poetry and work poetry. Each oral lyric genre will be described separately, taking considerable examples.

4.1. Love poetry

Love between opposite sexes, an important human attribute and a binding social force, is expressed in various ways in the Rayan oral lyric poetry. Discussing all the various ways of expressions of love in Rayan lyric poetry is not practically possible; yet an attempt will be made to discuss the most recurrent ones. According to the lyrics collected, love is by and large expressed in terms of lament, dedication, yearning, sadness, beauty, and gratification.

Performing lyrics of laments for love which is unfulfilled or gone away, or on strife is a common way of expression in Raya. This can be illustrated as follows:

1. Xn@¥ zNDé LkRMM BI >"½ My death is due this year, not beyond,
kb> →ü §Y xNcf Xy→y>"Ÿ For upon my illness, your love is added.

In this piece of lyric poem, the speaker laments that love becomes a sorrowful phenomenon which could worsen his sickness and even fasten his death. Though he is sick, his sickness could not make him forget his loved one. Her image comes to his mind recurrently and makes him love-sick. Here the expression of lament of sickness and an avoidable death in the specified time are not his emphasis. He uses this expression simply to show how much strong his feeling about his unfulfilled love is. Following are further illustrations on laments of love which are expressed in terms of pain, sickness and death:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2. ywF SU bšh# bQmM t sRè½
FQR> x" - ለኝ ካንጂቴ ስር ገብቶ። | Deep within me goes your love,
And there it gives me pain. |
| 3. -M, Āi h# XĀ MNLÆT Bă T½
qBÊ XN-ü » Ä k!Än MHR-TÝ | If I die, for I am a love patient,
My burial is at ‘Engoyä Mäda’,
At Kidanämihrát. |
| 4. አንቺን አንቺን ብዬ አንቺን ካላገኘሁ፣
glz@ ä tN XN©! I ጃM xLt mBh#Ý | If my yearning for you goes unmet,
I’d rather die than live with my ill-fate. |
| 5. b@T>Ā b@t& šÈ I šÈ nWj
DM}>N xS, " nFs@ I!wÈ nWÝ | As your house is next door to my house,
You let me hear your voice,
My soul would leave my flesh otherwise. |

Love could be unlikely to be fulfilled. In Raya, as could be true in any other places, lovers, especially young men could fall in love without prior adequate information or experience. They may fall in love with a girl without being loved. They could also think that courage and persistence are the only solutions to their denied love. So in pursuing such a love, they lament their woeful experience in terms of a burning sensation given rise by the kind of love in question.

In the second piece of oral lyric poem, the persona metaphorically expresses love in terms of pain, a pain such that one could feel when burnt. His deep pain is reflected in the second line of the poem as a lament which seems to call for a solution from his loved one.

The third lyric piece similarly reflects that the persona has experienced a pain of love. The pain that love gives him seems to be so strong that his death is likely to come. Through the expression of pain and the probable death that results from it, he laments how deep and strong his love is.

The fourth love poem shows how the persona is strongly intent on attaining reciprocation from his loved one. It seems that his suffering on account of his love has been long and serious. Yet his ultimate wish is to fulfill his love. He appears to endure the pain of love thus trying to achieve greater gratifications than any attainable on earth.

In the fifth piece, the persona seems to be denied of seeing his loved one, for all that she is a neighbor. In Raya, to love a neighbor and to make a love relationship without marriage is traditionally wrong. The persona, though he could not have the chance of seeing the girl, insists that her voice can relieve him from his impulse of love. He laments that his soul will depart from his flesh if she does not positively respond to his love. In addition to the above instances, love laments can be expressed in terms of equating love with something burdensome and something causing restlessness. The following poems will illustrate this point:

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 6. | yÖYÂ mk!Â y¥YcI WN½
x¹K¥" ydC yFQR Û²NŸŸ | Away she walked,
Loading me her love things,
Which a car made in China can't carry. |
| 7. | FQR FQR xI #T SÑ N xúNsW½
kDNUY YbLÈL I t¹kmW sWŸŸ | Simple is love to call,
Yet it is heavier than a stone,
For a person who is in love. |
| 8. | ydrq I 0, xYm- m_M½
¹UN ywdd xRæ xYqm_MŸŸ | As there can be
No sucking of dry lemon,
So is there no respite for a man,
Who's in love with a pretty woman. |

The sixth lyric poem seems to be composed very recently. The persona seems to associate his experience of love with the observation he has made in the road construction undertaken by Chinese people working in Raya. In Raya, there has been a road construction undertaken by Chinese people in recent years. While constructing, they have used big trucks to transport concrete and stones from different places. So the persona expresses his lament of love in terms of truckload. To him, love becomes heavier than a truckload.

The seventh lyric item similarly expresses love in terms of a weight of a stone, probably a heavy one. He claims, "People could say love is an easy experience, but for those who fall in love, it is heavier than a stone, a challenging practice."

In the eighth lyric piece, the persona expresses that restlessness is inevitable if a man falls in love. He has made an analogy based on what one doesn't do. As it can be seen in the poem, one does not suck a lemon once it is dry. Similarly, a person who falls in love does not keep quiet. He strives to alleviate the restless woe of love. He sacrifices different things to attain and fulfill his love. Following are examples of sacrifices:

9. Xn@ ygrm" xND ngR BÒ½ Xn@ yqĐ LJ n" Xú* y" LÒŸ	I am surprised upon one thing: That I am a son of a priest, And my lover a daughter of shaikh.
--	--

10. xNcĚ Â BI >" Xn@ mMĂ LĚ½ XNd DqNDqĚT MDR M¹ LMĚŸ	What matters is your will, Come what may, I feel sure, To come to you unseen.
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11. zNì b!zrU kmNgÇ §Y½ mTryS b!dgN kdr t&I Y½ 𐑦𐑦 𐑦𐑦 𐑦𐑦B" mQrT xI wYŸ	A python on my road, Or a gun at my chest, Won't stop me from going If a message is sent from that girl.
---	---

In Raya, there are two dominant religions: Christianity and Islam. Though the two religions are totally different in doctrine and religious practice, they would not prevent their members from social interaction. Rayans are very sociable people who love to be with others. It is common for them to share different things in their day to day life. They even share the pleasure of their religious festivals. Yet, the two religions do not allow their members to intermarry or to have love relationships. Members have to marry or make love relationship with someone who has the same religion. However, the persona in the ninth lyric poem has crossed this boundary. Though his father and his loved one's father are religious leaders ("qalicha" in Raya is a Muslim religious leader), we observe the persona wondering at how he or his loved one are determined to sacrifice his/her religious precepts for the sake of love. To him, love has such an enormous binding force which even the power of religion cannot prevent from making its impact. It forces people to leave even such things.

The tenth lyric poem has the same subject matter with the above poem. It signifies that the persona is a love devotee. The poem seems to reflect an irregular love relationship, one which does not hold the traditional consent of Rayans. Love relations with a married woman or unmarried young girl are likely examples. In such circumstances, lovers should be out of the sight of other people when they meet and derive their love pleasure. But the persona's loved one seems to be uncertain. She appears to believe that other people will see them and that their love relationship will be public. So he claims that he is a devotee to their love. For this, he assures his lover that he would do all in his capacity to come unseen.

The persona in the eleventh lyric poem seems to pay more sacrifice than the previous two discussed above. The scale of his love is higher than the fear of lethal things. If his lover sends someone for him, nothing will be a road block to him. A python is one of the most dangerous snakes. Yet, a python on his way will not prevent him from going to his lover. A gun's bullet is a killer. Still, a gun targeting at his chest will not stop him from going to his lover. He is claiming that he dedicates his life to his love.

In addition to what has been discussed in the above analysis, love can also be expressed in terms of yearning for meeting one's loved one. It is possible for love to fail. It is also possible for love

to be maintained again or lost forever. People, who have experienced the feeling of pain because of parting, yearn to restore their love. They express this feeling and wish of maintaining a broken love through their oral lyric poetry. An example is given below:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 12. XMÆ XMÆ YI ¾L XNÄW LQî LQî ½
yt ÄwTNbT SF%W Äê I Bî Ý | Tears well up in my eyes,
When I see the place
We used to frequent,
Is overgrown with weeds, |
|--|---|

If a land is kept aloof from animals or people, it becomes weedy, or grassy. As can be seen in the poem, the persona remembers that the place where he used to play with his loved one has turned out to be weedy. This reminds him of his lost love. He seems to be deeply saddened. His pain of parting from his loved one seems to be so intense that his sadness culminates into tears. He appears to be yearning to regain his previous love pleasure.

It is common for Rayan lyric poetry to be full of love praises and gratifying expressions about beauty. But the recurrent expressions of love praises in terms of beauty are the different parts of a girl's or a woman's body such as waist, teeth, hair, eyes, and breast. In addition to these, lovers use skin color as a mark of praise to their loved ones. Though it is believed that girls or women change the verbs of the lyric poems in the area and use them to praise males, these expressions are usually used by male when praising their loved ones. Let us now take some sample poems to illustrate this.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 13. h# T ÆR¥>§ xYÇNM mNgl @½
>NË* - መዝማዛ እንደ ካቻማሌ። | She is so slender, and so long is her waist,
Like a bus, called Caccamali. |
|---|---|

- | | |
|---|--|
| 14. yúR WS_ mNgD YmSSL wgÆ*½
mc& ÆS→W" L R Æ* _UÆÝ | As her waist is like a narrow path,
A path within a grassy land;
It is not easy to know
Whether she is full or starved. |
|---|--|

15. wGD UḡĀ IḡĀ öi sW LmLkT½ Away with you, ‘Gara Läncha’
y, - qI I W >NÈ* XNd wrqTÝ So that I could see a girl from Qobbo,
Whose waist could coil as does a reel of paper.

