

**MAJOR THEMES IN THE WORKS
OF
FOUR ETHIOPIAN WOMEN WRITERS**

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine themes women poets convey in their work.

The four women writers who are considered under these study are Aregash Seifu, Firmaye Alemu, Mekedes Jemberu, and Senayt Aberra. Their poems are found in the anthology of poem entitled.

The four women writers have written their poems depending on their individual experience, temperament, and their view of life.

The majority of their poem subjects are drawn from the ordinary social life of the Ethiopian people. The four writers have commonly touched the subject of love. They have great reverence for the issue of love. As each of them have different social background and experience, they seem to lack common frame of reference to explain it.

As regard the moral question, they have clearly stated the deteriorating moral condition and the general abject poverty that prevail in the country. It seems the four writers are not generally happy with the way things are in the country at present. As a result, they have voiced their concern and blatantly pointed out their bitter and critical social comment. The four women accept the universal law of life that upholds contradiction to be an inherent feature of all phenomena in the universe. Their attitude toward life is based on the principle of tolerance and optimism taking hope as a beckoning light.

In their individual work, the theme of woman subjugation is reflected in the works of Aregash and Mekedes have touched on the position of women in the society and how they suffer due to the traditional and cultural practice.

Firmay elaborated on the lack of self-respect and personal integrity the society shows by displaying unnatural behavior primarily to be on good terms in the day-to-day social relations at home and in public.

Senayt stresses on the necessity of moderate living. To conclude, in male dominated literary tradition of the country the four women writers have shown their intellectual competence.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1 General Background

At present women's presence is felt in all spheres of human activities including art and literature. Women are no longer the "mute" section of the society, but a force to be reckoned. In Ethiopia women have started to express their feelings and views not only on the political and social life of the country but also in art and literature, which for a long time were considered men's trade.

In Ethiopia the non-existence of a woman writer, especially a woman poetess was unarguable. Thus, no women writer was included in the history of the literary development of the country. Whether the omission is deliberate or not is an arguable question.

The idea that women have nothing worthwhile to contribute, which seemed widely spread among the Ethiopian population, is now no longer true.

In our literary history the place and position accorded to women is almost non-existent and the attention given to study their work is also very negligible. As a result, their works did not get the attention they deserve. It is obvious that in earlier times and at present too, a substantial number of women writers such as **Tsehaye Melaku**, **Yezena Worku** and **Sendu Gebru** have produced literary works in prose and verse. Regarding their literary achievement, however, few studies are conducted at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The studies so far conducted mainly focus on the prose of women writers and those made on poetry are very few and sketchy. Therefore, what kind of views, opinions and feelings women want to share with their society and above all what kind of message these writers convey in their poems are not dealt with in depth. Thus, studying the works of these women writers and bringing to light what concerns them seem proper to introduce their work to the general public and spark interest for further study.

Furthermore, the researcher has found it necessary to devote a few lines to mention government and non-government organizations, like the Ministry of Culture and Sports. The German Cultural (Goethe) Institute; Institute of higher learnings like the Addis Ababa University for showing keen interest for the works of women writers and for sponsoring and encouraging researchers, including this researcher, to study the works of women writers.

The women writers whose works are included in this study, among others, have acknowledged and expressed their heartfelt appreciation, for the contribution and the role played by individuals, government and non- government organizations and the Addis Ababa University, for the anthology of poem Eгна (we) 1990 to be published in book form. In this regard, it is suffices to quote what the writers have said in the book in their own words.

ይህንን መደበል ከማሳተግችን በሬት ራሳችንን ለስነጽሁፍ ስዳጆች ለማስተዋግግ ባደረግንግግ ገዛ በርቱ በማለት የተለያዩ ግለሰቦችና ድርጅቶች ድጋፋቸውን ሰጥተውናል። በተለይ ግን በአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ የቋንቋ ምኞት ጥናት ተቋም በባህልና ማስታወሻ ማኒፊስትር የሴቶች ጉዳይ መምሪያ የጀርመን ካልቸራል (ጉቱ) ኢንስቲትዩት ባለቤቶቻችን ናቸው (ገጽ 2)¹

¹ Eгна Ande Meto Seba Getmoch, (We, one hundred And Seventy Poems): Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1990 P.2

(Before publishing this anthology of poem in the process of our attempt to introduce ourselves to literary lovers, several individuals and organizations have encouraged us. We would like to express our indebtedness especially to the Addis Ababa University, Institute of Language Studies (emphasis mine), The women Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the German Cultural (Goethe) Institute

Therefore, in this study **Aregashe Seifu; Firmaye Alemu; Mekedes Jemberu;** and **Senayt Aberra²** are women writers whose poems are closely examined. Their works are found in the anthology of poems entitled Egna (we) which was published in 1990.

1.2 Rationale For selecting the Women writers

To start with, as far as I know, the poems these women writers hitherto have not been studied either at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Secondly, these writers are recent voices among others and have different views, opinions and temperament of their society as they have different social background. Besides, they are contemporaries. So the study may provide a good opportunity to see their similarities and differences in themes and techniques in the works they have produced.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General Objective

The purpose of this study is to look at what message women writers convey in their poems and to investigate whether or not there exists recurrent ideas expressed in

2 The order of the writers name have no any special significance. I have followed the order which the writers first appeared in the anthology of the poem.

their poems that commonly serve as a unifying theme to observe women's imagination and social criticism of the society they live in.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to analyze the common major themes that are treated in the works of the four women writers.

It also attempts to study the theme treated by each individual writer and in so doing the researcher will try to bring out similarities, if any, and differences in their work.

The study has included a chapter on the technical aspect so as to enable reader see similarities and differences in their work and understand better how they convey their messages through their techniques.

Finally by way of conclusion it assesses the social, political and economic conditions that have influenced their works.

1.4 Study Procedure

In the anthology of poems a total of 170 poems are published. Out of these, 100 poems are contributed by the above four writers, each writer has contributed a total of 25 poems. Therefore, after weighing the pros and cons, and discussing at length with my advisor and other staffs on what method to follow I finally and opted peruse the following procedure in conducting the study.

A total of 20 poems were chosen from the 100 poems selecting five poems from each writer's work. In analyzing the common major themes conveyed, I have used three broad categories of classification such as social, moral and philosophical.

Accordingly to substantiate my argument a total of 12 poems are used in these section for cross-reference. Furthermore, in order to see the recurrent ideas delivered by each writer, two poems are selected from each writer's work. Altogether 8 poems are considered in this subsection.

Last but not least, in the study procedure, attempt was also made to gather first hand information on the writers biographies and philosophy of life by conducting personal interviews to see whether it has direct bearing or influence on their poems. Hence, a semi- structured questionnaire was designed and the writers were asked to respond orally to the listed questions respectively.³

1.5 Limitation of the Study

From the outset, the researcher of this study would like to inform readers that the study does not cover all women writers. So the nature and scope of the study, page limitation among others have contributed to the limitation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 General

It is common knowledge that poetry is as old as man's history. And it is believed that poetry is one of the greatest arts invented by mankind. Even in today's modern world, poetry is considered to be among the first manifestation of mental

³ Firmaye, and Senayte have responded to the questionnaire orally and are recorded. Mekedes had given a hand written autobiography and has answered some question by telephone.

qualities attributed to man. Human relation and their day to day activities appear to be the firm ground for poetry flourish.

In this regard Cleanth Brooks (1960) says :-

“ . . . the impulse and methods of poetry are very deep in human experience, and that formal poetry itself represents, not a distinctive form, but a specialization of thoroughly universal habits of human thinking and feeling.⁴

The above extract explicitly states that eventhough human beings are separated by geographical location and time scale, the impulse of poetry seem second nature to man to share his experience that he has gone through by means of poetry. Poetry appears to be an ideal medium both for the oral tradition of poetry reciting and later for writing poetry.

Human beings reveal their happiness, sorrow, loneliness, lamentation and a host of other feelings through language.

Ethiopian women, in order to calm and sooth their babies, sing songs and lullaby's using oral poems. And present day women also express their feeling, groaning and emotion by writing poems. Hence, having a closer look at their poem and studying the major themes of these writers becomes appropriate to have an insight into what Ethiopian women think and feel.

In this regard, the studies so far conducted on Ethiopian is women poets are very few. And even those that are studied are sketchy. So far I have found only two studies related to women poets.

The first study, the researcher has come across, is the annotated Bibliography prepared by **Yeshiembet Tsige** under the title (**Ye Amargna Sene Getem Mestehafe**

Ke Acha Megelecha Gara (1976) (Annotated Biography of Amharic poetry books with equivalent explanation). The above study provides a chronologically organized list of Amharic poems with brief explanation on their thematic content. Since the themes are paraphrased in four or five lines, they don't provide adequate information.

The other study conducted in this area is an undergraduate study made by Genanew entitled *Yeset Getamiate serawoch Kegehte* Survey of the works women poets. (1933-1983 E.C).

Genanew survey of the works of women poets is the first serious attempt made in the area. Regarding women writers, Genanew has voiced similar tone and concern in his study like the present study. In his opinion, in the country's literary history women writers didn't get the necessary reception like their male counterparts. As a result, the lack of attention in the literary circle has contributed to their lack of recognition.

Genanew's study is divided into three historical phases. The first covers the period between 1933-1953, the second from 1953-66; and the third period from 1966-83. In the span of 50 years there were a total of 10 women poets in each period 4,4 and 2 respectively.

This study is similar with Genanew's study in one basic point. Both studies deal with women writers. Therefore, before beginning to analyze the major themes, it is necessary first to provide an overview of the status of women writers in Ethiopia. After referring and reading thoroughly on the available material from studies made in the area it has been possible to compile a brief history of Ethiopian women writers.

⁴ Cleanth Brook. *Understanding poetry*, New York; Holt Rinehart and Winston, © 1960 P.8

2.2 Ethiopian women Writers: An overview:

Studies made on the development of Ethiopia's literary history, consciously or unconsciously, have left out those written by women. The dominant position and role played by men in the political, social and economic activity is reflected also in the literary tradition of the country. The literary tradition has given high regard and recognition to male authors than to female writers.

During the initial period of fascist occupation (1928 –1933) there were a few poems written by male and by female. The main issues of the poems was anti - fascist in nature. As far as studies conducted in this area indicate (**Genanew Ketema: 1982**) the first Ethiopian women poet is **Yeshimbet Gename** and her work had appeared in **Belatn Geta Hiruy'' Zekre Neger**.

During the period 1933- 50 the first anthology of poem entitled **Ye Addis Zemen Mezmur sele Nesante Kibr** (New Era Anthem about Freedom and Honour) was published. Among the 35 youths whose works were included in the anthology, four were women namely, **Mulembete Gebretekle, Bezunesh Mekonnen, MsaleTeomeLessane and Mehalet Berhane Akalu**.

The four women writers, depending on their individual philosophy of life, temperament and experience, have pointed out the suffering the Ethiopian people went through during the five years of Italian occupation. The writers using their individual craft have treated issues such as the Italian fascist aggression, the struggle made by Ethiopian patriots to regain independence and what different writers wished for their country for the ensuing years. The four women poets were pioneers in the Ethiopian literary. Thereafter, women's participation in the literary life of the country continued.

Hence, in post-fascist era the first woman who published her collection of poem is **Aynalem Gebermariam**. Her poem is entitled **Yelbe Ethiopia winet Demetse Ye Addis_Zemen Bisrat** / Ethiopians Voice at heart, new Era Good News/.

Aynalem's poem primarily focus on the importance of national freedom, religion, value of knowledge and the significance of work.

Furthermore, **Sara Workneh** has translated William Shakespears play the Tempest into Amharic under the title Maeble. **Sendu Gebria** Yelebe Mesthafe (the book of heart) was also published in 1942. Thereafter, in the 1950's and 60's in two decades 20 women have published works on under plays and poems. Among this **GebereTsadik, Tadle; Sheto Mezgebu** and **Ayelech Bekele, Aster Fesseha, Zewditu Ashebre, Meseret Mengesha** are found.

During the period between 1950-70 the women poets who published their anthology of poems were Shewangejewe Belaynesh, Tsigie Adafre and Tirunesh Yimer. The anthology of the poems is entitled **Ye Helena Degaf Mekere, Wekessa** / Support of conscience, Advise and Blame/

From 1970 on wards **Teshay Melaku, Yezena Worku, Yemwedesh Bekele, Elefenesh Beruke, Kebedeche Tekelab** and **AlemTsehay Wodajo** are women who have published their poems.

In 1990, another group of women published an anthology of poem entitled. The women were altogether twelve. Out of the twelve poets, seven⁵ of them have published works. While the remain⁶ published their poems for the first time.

⁵ Mekedes ,Alem Sehaye Wedajo,Kebedech Tekleabe; Tirunesh Yemer; Tsigie Adafre;Shewengezawe Belaye, Sendu Gebru have prior published work.

⁶Aregash, Firmaye, Merekeb Tsegaye; Seneyt Aberra are publishing for the first time

Therefore, in the span of 59 years there were 16 women poets against men. The number is very small. However, what is important is that in men dominated literary tradition of the country, these poetess are hidden treasures that have come to light gradually through their own effort.

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE OF THE WOMEN POETS UNDER STUDY⁷

2.1 Aregashs Seifu (1949-1991 E.C)⁸

Aregashe was born in Kembata and had attended primary school in shone elementary school. As her father was a civil servant later her family was transferred to Gojjam and she continued her elementary education in Finote Selam and Debremarkos Aregashe had completed secondary school education at the Teferi Mekonnen High school. Thereafter, she joined evening class at Addis Ababa University and received a Diploma in Ethiopian language. Aregash had worked as a public relations officer in the Coffee and Tea Development Authority, until her untimely death in 1991.

