

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**MAJOR THEMES**  
**IN POST-1979(E.C.) AMHARIC SHORT STORIES**

**BY**  
**MESSERET ABEJE**

**JUNE 1992**

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**Messeret Abeje**

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## ABSTRACT

The post-1979 period has seen a great increase in the production of Amharic short stories. These stories treat a wide variety of themes and give an insight into the values, attitudes, fears, etc. of our society. However, the dominant concerns of the stories have not been studied and brought to light by researchers. This research examines the themes in contemporary Amharic short story anthologies.

The main purpose of the thesis is to make a thematic study of post-1979 Amharic short stories and provide the reading public with an insight into the traits, values and life styles that the Ethiopian short stories intend to promote or deter.

The study comprises three chapters. The first chapter gives a modest account of the Ethiopian short story and explains the purpose of the research. The second chapter is devoted to the discussion of basic themes. The themes have been studied in relation with their causes and implications on social life. The variety of themes reflected in the stories under study have been classified into five major groups. The last chapter summarizes the findings of the research.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### I N T R O D U C T I O N

#### 1.0 Objective and Plan

The present work is designed to study the major themes in post-1979 Amharic short stories. The research consists of three chapters of which the introduction is the first.

The introduction is intended to provide a modest account of the Amharic short story and the studies made on it, to state the purpose of the thesis and to offer definitions of some of the terms used in the study.

The second chapter is devoted to the discussion of dominant themes in post 1979 Amharic short stories. In this chapter five major themes are discussed at length.

The last chapter summarizes the vital findings of the research.

#### 1.1. A brief account of the Ethiopian short story

In Ethiopia the practice of writing prose fiction began in 1900 E.C., when Afäwärk' Gäbrä Eyyäsus published Libb Wälläd Tarik, "the first novel in Amharic".<sup>1</sup> However, the tradition established by Afäwärk' did not immediately attract other practitioners. More than ten years passed before other writers came to exercise the art.

At the turn of the second decade of the century Fitawrari Däresa published Yato Minim Laybäk'añna Yäato Miññot Bäkäntu Tarik, a short prose that runs to eight pages in one volume. Fitawrari's work is not actually a modern short story. But it bears some similarities with the short story form. It is a brief narrative limited to a few incidents in the lives of two main characters. Nothing that comes into the making of the story is magical, tricky

or strange. Nothing appears to be beyond social convention, human capacity or beyond our expectation. The incidents are not very difficult to verify. The setting, though not specific, is not an extraordinary land. Besides, the characters have names and are engaged in business. The characters have also a motive for action and a definite cause for a change of mind. These qualities distinguish the work from legends or myths. The work is, thus, an exercise in the story form.

Yato Minim Laybäk'añna Yäato Miññot Bäkäntu Tarik, which can be considered as the remote father of short prose writing in Ethiopia, is purely didactic. It is written to discourage greed and limitless ambition and to instruct readers about the importance of being content with what one has. The reader character who has reproduced the work with introductory and concluding remarks as well as comments stresses the moralizing effect of the piece. The story of the title characters is, therefore, reproduced with the aim of helping others to realize the uselessness of money or material wealth and enabling them to engage in sacred or priceless activities such as teaching "Wängel" (Gospel).

Although writing short fiction in Amharic seems to have its beginning in Fitawrari's work, it looks that no one, not even Fitawrari himself, was ready to write similar pieces and popularize the art of writing short narratives in the years that followed. In 1921 Mäkibib Dästa published a book in which he included a long winded narrative of 29 pages. His work, though short, is remote from the story form.

No matter that newspapers, like Birhanina Sälam were printed before the Ethio-Italian war, they hardly made a contribution to the growth of the short story form. Birhanina Sälam had in fact printed tales taken from oral lore. The tales were freely modified and printed with maxims or short explanations that emphasize their moral implications. A single tale can be found in two or three editions of the paper. Needless to say the tales were not the inventions of contributors. This implies that though many were using short narratives to convey ideas, they hardly invented their

own stories. Perhaps they lacked the artistry to write stories. Whatever the reason may be the tradition of issuing tales in Birhanina Sälam could not develop into publishing creative works, such as short stories. Addis Zämän gazette, on the other hand, started to come out with short stories nineteen years after its foundation. This is well after the production of the modern short stories of Taddässä Libän.

During the first half of the century the progress in writing Amharic short stories was negligible in relation to novel writing because literary artists like Hiruy, "Ethiopia's, first major writer",<sup>2</sup> focused more on longer narratives that enables to include more characters, actions, plots, description and deal with various subjects. But the story form, whose compactness restricts authors in many ways, remained unpracticed till the forties.