As can be seen from the above three pieces, a woman’s long waist is a mark of beauty and thus subject to expressions of praise for loved ones in Raya. Rayans praise their loved ones drawing analogies from things they observe in their environment.

In the thirteenth lyric poem, the persona seems to make an affectionate response to his lover singing a praise of beauty in terms of his admiration for the shape of her waist. He compares the length of her waist with a recent public bus called “caccamali” which has longer size than other buses in the area. Using a combination of simile and hyperbole, the persona has made his love praise to be a lofty expression of beauty.

Though he has used a different means of expressing his loved one’s shape of waist, the persona in the fourteenth lyric has made a similar love praise as is in the thirteenth lyric poem. He has compared her waist to a narrow path meandering in a grassy land and with one who has gone on a diet. As a path in a grassy land is difficult to see, for it is very thin and for it is covered by the grass that grows out on either side of the path, so is difficult to know whether she eats to her fill for her waist is so thin. This expression has nothing to do with her eating behavior. This analogy is made to appreciate her slender waist.

The fifteenth lyric poem seems to be a stronger an expression than the preceding two. The lover seems to look towards Qobbo and appears to find Gara Läncha, a mountain, blocking him from seeing his loved one in Qobbo. The persona has employed a combination of simile and hyperbole in order to heighten the beauty of his loved one’s waist. The expression “Away with you, ‘Gara Läncha’” gives an impression that the lover has been lured strongly to his loved one’s beauty. The comparison of her waist to a reel of paper through simile is hyperbolic, for it exaggerates how delicate her waist is. So this love praise of beauty seems to be loftier.

Admiration of love in terms of the beauty of one's teeth is another common way of love expression. Lovers in Raya appreciate their loved one's teeth in terms of whiteness. They also praise their lover's deep dark color of the tattooed gum which can make a color contrast with the whiteness of their teeth. Following are examples:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 16. ê© W b→C xgÄ qbl ø½
y_Rú* WQ%T YI WÈL bÊÝ | So beautiful is her tattooed gum,
That it could buy an ox |
| 17. XTü _RS>N Mn# Ñ èb→L?
h, N xgLDä NÈt\$ gDI ð→LÝ | Oh, sister, what happened to your teeth?
It hitched a silk and died of whiteness. |
| 18. xY Â¥ bn@ äT Xn@ xFR SÇN½
XSk! xNÁ úQÂ LyW _RSHNÝ | Come away my love, please,
And break into laughter,
So I can have a look at your immaculate teeth. |

As one can see in the sixteenth lyric poem, the persona claims that the beauty of his loved one's tattooed gum "can exchange for an ox". One may think that this comparison is weak, but observing the value of an ox among the Rayans (especially the farmers) and seeing how much they dedicate to their ox as a sign of respect and crucial property, one would imagine how this persona's love praise for his loved one is so lofty. He puts the beauty of her tattooed gum and the value of an ox on the same scale.

Similarly, the persona in the seventeenth oral lyric poem has given a strong praise for the beauty of his loved one's tattooed gum. But his way of expression is unique in that he compares it with black clothing worn during period of mourning. It is a traditional practice for women to hitch a deep black blanket-like "shäma" as a mark of sadness when they mourn a death of their close relative or loved one. The persona uses this comparison in order to show how the color contrast of his loved one's tattooed black gum and white teeth has brought ultimate beauty to her.

The persona in the eighteenth lyric poem seems to be lured by the beauty of her loved one's teeth. Though she has not made a praise of specific quality of the teeth, it is possible to say that

his teeth are exceedingly nice-looking to her. She is dying to see her loved one's teeth while he laughs.

Rayan love poems which have to do with praise of skin color indicate that a chocolate skin is one of the hallmarks of beauty. Following are examples:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>19. - YM ywdd n+ §M ĀrÆ½
z§I M Yñ%L j nT XNdgÆŸ</p> | <p>One who loves a chocolate girl,
And rears white cows,
Enjoys life forever
As if he were in heaven.</p> |
| <p>20. XÆB sl K§k@ mN→ nW M§s#½
- YM ywdd xY≠RM nFs#Ÿ</p> | <p>Merciless is love, a deadly venom,
If it is for a chocolate maiden.</p> |
| <p>21. y- YM xd%o xn#rW kb@t ½
s!Rb" b§" T s!→ - F xNj tŸ</p> | <p>They entrusted to me a chocolate girl
To keep her in my house,
But overpowered by my hunger for her beauty,
I broke my promise.</p> |
| <p>22. Yÿ wN² wNz# ĀbQ§L XNi D½
ያካል መጨረሻ - YM sW mWdDŸ</p> | <p>If you have to love, love a chocolate person,
For this is a mark of supreme beauty.</p> |

As is shown in the nineteenth lyric poem, the gratification one can derive from a loved one who has a chocolate skin color has been compared with the pleasure one can get from rearing white cows. The gratification is as ultimate as the pleasure one enjoys eternal life in heaven.

It is believed that white cows can be seen even from a distance, and can be known whose cows they are. They are easily identified. So there can be a room to appreciate the man who owns these cows. Similarly, a man who loves a chocolate girl is esteemed for doing so. For chocolate is a highly appreciated skin color as a mark of beauty, people could appreciate the lover in terms of his loved one's beauty.

The persona in the twentieth lyric poem has made his love praise for his loved one in terms of her chocolate skin color as is in the nineteenth lyric poem. However, his way of expression is different. To him, chocolate skin has a supreme power of attraction. Once a person is lured by the beauty of a girl who has this color, the girl will be the only love cure for him for her beauty is as powerful a sting as the venom of a snake.

The twenty first lyric poem calls for an explanation on the value of promise in Raya so that we can measure how powerful the persona's love praise on the beauty of chocolate color is. In Raya as in any other places in Ethiopia, promise is a highly respected social value. Anyone who is entrusted to keep something has to respect his promise. By the same token, this persona has been entrusted with keeping a chocolate girl in his home. However, the powerful beauty of her skin color has caused him to break his promise. So, one can see from this that chocolate skin color is considered to be highly beautiful. We can see this conclusive statement from the twenty second oral lyric poem. In this lyric poem, the beauty of a chocolate girl is supreme; nothing equals it.

Love praises for beauty are also made in terms of the beauty of a girl's or a woman's hair. Following are two couplets to illustrate this.

23. mNdf%o wDÃ SÑ nW ÄLÒ½ Only her 'qarisa' (hair style) can be,
 ¹! BR Ygm¬L " ¶úê BÒŸ Worth thousands for it is a large mass.

24. Ñ + Q§ LY ÂT U» ê KMR. She is so little a girl whose hair is a large mass,
 bh# T s¶¬ qr bJ MRŸ Which could not be done with two hairdressers.

As can be seen in the above two pieces, the personas have made love praises in terms of their loved ones' large size hair. For the first persona, the size of his loved one's hair is worthy of a thousand birr. For the second, his loved one's large mass of hair can't be done by two hairdressers. Even with two hairdressers her hair has been left unfinished.

In addition to the above expressions, it is also common to see Rayans to make love praises in terms of the beauty of one's eyes. Through their lyrics, they appreciate their loved ones' bright eyes. The following lyric can illustrate this.

25. XúT x→NDÇ XN= T YbŞŞLj Do not start the fire, for a firewood will be wasted,
 k#%Z x→NDÇ ŞMÆ YbŞŞLŸ Do not kindle a lantern, for the gas will be finished;
 xY• ÷rNtƒ nW s!Ãb%o ÃmŠLŸ Her eyes are electric light bulb,
 So they will give us light for the night.

It would not be difficult for anyone to imagine how much brighter a light bulb can be than a fire or a lantern used in a house. This persona has made love praise to his loved one in terms of the beauty of her eyes. Her eyes are as bright as the light bulb.

Praising the beauty of a girl's breasts is also another way of love praise expression in Raya. An erect shape of a breast is considered as a mark of beauty. The following couplet can illustrate this.

26. g#C g#C ĀI nW - #a XNd xÆËÜ Her erect breasts are like ripe papayas,
 S- BQ xDRk#' YfnÄL BÜŸ I stood vigil over the whole night,
 For fear they would burst open.

To the persona in the above lyric, his loved one's erect breast is a sacred delicate thing, which needs to be protected from a touch lest it should burst.

To sum up, in Rayan oral love lyrics, laments, dedications, and love praises in terms of beauty are the major recurrent subject matter. Mostly these lyrics express these issues with striking figures of speech which could bring vivid images to one's mind.

4.2. Marriage Poetry

Marriage in Raya, as is in any other place, is believed to be an institution which a family is built upon. Married partners are expected to show love, acquired or otherwise, trust, devotion, and cooperation with each other so that they could maintain their marital ties. For partners to succeed in their marriage, there are sets of beliefs which have been practiced in Raya.

Though now changing, one of the beliefs has been the need to exercise early marriage. In the earlier times, parents marry their son to a girl or their daughter to a boy at a young age. Girls were as young as 13 to 15 when they married and boys as young as 17. Due to this practice, boys seem to be tuned accordingly. Let us see the following examples to elaborate this.