Aregash adores nature and solitude. Among her hobbies reading books ranks first. It is believed that she had joined the Addis Ababa University Primarily to quench her thirst for reading books. In the anthology of poems, Egna We 1990, she contributed 25 poems.

Regarding her tendency towards poetry, Aregash had made the following remark:

ወደ ግጥም ያዘነበልኩት “ሳላውቅ የግጥም መንፈስ ስላለኝ ነው። ሕይወቴን ይበልጥ በተረዳሁ ቁጥር የግጥምን ጉልበትና ብርታት በተገነዘብኩ ቁጥር ቋንቋዬ ሁሉ ግጥም እየሆነ ይሄዳል።”

⁷ The Biography and Philosophy of life of the women writers were compiled from the personal Interview conducted with the writers and the published anthology poem Egna ,We, 1990

⁸ The dates are in Ethiopian calendar.

(I leaned towards poetry because without my awareness, I was captivated by the idea of poetry; the more I understood life, the more I realized the power of poetry: All my language started to become poetic.)

2.2 Firmaye Alemu (1950-)

Firmaye was born in Hossaena in 1950. She is the eldest daughter of a family of seven. She has one brother and three sisters.

When she was one year old, her father who was a merchant took the family to Gimbicho woreda to try his hand at a new business venture.

Firmaye's father, Ato Alemu GebereMariam, was a hardworking and thrifty person. He a rich merchant. He accumulated his wealth by selling flour and saving every penny he got. Her mother woizero Yeshe Gashe was a diligent partner.

Ato Alemu, among others, was the first settler and a pioneer in Gimbicho. He was always eager to accept new things. Ato Alemu was the first person to own a radio set and to have the roof of his house covered with tin sheet.

When Firmaye reached school age she joined an elementary school in Gimbicho and completed her elementary education (from grade one to six).

At that time, as there was no junior and senior high school in Gimbicho, she had to return to Hossena to continue her education. In Hossena, Firmaye lived with her aunt until she reached 12th grade. Up to 10th grade Firmaye learned in Ras Abate Buayallow High School. Meanwhile in 1964 a new high school named Leje Abebe Wolde Semayt was opened. Firmaye and her schoolmates joined the new high school. They were the first batch.

Firmaye completed high school in 1966. She was an outstanding student and had passed the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate examination successfully. She

was ready to join the University, when the 1966/1974 popular revolution broke out. As a result, the Institutes of higher learning were temporally discontinued due to the political turmoil that occurred in the country. Therefore, the historical course of event of in the country changed contrary to what Firmaye expected.

The then Provisional Government of Ethiopia promulgated a new program for the country's senior students to participate in what was then known as "Zemecha" (Development through Cooperation Campaign) as part of National Service. Thus, Firmaye, like other fellow students of her time, was obliged to participate in the Zemecha.

Soon she was assigned to Harar Administration Region (Present Region5). Firmaye and her fellow campaigners were dispatched to Harar to see, help the peasant raise their political awareness and perhaps learn the life of rural population of Ethiopia.

A year later, Firmaye was taken seriously ill and the Zemecha official gave her permission to be transferred to Gimbicho, where she would get better medical treatment near her family.

The country's wheel of history continued to turn and in 1967, the Dergue Regime issued a proclamation that nationalized private and public properties to be under the state control. So many affluent citizens and other people's properties were appropriated. And Firmaye's father was no exception. Recalling the event Firmaye says:-

“Eventhough I supported the revolution, when my father was disowned, I thought it was wrong. I love my father passionately. He is my friend. I felt sorry for him. He did not inherit a fortune. He started from scratch and built his

own fortune through hard work and saving every coin. Overnight he became poor. It was hard to believe. It was unjust!”

This was a turning point in Firmaye’s life. Ever since that day she began to study life critically. Thereafter, Firmaye, thinking she would be of some help to her parents, was employed in the Ethiopian Mapping Agency (her present work place). As civil servant with a small salary.

Soon she realized, it was impossible to help her parents and at the same time continue her education with the meagre salary she earn. Consequently, Firmaye became skeptical about the ways of life, and in a kind of philosophical way reiterated that there is no logic in life.

Life itself becomes a hindrance. It was very hard to get what she wished and dreamt. In connection with this Firmaye says “when I was brave enough to challenge the hardship of life and try to fulfil my aim, life eludes and frustrates me. I started to think that destiny and fate had become my enemies. That is why I entitled one of my poem Hulum Yalfale” (everything passes).

Firmaye seems prone to misfortune. The dark side of life seems to follow her like a shadow. In her office, she was not in good terms with her boss. According to her version, the reason might be that she was outspoken, bold and rigid she does not want her to be molested; she wants to get what she deserves by the merit of her work.

The disagreeable working environment resulted in Firmaye being passed during promotion. To make matters worse, she was demoted. In connection with this she points out it was like a banishment. And I became alienated. I was exiled in my own office, The poem Mekegna AtaSatagne (I need rival); Ye - - - le (there is no), and

keshe – ishe (from thousand - - - okay) are the result of her disappointment and indignant reaction to show her personal integrity and self respect. Therefore, the circumstances that led her father to misery; her thwarted dream; the antagonistic work relation. Were the main driving force for Firmaye to turn her face to literature as a solace. The young woman writer began to devote all her time to literature.

As Firmaye started to be engrossed in writing poem an idea sparked in her mind to take literature as a vocation. Formerly, her intent was to study engineering. That could not materialize. So she decided to develop her talent and her love of literature with education. In 1984 (Ethiopian calendar) she joined Addis Ababa University and studied literature in Ethiopian languages and has received her diploma. At present, she has continued her studies in the same area for her Bachelor of Arts in literature.

Regarding her philosophy of life Firmaye says; I love my self. I like to do things that make me happy. I like sharing the pain and trouble of others and help others. I do it not to earn a personal favour but because it gives me pleasure. If I do not do it, I practically become sick. I want people to be happy and get the best out of life. In connection with this in the biography prepared for the anthology Firmaye has made the following remarks.

“በተፈጥሮ ያገኛለሁትን ነፃነት ሊጋፉ የሚሹ ሰዎች በበዙ ቁጥር ይበልጥ እጠነክራለሁ፡፡ ሳቅን ከፈቅራለሁ እኔነቴን ከነሰሜ ከሁለግም በላይ አደንቃለሁ”¹⁰

(As the number of people who want to infringe upon my natural right increase, I get more strength. I love laughter and above all, I love myself with my name.)

¹⁰ Egana Ande Meto Seba Getmoch (we one hundred And Seventy poems): Addis Ababa, Artistic printing press, 1990 P.50

As regards her work, Firmaye writes her poem spontaneously. Whenever an incident provokes her mind, it incites her to ask herself, “if I do not write on this issue on what else can I write.” Therefore, “a spontaneous overflow of emotion” drives her to put pen to paper and write her poem on the spur of the moment.

Regarding her style, she uses ordinary language and writes the way she speaks. That is, her poems have a conversational tone.

Firmaye used to write long meters in her poem that she only knows how to read by inflicting her voice. As many of her poems admirers commented on her lengthy meter, saying it is difficult to read and understand. Recently, she has reverted to writing short-metered poems.

Firmaye repeats words on the same line primarily to give emphasis (see chapter three)

Among the male poets, Firmaye likes best the collection of Wondye Ali’s poem entitled ‘Wofe Komech’ which literally means ‘My bird stood’. According to Firmaye she likes his style and the way he uses words.

He gives great credit and value for each word. From women poets, she admires the works of Alem Tsehaye Wodajo whose collections of poems are included in the anthology of poems Eгна (1990).

Among her contemporaries, she thinks highly of Senayt Aberra. Firmaye says, taking her young age into consideration, Senayt’s poems are more mature.

Firmaye strongly uphold and hammers the notion that poetry writing is more of a woman than prose because a woman is nearer to feeling and emotion and so is

poetry. She reiterates that a woman thinks and reacts fast; she is boisterous, sarcastic and adept at using proverbs.

As regards the status of women writers in Ethiopia, she holds the view that there are many women writers in Ethiopia. Ethiopian women especially those who used to be in the highest echelon of life have great love for art and literature. These women used to write in their leisure time.

Firmaye mentions as an example woizero Sendu Gebru (1908 -) who was in the high pedestal of life almost a queen writing about the lower social life. Firmaye says it is not surprising if we write about poverty because we are near to it. But a woman in her position writing about it is surprising. To strengthen her point further, she cites the works of an eighty year old woman writer named woizero Zenebework whom she had introduced and brought to public notice in the literary symposium she organized at Hager Fikere Theatre. The symposium was held on April 16, 2000. Woizero Zenebework had displayed 6 volumes of her unpublished works.

The symposium was covered by two weekly free press namely Reporter and Genanaw who printed their news coverage on April 23, 2000 and April 21 respectively. The number of women writers who wanted to present their work in the symposium were many.

However, Firmaye says, "women's works are not included in the countries literary history development primarily due to the reason that the researchers are men. As the Bible was written by men. The literary history was also written by men." Therefore, one can speculate different reasons for women exclusion.

The first reason is perhaps the researcher have left it out unconsciously or the researchers are not honest to their profession. The second reason might be researchers do not take the initiative to trace back as far as possible to see if there are women writers. We women ourselves should seriously attempt to trace back and discover our literary foremothers. For a woman literary heritage. We must strive for woman writers to be included in the history or prepare a revised version of the history.

Firmaye is energetic and has a great feat for organizing. She was the first to take the initiative to contact MEDROC Ethiopia to publish the anthology of poem Egna. She is instrumental for its publication.

Firmaye is true to her words. Helping others is not only her philosophy of life, but an inherent inborn quality that she is endowed with the one-hour stay I had with her is wittiness to this fact.

2.3 Mekedes Jemberu (1950 -)

Mekeds was born in Gojjam province at the town of Debere Markos in 1950. Mekdes completed her elementary and secondary education at Debre Markos Negus Tekle Haimanot Senior High School. Later, she joined Asmara University in 1977 and received Diploma in accounting. Beginning from 1979 she has been working at the Ethiopian National Bank.

Mekedes is a mother of two daughters. The love of poetry captivated her from her childhood's days. She used to read poems while she was in grades five and six and thereby started writing her first poem while she was in grade eight. Her effort was acknowledged and earned her an extra mark from her teacher. And she still remembers

the enthusiasm of her teacher. Thereafter, she has participated in nationally organized literary contests and had won an award.

Mekede's debut as a women poet began when she published in 1984 E.C her first collection of poems under the title Nebasle. In this collection there are 39 poems.

Mekedes has around 230 unpublished poems. Among male poets she likes and admires the works of Lauret Tsegaye Geberemedhin, Seifu Metaferia, Yohannes Admasu and the late Mengestu Lemma.

2.4 Senayt Aberra (1968 -)

Senayt was born in 1968. She is the last daughter of a family of eight. Her mother is a house lady, and her father Ato Aberra was a civil servant at the Ministry of Defence and had worked as an auditor until he suddenly passed away.

Senayt has three brothers and two sisters. Her sisters are artists and have graduated from art school with Diploma. One of her brothers has studied law. He likes literature and used to write. But now he has stopped writing.

Senayt completed her elementary and senior high school education at Shashemene Catholic boarding school. In 1988 E.C she completed high school. Thereafter, she continued her studies by correspondence, learning the English language for a year and received a Diploma from the International Correspondence School (ICS). At present, she has continued her studies in management and is a prospective graduate in the just ending year (1992 E.C).

Senyate has also attended short course that familiarize on basic fundamental literary concepts. These studies have greatly assisted her talent of poetry writing.

Senayt is working in an organization that she formed herself. The organization is called "MAEKOT". The name is derived from (the oldest language used in the Ethiopian Coptic Church) it means "Kale Kidane" (promise).

The aim of the organization is to take care of disabled people. It accepts both male and female disables. The organization task is to teach, support and develop the skill of disabled people who have natural talent and interest for literature, music and art and publicize their work. It also prepares exhibitions and organizes festivals. It has literary, Musical and Art clubs, where the disabled take part and develop their talent in their area of interest.

For the near future, it has a plan to contact other similar organization and it held organize literary competition whereby the members will present their work. And also there is a plan to publish their work in books and filmstrips and decimate to the public. Even though there is no discrimination in acceptance, the organization gives priority to woman, as it is very hard to be and disabled.

The organization gets its fund from France. It also corresponds with other donor and humanitarian organizations who support such kind of cause. Up to now it has gained acceptance and favorable response from benefactors stationed locally and abroad.

As regards her literary world, Senayt has started writing poems, short stories and **novelette** beginning from her early childhood days. She has participated in Children Literary Competition organized under the auspices of the then Ministry of Culture and sports (Ministry of Information, culture and sports) and have won the Literary Competition twice (Possibly in 1984 and 1985). She has received awards and

certificate of merit for participation. Ever since her family has encouraged and supported her to pursue and develop her natural literary talent.

Senayt had read Lauret Tsegaye Gebermedhine collection of poem entitled Esate way Abeba (fire or flower 1966) while she was a child and used to recite the poem by heart. The Tsegaye poem to a certain extent had influenced her style of poem writing until she developed her own way of writing.