27. $y x \S \forall \dot{E} \ k \# \rightarrow \ y \mid \ W M \ q \# \dot{A} \frac{1}{2}$ For my “kuta” does not have a flee,
 $x \acute{u} D U T \ x \mid \ h \# \ T h \# N L \ " \ \tilde{N} \ \dot{A} \ \dot{Y}$ Let my loved one a child be,
 So I will let her grow under my care.

(“kuta” in Raya is a traditional bed.)

28. $\tilde{N} \ \dot{A} \ L J \ \hat{A} T \ B \ddot{u} \ B N \ " \ T \ B N \ " \ T \frac{1}{2}$ I belittled her for she was such a small girl,
 $x \tilde{N} \ " \ " \ x d r C \ x \S H \ Y m R \ " \ T \dot{Y}$ But she gave me warmth; may Allah bless her.

In the twenty seventh lyric poem, the would-be bride seems to prefer his marriage partner to be a young girl. He says that he will be committed to bring her up till she becomes a fully-grown girl to responsibly manage her household. He is sure that his home would be convenient to his future marriage partner.

Similarly, the persona in the twenty eighth poem seems to be satisfied in his marriage beyond his expectation. As can be seen in the poem, the persona was not happy about his marriage for his marriage partner was a little girl. However, he became very happy and blessed her for giving him satisfaction.

Girls also shared this belief. Early marriage has been considered important for the girl to maintain her chastity. Virginity has been used as a mark of honor for the girl and her parents, as well as for the boy she is to marry. For this reason, a girl is advised to be restricted to her homestead unless she has a family duty out in the farm, at a market, or to a river, etc. Loyalty is expressed in terms of the girl's confinement to her home. If a family wants to marry its son to a girl who has been suggested as a prospective daughter-in-law and wants an opinion from a neighbor, the highest quality is her confinement to the homestead. The following poem illustrates this.

29. bmk!ÂW mNgD k#L¥N ÃÃCh#½ _qR Wš h#B I Mß §B§Ch#Ÿ	If you see my lovely one on the road, I will make myself a black dog To beg and serve you food.
---	---

In the above poem, the persona seems to be proud of his fiancée's confinement, for to go out in a street for girl is considered ill-mannered in Raya. He is bidding that she has good manners and that she is free from waywardness. We can see how he strongly trusts her. If this is not true, he is saying that he will serve his audience food by acting like a black dog, which is considered to be bad.

Children are usually under the guidance of their parents, so they have to abide by their wills and beliefs. However, the persona in the following poem opposes the parents' stand on early marriage.

30. XúM LJ Xn@M LJ tUb# YI #ÂL½ yt sqI W ùZ ¥N ÃwRDLÂLŸ	They tell us to get married while we are only kids, But how can we manage our household chores?
--	--

Early marriage has been believed to be appropriate. Yet the persona in the above poem is against this idea. For him, he and his would-be partner have not grown to the level of maturity that marital life requires. That is why he complains: "We are not matured enough to bear marital responsibility."

Marriage choice is made by parents. Unlike girls, boys can make the choice. Still they need to have their parents' consent. If boys act against the consent of their parents, it is likely that the latter will deny them support. The following poem illustrates this.

31. ካልተቀፈቀፈ ቁንቁራ ገብኜ፣ I got myself into an untrimmed “qunqura”, a thorny tree,
 XNd gÆH WĒ xI #' zmî cŸŸ An unacceptable love relation with someone,
 But my parents denied me a hand,
 And told me to face it alone.

The arrangement of marriage has usually been based on the relationship of parents. After the two families agree upon the marriage of their children, wedding day would be set, and then the children will get married. A dowry from the girl's family and a gift from the boy's are expected. This is meant to support the newly wedded ones economically.

However, the persona in the above piece seems to have been lured by the beauty of a girl. He has gone out of his parents' will while making a love relationship and then getting married. He has expressed the serious problem he has faced metaphorically. “Qunqura” is a thorny tree known in the area. Once you are in it, you will get caught up.

By the same token, unaccepted marriage has become “qunqura” to the above persona. Consequently, his parents denied him economic support. Because of this he considered his marriage as a bitter peel to swallow.

In Raya choice of marriage is a serious issue. One has to be careful to meet the requirements of the tradition while choosing a marriage partner. The following poem warns youngsters against choosing their marriage partner merely based on beauty, for beauty could be deceptive.

32. > YN bk#L ĀM%L _RS bWQ%T½
 Xym%r - # XĀ† nW ¥GÆTŸŸ

One can beautify teeth with tattoos and eyes with antimony dust;
 So it is wise to see and choose a spouse before a wedding is set.

economic strength and faithfulness are believed to be causes for satisfaction in marital life. Spouses may feel unhappy or regret if they do not meet the qualities they expect to have. Let us now see poems which reflect these ideas.

35. 1U äYzRÂ 1U ½ ST ÃI W sW½
ksW sRG xYÿDM kb@t\$ sRG xI Wÿ

He who has a beautiful “moyzär”, and a beautiful spouse,
Need not go to others’ wedding, for he has one in his own house.

In the above poem, the persona seems to suggest that a husband whose wife is beautiful is likely to be happy. He compares the pleasure beauty can give with the merriment one can derive from a wedding. During weddings, invited people will have an opportunity to drink, eat, sing, and dance as much as they need. They are likely to derive happiness from these. Similar is the situation for a man who has a beautiful wife. He is likely to derive gratification out of the beauty of his wife.

In addition to beauty, having a child is another source of happiness one can get from marriage. Following are poems which reflect this idea.

36. xgR XNd öi wNZ XNd ÇR¥T½
½ ST XNÄcİ ÃI LJ XNdgnTÿ

As “Qobbo” is a home, so sweet,
And “Hormat” a river, so sweet,
So is a spouse like you,
And a daughter like Genet.

Qobbo is appropriate for its suitability of its cultivation. It has fertile plain land. In this place, there is a popular river called Hormat. This river is a source of happiness for the farmers, for it gives them water throughout the year.

The persona in the above poem compares his wife with this river and with Qobbo at large. As these two give happiness to people who dwell there, so does a beautiful wife to the persona. She has given birth to a daughter, Genet. This seems to give him maximum happiness. That is why he

praises his wife and his daughter, Genet. The following poem also shows how a child is the center of marriage.

37. ተዋደው ተዋደው ካልወለዱ ልጅ፣

XNd mNgd^{3/4} dHĀ êL nW XN©!Ÿ

If love does not cause lovers to have a child,
Their love relationship would not endure,
It would be like wayfarers' bidding each other farewell.

Love is a binding force in a marriage relationship. But having a child is more binding a force than love. The above persona stresses the need to have a child in a marital relation if a marriage is to be sustained. If spouses are unable to have a child, it is likely for their marriage to end up. So a marriage without a child is likened to momentarily meeting of strangers or mere acquaintances bidding each other farewell afterwards.

As there can be causes of satisfaction, there are also reasons for regret and disruption of marriage. One of these reasons is believed to be poor communication between the partners. If partners open their ears to rumors and deny communication to their partner, their marriage will be liable to be broken. Following is a poem which reflects this thought.

38. yĒt& qI bT xTn" nqf

sW ngr^{3/4} nW sFR xSI " qŸŸ

My ring, do not move,
For people are trouble makers,
And a cause for separation.

A ring is believed to be a symbol of union in marriage. The above persona seems to address his marriage partner using his ring symbolically. His ring is his wife. The movement or removal of the ring from his finger signifies the instability of his spouse because of interference. It seems that his wife has become unhappy about her husband's conduct. So he advises her to be firm and to close her ears to people who interfere in their private marital affairs.

Another cause for unhappiness seems to be the clash between spouses' expectation before marriage and their later actual marital life. The following poem addresses this conflict of expectation.

39. YŠl ¾L BÜ drú ÆgÆ½
 xUMt& sdd" qNq%o I q¥ŸŸ

I get married with a “däräsa” thinking that he is better,
 But he sent me to “Agamte” to gather “qunqura”.

“Däräsa” is a Muslim devotee. He dedicates most of his time to religious matters. So the persona in the poem might have been attracted by his religious qualities. Yet, after getting married, her expectation of having a happy marriage has not come to be true, for her husband could not win her sufficient bread. As a result, she has been reduced to a poor means of sustenance, that is, collecting wild fruit known as “qunqura”.

Similarly, famine could also be a cause for dissatisfaction in marital life. Women are given the responsibilities of running the household chores, budgeting, and for making decisions concerning children's well-being. So during famine, women could face difficulties in making ends meet with the meager household provision they have. Because of this, they might desire to put an end to their marriage. The following poem addresses this issue.

40. ¾ St& F¬" B§ STgrGr"½
 xNÇN bÊ >= xND¾W s!qr"½
 kMD©W gBè !Ws@ gl gl "ŸŸ

When my wife forced me to have my marriage ended,
 When I was left with one ox, having the other sold,
 The maize, called “hawse” get my problems solved.

The persona seems to have faced marital troubles. Famine had caused him to sell one of his oxen. His wife has been dissatisfied of her marriage because of the poor economic situation they

have, subsequently causing her to insist upon having her marriage ended. However, the persona has been relieved of his problems. The fast growing maize called “hawse” has been ripe and has alleviated the persona’s economic inconvenience. So it seems that poor economic situation is a cause for marriage dissatisfaction and disruption.