Senayt likes writing poems. She has never dreamt her poems will be published and reach the general poetry reading public. She simply writes her poems and compiles them. However, her encounter with Dr. Fekede Azeze, a senior lecturer at the Addis Ababa University, Institute of Language studies, had opened for her a new Avenue. In her own words Senayt says;

“I gave my poetry manuscript Dr. Fekade to look at it. He went through it and invited me to present some of my poems in Yegetem Meshet (poetry evening) which was held in the Addis Ababa University. Dr Fekade has done a great job. He is instrumental for my work to reach to public notice. I am grateful to him”

The poetry evening was prepared as memorial commemoration to mark the 6th year date of the death of the late renowned, poet and playwright Mengistu Lemma.

Senayt has presented five of her poems. Among the poem, Be Nege- Nege (tomorrow- by tomorrow) and Heg New (It is the Law) are found.

The evening had opened for her a new horizon. Senayt’s literary debut has started from this evening. She was inspired, became confident and realized that she has a feat for poem writing.

Senayt does not claim to have her own style. However, at the early stage of her writing she was influenced by Lurate Tsegaye Geberemdhun. But later she has developed her own way of writing poetry.

Among the women writers, she likes best the works of Kebedech Tekelab whose collection of poems is published under the title "Yet New (where is it 1983). According to Senayt, eventhough Kebedech's poem revolves around one major central idea, like what life in prison looks like in exiled country. (Kebedech was imprisoned in Somalia) It has depth and is wider inscope. She also admires the works of Aregashe Seifu.

From male poets she admires the works of Seifu Metaferia, a senior lecturer at the Addis Ababa University, Institute of Language Studies.

At present, aside from the 25 already published poems, she has three volumes of unpublished collection of poetry manuscripts each volume Consisting of sixty- six poems. The first volume is entitled Balenger (My friend); The second one Lebena Ayene (The heart and the eye); while the third is entitled Bereketete Quene (Gift of Quene). She says, she would like to publish her collections and distribute them to the general public if God wills and conditions are favorable.

As regards her feeling as a woman writer, she does not associate her femaleness with poetry writing. However, she holds the view that women are nearer to feeling. They have readily changing nature. Their mood changes easily one moment they are happy the next moment they are sad. If they start writing they can express their feeling in poetry more than they do in prose.

Senayt further asserts Ethiopian women to have great love and appreciation for art and literature. There are many women who write in their leisure time and she even knows some of them personally. However, the women write for their own satisfaction. They do not want to go public. They need encouragement from the public. If they get opportunity to publicize their work, they will understand how much they are worth and will build confidence.

Neither the society nor the culture has deterred them from going public. It is simply the women do not show effort. If they get together and form their own literary circle or exchange their manuscript and boldly present their work in public literary forums. There is no reason why their work would not be accepted.

Senayt believes Ethiopian women to have an inborn natural talent for poetry making. However, natural talent by itself should not be an end by itself. It should be assisted by academic knowledge. One becomes refined and a seasoned poet if he/she develops her natural talent with good literary knowledge.

Senayt reads any kind of poetry books. She even reads poems, which are considered bad.

She has her own way of reading a poem for instance she reads a poem on **Tezeta** (Memory); she reads all versions written by different authors and compare and contrast them.

Senayt has got her own philosophy of life that she adheres as a principle. For her life is a never-ending struggle. There are many up and downs. In life there are somethings in life that one has to accept as they are above all, she gives great value and reverence for love.

CHAPTER THREE

MAJOR COMMON THEMES OF THE FOUR POETS

3.1 General

As Cleanth Brook states “The theme of a poem . . . amounts to a comment on human values, an interpretation of life”¹¹

The subject matter of these four writers poem are drawn from the every day life of the Ethiopian society. They depict the sorrows, desire, thoughts and personal reflections of their society and life in general with humble sincerity. And as a result, the messages they convey in their work primarily focus on the social side and their philosophical reflections lean towards expressing the concept of “what is life?”

Therefore, even though some of the ideas raised in their poems appear to be too familiar and common place when they are presented in a poem form they are the most difficult to articulate. Hence, to understand the message conveyed in their work, it is necessary to cite what Robin Skeleton (1971) says regarding a poem

A poem is an exploration rather than a disquisition. It is not a way of stating effectively an already known idea or message. It is a way of struggling with the excitement and tension of the words surrounding and embodying ones attitude towards a particular subject until those excitement and tension result in the creation of a pattern and at least a temporary conviction of having achieved some kinds of resolution.¹²

Therefore, as cited in the above quotation I will try to elaborate the message conveyed by providing the tone and altitude of the writers with the way the use words.

¹¹ Cleanth Brooks. Understanding poetry, New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, © 1960 P.342.

¹² Skeleton Robin, the practice of poetry London: Heineman Educational, 1971 P.4

3.2 Social Theme: The issue of love

The meaning attributed to love is so varied that it has been difficult to pin it down to a single term or definition. Some say it is unique to each person's experience, feeling, emotion and temperament. Others are of the opinion that love is expressed through the deeds of the lover to the loved object. Be it in real life or in the make-believe world of fiction, many acts of love are expressed. Many suggest the greatest act of love is expressed when a lover sacrifices his life for his beloved.

In the Holy Scripture, the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified to redeem mankind from original sin. In literature, the most talked subject about sacrifice for the object of love was written by the renowned poet, playwright and dramatist, William Shakespeare in his play *Romeo and Juliet*.

Even though the concept of love is not limited to opposite sexes, love of one country, platonic love, filial love. . .etc, seem to revolve around a frame of reference largely set by a male world. How does a woman express her love, especially how do Ethiopian women express their love? What kind of message do they impart regarding love? In the following passages we will try to see how this theme is treated by referring to the poems. The poem entitled "**kale Albo**" which literally means "wordless" relates how love and hate should be expressed. The tone of the poem suggests that the speaker had some kind of reverence for the subject.

The poem tries to explain how this abstract word (concept) is beyond worldly measurement. The poem cadence has its own pattern. It begins by providing objective and concrete materials as a measurement for love to draw parallel image. It ranks the

precious stones, in accordance with the importance and value people attach to them in the secular world.

For the purpose of analysis we will quote from the poem. The opening line of the poem run as:-

ካልማዝ የከበረ
ከወርቅ የነጠረ
የጠፋው መስፈሪያ
ዕውነተኛውማ
ከቋንቋ የላቀ
ከቃል የመጠቀ
ከዐረፍተ ነገሮች፡ ከሐረጎች ውጭ
ከትርጉም የራቀ
“እኔ ወድሻለሁ . . .”
“እኔ ወድሀለሁ . . .”
መደዴ ፣ መደዴ ባዶ ነው ካካታ

(ቃል አልቦ ÷ አኛ÷ገጽ 30)

(Love is precious than Dimond and refined gold. True love is beyond language, words, sentences and phrases. It is beyond meaning. The utterance ‘I love you ...’ spoken by both sexes is trite and an empty noise)

The precious stones “Almaz” (Dimond) and “warque” (Gold) are the highest gems a man offers to a woman to show his love. In the Ethiopian context this precious metals are offered by a lover as a gesture of good will and token of respect for the loved ones. The poem suggest that unlike the popular belief women are materialistic, when it comes to love, neither material things nor printed words measure up to what a woman thinks to be true love. Material possession is not a yardstick to know what a women considers as love. However, the poem does not give what it considered to be true love by offering explanation.

Starting from the above general explanation the poem further builds up on the valuable traits of love by providing it human qualities. Love is beyond words and phrase patterns.

The poem further concretizes the expression of love by specifying it to individual utterances. It points out that the utterance “I love you” exchanged between a man and a woman is banal. The above poem implies that ordinary mortals of both sexes have profaned love by their trite and utterances in expressing their emotion and feeling to those they love.

The poem further states neither extreme love nor hatred should be expressed in words. The best way is to remain silent. In the poem it is indicated as follows:

ለክብሩ መግለጫ
መክላት መከላከል
መሞትም መሰዋት
ዝም ይሁን ፀጥታ
አብዝቶ መጥላትም
አብዝቶ እንደመውደድ
ከቶ አይነገርም

(Ibid., p.30)

(To honor love being becoming wretched, death and sacrifice should be silence. Extreme love like extreme hatred is not to be spoken.)

The poem even though it suggests that extreme manifestation of feeling to be undesirable, and opts for moderation, it does not reveal how this moderation is to be achieved to explain the feeling of love.

In the poem the key word that explains the meaning of love is “**Zemeta**” silence. Silence can mean agreement, disagreement or even indifference. Therefore, one can come up with various interpretations for the stand manifested in the poem. Either the subject of true love has eluded the speaker or is affected by the dominance of the patriarchal system which to a large extent relegates women to secondary position and does not allow them to express their feeling as it does on the political and economic activity.

In the Ethiopian context depending on the cultural norms of the diverse ethnic groups, depending on his income the man expresses his love in various ways. In general as a gesture of expressing ones love feeling, some offer their women small gifts others present their beloved with lemon and still others provide precious ornaments such as Jewel, pearl, gold necklace, earrings etc...

But in this poem, love is above all these worldly ornaments and it implicitly suggests that from a woman's perspective the concept of love does not measure up to the honor, sacrifice and prestige a woman accords to love. Therefore, in using silence as a mechanism to express love, the title of the poem becomes symbolic in the sense that there is no word to express true love.

The poem subtly suggests a far deeper meaning when viewed from the diversified ethnic groups. It conveys the imposition laid down on women by the society not to express their true personal feeling. To express such august abstract concepts like love is very hard. If a woman is bold enough to express what she feels saying, "I love you" the man may despise her or may become very proud and arrogant. Furthermore, the society also thinks of the woman to be uncultured, mannerless and her act will be considered unladylike. One may argue that although this is generally the case, some women express their feelings in private. At present this appears to be the general trend. So they do not reveal their love feeling in public. Therefore, the poem's last line has a tone of resignation and instructs saying it is better to watch quietly and silently. The last line run as;

የውቅያኖስ ጥልቀት : አድማሳትን አልፎ
 በዝምታ መንበር
 ማየት ይበጅ አርፎ
 ሲበዛ ገደቡ ዝም... ዝም... ዝም
 እንዲያ ነው ሚገለጥ
 ጥላቻም ፤ ፍቅርም ::

(Ibid., p.30)

(The tenseness and depth of her silence is compared to the depth of the ocean and the spread of the horizon which are symbolic for their tranquillity and eternal silence, unless disturbed by natural elements.)

Perhaps the poet love of silence may manifest the passive nature women possess in Ethiopia.

Unlike the former poem of Aregash which indicate an attitude of detachment the poem entitled **Fiker End Amargn (Longing for Love)** is more human and warm and shows the speaker involvement. Like the first poem, this also is a personal reflection. The speaker narrates from first person point of view. The language used is ordinary and has conversational in tone. One feels as if the speaker is confiding in the reader. The tone of the poem suggests a sense of regret and bewilderment on the part of the speaker.

In general, the poem does not reveal for what kind of love she is really longing. But from the general mood of the poem it is assumed to be love for the opposite sex. However, one discerns a pattern in the general cadence of the poem. That is the first part that states the speaker childhood days and her failure to experience love. The second part tells how earning a living has taken most of her time. The last part winds up with her longing and desire mounting to a feverish scale. Therefore, in trying to analyze the message the stanza is divided following the above major events in the persona's life. Accordingly, the first stanza of the poem run as follows:

መጭቅላ ሆኜ ፈቅርን ሳላውቀው
 በንጥር - ንጥር ኑሮ ስጨፈላለቀው
 ቃናውን ሳልቃኘው
 ውሉን ሳላገኘው
 በመብላት መጠጣት
 በመግባት በመውጣት
 ብዙ ብዙ አለፈ
 ልቤ ልብ ሳይለው

(ፍቅር እንዳማረኝ፣ እኛ፣ገጽ 65)

(In my tender age, when I have no experience of love, I was trampling over it by daily life, I did not get a chance to taste love. The time passed, by daily living with out my realization)

The above stanza gives an account of the speaker’s regret due to her inability to be involved in love during her child hood days and due to the daily routine. Every day domestic activity has dominated her life rhythm and she was not aware of the passing days. The poem uses the Amharic word “Mutekela Hogne” (while I was a child) which literally means in my formative years.

To show ordinary drudgery of life she uses the phrase “Niter-Niter nuro” (pouncing daily charge.) The impact of daily life had put a stamp on her being physically and mentally. This is expressed in a strong Amharic phrase **Sechefelalkew** (to trample) because of life she trampled over love, as elephant tramples young plants.

The necessary but monotonous repetition of her life is clearly stated in rhythmical couplet that runs as:

በመብላት መጠጣት
 በመግባት በመውጣት

(Ibid., p.65)

(Bemblat Metetate (eating and drinking) and Megebat be Mewtate (coming in and gong out)

The above couplet indicates the daily activities that ordinary people follow out of necessity. It seems these repeated actions have worn out the speaker both physically and mentally. She has become numb to the passage of time. Her lack of awareness is shown in the Amharic phrase ‘lebea lebe Saylew’ (without my heart realization). Actually one observes with ones mind. However, among the Amharic speaking it is a common expression it is the heart that remembers things ‘lebe Alalequtum’ to mean, “I did not realize.” Ethiopians attribute cognizance to the heart than to the mind.

Therefore, her heart has fled like a man who is in flight, the compound word **Endekenanfe** which literally means (to flee) is formed the Amharic comparative maker “Ende” (like). In this context the word is used to give the image that the love she so desperately craved for has flown like a swift bird. Therefore, the above stanza of the poem as a whole provides a feeling of sadness and regret to have invaded the mind of the speaker. It is by and large a nostalgic reflection of her thinking. In a nutshell the above lines in particular and the whole poem in general epitomizes the lot of the majority of Ethiopian woman who do not have a chance to experience love at their tender age. It clearly states women’s place to be domestic. They are engaged in domestic work and are estranged from public life. Since the mores and code of the society have women’s place to be in the kitchen, it is very hard for the majority of them to spend their time with the one that appeals to their desire.

The poem after reflecting on the child hood memory of the speaker brings as back to the present in the line where it says:

አሁን አሁን ሁሉም
ሁሉም ረጭ ዝም
ፈቅር ኋሊት ቀርቶ
ኑሮ ሚሉት ቅድም
ሲል መቅበጥ አሰኘኝ
መወደድ መፈቀር
አላገኘሁትም ከመናፈቅ በቀር::

(Ibid., p.65)

(Now everything became quiet and silent. Love was left behind and living became prior. I longed for a man: to be liked and loved but I could not find it. I remained longing for it).

Thereafter, even when she became an adult, earning a living has taken most of her time. As a result, her love life was left behind leaving her capricious. The poem repeats the words Ahun; Ahun (Now:Now) Zem Zem (quiet quite) emphasizing that no one dares to suggest or comment on what a woman has to do to express her feeling, now she is a grown up person, other pressing matters like earning a living does not provide her with room for search despite her effort.

The word 'Mekibte' (to go out with a person), which in Amharic means secret visit, is a humorous sardonic word which implies in a country where women's hands are given in marriage without their consent, falling in love is a luxury they can not afford.

In the last stanza the poem concretizes when her longing becomes acute by citing two major holidays where people express their feelings and happiness for the loved ones by sending perfumes. The

“እንኳን አደረሰሽ መልካም በዓል” ሚላኝ
 በነበረ የቀረበው ፍቅር እንደማረኝ
 እንደማረኝ ሊቀር፣ ሊቀር ነው መሰለኝ
 ፍቅር እንዳማረኝ

(Ibid., p.66)

(On the eve of New Year and Easter, leaving aside the perfume and greeting cards, my aching heart lounged for a man. Who utters “Happy New Year. But my longing for love is going to remain in vain)

Here it should be noted that the exchange of cards be it for greeting, well wishing or as an expression of love has started earlier. All the above seem fancy to the speaker. She could not find a single well wisher that utters the words “Enkuan Adaereshe” Happy Christmas, New Year, or happy Easter. Therefore, in the last line of the poem the word love is repeated four times and the title Fiker EndeAmargne two times emphasizing the personals strong urge and unfulfiled desire for love and the fear of growing old before experiencing love seems to worry her.

On the other hand, the poem “matate” (Which latterly means unrequited love) is a personal reflection. The speaker describes how she tried to fall in love encouraged by what others have experienced. Although, she had spent years seeking the love of her mate, she could not get her hearts desire. As a result, her love life is nipped in the bud. To see how the message is conveyed first let me quote form the part of the poem

አይቅርብኝ ብዬ
 ሰው ያረገው ነገር
 ከፍቅራ ፍቅር ተራ
 ገባሁ ተሰልፌ
 ግንቡን አለፈኩና
 በመጀመሪያው ዙር
 ከሁለት ቤት ስንቀር

(ማጣት፡-እኛ፡-ገጽ፡ 107)

(Wanting to experience, what others have I took my line in
loves queue, I passed the gate and in the first round only I
was divided, split, halved.)

The poem begins with a description presented in a matter of fact tone. The poem is told from first person narrative point of view. The speaker is a “she”. The narration of the poem suggests that a kind of dialogue is taking place. The beloved is listening passively to the woe’s of the speaker. The speaker pours out her sad encounter with her one time lover with intense feeling. From the attitude and tone of the speaker’s sorrow, distress and grief seem to gnaw at her.

At the initial stage, the speaker has no intention to tread in “Land of love”. This is clearly stated in the Amharic phrase which says **Kefekera Feker Terra** (which literally means where love is found) has a mild sardonic attitude. The speaker mocks at herself. She wanted to experience the feeling of love because other women do it. A kind of cynicism is observed. The speaker then states what she encountered in her love sojourn. The next stanza of the poem runs as follows

ስምህን ለማወቅ ...
ወራት ...
አንተኑ ለማረቅ ...
አመት ...
አንደ መካኗ ሴት ...
ልጅ እንደምትጠብቅ ...
አንደ በሽተኛ ነገ እንደሚናፍቅ
አይገቡ ገብኛ
ተረታሁ ንጉኛ

(Ibid., p.107)

(To know your name it took me a month to mould your
behavior a year. Like a barren woman and like a patient
who longs for to morrow. In my eagerness I was defeated.)

The incompatible rejected love life is presented by time elements sequentially. Her attempt to understand her lover and the misunderstanding that followed is stated.

To know the name of her lover it took her months, to mould his behavior has taken a year. The speaker (person) uses beautiful comparison to show her patience and tolerance for the love she planted to mature and bear fruit. From the comparison (simile) she employed, one can clearly see that her dream will not be realized. The associations used for comparisons such as like a barren women a who long for her offspring and like a patient who longs for tomorrow implicitly forshadow and confirms what I have stated above.

እንደመካኗ ሴት...
 ልጅ እንደምትጠብቅ
 እንደ በሽተኛ ነገ እንደሚናፍቅ

(Like a barren woman, who expects a son and like a patient who longs for tomorrow)

The image drawn is stated with a simple language. It brings to the poem some kind of emotional feeling. It is true that a barren woman longs to bear children and experience the sweet pain of labour. In this regard the speaker seems to realize from the outset that her love will not be. But the speaker fears that her wishes will remain unfulfilled. And the second comparisons which says like “ a patient who longs for tomorrow” but knows he cannot regain his health signifies an element of mixed feeling of hope and fear. The last five line of the poem confirms our fear. It runs as follows

ልብህና ልቤ ...
 ሳይተቃቃፉ ...
 ሳይደጋገፉ አመታት አለፉ ...
 ሳይበራ ቀለጠ ...
 የፍቅራችን ጧፉ
 (ማጣት፣ እኛ፣ ገጽ 107)

(With out mutual understanding and support years have passed. Our love candle melted before it is even lit)

The paradox of their love is symbolized by the “love wick” which burned before it is even lit. The speaker and her lover are estranged from each other.

Senayt Abera too present love in the poem entitled Ale Ageru (Not in One’s own land). Since the poem is very short the whole verse is presented here.

ፍቅር አላገሩ አለወንዙ ወድቆ
አለቦታው ገብቶ ድንቅ አደርግ ብሎ
ሲያለምድ አንበሳ
እንደቤት እንሰሳ
በለስለስ ቃል በሞኝ ወቀሳ
አፍቅረኝ እያለ ሲያሳየው አበሳ
በጊዜ ቀበቶ ሽቅብ ተንጠልጥሎ
ያጎረሰበትን ቀኝ እጅን ገንጥሎ
ይናከስ ጀመረ ፍቅርም አላገሩ
ለቦታው ወድቆ ስጠፋበት ነብሩ

(አላገሩ፥ አኛ፥ ገጽ 164)

(Love makes a sojourn to a strange land to make wonders and tried to tame a lion like a domestic animal. But the mission fails and love turns to a wild beast and starts to bit contrary to its nature)

In general the poem Ale Ageru Not in One’s Own Land is presented in narration. The tone of the poem is instructional. Unlike the first two poets who have the speaker of poem in the center, the speaker in this poem describes the episode from a distance like one who reports an incident he has seen from afar. She is in the periphery.

In this poem love is personified as a human being. It is an apostrophe. Love tries to tame a lion by offering a flower. Here one can observe the surrealistic approach. Two unlikely elements are associated. You present a flower to a human being not to a lion. A lion needs a chunk of meat. The poem in conveying its message seem to forward warning. The love was one sided. So the love could not prosper. Love should get its proper nest to be nurtured and grow to maturity. Other wise the natural

qualities of love, tenderness, understanding, attention which are loves inherent manifestation of feeling and emotions will be thwarted, when the one that is loved is forced to act contrary to its natural setting. It turns wild and fierce, and ultimately the poem also clearly states that the idea that love knows no bounds holds true. The norm and code of a particular society have great influence on nurturing love.

All the four have written on loves universal human trait and they all have perceived it differently as their experiences differ. For Aregash since love has no word, immersing in a wave of love and being silent expresses love more. For Firmaye she longs for love but is unable to taste it. And therefore yearns and pours here lamentation the third Mekedes who thought love is beautiful and eager to taste from its nectar like others involves herself but become unsuccessful. All of them are similar in a sense that they have written on love. Their experience makes them different.

There is also difference in the manner of presentation Aregashe and Senayt treat the subject from the outside. Their presentation appears to be a causal reflection.

Although both of them, present love from a distance as if they have not been affected, Aregashe's poem is metaphysical while Senayt's is witty aphorism.

The poem of Firmaye and Mekedes reveal personal reflections and tend to be narrative. The tone of their poem consists of deep feelings and intense emotion. They are more involved. Furthermore, the moods of the poems are sad.

As regards language Firmaye conveys her message in simple and ordinary language while Mekedes' language is full of imagery.

Regarding this common theme it is possible to conclude that these women poets do not have common frame of reference to express what they feel and think about this human experience known as love.

3.3 Moral : The Theme Of Moral Decadence

Going into the discussion of the theme of moral decadence of the society both on its material and spiritual life, first it is necessary to provide a frame of reference of what is regarded as moral decadence. In conveying the theme of moral decadence all the four writers, depending on their specific individual experience and temperament, have stated their concern with feeling and emotion about the contemporary social condition.

The Oxford paper back Dictionary (1983) defines the term morale: as moral (adj) of or concerned with goodness and badness of human character or with the principles of what is right or wrong in conduct (p.424)¹³

If we extend this definition further it gives a connotation of the condition of right and wrong in human relations. On the other hand, decadence refers to becoming less worthy, deteriorating in standard. Therefore, as used in this context moral decadence refers to the debased nature of the contemporary society as manifested in idea, thought or action to shoulder social responsibility and negligence to build a nation as an act of social obligation.

Therefore, hereafter the moral decadence will be discussed by taking excerpts from the poems.

¹³ The oxford paper back dictionary, Great Britain, Richard clay (The Chaucer press) ltd., © 1983.

The poem **Nuelgne Dehawoche** (come my paupers) is drawn from the present Ethiopia reality. Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is a country of paupers, where life is a great agony and burden for the majority of its citizens. Most of the inhabitants spend their day with an empty belly begging for alms in order to survive.

Against this background the poem “come my paupers” is a bitter satire against the amoral behavior manifested by both governmental and non-governmental organizations who make their bread out of the misery of the poor, The fact that among the poor, the vulnerable groups being children and women, makes the picture grim; Aregash in her poem presents it as follows:

በስነተዋልዶ ዕውቀት ልካባችሁ ÷
 በመውለድ በመሞት መካከል ልዩነት ያጣችሁ ÷
 ኑ ... ኑ... ምስኪኖቼ !
 የአመገብ ሥርዓት ሳይንስ ልምክራችሁ ÷
 ብርቱካን መንደሪን ሮማን ፖፖዬ ...
 የአሣና የሥጋን ጥቅም ላስረዳችሁ
 እኔ ምንችገረኝ ቆሎ ባይኖራችሁ::
 ብትልሱ ብትቀምሱ የሰው እጅ አይታችሁ
 ሥራ ሰራሁ ብዬ ልራቀቅባችሁ
 ኑልኝ ተደራጅ ልለምንባችሁ

(ኑልኝ ደግሞቼ =እኛ =ገጽ 27)

(Let me advise you on nutritional science. The benefit of apple, orange, fish and meat. I do not care a hoot if you have nothing to eat and if you live on the charity of others. Let me make my self-pompous as if I had done a job. Come be organized and let me beg in your name)

The speaker of the poem is first person. The “I” in the poem is a corrupt individual. He knows deep inside his heart that the poor cannot afford to get the list of food items (nutrients) that he enumerates.

The poem ironically attacks the present fashion of helping the poor that had prevailed in the world at cosmic level by showing the Ethiopian reality in microcosm.

The established institutions (government or non-government organizations) through the medium of their personage preach the poor about birth control and the need to change their feeding pattern and habit by introducing different kinds of nutrition. The poem's last line has a powerful couplet.

ሥራ ሠራሁ ብዬ ልራቀቅባችሁ
ኑልኝ ተደራጁ ልለምንባችሁ

(Ibid., p.27)

(Let me make myself ostentatious as if I had done a job.
Come be organized and let me beg in your name.

The above couplet indicates the banality of these institutions who deep in their hearts know that they recognize their own wrong doing. What these institutions consider as work regarding the poor is organizing workshops, compiling reports and ordering procurement, which are not related to the needs of the poor. They are not there to alleviate the misery of the poor but are means of creating jobs for themselves and their accomplices. The poem also mocks and sneers at higher officials who preach democracy for the poor.

The bitter satire is prominently directed against the amoral behavior manifested by the country politicians. In the poem it runs as follows

ሰብሰብ በሉና ስለዲሞክራሲ መግለጫ ልስጣችሁ፥
እኔ መንተዳዬ የባቢሎን ቋንቋ ቢሆን ልሳናችሁ፡፡
እናንተ ምንድባን ኑልኝ ድሃዎቼ፥
የእንጀራ ገመዴ ለኔ ሥራዎቼ

(Ibid., p.27)

(Please gather together let me discourse on democracy. I do not care if your tongue becomes like that of Babylon. Come you miserable paupers my means of earning bread and job.)