Patriarchical attitudes could also be causes for marital conflict. In Rayan culture, it is not common for husbands to help in the kitchen, or help with the household chores in general. A man is considered womanish if he attempts to be involved in such tasks. Men are supposed to work out in the farm. And usually, it is believed that men are income-earners, breadwinners. For this reason, the daily chores of cleaning the house, washing clothes and dishes, grinding and cooking which women have to undertake are not considered as important as men’s activities. The following poem shows this sentiment.

41. Xn@À bRü Æf%nW b@T½
MD©èN Y² ñfÈI C s@TÝ

For she does household chores, my wife becomes a nagger,
She tries to control everything, and to be a manager,
Though my ox and I are the income generator.

As indicated in the poem, the persona believes that he is the only source of income for his household. He does not seem to consider the contribution his wife makes in the productive work besides her engagement with the chores. Here we see him belittling the value of the household chores with a view to silencing in matters concerning income. This attitude seems to be a cause for dissatisfaction or conflict between the marriage partners.

Another cause for unhappy marriage is interference. A mother-in-law, along with her children, is usually considered as hostile to a bride. Mostly, unlike the groom, the bride is believed to make economic and other supports to her parents. Due to this, the groom’s parents, especially his mother is believed to interfere and cause a misunderstanding between the marriage partners. The

persona in the following poem reflects how the groom's family feels hostile to him and to his partner.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 42. I ÂT xSR >mT YI qS\$T½ | Mourn for a mother for ten years, |
| I xÆT xSR >mT YI qSI T½ | Mourn for a father for ten years, |
| I XHT xSR >mT YI qSI T½ | Mourn for a sister for ten years, |
| I wNDM xSR qN Y, WM s!b²½ | For a brother, even enough are ten days, |
| St\$ -LQSI T zmì -N Y²Ÿ | Let his wife mourn him with her relatives. |

As can be seen from the poem, the persona gives more weight to the grief of the death of one's mother, father and sister than to the death of a brother. Giving the relatively small number of the days of mourning for a brother's death, the persona shows his loose attachment and rough attitude towards him.

Besides, "Let his wife mourn him with her relatives" indicates that a brother is more connected to his wife and her relatives. From this, it can be said that the groom's relatives are likely to be hostile to the bride and to be a cause for marriage dissatisfaction and disruption.

One final recurrent issue related to causes of marriage dissatisfaction and disruption is unfaithfulness. Though sex is believed to be a source of intimacy, and an expression of conjugal love, it would result in shame and misery if it is out of the moral standard of the society. Sexual fidelity to one's marriage partner is a moral obligation. It is not allowed for a partner to seek sexual fulfillment outside marriage. It would be a gross disrespect to the woman's husband and his age-set if a woman is found to have a sexual practice outside her marriage. The following poem relates to this issue.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 43. XwD> nbr XNd mqnt½ | I used to love you like my waist band, |
| ¹RÑ È n> xl# qR_ xl xNj tŸ | But now I quit, for I am deeply saddened, |
| | Of hearing that you are a whore. |

In this piece, the persona had been very much in love with his partner. He used to love his partner just like his waist band. Men's waist band (about 15-20 meters long) in Raya has had a great value. During war times, it has been used as a bandage by people who wounded in battle fields. It has also been used to tie and carry people who died in war fight. Besides, it has been used as a means of protecting oneself from an enemy's dagger. It has also been believed to protect one from a starvation during hard time such as war. From this background, we can say that the above persona was very much in love with his partner. However, her unfaithfulness has caused him to stop his love relation.

4.3. Elegiac Poetry

In the above section, an attempt has been made to see the recurring issues reflected through poems about marriage. An effort has also been made to look into lyrical pieces that throw light on how the practice of early marriage and the role of parents in marriage arrangement affect marital life. Moreover, an attempt has been made to examine pieces that have to do with how sexual faithfulness, economic strength, interference, beauty, potency to bear children can affect marriage.

In this section, there will be an endeavor to discuss how death is expressed through elegies. Death is obviously an inevitable cycle of human nature. As there is birth, there will surely be death. The following poem shows this clearly.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 44. | XMÆ*Y k!b! k!b! yLí C Åw¬½
È*T È*T Xys%o ãfRsêL ¥¬ŸŸ | Man is like a game of children,
He is created in the morning,
And is ruined in the evening. |
|-----|---|---|

In the above poem, birth and death are viewed as inevitable. Man's life is taken as a type of children's game. As this game obviously has a beginning and an end, so does man. This piece also shows that life is too short.

Yet death is always new. That is why people mourn deaths. It is common in the Rayan society to mourn the death of someone they love or are associated with. Burial ceremonies are accompanied by a strong arm of grief and an outlet of intense emotion of sorrow by wailing, sobbing and weeping. Elegies are other means for the Rayans to reflect their feelings of helplessness, loss, disconnection, and anguish during such circumstances, and at times when later memorial rites and other occasions remind them of the deceased. Such moments are also seized upon to express praise for the deceased based on the deeds and qualities he/she had before. Furthermore, elegies are used to suggest how the bereaved family should handle their grief. Following are some sample pieces.

45. b- FÈÍ DNUY ktzU b,, ½
 XÂT xTg"M XNd wF b!b,, Ý

Once a mother is in a grave, closed in by a flat stone,
 You won't get her though you fly like a bird.

46. [;Yê ST- LQ Yb\$L X%oT½
 XÂT xTg"M xfR kb\$TÝ

When the sun sets,
 People take a dinner,
 But a mother will be no more,
 Once she is in her grave.

47. XÂt& xTÑ C LÑ TL> Xn@½
 ksf,, úÈ> YÆKÂL xYn@Ý

Do not die, my Mom, let me die for you,
 For my eyes will wander when I miss you,
 In the homestead.

The personas in the above three poems seem to have felt that the separation from their dying mothers is so moving. They have felt strong helplessness for they will not see their mother again physically. The closure with a flat stone in the first poem, the euphemistic expression of 'the earth's swallowing the deceased' in the second, and the helpless wandering eyes in the third show how these personas have felt utter sense of loss. The loss of their beloved mother seems to

It is natural for parents to love and look after their children. However, if death takes them away, children are most likely taken to their close relatives. Yet, relatives are believed to be less sensitive, or they are not as dependable as parents. They are even totally untrustworthy for the above persona. To him, to rely on them is similar to expecting meat from a flying hawk. Following is another impact of death reflected through an elegy.

51. xTl y" xNt y, Äz!Ä gbÊ½ ¥N l !Äs¥%o kBT? ¥N l lnÄ bÊ?	Oh, the diligent farmer, The man of April, Do not depart from me, For no one else will there be, To lead the cows away, And the oxen to accompany.
--	---

A husband is believed to be a bread winner and a wife a homemaker. If a husband dies, the wife becomes helpless. The mourner in the above poem grieves over the death of her husband reflecting despair and sense of loss. Her deep sympathy for the loss of her husband is reflected in her praises of his diligence.

Bitter is also the impact of the death of one's wife. Let us take the following poem to explain this.

52. xh#N ¥N xI Ä XNd XGzR ÇÄM½ l @i Äzñ ÄË- ÄË- Äz-ñ qm ÄË-Äm::	Can there be anyone who is a big eater as God! Even a thief does not steal a cow, Which has a yearling at home.
--	---

The above poem has been composed by a husband while mourning the death of his wife who had delivered a child recently. Due to the deep, bitter grief he has experienced, he has accused God of being unkind to him. He claims that even a thief does not steal cows which have left newly born offspring at home. The persona thinks that God is worse than a thief, for He takes the life of his wife who has left a newly born baby.

Another impact death brings out is the loss of an educated person. Let us illustrate this with the following poem.

53. m¥R _„ nbR dGä M ¥St ¥R½ It was good to be educated and to teach,
 ታዲያ ምን ይሆናል ተምሮ ካፈር። But what is the use if an educated one is to die.

It is a commonly held view that an educated person takes more responsibility in assuming societal roles. He/she is believed to dedicate his/her knowledge to public good. Due to this, the impact of the death of such a person goes beyond the level of a family. It is expected for the bereaved family, friends and other people who have attachment with the deceased to lament with anguish and deep sense of loss in terms of the quality of the deceased. By the same virtue, the above persona grieves over the loss death causes. Expressing the value of education and the status of the deceased, the persona marks an affective attitude which signifies his deep sorrow over the loss of the deceased.

In Raya, giving value to education is a recent phenomenon. Bravery has been considered one of the best qualities one desires to have. A brave man is a token of pride to his family, to his wife and to his village and to Rayans in general. To respect bravery, Rayans had set norms. A brave man’s wife has been given the privilege of fetching water ahead of other women. It has been a sign of respect for bravery to let his cattle drink ahead of others. If a brave man dies, bitter will be the sorrow to the people he belongs to. This is reflected in elegies such as the following.

54. ²Ê gÂ ä t j GÄW ÆI wn½ Weep all of you together,
 XSk! h#SCh#M bl # wYn@ wYnðÝ For a man has died,
 Who is a brave of his own time.

The persona announces the death of a brave man, picking out the quality of the deceased’s bravery. His/her announcement and sense of loss seem to urge mourners on to wail, weep and express their grief.

Though death causes people to have deep grief, it does not last life time. The intensity of sorrow fades away in the course of time. Following are poems which reflect how people in Raya console themselves.

55. §Nt YBŞ" XN©! Xn@ xI " mD|n!T½ Your death is bad for you, not for me,
 XHLÂ W| XNQLFÂ I ¼ !TŸ For I have the means to cure,
 Which are food and water, sleep and night.