The tone of the above quartet is tinted with bitter satire. It shows the uninteresting oration of politicians who preach democracy to the poor with empty stomach. The Biblical reference to the tower or Babylon in the poem suggests that the politicians know that the poor do not understand what they say. **Ene men Teday; yebabylon Kunkwa Behon Lesanachhu** (I do not care if your tongue becomes like that at Babylon. Unlike the Holy Scripture the comparison made in this poem is ironical. It states the evil intention of politicians who design to sow the seed of confusion among the populace, so that the nations poor do not raise their voice in unison. In short, the poem satirizes the moral degeneration of contemporary politicians who earn their bread and lead luxurious life by using the poverty-stricken people as a means of amassing wealth.

The “I” in the poem who says “come my pauper” is a corrupted, morally debased individual; he adds fuel to the misery of the poor so that their wretched life perpetuates in vicious circle.

In the same way, **Senayt Aberra** in her poem entitled “Sew Below” (The Man-Eater) has voiced her indignation by attacking those officials who are making empty oration to the poor.

The corrupt “He” in the poem and what he thinks and stands for is portrayed in the poem. It is a bitter remark. The title is aptly coined and mirrors the current reality. I will quote the whole poem.

ውስጠ ባዶ ነው ሸንቦቆ
 ሰው አለው - መተላለፊያ
 እንደ ደም - ቅዳ መልስ
 አለው ወንፌት ነገር መንፌያ
 እንደ ቅል ተበለጭልጮ
 የቤት ጉልላት ቁንጮ
 በሥጋ ድር ተለገሞ
 ባምሳል ለይምሰል ተጣምሮ
 አልባሳቱን አሠማምሮ
 መነባነበን ደርድሮ
 ይጨገለ ላይ ተነጠልጥሎ
 ሰውን ሰው - በላው !ብሎ::

(ሰው በላው ፥ እኛ ፥ ገጽ 154)

(He is hollow like reeds. He has a way to brew trouble. He shines like a gourd of butter and is conspicuous like a decoration on a dome of a house. Though created in the image of God, his personal relation is pretentious. Fully dressed and rehearsing his soliloquy he criers man ate man.)

The “He” in the poem “Sewe Below” The Man-Eater epitomizes the current officials who are similar with their fellow citizens in body and flesh. They are all created in the image of God. However, in their deeds they are the Devils incarnate.

The phrase Ende Kebe Kil which literally means like guard that contains butter shows the well-fed and pampered complexion of the officials from good living. The officials have made riches at the expense of the poor.

These officials being at the apex of the social pyramid appear fully attired on public occasion to deliver their well-orchestrated unwelcomed oration “man ate man.”

The phrase man ate man is a figurative language which implies the exploitation of man by man.

The oration is deliberately organized to convince and dupe the common people, as if the monster that caused the wretched life of the people is outside the realm of the social condition. In short the politicians shed crocodile tears.

The poem's tone and attitude show the poet's resentment and indignation against the arrogance and the despise manifested by these officials on the common people.

Like Aregashe's poem "Nulegne Dehawoeche" (come my pauper), the poem "Sewe Belaw" (The Man-Eater) is also a bitter satire against the debased morality of the leaders. Unlike the above two poems that reflect the general abject poverty and degeneration of the system that gained the upper hand of the contemporary Ethiopian society; **Firmaye's** poem "**Yekebre Gudatag**" (**victim of honour**) depicts the decay and the excessive selfishness that frequented the society. The poem reflects specific incident that has become a norm on its own right due to the malfunctioning of the system. This norm is begging. The poem deals how with people gradually lose their honour and dignity as a result of it.

ምንም አይፈልግም መፈለጊያም የለው
ካጠመው በልቶ ጦማድሮ ከሌለው
የእድልን ፈንታ ድርሻውን ወሰደ
የኛ ባለእጅ ዳሽ ልመና ለመደ ፤
ልመና ወግ ሆነ ነውርነት ቀረ
ክብር በቀን ብዛት ተመነቃቀረ
ለማኙ በርክቶ ተለማኝ አነሰ
የሰርቶ በሊታው ቁጥር እየቀነሰ

(የክብር ጉዳተኛ ፡ እኛ ፡ ገጽ 74)

(He needs nothing. And he has no where to go. If he is lucky he eats. If not he spends the night starving. He became accustomed to begging. Begging is no more shameful. It is the norm. Through time honour is dismantled. The number of working people dwindles the swelling the number of beggars than the begged.)

The poem's tone suggests the deplorable condition that has engulfed the whole country. The attitude of the poem states that the poet is bitter about the whole situation, The key word such as "**lemena Newerentu kir**" (beginning is no more shameful practice); the imbalance between the begged and the beggars; and the general joblessness is clearly stated.

The poet has clearly pointed out her fear that the number of un-employed people is rampant and the trend seems increasing. As a result, the quality of life has degenerated and poverty has spread. This in turn has bred individuals who stretch their arms for alms, than doing decent work to earn their bread. People gradually lost their dignity and self-respect.

Begging which was once a rare sight seems an accepted norm both at individual and national level. People no more look at it as something that touches one's morale and pride.

In general, selfishness and greed at national level and loafing and lack of self respect at individual level seem the general syndrome that gnaw the very root of the moral fabric of the contemporary Ethiopian society.

The poem's tone and the attitude of the speaker suggest that begging to be a chronic poignant malady that has corroded people's honour and dignity.

The moral decadence of the Ethiopian society appears to be tuned to the general grim and squalid life of Addis Ababa.

Mekedes' poem "**Shegere**" (The nickname given to Addis Ababa) reflects the general sordid scenario of the city and the amoral behavior of its citizen. The opening line of the poem run;

ወይ አዲስ አበባ ...
 ጉንጭና ጉንጨቺ ... እሳት መስሎ ቀልቶ
 አምርራ ስታለቅስ ... ቆማ ስታነባ
 ሲያስቸግራት ጊዜ ...
 የሰራ አካላቷ እንደቁስል ሸትቶ

(ሸገር፣ እኛ፣ ገጽ 119)

(Oh Addis Ababa, bothered by her stinking smell that pervades from her body, she stood crying and wept bitterly her cheeks turning aflame)

In the above lines of the poem Addis Ababa is personified as a woman. The woman's whole body is petrified and decomposed. Its smell pervades the atmosphere. It crates a vivid image of a city engulfed in its own filth. Addis Ababa, which literally means new flower, does not seem to stand up to its name. The filth, dirt and stifling atmosphere of the city makes one wonder and suspect whether there is a hint of sarcasm beneath the naming of the city. The poem after describing the general untidy nature of the city specifically states the amoral behaviors of the citizens by portraying their daily activity. This is cited in the poem as follows;

ብናገር ማን ሰምቶኝ
 ማን ተጉዳይ ጥፎኝ
 እቴጌም ወስደ ክምብል
 አተላና አምቡላ በየጎዳናው ዳር
 ጋሼም ሄዶ መክፈል ...
 በየግንባግንቡ በየግድግዳው ስር
 የመንገድ ጥራጊ ... ኩሉ ኩላኩሉ
 ያይኔ ጥላት ሆነ ...
 በየጎዳናው ላይ ... እዳሪ ፈነዳ
 አመድ ተከመረ አባራው በነነ።

(Ibid., p.120)

(If I speak no body heeds and gives attention my sister disposes waste matters on the side of the street. Brother on his part piss on walls and corners. The liquid and solid waste; the flood of excrements soared my eyes

ወይ አዲስ አበባ ...
 ጉንጭና ጉንጨቻ ... እሳት መስሎ ቀልቶ
 አምርራ ስታለቅስ ... ቆማ ስታነባ
 ሲያስቸግራት ጊዜ ...
 የሰራ አካላቷ እንደቁስል ሸትቶ

(ሸገር፡-እኛ፡-ገጽ 119)

(Oh Addis Ababa, bothered by her stinking smell that pervades from her body, she stood crying and wept bitterly her cheeks turning aflame)

In the above lines of the poem Addis Ababa is personified as a woman. The woman's whole body is petrified and decomposed. Its smell pervades the atmosphere. It crates a vivid image of a city engulfed in its own filth. Addis Ababa, which literally means new flower, does not seem to stand up to its name. The filth, dirt and stifling atmosphere of the city makes one wonder and suspect whether there is a hint of sarcasm beneath the naming of the city. The poem after describing the general untidy nature of the city specifically states the amoral behaviors of the citizens by portraying their daily activity. This is cited in the poem as follows;

ብናገር ማን ሰምቶኝ
 ማን ተጉዳይ ጥሮኝ
 እቴም ወስደ ክምብል
 አተላና አምቡላ በየጎዳናው ዳር
 ጋሼም ሂዶ መክፈል ...
 በየግንባግንቡ በየግድግዳው ስር
 የመንገድ ጥራጊ ... ከሉ ከላኩሉ
 ያይኔ ጥላት ሆነ ...
 በየጎዳናው ላይ ... እዳሪ ፈነዳ
 አመድ ተከመረ አቧራው በነነ።

(Ibid., p.120)

(If I speak no body heeds and gives attention my sister disposes waste matters on the side of the street. Brother on his part piss on walls and corners. The liquid and solid waste; the flood of excrements soared my eyes

In the above stanza the speaker further concretizes the degeneration of the city by citing the activities of the inhabitants. The speaker's tone and attitude appear to be full of despair. No body listens and gives attention to plea. People continue to be engaged in this unholy activity.

In the poem the words "Attella," and "Ambulla" (which are by products of the local drinks "Tella" and "TeJ"); Mekefle (urinate); 'Amed' (Ashes) all indicate and suggest image of decay.

The polite Amharic euphemism "Mekefle" which denotatively means to pay and connotatively to urinate implies citizens relieving themselves at street corners and walled residential houses throwing liquid and solid waste material, show the rampant moral degeneration and the sordid life of the people.

The above mentioned word "Mekefle" both in its denotative and connotative meaning ironically conveys the idea of paying homage to corruption. The morality of the citizens has fallen so low that they have fallen below their standard losing all their self-respect.

3.4 Philosophical :Philosophical Reflection on the question of life

In this subsection the title philosophical reflection on the question of life is chosen primarily due to the reason that the writers do not coin their own philosophy. Their outlook is the sum total of the society's social, economic and political life. Each writer depending on her social background, experience and temperament has reflected on the question of life in the way she thinks and perceives it.

The poems of the four writers mirror life's dual nature as manifested in thesis and antithesis hope and despair, happiness and sorrow and vision of tomorrow.

Aregash in the poem “Matafecha” which literally means ‘spice’ expresses the idea that the beauty of life stems from the contradictions inherent in all phenomena in nature. Life is appreciated because it is full of contradictions that invite challenge. The poem runs as follows;

እሥርን በነፃነት ፡
 መውለድን በሞት ፡
 ሹመትን በሽረት ፡
 በረሀብ ጥጋብን ፡
 በበሽታ ጤናን ፡
 ክፉን በደግነት ፡
 ማጣትን በማግኘት ፡
 ባያፈራርቀው የለም ሕግ በግዱ ፡
 ባያቻችል ኑሮ አለዚያም በውዱ ፡
 አይጠግቤው የሰው ልጅ
 አይገታም ነበር የምኞት ልጓሙ ፡
 አይታየው ነበር የሕይወት ትርጉሙ ፡
 ቅራኔ መሆኑ ለዛውና ጣዕሙ፡፡

(ማጣፊጫ ፡ እኛ ፡ ገጽ 29)

(If natural law did not create Balance and compatibility by alternating binary phenomena like imprisonment with freedom, birth/death, appointment/ depose, famine/feast, disease/ health, evil/good, the unsatiabable human desire would not have been harnessed. He would not have seen the meaning of life. And that the meaning of life is its contradiction.)

The above poem explains the binary opposition of things. There are inherent contradictions. Marxists refer to this kind of relation as the unity and struggle of opposites.

In the social realm man’s existence is full of a parody of dual contradictions which are manifestations of the thesis and antithesis of life. For example birth/death, famine/prosperity, love/hate sickness/ health etc...

These binary oppositions and the constant struggle they manifest in human life with respect to man’s continued effort to maintain order are galvanizing forces that

propel human life forward. They are pace makers for man's failure or success individually and collectively.

Man by nature is an ambitious creature. And he always strives and struggles to fulfil actualize his dreams, wishes. He never gets satisfied. However, man's greedy nature is checked by the universal law of opposition. Whatever energy man expends to quench his selfish motive, he always faces setbacks. There is limitation. The urge to go forward is harnessed by natural laws. These natural laws even though they are mechanism to regulate man's desire, they are also means to stop man from the fiercely competitive struggle and think for his fellow beings benignly for the benefit of the majority of the people. The poem's title is aptly Matafech (spice)

Unlike the poem Matafech "Spice" with its tone of reprimand and upholding the view on the necessity of contradiction as an ingredient to life and as a regulating mechanism for human greed, the poem 'Hege New' (It is the law) presented by Senayt has a human touch. The poem in a nutshell describes life and death to be part of the law of nature which ordinary mortals must visualize in their mind and obey. There is no need to look back and regret one's life experience. As the poem is very short the whole poem is presented as follow;

የነገንብርሃን -በሀሊና አልሞ ÷
- ይወጣል ቀን ብሎ ÷
ሐምሌ ጨለማውን በዳበሳ ሲንዝ ÷
ጌታ እንደሚያዝያ -ተቀምጦ እንደሚያዝ ÷
ደስታውን ወደፊት አሰልቶ ገፍትሮ ÷
በተስፋ ሰንሰለት አስሮ ተቆጣጥሮ ÷
ይኳትናል እንጂ አያየውም ዞሮ ÷
ቢያይስ ምን አባቱ ሳቅ ለቅሶ ነው ኑሮ ÷
ሕይወትም ህግ ! ነው - ሞትም ነው ተፈጥሮ::

(ሕግ ነው ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 170)

(Dreaming in once mind tomorrow's day will break;
chained by hope, and calculating the happiness that lay
ahead; Man strives forward. He never looks back. So what
if he looks back? After all life is laughter and mourning.)