In the above poem, the persona indicates that food and water, sleep and night are means of forgetting sorrow. This does not mean they are taken as one does in medication. But the persona means that through time, she/he will get involved in the usual practices of worldly life to win bread and will forget her/his sorrow.

In addition to the daily routine, the belief that death is inevitable might be considered as a means of consoling oneself. Following is a poem which shows this notion.

56. bl # XÂNtM EÇ X¾M wdz!ÃW nW½ So go ahead and we shall follow ,
 wTÉM mNgd¾ ÕTÂ " § nWŸ For it is quite in the order of nature,
 To travel one after another.

The conception of death as a journey with its implication of inevitable physical separation and the notion that the mourner will some day join the deceased is expressed in the above poem. The dead men are supposedly setting out on an inevitable journey, so that what the mourner is doing is bidding them farewell.

In addition to impacts, causes of deaths are mourned. People die through different causes. Some of these causes are illness, murder, and accident. Death through illness is acceptable, especially if the deceased is old. People believe that it is from God. However, if one is murdered, the case will be seriously offensive. The police will arrest the offender. But if the offender escapes, he will be seriously sought both by the police and by the relatives of the deceased. If he is found by the relatives of the deceased, death will be his punishment. Yet, there is a custom in Raya for

traditionally organized elders called “Gäräb, to intervene and solve the case through arbitration. If one dies in accident such as by car crash or drowning, his/her death brings shock and bitter sorrow to the families and relatives of the deceased, for it is probably considered untimely death. Following are sample poems which show the lament on people who lost their life because of drowning.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 57. ሸጎ፣ ሄጋ፤ - ፍ ጸገ ገ፣ ገገግ፤ | Contemtuos of the sorghum of their home, |
| ሸጎ፣ ሄጋ፤ - ፍ ጸገ ገ፣ ገገግ፤ | Disdainful of their home’s “injära” made of teff, |
| ገ፣ ገገግ፤ ገ፣ ገገግ፤ - ገገግ፤ | They were drowned on their way traveling abroad; |
| ገ፣ ገገግ፤ ገ፣ ገገግ፤ - ገገግ፤ | They were drowned on their way traveling abroad. |
| | |
| 58. ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ | You black, sleeping sea, you black, sleeping sea, |
| ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ | You black, sleeping sea, you black, sleeping sea, |
| ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ | Is it impossible to meet a person one has missed so much? |
| ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ ገገግ፤ | Is it impossible to meet a person one has missed so much? |

Poverty, unemployment and aspiration of better life are currently believed to be stimulating many people in Raya to migrate to Arab countries. Many of these migrants are said to be helped to cross borders by human smugglers. However, many have resulted in tragic endings; they died drowning in the sea, probably in the Mediterranean Sea.

The above two poems are laments of such deaths. In the first poem, the persona laments the loss of his/her brothers through the mention of the wrongs of migration. To him, better is home which provides sorghum and teff than migration which leads to death. In the second, the persona expresses his deep sorrow for the deceased mentioning the black sea as a cause for the bereavement.

In addition to the above issues, mourners reflect their sadness for the death of people who had names and fames in the area in general. There are poems which generally lament for people who were regarded as brave, patriotic, determined, courageous in war and rich in their environs. Following is a poem which could exemplify this through its hidden meaning (It is written in gold and wax style).

59. öÄÄ - - % ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Qobba” and in “Tätära”
mÒÊ mçñ! ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Mohoni” and in “Mächare”
d† w%Ü ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Dayu” and in Worabaye”
= R= R xI ¥È ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Chärchär” and “Alamata”,
%¥Ä ê© ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Rama” and “Wajja”,
x¥Ä xRGÄMÆ ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Amaya” and “Arginamba”,
bê n#GS UI @ ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Bäwa” and “Nigus Gale”,
g#Ä , -Y wRq& ynbr \$M½	Many were the cows in “Gura” and “Wärke”,
t sÆBé xI q Äh# # qNÄM¿	But now all these horny cows are broken, they are no more,
t sÆBé xI q Äh# # qNÄMÝ	But now all these horny cows are broken, they are no more.

In the past, probably three decades before, Rayans were known for owning large herds of cattle. They used to enjoy milk and milk product in abundance. It was even wrong to let a stranger go without drinking milk. The following poem can remind us of this.

60. XNdMnW %Ä y_êt\$y_Nt½	How is Raya of the earlier days,
wtT XNd ý y- ÈNbtÝ	Where we used to drink milk as we would water.

However, after the area has been smitten by recurrent droughts, cows alarmingly dwindled. Life has become difficult. So, the persona in the fifty sixth lyric poem (in its surface meaning) laments about this historical calamity. Through repetition of localities where cattle used to be reared in large numbers, he/she has shown the tremendous and sorrowful destruction of cattle.

Yet, the second meaning (hidden meaning) reminds us of people who earned great names in wealth, and bravery in Raya. Through the association of the destruction of cattle, the persona has expressed his deep sorrow over the deaths of these great people.

4.4. Topical poetry

So far in the above section, it has been attempted to discuss how people in Raya conceive the causes of death through oral lyric poetry. It has also been endeavored to show how they express their grief over the deceased and what impacts death can have on families, relatives, and friends of the deceased.

In this section, there will be an attempt to see topical issues raised in oral lyric poetry. It is customary in Raya that people use oral lyric poetry, especially males in drinking places such as “täj” and “tälla” houses to comment and reflect public opinions on different current issues that touch upon day to day affairs.

According to the poems collected, the topical issues include abuses of public power, deforestation, identity, political propaganda, comments on ways of solving conflicts, and women’s education and employment. Let us now take examples which illustrate these.

60. bmNdR w- - @ bb!%o b- J ½
ml S Æ\$wqW mÊT ãg¾Ch#½
DB XNÄ¬ fRs# TmLú\$Ch#Ÿ

Those of you who have got land through the young village heads,
Through a bribe of beer and honey beer,
And without the knowledge of Meles,
Do not destroy the boundary line,
For you will be made to return the land.

Land in Raya, as is in any other place in Ethiopia, is a major source of living for farmers. It plays a great role in their lives. However, due to population pressure, land has been scarce in the area. Because of this, there have been occasions of land redistribution to landless people in the society, taking pieces of land from those who possess large plots of land.

Another issue which has been reflected in the following poems deals with deforestation. In Raya, there have been many forest covered places where farmers used to graze their cattle. However, due to recurrent droughts and felling of trees for fuel consumption and house construction, most of these places are left without trees and some others are turned into agricultural land. Now deforestation is such a pressing and urgent issue, demanding a due attention to be given. Let us see the following poems and subsequent analysis.

63. yx\$¥È gRb! ör- #T yKsL XĀI #½
 yê© ÷é%o ör- #T yKsL XĀI #½
 xNtNM xÆ*Ê ĀsU!L xI #Ÿ

People cut the big trees in Alamata, for producing charcoal,
 People cut the big trees in Wajja, for producing charcoal,
 Same threat lies in wait for “Abuare” too, as it has been rumored.

64. XĀNtM mĒCh# X¾M xyĀCh#½
 xTml s#M wY xĒn BŞCh#Ÿ

We have seen what you are after,
 You have seen what we are after,
 So why don't you lose hope and go back?

65. gl!z@ ĀmĒWN gl!z@ YmLsW½
 Āzz#HN h#Ş X! bL xNt sWŸ

This is a matter of time, time will solve it,
 So accept whatever you are ordered.

According to the persona in the sixty third poem, trees in Alamata and Wajja have already been cut down for reasons of producing charcoal. Now, the persona warns that the forest in Abuare is under threat, thereby expressing his anger and seemingly calling for people to react against this action. The persona in the sixty fourth piece also expresses his reaction against the tree cutters (investors), saying, “Go back, we know what you are after”. However, the persona in the sixty fifth poem seems to fear the consequences of the reaction. He instructs the reactants to accept orders from authority. He believes that the problem will be solved in due course of time.

67. MÈÇ b!sbR gl # y³/₄ nW¹/₂ Even if the “mitad” is broken,
 XNÁn> x!T xùÃ kn ÆNÄ!%WÝ The larger part remains to be ours;
 How are you, Ethiopia, along with your flag?

As indicated in the poem, the persona compares the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia to a broken “mitad”, a clay pan. Once part of “mitad” is broken off, it is not common to repair it again. For the persona, the same holds for the two countries. It is unlikely to reunite them. Expressing this grievance, the persona proceeds to ask again about the present state of Ethiopia’s unity through his/her symbolic reference to the flag.

Lyric poems are also played for promoting political propaganda. The following two poems are examples. These poems were played to promote CUD during the 1997 national elections that took place in Ethiopia.

68. k+ NQŞt& ŞY Nb!t\$ BTnDf"Ý If the bee stings me on my head,
 mRz# X¥wÈbT h# T ÈèC xI #'Ý I have two fingers to take the venom out.
69. ¥R XbŞ Bù gBc kqæ½ I get into the beehive to eat honey,
 Ñ cŞCh# nbR Nb# nDæ nDæÝ But I was about to die,
 Because of the bee’s deadly stings.

It is obvious that policies and the functions of “wäräda” administrative bodies have great impacts on the every day life of the residents in Raya, as is probably true to any other places. So to avoid possible risks, the above two personas express their propaganda symbolically in convincing others to vote for CUD during the election. “Bee” and two fingers (in the form of “V”) were election symbols of the two contending political parties. As is stated in the sixty eighth poem, the persona talks about a bee’s possible sting to mean that he would run a possible risk of some sort to be caused by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) if he/she were to vote for CUD. Yet, he/she asserts that the two fingers he/she has are dependable means of avoiding the sever pain of the bee’s sting (possible risk). Similarly, the persona in the sixty ninth

piece affirms that he/she has symbolically experienced a deadly sting of the bee but somehow he has survived the deadly bee sting.

Lyric poems are also directed against cases of opposing individuals and their wrong ways of solving conflicts. They are instructive as is indicated in the following poem.

70. MN ĀdRUL BrT mNGST y- §W½
ምን ያደርጋል ካሪያ መንግስት የ- §W½
bl W bSKRBè sNbR bl I WŸ

What is the use of an armament, which the government hates?

What is the use of a dagger, which the government hates?

You attack your enemy with a pen, which does not leave bruises.

Daggers and guns such as “moyzär” had long been armaments of fighters in Raya. They were also ornaments. Also, in hostile situations, they were used as protective and weapons for protecting oneself from enemies. If a feeling of enmity could not get solved peacefully, physical attacks did obviously follow as a last resort, but not before a popular warning word called “ayam bäl”, which means “please understand the case first”. In the above poem, the persona seems to comment on the physical attack which people resorted to as a means of protecting and attacking. Instead of using guns and daggers which are against the laws, the persona observes, legally held cases would bring more benefit and satisfaction to the one who has sustained any harm.

The last topical issue to be mentioned here is girl’s education. In Raya, as could be in any other place in Ethiopia, girls are traditionally expected to share out domestic tasks, and sometimes productive tasks such as weeding during busy farming seasons. They usually dedicate most of their time in undertaking the daily chores of collecting firewood, cleaning the house, washing clothes, and dishes, and cooking. So due to this, girls may not have time to work hard on their studies. It is even likely that they drop out in some classes and enroll again some time later. As the result of this, they may not be able to achieve good results in national examinations which

are also ironic criticisms for idle farmers who sit beside these self-praising people probably in drinking houses.

In addition to family sustenance, Rayans consider work as important for the following reasons reflected in the following.

76. በኅባባ ሞፈር መሬት ካላረሱ፣
BR wYT Yg¾L ïRú b!ÄBs#Ÿ If you do not cultivate your land well,
You will be low in the purse.
77. xŞy, WM wY yxi ŞWN t%½
XNd KrMT xGb! úNtÑ s!fŞ? Haven't you seen the market place of "abola"
One gains as many Birr as a swarm of insects.

In Raya, crops have long been used both for food and for generating income (cash). To have much money is a mark of status. So to generate enough income and to attain the status, the personas in the above two lyric poems believe that working hard is important. These poems are also sarcastic remarks for idle farmers.

Praises are also expressed in terms of the capacity farmers attain to entertain guests. Hospitality is one of the public qualities appreciated in Raya. They are hospitable to guests. The following poem shows how working hard and producing enough for a family sustenance and for entertaining a guest is a mark of status.

78. ĀRúL b- %%%T Y- MÄL ¥I Ä½
yi Ê ÆI b@T xYf%M XNGÄŸ

He yokes his oxen at dawn and till his land even in the noondays,
The owner of "Bore" (a name of an ox), have enough, even for his guests.

We can observe that the above persona believes in working hard. He begins working early in the morning and carries on to the noon when one can feel the scorching heat of the sun. His working behavior gives him reason to be confident. He asserts that he is pleased to welcome his guests for

he has enough produce. This boast of self praise is also a criticism for idle farmers who do not have this status.

The amount of produce as a mark of status is another factor which lets Rayan farmers to give great value for working. During the earlier days, probably three decades ago, it was said that some Rayan farmers used to assume they had maximum size of produce if a bullet could not pass through the pile of their produce. If a bullet passed through the pile, the produce was considered as unsuccessful. Let us take the following dialogue in lyric poems to illustrate this point.

79. b̄ÆÆ ä fR MDR Xs= Âq½
b- ÆB xWD¥ mē mē wqŷŷ

I harrow the land with a beam of a plough, so over hanging,
And harvest a hundred of quintals from every narrow floor of threshing.

80. ÆI mēW YöY ÆI ¹! YÂgR½
CGR xz§qŷ xND MSI n@ xgRŷŷ

Mine are thousands, you keep quiet, and let me speak,
And enough is my produce for people of a district,
When their life becomes hard because of a poor harvest.

The above dialogue of the personas indicates how surplus produce is taken as a status. The persona in the eightieth poem boasts that his produce is higher than the produce of the persona in the seventy ninth poem. It is adequate even to supplement people in his district in the form of loan. This sense of competition seems to indicate that farmers undertake their agricultural activities to gain higher status.

In addition to reflecting the importance of working during the time of ploughing, praising oxen in threshing occasions is common for people (farmers) in Raya. It is believed that lyric poems used for threshing lighten the nature of work and make it attractive. The speedy rhythm induced

by playing the lyric pieces seems to encourage the people to work fast. Oxen are made to tread the sorghum or teff on the threshing floor. Farmers have to drive them until the produce is separated from the chaff.

Threshing marks the completion of a harvest. For there will be plenty of food once again, farmers usually shower their praises on their oxen to indicate their satisfaction. Following are examples which show this issue.

81. %r bÊ dg#½ xr bÊ dg#½ §Nt ãdGDg# ÆI ¥:rg#Ÿ	Oh, graceful ox, the good helper, Let people respect you.
--	--

82. bÊç! bÊç! ÃrSkW XNç½ b/MI @ w= æ½ በሰኔ ከፍካፍ፡፡	Oh, ox! Oh, ox! Here is the product, Of what you have tilled, In July's heavy rain, And in June's drizzle.
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As indicated in the eighty first poem, the persona asserts that an ox is a graceful animal and that people should respect it. This is because an ox's favor for the farmer is great. The favor is clearly indicated in the eighty second poem. The persona shows what role the ox has played during the time of ploughing. The ox has endured June's drizzles, and July's heavy rain while tilling the land. Its favor has resulted in the harvest from which the farmer has derived satisfaction. Because of this satisfaction, the farmer even considers recommending people to take care of a cow which gives birth to an ox. Following is a poem which shows this.

83. X>R,, ½x>R,, bÊ ybÊN XÂT½ xWŞ*T kb@T¿ úR X= ÇŞT¿ W! QÇŞTŸ	Sing to the ox lullaby And let his mother at home stay, Provisions avail and keep wants away.
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The persona recommends people to take care of a cow, for it contributes to the system of production work. It gives birth to an ox which is the center of agricultural work. Without an ox agricultural work is impossible. So for this favor, the persona recommends people to keep a cow at home, giving it grass and water as much as it needs.

To sum up, work-related lyric poems focus on three major topics: self-praise, sarcastic censure for idle farmers, and cattle praise. In different occasions such as in agricultural activities and in “tāj bet” and “tälla bet”, it is common for farmers to play lyric poems which praise the status of their productivity. Besides, by way of praising themselves, they ironically censure idle farmers. During harvesting time, praises are showered to the cattle –their oxen and cows to acknowledge the favor they have done to the farmer.

Summary and Conclusion

In the preceding chapter, an endeavor has been made to provide a classification and subject matter analysis of Amharic oral lyric poems played in Raya. Based on the theoretical framework indicated in the review chapter and using the contexts in which the poems are played as well as their subject matter, it has been possible to classify the poems into five genres: love, marriage, elegiac, topical and work poems.

According to the love poems collected, it has been identified that love is lament, dedication, yearning, beauty and gratification derived by a love devotee. A lover laments for his/her unfulfilled or frustrated love. In such situations, love is expressed in terms of a woe of fire, sickness, and death. A lover also sacrifices himself/herself many things to attain or maintain love relationship with his/her loved one. He/she even dedicates his/her life. If a love becomes impossible and yet the lover wishes to attain it again, it will be a yearning, probably causing the lover to be in tears. However, if love is maintained and becomes satisfactory, lovers, especially males, express their gratification to their loved ones through showers of beauty praises. Chocolate skin color, slender waist, immaculate teeth, lengthy and large size of hair, and erect bud of breasts are distinctive marks of beauty praises in Raya.

Apart from subject matter of love, Amharic oral lyric poetry in Raya includes issues of marriage. In the oral lyric poems collected, the practice of early marriage has been one of the recurring issues. It is generally believed that early marriage could enhance chastity on the part of the girl for it has been a mark of honor to herself, to her parents, and to the person she was going to get married. In addition to this, girls have to be confined to their homestead, for confinement is considered as a sign of good manners and as a criterion for prospective marriage partners.

Marriage, in Raya, has been arranged by parents. Parents think that marriage will last long if they make a careful choice of marriage partner to their children prior to marriage. Unlike girls, boys have the freedom of choosing their partners; still they need to have the consent of their parents. But if boys go out of their parents' consent and begin a marriage relationship, it is believed that parents would feel unhappy and that married youngsters would lose possible support from them.

Due to this, it seems that boys are warned not to be deceived by the beauty of girls which at last leads them to make a relationship against the will of their parents. The warning seems to emphasize that external beauty is not enough for making marriage relationship. Prior relationship between the parents of the partners and the skill of the girl seem to count more than mere attraction of beauty.