The poem 'Hege New' also shares the view that life has binary functions. These opposites exist in constant struggle. Like the law of opposition human life consists of happiness and sorrow, that recur alternatively as manifested in each individuals life.

The ebb and flow of life follows this rhythm. The poem instructs people to look forward and seem to suggest for people to follow one basic maxim in life-to live in day tight compartment, using hope as a becanoing light.

The poem explicitly states and emphasizes hope to be the prime mover that stimulate man to action. The whole fabric of human life is woven by the thread of hope. The idea of hope is a crucial element for man's survival. The idea of hope is also stressed in Mekedes' poem 'Tesfa' (hope). The philosophical concept of this poem can be summed up in the last couplet of the poem that reads as:

የሕይወት ለዛ ዋካ ፥ አለኝታ
ተስፋ ሲሳይ ነው ስጦታ

(ተስፋ ፥ አኝ ፥ ገጽ 104)

(Hope is a fourtune, a gift that makes life worth living and beautiful)

The collocation of words such as "Leza" "Waka," "Allegnta" denotatively convey the meaning hope to be beautiful, dependable and something to look up to. They amplify the significance of hope. Hope is a gift of fortune. Unlike the above poems with their attitude of optimism the poem "**Hulume Yalefale**" (Everything Passes) expresses the temporal nature of life.

The span of human life with its worldly miseries, with its happy/sorrow good/evil, rich/poor dichotomies that gnaw the social, and psychological fabric of individuals are all transient nature of life; The poem reads as;

ቀድሞው አልፎ - ኋላ ኋላዬን ሲያየኝ
 ሁለዜ -ወደዛ -ወደዚህ - ትልልቁ ትልልቁ
 እተወሰነበት እመድረሻ ቅንፍ
 ባንድ ተጠመረን እኔ ፊደልና ወቅት
 “ሁሉም ያልፋል” ባለው በብርቱው እንደበት
 ለኔም አለፈብኝ ለሱም አለፍኩበት።

(ሁሉም ያልፋል፣ እኛ ፣ገጽ 88)

(I passed life. It looked at my back. And it passed me. We alternated places a till I reached the ultimate Destiny. I, luck and time forming a trio, in accordance with the word uttered by the powerful tongue, ‘everything passes,’ life passed me, and I passed for life.)

The title of the poem seems to be taken from the Holy Scripture, Ecclesiastes where it says;

for who knows what is good for a man in life during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone? (Ecclesiastes: 6:12)¹⁴

The idea of christian mythology that asserts everything passes in due course of time is used here. According to this view secular life is transient. It is a half way house that prepares human beings for eternal life. Life on earth is temporal.

In the above poem the phrase “Etewesenebt” “Emedershaw” (The ultimate preordained Destiny) indicates the final ultimate destiny of man to be death. Death is the transitional point.

The poem also elaborates on the relation of the individual, fate and time. Man moves thorough time gathering what fate has provided him until he breathes his last.

¹⁴ Taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version © 1973, 1978 p.689.

The poem's tone suggests that human life is preordained by fate. However hard an individual may strive unless luck fate and destiny conform and are in the same plane, it is hard to fulfil one's desire. That is why the "I" in the poem, whenever he strives to achieve something in life, it eludes him. Therefore, human beings rather than fighting a preordained fate must bear and carry the burden of life.

The last part of the poem concludes with ironic tone. The speaker passes through life, and life also passes through her/him. So life and man become one. And both life and man move through time.

Life's binary aspect is not limited only to nature but it is also reflected in human relation as well. The law of contradiction also applies to the relation of both sexes. Man and woman ever since the day they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge are constantly in contradictions. In a general sense, the misery of the secular world is more pronounced on women rather than on men. The contradiction between man and women is seen with tolerance and optimism from female perspective. The above philosophical reflection of the writers bring out the following two points;

First despite the various notions expounded by the four writers it is difficult to generalize their philosophical reflections on the question of life. However, they seem to tolerate the man made social system and laws having hope as a torchlight. Their poems suggest that a lot of women carry their subjugation and burden passively and hopefully aspire that one day it will be taken away from their back. The women seem to remain passive and tolerant until events follow their own course and bring the desired change.

Second, their poems also point out that women, be it in Ethiopia or else where in the world, have the capacity to look at things and events that occur in life objectively and provide solutions. They are not easily discouraged. Their stamina under great stress is remarkable. Despite centuries of subjugation and the misery they faced in the social arena, deep inside the women's hearts there are always rooms for optimism and tolerance.

3.5 Topical Themes that recur In Each Writer's Individual work

3.5.1 The Theme of Sexual Harassment and Abduction.

The poems entitled “**Kenetaqui Raqu**” (distance yourself from Snatchers) and “Yegodana Shama” (street light) revolve around the harassment and assault women face due to Abduction and its consequence on their later lives.

The poem entitled “Kentaque Raqu” (Distance Yourself from Snatchers) revolves around on the theme of sexual harassment. Caused by Mekedes in this poem reflects on the harassment women face, due to abduction and its impact on their later lives. It epitomizes the hardship women face at individual level by warning the “she” in the poem.

Sexual harassment is described as a form of communication that violates its victim right of privacy The most common definition identifies five types of sexual harassment: generalized sexist remarks or behavior; inappropriate and offensive, but essentially sanction-free, sexual advance; solicitation of sexual activity by threat of punishment and sexual assault (Edmund wall:1992)¹⁵.

¹⁵ Edmund Wall, Sexual Harassment: confrontations and Decision, (New York: Prometheus Books 1992 p.26

The above quoted passage points out that sexual advances are made on women to reinforce the power of men and deny women to any other role than that of sexual availability. Therefore, the poem “Kenetaque Raque” (Distance Yourself from Snatcher) when summarized relates about how girls of marriage age are abducted by men who wait in ambush. The abductors are primarily interested in the virginity of the girl and the sexual gratification they derive from it. They are not interested in the future fate of the girls. Therefore, the poem warns and advises that in a country like Ethiopia where men are predominantly the bread winners, leave alone by abduction, living once home in marriage makes them fearful.

As cited earlier in order to understand the message and how it is conveyed, one has to look into the structure and its interrelatedness into the theme.

ይገደሩብሻል ... ይቃጠሩብሻል
 ጉድሽን ሰምተሻል
 ጠልፈው ሊወስዱሽ ነው...
 እነጆራ አሞራ
 እነ ጭልፊት አፉ
 አንዱ አንዱን ተጣራ
 ዙሪያሽን ከበቡሽ ... ደግሞ አሰፈሰፉ

(ከነጣቂ ራቂ፥ እኛ፥ገጽ 98)

(Have you heard, vultures are confiding and making appointment to abduct you. They have encircled you calling one another.)

The opening line of the poem begins in a kind of rhetoric question have you heard indicates that. The words “Yegederubshal and yekaterubshale” which literally means they conspire and take appointment are indicators on how the process of abduction begins. The above stanza beautifully objectifies the situation of abduction and creates a vivid image of the scene of abduction.

The abductors are metaphorically compared by association with birds of prey such as (vultures) and (eagle) that always stalk and wait their innocent prey on the sly. The movement of the predators is likened symbolically with the movement of the abductors. The predators call each other to hunt and feast on the unaware prey similarly these brutes are also engaged in the act.

Therefore, the poem explicitly suggests that, in Ethiopia, in some areas, possibly in the writers birth place, (Gojjam) girls who reach marriage age are inconstant danger of being abducted by a would be lover. The motive is to seduce the girls and deflower them. In some community it is a norm for girls of marriage age to remain virgin until their hands are given in marriage. Therefore, once a girl loses her virginity her chance of getting a husband is slim.

The tone of the poem is sympathetic. One finds a feeling of gender proximity. Women who undergo such kind of dehumanizing experiences move the heart of the writer. She is indignant to this kind of sexual harassment and violation of women's right. Society is subjugating women by either turning deaf ear on the practice or by manifesting sheer indifference to communities who uphold such practice in the name of culture and norm.

At present, the issue of abduction and sexual harassment have become serious issues and number one priority agenda. Women are voicing their grievance and protest in various fora. Therefore, the poem is timely in conveying the message of women suffering. Mekedes does not stop her bitter reflection on this evil, wrong and amoral practice. She shows her concern by revealing the effect and magnitude such practice causes on women in the social arena. As cited earlier, one result of abduction is

unwanted marriage. Dissatisfied women of rural Ethiopia migrate in thousands to the big towns and cities and start to earn their living by becoming prostitutes, hustlers, street walkers or if they are lucky enough by opening their own tavern houses which are commonly known as “Katikala Bet”. Still those “fortunate” may open brothels and become owners of bars.

This is the only avenue open for the majority of rural women whether they are married or not. A present, even town bred women have turned their face to prostitution.

In the poem entitled “Yegodana Shama” which literally means (street candle) she deals with the same issue. The title itself is symbolic in a sense that in its denotative meaning it is a guiding torch that provides light on a street conquering darkness. But its connotative meaning implies women who stand at night on street corners and who wait for passers by who are interested to pass the night with them. The girls wear clothes that allow them to display their body and thereby attract men. To illustrate this we will quote from the poem.

ጉልት ቸርቻሪ ነኝ ... ግንብ ተጠግቼ
 የመንገድ ደር ቋሚ
 የጎዳና ሸቀጥ አካሌን ዘርግቼ
 አላፊ አግዳሚውን ሁሉን ተሳላሚ

(የጎዳና ሻማ፡ጸኝ፡ገጽ 112)

(I am a retailer, hustling my body. Standing on a street posing for passerby.)

The speaker uses powerful phrases and metaphor to describe her situation. Let us first take line from the poem.

እንደ እርካሽ ዕቃ... ከዚያም በወደቀ
 ከጎዳና ቆሜ ገላጭን መንዝሬ
 ለዝንጉ ጉባዔ ... ጫጉላው የተናቀ
 ለጠቀሰኝ ሁሉ በመንገድ ተድሬ
 እንደ ባዶ ሰፊፍ ተመጥጦ እንዳለቀ
 ጣዕም አልባ ሆኖለሁ ማር የሌለው ገሬ

(Ibid., p.112)

(I sold my body like a cheap commodity that is thrown on the street and like honey whose main part has been taken)

The phrase Ende Erekashe Equa which literally means “Like cheap commodity”

I have become like a container whose honey has been seeped. The speaker of the poem further builds up on stating her condition of life. By relating specifically on the change that had occurred on her physical being.

የልጅነት ደሜ ውስጤ ተመረዘ
 ዋግ እንደመታው ጤፍ ... ቀጭጭ አስጠየፈ.
 ቅስሜ ተሰበረ ... አካሌ ቧዘዘ
 አንደ ወይራ አበባ ጠውልጎ ረገፈ.

(Ibid., p.112)

(My young blood is infected. I am beaten like a blighted left and my body wilted likes an alive flower.)

In the above versification the poem compares the speaker’s severe condition by associating and contrasting her state with plants that are affected by natural blight. This creates powerful image. It compares the sallow complexion she now has with her former fresh youthful body. It says it has become withered like teff that is bitten by frost and she further uses another symbol that her body had wilted and fallen down like the flowers of olive trees.

The speaker’s tone suggests that she hates herself and did not like what she is doing. However, she is forced to do this job with out her will. The speaker is

lamenting and feeling sorry for herself. It suggest that her young productive years have been wasted. It epitomizes the fate of many young girls, and women in Ethiopia who become victims of circumstance beyond their control. The last line of the poem has a mild sarcastic tone.

የቀንን ብርሃን ናፍቄው እንዳልቀር
 የፀሐይን ጮራ
 የውድቅት መጋኛ የመንገድ ላይ ቃፊር
 የሌሊት ናዜራ
 እርባና የሌለው ትቢያ ሆኜ እንዳለቀር
 አውጡኝ ከዘሀ ህይወት አስታወሱኝ በጋራ
 አደራ. . . አደራ

(Ibid., p.113)

(I am eager to see the daylight I do not want to be nocturnal. And remain useless. So please save me from this miserable life)

In the above extract the speaker says her life rhythm has been reversed. She has turned nocturnal. Unlike people who work at daytime and spend the night peacefully in their beds or chatting to their families in their cosy rooms, she is forced to wait for a person willing to spend the night with her. In the daytime she rests her tiring body so as to be fresh for her next routine. Therefore, she craves for the rays of the sun, which symbolizes rays of hope and a better life. The poem ends with the word ‘Adera’ (which means pleading, entreating or imploring) repeated two times to magnify the situation. It is an appeal to the Ethiopian society to emancipate women from the sordid life they lead. Therefore, as indicated in the above two poems Mekedes clearly points out the defect of the Ethiopian custom and the malfunctioning of the system and its indifference to the subjugation of women by turning its back to this dire issue.

Summarily, therefore, abduction is a practice, which the poet condemns. And society needs to re-think and evaluate its cultural norms. The poet further presents the

symbol seems to deteriorate. In its literal meaning a cloak is any garment worn as an overcoat especially in ceremonial occasions. In its connotative meaning it is a symbol signifying different social role. Married couple wears it to mark the occasion of their marriage and lead their lives according to the dictates of their religious demands. Judges wear it when they preside over the tribunal; religious leaders also wear it as mark of distinction of their rank bestowed on them in accordance with the order of the diocese. Others wear it for elegance and beauty. To all instances, the cloak is a mark of distinction. However, the poem satirizes those people who wear this culturally valued dress but act contrary to it.