In addition to the above issues of marriage, issues of possible threats for marriage has been raised in the poems collected. An instance of a threat for marriage is if girls are unable to bear children. Having children is a binding for marriage to sustain. Otherwise, it is likely for the marriage to end up.

Another cause for marriage dissatisfaction or disruption is the poor economic situation of partners. It seems that if the husband cannot win bread, his marriage is likely to be threatened. Impositions and attitudes of male partners to their spouses in economic matters could be other causes for poor marital life.

Sexual unfaithfulness is a further serious threat for marriage disruption. If married partners make sexual relationship outside their marriage partners, and if this relationship becomes public, it will be causing a sense of shame and misery for them. Due to this, marriage will likely be disrupted.

The final issue with regard to marriage is interference. If parents or family members interfere in the marital affairs of the partners, partners seem to have misunderstanding between them. They might be led to disrupt their marriage.

The next major issues are beliefs, causes and impacts of death. It seems clear that the society in Raya believes that death is an inevitable cycle of life. Death is generally regarded as a journey for another life after death. Yet, it is always new. People mourn the death of their family member, relative, or close friend in terms of their attachment, their quality, and their later impact on the bereaved family.

People mourn bitterly if the deceased has been kind or generous. Mostly mothers are mourned for these qualities. Males are mourned for their diligence, bravery and fame. People are also mourned for the societal role they had or they could have.

Lyric oral poetry is also an instrument for Rayans in reflecting different topical issues. These issues include abuses of official power, grievances on tree cutters, a question of identity, political propaganda during elections, comments on women's education and ways of handling conflicts.

Civil servants such as administrators and judges have been criticized for misusing of their public power. Bribe and nepotism have been identified as influences for these civil servants to misuse their official power.

Forest in Raya is highly declining. According to the poems collected, tree cutters who prepare land to cultivate crops, and those who cut trees to produce coal have been identified as the main agents in the deforestation of the area.

Another issue raised as a topical issue is the question of identity. Rayans are under two broad administrative states: the Amhara Regional State and Tigray Regional State. So reactions concerning this issue have been expressed through lyric pieces.

Political propaganda is also an issue. During the 97 election campaigns, political party members were obviously working hard to win the election. Accordingly, it has been identified that, in Raya, lyric poems are used as indirect instruments in propagating "convincing" ideas to the public to fight an election.

Furthermore, women's education is raised as one of the topical issues. It has been commented that women could not benefit more in their education. They could not get jobs which they could earn more money from.

One more issue in this regard is ways of handling conflicts. In Raya, if people pick quarrels, physical attacks are taken as a resort. Against this experience, it has been remarked that legally held cases are more benefiting.

The final issues which have been raised in the poems collected are work-related issues. Self-praise, censure for idle farmers, and cattle praise have been found to be the issues raised in the work poems. Farmers praise themselves based on the success of their productivity. They also praise their cattle for their due service. By way of praising themselves, it has been observed, farmers sarcastically censure idle farmers.

Thus, it is possible to say that oral lyric poetry is an important vehicle of communication for Rayans in their day to day life. It is an artistic instrument in which they express their world view, socio-cultural norms and socio-economic values and political philosophy.

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APPENDIX: TRANSLATION

84. b@T > Â b@t & xGDmT I xGDmT½
xNgt & rzm xY_ XNÄü DmTŸ

As side to side are my house and yours,
Long my neck grows
Like a cat which looks at a mouse.

85. XNj %o bäsB - @F b̄ - äLè½
xrg" BSKSK ÄnCw FQR gBèŸ

Though plenty is 'enjera',
Plenty is teff,
Your love within me,
Caused me to worry a lot.

86. TmÄI > BÜ úY ¥ì úY ¥ì ½
yLJ nT xYn@ à à XNd brì Ÿ

Thinking that my love would come,
I fixed my eyes into the distance
Till they melted away like snow.

87. አንኳን አNCNÄ yMwD>N½
xSrW Ä¹KÑ " zmì C>NŸ

Let alone for you, for my beloved,
For your relatives, there is nothing
I would not carry out.

88. Āfqr¥ sW ywdd¥ sW½
= I ¥M xYf% J BM xYmLsWŶ

A hyena would not stop a person,
Nor darkness would frighten him,
If he falls in love with someone,
And want to go to her.

89. J b#t£ nUÁ bwR YmI úL¿
ĀNCW - mN¥Ā bxND qN YdRúLŶ

A trader from Djibouti would take
A month to come back home,
But I, your restless lover,
Would arrive within a day.

90. wY xgR> Y%Q wY SM> YI w_½
k~rb@T h#n> ¹tT>" XNd w_Ŷ

xgÊM xY%Q S» M xYI w_½
BŞ" XNd XNj % x_Qs" XND w_Ŷ

Move your house away, or have your name changed,
Being in a neighbor, you became to me the aroma of “wot”

Let not my house be moved, or my name be changed,
Eat me like “enjera” and dip me like “wot”.

91. bŞä C> xMŞK bn xdY wI Ş
bī éC> xMŞK bn qNd úŞ
XëH wU" BI > Q¶ wd " ŞŶ

XëH wU" Bù BqR wd" Ş½
ĀWqB" yI M wY sāc\$bmŞŶ

In the name of your honeycomb cows,
Or in the name of your horny oxen,
Tell them a thorn pricks your feet,
So that you can stay back,
And we can easily meet.

If I say a thorn pricks my feet, and stays back,
Wouldn't they guess my intention and know the case?

92. xNcǝ XNdMN xI > Xn@ XNÄI h# xI h#
ፍቅር ተሸካሚ መቶብል ሁኛለሁ።

ፍቅር ተሸካሚ መቶብል ከመሆን
LBH ፣ ሃS% TmkR XNdፍNሃ

How are you, my dear?
I am still as usual,
Your love became a passenger,
And I its automobile.

If you are to listen, set your heart to married life,
Instead of being an automobile for my love.

93. %¥ s!zLq\$ Y-ÄL ፣mJ ½
kNf... y, IW IU IU - Jሃ

Your lip is so sweet,
As a fresh honey bear.

94. Sà N ST- %W sYÈNM YR" L፣
_RúN STgL- W b>-H YI " L፣
XúN I ¥GBT bHLMH Yb" Lሃ

A devil will go away if you call her name,
 A disease will be no more if she parts her lip,
 And shows her teeth;
 It would be enough to be with her in a dream.

95. - YM zI G ĀI q#m t I G\$U½
 I FQR yMmC xml #M yrUŸ

He is a young chocolate,
 Well-mannered and well-built,
 Who knows how to give love for his lover.

96. X%úN xND XG% t sR¬ BTmĒ½
 _RúN g#%ŸI @ t wQ% BTmĒ½
 úL¬mM äTk#' úLä T nFs@ wĒŸ

When she comes having her hair done, “And Egra”
 And her teeth tattooed,
 I die with no cause of illness,
 And before my death my soul leaves my flesh.

97. አሁን ዓይኗ መጣ ተልኳል መሰለኝ፤
 አሁን ጥርሷ መጣ ተልኳል መሰለኝ፤
 Xstf GÆ bl #T mLXKtN Yngr"Ÿ

Now her eyes have come,
 I think they have been sent for,
 Now her teeth have come,
 I think they have been sent for,
 So let them come in and tell me their message.

98. xYN> y, mSI W yNUT x_b!T½
 _RS> y, mSI W yg!dR wt T½
 drT> YmS§L yxyR mS→WT½
 ig#R> y, mSI W yÑ Ê Ä!BT½
 ካንቺ ጋር አድሬ ሲኑ LÑ T½
 I ä T xYdI M wY yt f - Rk#TŸ

Bright are your eyes like the dawn star,
 White milk are your teeth like the milk of a heifer,
 Glassy is your chest like the glass of a plane,
 A sheaf is your hair like the sheaf of teff,
 Let spend the night with you,
 And die the night after.

99. xY• ¥ _Rú*¥ mC YbLÈL ksW½
 wgÆ* nW XN©! XHL ÃLqmsWŸ

Her eyes and her teeth
 Are the same as anyone else's,
 But her waist is so different,
 For so slender it looked
 As if it did not take food.

100. xQN→ STÿD >NÈ* XÃrgd½
 zQZ" STÿD DRMà XÃbd½
 እንኳን እኔ ባዳው ወንድሜም አበደ።

Her waist resonates when she goes up,
 Her 'dirmim' (hair style) goes up and down,
 when she steps down,
 Let alone me, her brother became mad with her love.

101. ¹Gü _RS>N xNÁ LêsW½
SSQbT Wü ¥¬ XNDmLsWŸ

Oh, my lovely, owe me your teeth,
For a day, let me laugh with it,
And turn it back at night.

102. xr - YM - YM - YM xTWdÇ½
- YM wDj nW y- Í " mNgÇŸ

Oh, chocolate, chocolate,
Do not love the chocolate,
See how I was lost,
For I fell in love with the chocolate;

103. bn- § Å ¥ Æncf xr¥mD½
XNÁT BI ð xl q ã h# # mNgD ?

With a sandal and with your gait,
I wonder if you go all the way.

104. ig#R>M bmè YgmTL>½
RS>M bmè YgmTL>½
>N_>M bmè YgmTL>¿
btgmgmW Xn@ §SqR>Ÿ

Let your hair be worthy of hundreds,
Let your teeth be worthy of hundreds,
Let your waist be worthy of hundreds,
And let me take you with the given price.

105. yLJ FQRĀ yÙé bRbĒ½
>mT YI q¥L úYs¥ wĒŸ

Pepper in a garden, and love with a little girl
Can be harvested for a year, with no rumor.

106. TMRT b@T SÿD q+ N XŠH wU" ½
gĀ bLJ nT FQR xzĀU"

Love, with its thorn, pricks me on my way to school;
It made me crazy, though I am so little a girl.

107. yLJ FQRĀ q+ N mqnT½
እየሰረሰረ ይገባል ካንጀት።

To fall in love with a little girl
Is like a waist band,
Which slowly goes deep within.

108. yLJ FQRĀ yg!dR wt T
እንዳው ሲውል ሲያድር ይገባል ካንጀት።

To fall in love with a little girl is like a milk of a heifer;
When it stays for days, it goes deeper and deeper.

109. xĀaM YŠI # LT¥R ĒĀI C½
XĀaM YŠI # LT¥R ĒĀI C½
LJ a Lí C UR b@R TWŠI CŸ

“She goes to school,” her father says.
“She goes to school,” her mother says.
Though she is in a bar with boys.

110. X¾ Æg%CN xND sW §ND nW½
XNd - @F x% sW xb²> MnWÝ

One woman is for one man in our areas,
But you make lots of friends,
As many as people who weed teff.

Secret Relationship

111. yÇÁN gL~ y¥ÅWT>½
yFQR xd% yMtWL>½
sW XNÄYs¥n ¹UÜ XNÁT n>Ý

My lovely, let not anyone hear my love for you,
And all what I have talked to you

112. yUN mB%T Yh#N xYWE MS_Ê½
ገና ካንቲ ጋር ነው ፍቅር መጀመራ።

Keep my secret just like light in a jar,
For it is my first time to me to make a lover.

113. እባካችሁ ሰዎች ለፍቅር አትሳሱ
XNd J b#t f LBS YmÈL xÄ!s#Ý

Oh, men, do not be so eager to love,
For a new one will come to you,
Like clothes from Djibouti.

114. ÆLrÆ ZMDÂ Xytö- r½
g#C g#C ÆI - #T BÒWN xdr¿
g#B g#B ÆI - #T BÒWN ÆD%L wY?
XNd MC xDR⁻ Ygl W yI M wY?

Should a shooting breast spend a night alone?
 Wouldn't the heat of fever kill it?
 Why count a kinship, so distant?

Beauty and Environs

115. y%₀₀Ã LJ Â yËT wrQ xND nW¿
 kXJ kwl q fŠg!W Bz# nWÝ

Rayans and a ring of gold are the same,
 Seekers are many once they slipped off.

116. bdÂ BbŠ xØN mrr"¿
 qNq%₀₀ BbŠ çÁN xmm"¿
 Xstf LfD öi TR⁻N Æg"Ý

When I eat “bedna” so bitter my mouth tastes,
 When I eat “qunqura” my stomach aches.

Let me go to “Qobbo”
 If I can get “Tringo”

117. b#→Â mRÍ → xND nW G²t%₂
 b#→ YŠl ¾L ¹U Ãl btÝ

“Buta” and “Merfata” are in the same territory,
 But “Buta” is better for me as it is a home of beauty.

118. xg%₀₀CN %₀₀Ã ⁻DÜÄ mËT½
¹U LJ ÃbQŠL XNd dUI!TÝ

xg%₀₀CN %₀₀Ã + NÄ ymsl
¹U LJ ÃbQŠL xÃzÃfI Ý

Our home, Raya, suitable land for cultivation,
Grows a child like “degalit” which is so beautiful.

Elegies

119. አፈር አታብዙባት ካንገቷ በላይ፣

Xgl @ SNDR BQ B§ XND→ YŸ

Do not pile up the earth on the head of the grave,
So that she could come out to see her child’s wedding.

120. ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ

qBrW s!ml s# Ywr%L b@aŸ

What is there for a barren woman if not her waist ,
When people come back after her burial ,
Her house will be ransacked.

121. ሰገጥ ሰገጥ ሰገጥ ሰገጥ ሰገጥ ሰገጥ

s!→ È nW XN©! y, örq\$, ŸŸ

A brother and money seem simple when you have them at hand,
But one becomes so deeply sad when they are once lost.

Topical Poems

122. ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ ለ ሠገጥ

— Xyf t l # Ub! ¥s%TŸŸ

Instead of backbiting, while drinking coffee,
It’s better to spin cotton,
and to have your “gabi” made by someone.

123. xBR| c÷l y÷é%o ÷Ā>½
xStWI H tk#S öÄ XNÄ÷b§>Ÿ

Abrha Chekole, cholera's younger brother,
Aim at the head, miss not your target.

124. yxBR|ü XĀT xYø> x÷LQ>½
yLb# sRè nW yä tW LJ >Ÿ

Abrha's mother, do not weep,
For your child died brave.

125. k¾M xI # ÷Mb!î xú≠¶½
k¾M xI # ÷fÊ xbÈ¶½
SNyD b# § SNmI S m¶j
SNyD b# § SNmI S m¶Ÿ

There are people within us who beautify their “gombiso”(male's clothe)
There are people within us who beautify their “afro” (male's hair style)
Who follow us when we go for a battle field,
And who lead us when we come back home.

126. MNM b!l sLS ý | xY§m_Mj
ገንዘብ ካጣ ኅብዝ በወጉ አይደመጥም።

A brave man is not heeded
If he does not have money,
As water, though soft, is not chewed.

127. MN sW ä"Ā nW mbú= T kNt§
LJ mWI D BÒ nW l sW mD|n!t§
xMŞK ĀI W xYqR bĀW bSxtŸ

Man is foolish, why so much anger?
 Only breading a child would sooth,
 If God fixes one's death, it is unavoidable.

Work poems

128. q\$+ BI 0 YW\$L kb@t\$b\$Y½
 sW WI 0B" Y\$L xÄÈM - NÌ YÝ

He always sits idle in his homestead,
 And blames sorcerers as an excuse for his poor farming

129. bÊÂ gbÊ s!ÈI #M xYb©!½
 XNÄ!ÄW st T BI 0 s!- mD nW XN©!Ý

A farmer and his ox should not pick quarrel,
 It is good for the ox to be yoked willingly.

130. |MI @ GM ÄI XI T bÊ yI d W sW½
 /#m%o xYyDM wY MN xLksksWÝ

If you do not have an ox during July, the rainy season,
 What is the use to sit idle here,
 Better is “Humera” for you, so let you go there.

131. yi Ê AEI b@T yRŠ È: M xêq½
 b~ÆÆ ä fR MDR xS= ÄqÝ

I, the owner of “Bore”, who knows the taste of farming,
 Harrows the land with a beam of a plough, so over hanging.

132. i écN - Mj XRF XÄNg\$→"½
 መጣች ያች ደባካ ስራ ልታስፈታኝ።

My love comes in the farm,
Where I have yoked my oxen,
And when I have felt exhausted.

133. yx@RT% mNGST Lb b!s# Lb b!s#½
yXn@ i éC q\$mW ys# i éC I !ÃRs#Ÿ

My neighboring farmer, a foolish governor of Eritrea,
Thinks that he would yoke his oxen and plough the land,
But he should know that my oxen would not be left idle.

134. bÊ bÊ BÜ yMw²wzW½
እንጂራ አይገኝም አምላክ ካላዘዘው፡፡

Though I am restless, cultivating my land,
It won't be successful without the will of God.

135. s!Ã+ Ç xÃ+ D s!z,, xYZ%½
YqnQÃL bsW xZm%Ÿ

He does not sow when other people are engaged in sowing,
He does not harvest when other people are busy harvesting,
However, he is jealousy over other people's product.

136. yi Ê ÆI b@T½ yUb@ ÆI b@T xYf%M k!ú%½
s!- Ê YW\$L½ Q@! SL YW\$L½ >Øéc\$ U%Ÿ

An owner of "Bore", an owner of "Gabe" won't fear of being broke,
He orders the waiter all day, drinks with chuffers all day long.

137. በደባራ በሬ ድብ ካልጎረጎሩ፣
y- t% I @ ÆdRUL xg,, Ÿ

If you do not till a land,
A thief you will be named.

138. X>R,, ½ X>R,, bÊ½
 ybÊN WI ñ wsdW frS½
 Y, rJM XGR YH äRà‰ _RSŸ

Sing to the ox lullaby,
 A horse has taken the favor of an ox,
 This longish leg, this protruding teeth.

139. X>R,, ½ X>R,, bÊ½
 bRü S`D½
 ÃŞNt yI M wND½
 äfR qMbR Yø MDR y, qDŸ

Sing to the ox lullaby,
 Let you go, my dear ox,
 No one is as strong as you,
 Who could plough a land,
 With a beam of plough and a yoke.

140. x¹Bi x¹Bi ½
 - ŞCN bgNi ½
 X‰→CN Äi Ÿ

Sing to the ox lullaby,
 Here is the local bear,
 Here is bread, our dinner.

141. X>R,, ½ X>R,, bÊ½
 bÊ ÇY½ bÊ ÇY½
 ÃLg² s!nÄH XMb! XTLM wY½

ÃLg² b!nÄ" Xn@ MNt Äü½
 ¥rS nW mLÍ T nW MN glz@M n#éüŸ

Sing to the ox lullaby,
Dear ox, dear ox, should you not say “no”
When you are driven by people,
Who have not bought you?

Does it make difference if they drive me,
For tilling and toiling is the practice of my life.