The last line of the poem which says **Lezech Lezehema Aylebs Kaba** (If its cultural value is not maintained what is the good of wearing a cloak.) point out those who have made implementation of the law their trade should respect this august symbol, especially the judges who preside as judiciary body. The poet denounces the act of individuals who on the surface appear to be genuine but deep inside who act contrary to social etiquette.

The deteriorating quality of the oncs respected cultural dress symbolizes, the waning confidence people have started to show on the justice system in general and on those who are gate keepers of the law in particular. The justice system of the country is being corroded and gradually eaten away by corruption and malevolent individuals. Aregashe further indicates the default of the justice system to be more pronounced, when it comes to women. In the poem *Daghente'* (Judgement), she relates about a woman who is said to have committed adultery and was brought to a judge to be

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stoned to death and the Judge says “let among you who has not committed a sin throw the first stone. The poem runs as:

አንዲት ሴት ናት . . .
 ጠላት አስጠላት።
 ነውረኛ አመንዝራ . . .
 መለኮን የሴት ጭራ።
 አላት. . .
 ላያኖሯት
 ለያግዟት፤
 ይባሰም ብለው ከሰላት።
 በድንጋይ እንድትወገር . . .
 ከዳኛ ፊት አቀረቧት።
 ፈራጁም አለ . . .
 “ከናንት ኃጢአት የልሠራ ይውገራት!”
 ሁሉም ዝም . . .
 ገሸሸ . . .
 ገለል . . .
 አሉላት።
 ምን ነበረበት?
 እንዲህ ቢሆን ሁሉ ዳኝነት!
 ባልኖረ ስደት

 ወና በቀረ እሥር ቤት

(ዳኝነት፣ እኛ፣ ገጽ 48)

(There was a woman, they hated and called her adulteress. To make matter worse, they put her on trial to be stoned to death. And the judge said ‘Let among you who is not a sinner throw the first stone. They dispersed. I wish all judgement could be like that so that there will not be migration and prison will be empty).

The line “Let among you who is not a sinner throw the first stone” is an allusion to the indictment of a woman brought before Jesus Christ. The parable according to the Holy Scripture runs as:

At dawn he appeared again in the temple court. Where all the people gathered round him. And he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus. “Teacher this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you

say? They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him . . . He straightened up and said to them, if any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Emphasis mine again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time. The older one first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

(JOHN 8:44)

The poet’s allusion to Christian mythology shows her ideal and utopian wish. Unlike the celestial world where it is said there will not be partiality; where individuals are judged in accordance with the merits and demerits of their secular world performance; The rule of the secular world is governed by men who have weakness. The kingdom of earth as opposed to the kingdom of heaven is run by nepotism, corruption and unfair judgement which are common trends observed in the Justice system. The Amharic phrase “Endya Behone Hulu Dagnente” (suppose if all judgement was like that) shows the naivete of the poet. It is an ideal wishful thinking to expect true judgement from the contemporary society. In general, the poet suggests judgement to be like the Christian mythology. Therefore the poem suggests, institutions like prison will be empty and the large number of Ethiopians flight from their native soil to another land would have been deterred if there was fairness in all sphere of the social life.

3.5.3 Lack of Self Respect and Personal Integrity

Firmaye in her two poems *Ye . . . Le* (There is no) and *Keshi – Eshi* (from one thousand Okay is better) critically comments on the unnatural, over- exaggerated mannerism manifested by people and individuals in the present day Ethiopian society.

The Lack of self-respect, the disintegration of their personality, the frailty and weakness shown in their personality to stand firm for what they believe appear more than what she can tolerate. Her disappointment and disapproval is therefore presented in the above two poems. The poem ‘Ye. . . le’ (There is no) begins as

ሸቁጥቁጥ ሸቁጥቁጥ
ፍቅር እንዳይጠፋ
ውል እንዳይዛባ
በሥራ መሸቆጥቆጥ
ሹም እንዳይቆጣ
አኩርፎ እንዳይቀጣ

(የ . . . ለለ፡እኛ፡ገጽ 86)

(Affectation is shown not to lose and disturb love relation and also at work place not to be snubbed and punished by the boss.)

The above two poems entitled, “Ye . . . le” (which means there is no) and “Keshi - Ehi” (from thousand – Okay) are written as bitter comments against the current society that shows an affectations mannerism both in deeds and words. This unnatural display of mannerism has become almost a national character.

In the poem “Ye . . . le” the key word that recurs frequently is the word “Mesheqotqote” which literally means affectation. Affectation in this context means to attend carefully and fulfil the whims and needs of a person. Before analyzing the message imparted in the above two poems proper, it is necessary to see the denotative meaning of the word “Mesheqotqote” as used in the traditional social context of the Ethiopian society.

In the Ethiopian tradition, when relatives, nearest kin or a stranger or unexpected guest appear, which in Amharic is referred to as “Tikur Engeda”, as a guest in someone’s home be it rich or poor, the host receives him cordially and friendly and entertains him lavishly with what is available in the house.

It is said, in rural Ethiopia, guests feet used to be washed and their beds made. Neighbours in the vicinity used to drop by carrying in their hands some refreshment to

share with the guest as a token of respect. There was a belief that the coming of strangers heralds good fortune. As a result, a person who hosts a stranger is respected.

The host shows his generosity not only by providing but by displaying his natural genuine behaviour. In Amharic the phrase “Yeshe Qote Qotal” (showing affectation) describes this action, In short the guest gets royal treatment.

Unlike the meaning and conveyed by the word in its traditional sense, the word “Meshquotequote” has a negative connotation as used and employed in Firmaye’s poem. The word “Meshquote quote” implies the unnatural and false manner or behaviour people put for display. As cited_ this is pointed out by the activities of individuals and the community in their day to day life, on work place, at home and on social occasions. The affectation people exhibit is not natural, and genuine. It is tinted and smeared with false hood and pretence. The affectation displayed did not originate out of mutual love and respect but out of fear to pacify the possible anger, conflict and ensuing danger that may crop up with the contact or relation one develops with people at different social spectrum.

It clearly states that the inhabitants rather than trying to create the bondage of true love based on mutual respect, they degrade themselves by throwing away their self respect and personal integrity. As indicated above the poem further concretize the situation by stating the relation shown at work places between workers and their respective bosses.

The majority of workers carry their duty not out of ethical principles but to satisfy the personal whims of the boss. The poem epitomizes the current trend that has prevailed in the country’s working place.

The workers are no more self confident. They are fear ridden. One can argue that the poem implicitly suggest that the behaviour shown by the workers and their relation with the bosses was probably affected either due to politically related reason which in turn is manifested in the malfunctioning of the system. As a result, people have lost their self-respect and personal integrity and are reduced to sub human level becoming lackeys.

The current fad seen in work place, Where the question ‘what did the boss say?’ is uttered before the exchange of the customary of greeting show, how workers are paranoid. It seems to earn one’s bread, one has to wag one’s tail.

The poem further specifically indicate how affectation has affected peoples public and in their private lives. In the poem this fact is presented as follows:

መንገድ ላይ መሽቆጥቆጥ፥
ሰው እንዳይጣላ፥
እንዳይለክፍ ወያላ፥
እቤትም መሽቆጥቆጥ፥
ኗሪ እንዳይከፋ፥
ፍቅር እንዳይጠፋ፥
ኑሮ እንዳይደፋ፡፡

(Ibid., p.86)

(Affectation on the street, not to quarrel with people and accosted by “Wayala”. Affectation at home not to disappoint family members and disturb the peace and love of ones life.)

In the above poem the Amharic phrase “Endayelekfe Woyala” (which literally means not to be accosted by taxi driver’s assistant) shows the street scene people are afraid of to encounter in their day to day life.

Addis taxi drivers and their assistances are noted for their rude manners and long tongue. People who frequent taxies for transport , keep silent or let pass an

incident passively, even i.e. violates their personal right, being afraid not to be in public.

As the assistant is considered a nobody in the social pyramid, the reference Endayelekfe assistant is a bitter irony the person of has employed to show how grave the situation has reached. Furthermore, in family relation husband and wife assume that their love, style of living and the ensuing peace will be disturbed if they are not affectations. The relation between husband and wife is based not on genuine discussion to iron out problems, but on bogus behaviour that masks the disagreement. As a result, there is no true love, respect and appreciation in their midst. The last stanza of the poem emphasize this point.

ሁልጊዜ መሸቆጥቆጥ፥
መሸቆጥቆጥ መሸቆጥቆጥ፥
እሱ ሆኗል ትርፉ፥
መዝናናት መወደድ፥
መመስገን መደነቅ፥
መከበር የታለ።

(Ibid., p.86)

(There is no love appreciation and respect what remained is to affectation always)

The unnatural and false behaviour people display is accompanied by the utterance of the Amharic word “Ishe” which means okay. Okay is a word that denotes agreement and willingness to do things. However, in this poem the word is used to denote and imply negative attitude. It suggests people say okay to dupe people and momentarily get relief by pacifying individuals not to get angry. Therefore, the poem “Keshe – Ishe” from thousand- Okay) present the affectation trend that was

widely spread among the populace. This fact is stated in the last triplet of the poem which runs as:

ምነው ሰዎች!
ሺ እሽማ, ያበላሻል
አንዲት እምቢ እሷ ትሻል

(ከሺ - እሺ፣ ገጽ 58)

(why do I care, from a thousand okay that spoils a single no is better.)

The above Amharic phrase “She- Eshe Yabllashale” (thousand okay spoils) is a reference made to many government employed civil servants who use the customary habitual Amharic phrase ‘Eshe Nege’ to procrastinate a work that should have been accomplished on time. The tone and attitude of the poem clearly states the speaker stand that form thousand Okay- it is better to have a firm No as an answer. People should have guts to say no to matters that jeopardize their self respect and personal integrity be it in public or in their private life. It is no good to display unnatural behaviour.

To conclude, in the poems “Ye... le” (There is no) and “Keshe- Eshe” (from thousand Okay) the writer has discerned the psychological behaviour of people in the current life and has bluntly voiced her critical comment. It is a bitter attack directed against a society that offers due credit to the whims of harmful social etiquette than to be governed by solid personal and social ethical principles. Self respect and personal integrity seem the Maxim Firmaye upholds as a principle of life.

3.5.4 The Theme Of Moderation

Senayt’s poem tends to the philosophical side. She muses over man’s unsatiabile nature in his social life. The two poems Melekia (Measurement) and “Leke” (limit)

revolve around the concept of why does man not have measurement? What is the limit of being human? The poem runs as

ከምድር እስከ ሰማይ
 ሃሳብ ተዘርግቶ
 ስሌት - ተተብትቦ
 ሲመተር - ሲለካ
 በወጥ ሲታወቅ
 መረሬና - ዋልካ
 ጂን ውስኪ ዕ በቆሎ
 በብልቃጥ - በኪሎ
 ባሕርም - ተነጣሎ
 ልክ - ሲወጣለት
 እንዴት ! - እንዴት !
 እንዴት !
 ልክ ያጣል ሰውነት ?
 (መለኪያ ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 152)

(Man's ideas stretched from earth to the heavenly bodies has provided arithmetical measurement for the vast spreading sea, for earth and for Gin, whiskey and barely. How come that being human has no measurement)

The speaker contemplates and muses over man's intellectual capacity providing credit.

Human curiosity and craving for knowledge is indicated in the poem where it says "Kemedr Iske Semay" Hassab Tezergeto (Idea stretched form earth to the heavenly bodies.) The poem relates that in animate objects such as "Bahre" (the sea) and human material products such as "Gin whiskey and Corn" to have measurement. Man has created measurement for both animate and animate objects. To clabrrate this first it is necessary to provide on necessary to provide an explanation on the denotative and connotative meaning of the key word "sewnet" literally meaning the body. In its denotative meaning the Amharic word sewnet implies humanity. The whole biological entity. Man has created measurement for the biological entity of a human being. Human body is measured either in kilos like the above-mentioned inanimate products

(Whiskey Gin Corn) or in pounds. Therefore, when the speaker of the poem poses a question.

እንዴት ! እንዴት !
እንዴት
ልክ ያጣል ሰውነት?

(Ibid., p.152)

(How come! How come! How come! Humanity has no measurement?)

The “she” of poem is not talking about measuring the its literal meaning but figuratively, taking it connotative meaning of sewenet which means being human.

According to the Christian mythology, in the Biblical times, man was privileged and was given by the Lord to be ruler of all creatures. According to the Biblical account of Genesis it says!

The God said “ let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let him rule over the fish of the sea and the birds at the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground

(Genesis 1:26)

However, in the account of Genesis Eve was beguiled by the serpent and she in turn beguiled her husband and both of them ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Man’s downfall, his unsatiable nature has commenced from this transgression. Ever since that day being human means being unsatisfied. His curiosity to gain wisdom by eating from the tree of knowledge and become like the creator himself has costed him the idyllic life in the garden of Eden. Man was banished to earth and was made to toil constantly unable to reach his limit.

In the secular world man’s quest for accumulation of material wealth has increased more than ever before. It has affected his spiritual life. This lack of limit, be it in wisdom or material accumulation as manifested in the social life, can be

illustrated. In social life people indulge in excessive luxury, at times eating themselves to obesity. On the contrary some people live in great abstinence, nearly leading a saintly life devoting themselves to the cause of the poor distributing their earthly belonging to the needy. One observes dual behavior of man in the secular world for ever searching for his limit. Therefore, being human has no limit. Thus, the speaker in the poem “Melekia” has no answer for her philosophical question? She turns her face to God and appeals to him to enlighten her on how to lead her secular life.

In the poem “Lek” (Limit) the speaker beseeches and pleads with God to make her life moderate. The poem runs as follows:

ከሰው በላይም አልልህ
 ከሰው በታችም አታርገኝ
 ሰውነቴ ሰው ሰው ብሏል
 ራሴ ራሴን ጠልቷል
 እባክህን አምላኬ !
 እባክህ ተለመነኝ
 ሰውነት ልኩን ሳያልፍ
 ጉንዳን አድርገህ ፍጠረኝ::
 (ልክ ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 150)

(I do not want you to make me above or below my fellow beings. My body craves for human relation. My being has hated itself please create me with my body not exceeding its limit like an ant.)

The speaker’s tone appears to be modest. She does not want her earthly life to be above her human beings. Because if she wallows in riches and becomes extremely affluent, she may forget to thank her creator. The speaker also does not want to be below her fellow human so as not to complain on her wretched existence day in day out. She asks God to make her life.

The speaker opts for moderate life perhaps the question she set on the poem “Melekia” (measurement) to find the limit for being human is indirectly gets its reply in the poem ‘Leke’ (Limite). Man’s limit is probably moderate living on individual

basis. Otherwise, man's search for wisdom, his relentless struggle against nature to satisfy his material needs; man's contemplation to understand his role in the universe his craving for spiritual matters will have no limit.

The speaker in the poem hates her individual being and craves for human relation in the poem it says:

ሰውነቱ ልኩን ሳያልፍ
ጉንዳን አድርገህ ፍጠረኝ

(With out my body exceeding its limit like.)

The last line of the poem has a twisted turn almost creating comical effect. The speaker begs the lord to create her like on out. This has symbolic significance ants by nature are industrious and contribute to the well being of the colony. The contribution of each ant is significant for the existence of the ants community.

It seem ants do not accumulate morethan what is necessary for them. Moderate living, hard work, mutual cooperation seem the philosophy reflected behind this poems theme.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WRITERS FROM, TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction the main concern of this study is the analysis of themes of the poems. Therefore, in this chapter a fully-fledged and an in-depth analysis of the techniques which the four writers employ in their work is not given. These by itself require a specific study or a wider research on technical aspect alone. Therefore, I will deal with selected basic technical aspect such as, word usage, figurative language, tone and attitude of the poems among others .

Regarding writing poetry in Amharic or to appreciate or comment on Amharic poems as a reader the late poet and playwright Mengistu Lemma in his book entitled. The Technical aspect of Amharic Versification says; one must take into account and consider the following

ግጥም በአማርኛ የሚገጥም ደራሲ በድርሰቱ ለሚገልጸው ኃሳብና ለሚያፈልቀው ስሜት ተስማሚ የሚሆንለትን የግጥም ዓይነት እየመረጠ ሊገጥም ይችላል። ካሰኘውና ከመሰለው ሁለት ሦስቱን ዓይነት ባንድ ግጥም ሊደባልቅ ቢል ውጤቱ ካማረለት የራሱ ስንፍናና ለልማድ ፤ ባሪያነቱ እንቅፋት ካልሆነው በቀር የሚያግደው የለም። አንባቢዎች ግን ሥራውን የምናመሰግነው ወይም የምንነቅፈው የምንወድበት ወይም የምንጠላበት ቤት አመታቱን የስንኙን አሰካክ የቃላትን አመራረጥ የግጥሙን አወራረድ የስሜቱን አፈላለቅ የሐሳቡን ርቀትና ጥልቀት አንድ ባንድ ፥ ደሞ አንድነት አስተውለን ካመዛዘንን በኋላ ነው። ካልሆነም ሊሆን ይገባል¹⁶

(A writer who tries to make a poem in Amharic can choose the type of poem that suits him to express his idea and feeling. If he wishes and prefers to blend two or three types in a poem simultaneously; if the result is good and his own laziness and slaveness to conventions are not hindrance; nothing can stop him. However as, readers we appreciate or criticize; like or hate by looking separately and as a

¹⁶ MENGISTULEMMA, The Technical Aspect of Amharic Versification Reprinted from the Journal of Ethiopian studies Vol. 1 No. 2 (1963)

whale at its rhyme, rhythmic pattern, choice of words, cadence of the poem, manifestation of feeling, the depth and refinement of his ideas.)

According to the classification of the versification of Amharic verse the four writers write their poem in “Danbagna Bet” (meter based on four stressed syllable in a line and “Buhe Belu” (meter based on two stressed syllable in a line)

The cadence or rhythm of their poem is well coordinated and each foot and meter in their poem treats the central idea until it reaches the last line. Now and then they repeat the title of their poem at the last two lines or the last line.

This is noticeable in Aregashe’s poem “Kabana Wostu” (the cloak and its inside); in Firmay Fiker End Amargn (Longing for love) Mekedes “Tesfa” (hope); and Senayt Aberra’s “LEKE” (Just or limit).

4.2 Word usage

All the four writers employ the technique of repeating the same word either in the same line or on the couplet. The verbal repetitions help create a general emphatic quality, as all controlled repetition tend to do. (Karl Shapiro and Robert Beum 1965). This is to say that the repetition is made to express oneself with emphasis. It is done deliberately for artistic effect. I will illustrate this fact by quoting from each writers work.

Aregash repeats words in her poem. A case in point is in the poem “Kale Albo” (wordless) one of the triplets runs as follows:

እኔ ውድሃለሁ
 እኔ ውድሻለሁ
 መደዴ መደዴ ባዶ ነው ካታ

(ቃለ አልቦ! እኛ ! ገጽ 30)

(I love you for both sex) as non-polished hall and empty noise)

The words Mededa (non-polished) is repeated two times in a line and the first person personal pronoun “I” is also repeated two times. In the first line the first person speaker is female. In second line the first person speaker is male. One can also cite another example from Aregashe poem ‘Kabana Westu’ (The cloak and its Inside) to show that she frequently uses repetition as a style. The poem runs as;

አሁንስ እንጃለት እንጃለት አነሰ
ተራ ሆነ ምንዝር ደብቡን ቀነሰ

(ካባና ውስጡ ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 44)

(Now, I do not know what has come over it has become ordinary and lost its magestre aura).

The word Injalet which literally mean (I do not know what has come over him) is repeated two times. Likewise, Firmaye also seem to adopt the same style. This is clearly seen in the poem Fikere Ende Amargne (Longing for love)

አሁን አሁን ሁሉም
ሁሉም ረጭ ዝም

(ፍቅር እንዳማረኝ ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 65)

(Now! Now everything is silent)

The word Ahun (Now) is repeated in the same line and the word Hulum (All) is repeated, once as a rhyming word at the end of a line and second at the beginning of a line forming an internal rhyme with the word Zeme.

It appears Mekedes and Senayt are also captivated by this style.

ብናገር ማን ሰምቶኝ
ማን ከጉዳይ ጥሮኝ

(ሸገር ÷ እኛ ÷ ገጽ 120)

(who listens if I speak, who gives me attention).

The word Man (who) is repeated two times and serves the function of internal rhyme if the poem is written in a single line as ;

ብናገር ማን ሰምቶኝ ማን ከገዳይ ጥፎኝ

And in Senayt's poem Leke (Just) the last triplet of the poem runs as;

አንዴት አንዴት
አንዴት
ልክ ያጣል ሰውነት

(ልክ-አኛ -ገጽ 150)

(How! How! How! Does being human lacks limit)

In the above two poems and how are repeated two and three times respectively.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that all the four writers repeat words for emphasis. Since they are contemporaries and close friends they may have influenced each other.

4.3 Rhyme

In the widest sense of the term. Rhyme is agreement in sound between words or syllables, the agreement may range from exact correspondence (rhyme-rhyme) to correspondence at one or more points. That is a rhyme based on same words or rhyme that correspond at every point except one, which is known as homonyms (Karlshapiro and Robert Beum 1965). Hence, unlike the English rhyming scheme, in Amharic versification it is not usual to find a verse that rhymes with the same word. The conventional rhyming scheme seem a homonyms type.

At times one faces incongruity to the above-mentioned general rule. From the four writers Firmaye in one of her poems entitled Ke-she Eshe (from thousand Okay) uses an identical word for her poem to rhyme. For example

አልፎ አልፎ እሺ ክፉ
ሺ እሺ በጣም ክፉ

(ከሺ - እሺ ? እኛ ፡ ገጽ 58)

(Now and then to say okay is bad, to say okay always is very bad)

The underlined word kefu which literally means evil is repeated to keep the rhythm. Otherwise, in Amharic poems it is customary to see words that correspond at one point like in words Anese/ Kenese (to get smaller) where the syllabuse Nese are similar.

Unlike the other three poems Aregashe employs alliteration in her poems which server as emphasis alliteration a device commonly used in poetry and occasionally in prose the repetition of an initial sound in two or more words of a phrase, line of poetry or sentence. Alliteration is considered ornament or decoration to appeal to the ear. A device to create an effect (Harry Shaw 1972)¹⁷

Aregashe in her poem Matafecha (spice) has used the above-mentioned alliterational form where the initial letter for example serves as sound correspondence.

አይጠገቤው የሰው ልጅ
አይገታም ነበር የምኞት ለጎሙ
አይታየው ነበር የሕይት ትርጉሙ
ቅራኔ መሆኑ ለዛውና ጣዕሙ

(ማጣፋጫ ፡ እኛ ፡ ገጽ 29)

The underlined word አይ (aye) serves the alliteration purpose it is negative marker.

¹⁷ Harry Shaw Dictionary of literary Terms : New York Mc Graw- Hill, inc © 1972

As regards language, all the four writers use ordinary language with a conversational tone. The words they employ are simple with the exception of Mekedes who uses the idiosyncratic dialect of her native region. (Gojjam) Aregashe and Firmaye sometimes use proverbs and sayings. They also employ satire and irony as a means of hammering and voicing their comment. They are bitter in their criticism and to point out the weakness of the society. This is clearly indicated in the poem (come my dear paupers) and (victim of respect). They also use allusion to drive their ideas home. For example in the poem (Judgement) and Hulum Yalfal (Everything Passes).

On the other hand Mekedes and Senayt use simile to create verbal picture: Senayt also uses fables and personification. Their poems although objective like Firmaye and Aregashe are impersonal. The language tone leans to words the instructional side. However, Firmaye and Aregashe language tone demands the readers sympathy.

CONCLUSION

In the social milieu changes effected by political, social and economic conditions have great contribution in shaping peoples ideas, views and attitude towards life. The Ethiopian writers are not exceptional to the above-cited general truth. Eversince Ethiopia has regained its independence in 1933 (Ethiopian Calendar) from the Italian facist occupation, it has passed several ups and downs by popular uprising becoming a bedlam of revolution. And major significant political, economic and social changes have taken place.

In this regard, the influence of the political social and economic condition that prevailed in the country at the various historical periods without doubt have an influencing factor at providing raw literary material to fire the imagination of veteran, and young promising writers a like.

The above four writers Aregashe, Firmaye Mekdes and Senayt are not exceptional. All of them have witnessed the revolutionary turmoil the country had undergone and have observed it at close range.

They have first hand experience on the changes that had taken place. Directly or indirectly they are affected. Therefore, the social milieu, the writers personal experience and the literary tradition of poetry writing that was generally available in the various periods were instrumental to inspire the four writers to write their poem.

It is a generally accepted fact that a poet ideas are conditioned by his time. This is not to say that a poet simply reports his personal experience, but as poems are fictions and product of imagination, the poet uses his imagination when writing a poem

However, the imagination itself is not free of personal experience. Therefore, the four women writers depending on their individual experience, temperament, outlook on life have written their poems. Although, there are few subjects that concern universal condition of human life. The majority of the subjects are drawn from the ordinary life of the people and are reflections on the contemporary Ethiopian social life.

From the biography and philosophy of their life and from the tone and attitude of their poem it seems the four writers are not generally happy with the way things are in the country at present. As a result, they have voiced their concern and blatantly expressed their bitter and critical social comment. Regarding the issue of love, they do not seem to have a common reference. Their philosophy of life is based on the principle of tolerance. They have an optimistic view for life.

In general, the four women writers have conveyed messages that reflects the society's general appalling condition and the deteriorating moral condition. They have also touched on the position of women in the society. The women of Ethiopia still suffer from the traditional social and cultural practices. The four writers have forwarded their social criticism of the society they live in. They have shown women place in the society they live in. Therefore, in the male dominated literary establishment of our country, where literary work is considered as the province of men and service as that of women. The four women writers have shown their intellectual competence. The women writers work and the notion and premise this has started that is giving due recognition to woman writers work has provoked the four writers and have forwarded constructive suggestion.

In general, there is a belief that woman writers works should be taken seriously and studies concerning their works should be encouraged. Government and non-government organization above all the Addis Ababa university is to be credited and appreciated for taking the initiative, there is hope that other will follow suit.

As time has changed studies concerning women works first should trace back and prepare annotated bibliography of the women writers of the country both in prose and verse. Thereafter, should try to incorporate in the already prepared literary history of the country or prepare a revised version of Ethiopian literary history. Primarily, women have prior responsibility to trace back the country's women literary heritage and compile a well-researched history of Ethiopian women writers.

In this regard, the media and Ministry of Culture and Sports have great task ahead of them to introduce to he public the works of new women literary lovers and systematically arranging the already existing works. The work of making women writers work public, should not be a one time act but a continues process.

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work, it has not been presented for a degree in any other University and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged

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