In 1941 E.C. Tämäsgän Gäbre published a modern short story in one volume under the title of Yägulälew Säkaram. However, about eight years passed before any other modern Amharic story was produced.

The story form became a popular art in Ethiopia only after the publication of Taddässä Libän's first and second collections of Amharic short stories in 1949 and 1951 E.C. respectively.

In Mäskäräm, which consists of seven stories, Taddässä has included some accounts of the story form so as to familiarize it to the Ethiopian audience.

In point of fact Taddässä has made a valuable contribution to the development of the form but he is hardly the pioneer in Amharic short story writing, though, he has been credited for introducing the genre to Ethiopia. Among those who accredited him are Gerard, Amsalu and Olga. These researchers have perhaps not been aware of the production of Yägulälew Säkaram prior to Taddässä's collections. Gerard asserts that "He [Taddässä] became Ethiopia's first writer of modern short stories as distinguished from traditional fables and moral allegories".<sup>3</sup> Amsalu also states:

In the first place Taddässä Libän introduced a new

and an unusual genre "the short story" to Amharic literature....A new form of art, in the history of Amharic literature, begins with Taddässä Libän. This new form of presentation has probably perplexed readers.<sup>4</sup>

Olga holds the same idea when she says:

The short story emerged in Ethiopia towards the second half of the twentieth century. The first collection of Amharic short stories was published in 1949 E.C. (1956-57) by Taddässä Libän under the title of Mäskäräm. No short stories were published prior to that date. Taddässä Libän is, thus, Ethiopia's first short story writer. His short stories are distinguished from the traditional folk-tales in that he, for the first time, applied the techniques of the modern short story to Ethiopian material.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the short prose works, particularly Yä Gulälew Säkaram, preceding Mäskäräm it is hard to believe the contentions that there were "no short stories" before 1949 and that Taddässä was the originator of the genre in Ethiopia.

Yä Gulälew Säkaram, which was published in 1941, can serve as a proof against the established belief about the beginning of the modern short story in Ethiopia. This story, which runs to 13 pages, differs from traditional myths, legends and folk-tales in both form and content. It is compact in form, has few characters and is worked towards creating a single effect.

Yä Gulälew Säkaram relates the story of a chicken vendor, Täbäje, who almost ruined his life on account of excessive drinking. The main character gradually realizes the side effects of alcoholism and decides to refrain from bad habits so as not to endanger his dearest life. The story is a criticism against indulgence in depraving practices like boozing, vanity and extravagance.

In Yä Gulälew Säkaram description of scenes, actions and incidents are centered around the main character. Most of the

events in the story are significant in the life of the character. The story is briefly told and is complete in its structure of actions. The compact form of the story along with the author's skill in handling the material to create a single effect and in delineating character render Yä Gulälew Säkaram the qualities of a modern short story. In his comment on this story Asfaw Damte asserts : "Yä Gulälew Säkaram certainly is a work in Amharic in the modern short story form."<sup>6</sup>

It was after the publication of Tämäsgän Gäbre's modern story that Taddässä came to the literary scene and made an indispensable contribution to the growth of the story form in Ethiopia. He published two volumes of stories under the titles of Mäskäräm in 1949 and Lelaw Mänqäd in 1952. Taddässä's stories are remarkably modern in many respects: plot construction, characterization, technique and description of events.

Taddässä writes short simple sentences, uses life like and well motivated characters and plans an ordered structure of actions or events. His descriptions and narration revolve around a single incident or character. He designs plot to induce curiosity and also create the intended effect in the reader. Digression is rare in his stories.

Many of Taddässä's stories reflect the acute social problems of his time. He has treated nepotism, prostitution, superstition and other social evils as themes.

In 1952, three years after the production of Mäskäräm, the Addis zämän gazette began to issue stories. The first issue was "Indämin Yiqbabu".<sup>7</sup> By and by the story form became a familiar literary genre among Ethiopian authors like Haylä İyyäsus, P'aulos, Tappä and Bırhanu.

Haylä İyyäsus Bäfäk'adu published his collection entitled Käingdih wädia Adarra Indaydagäm in 1953. In 1957 Täklä Maryam Fantayä compiled Acaččır Libb Wälläd Tarikoč (short stories) that served as elementary school text before the revolution. This text might have contributed to the increasing number of story writers in

the later years. Also in 1957 K'iyyt' and Diblik'lik' and in 1958 Misk'ilk'il were published by P'aulos Ñoñño. The tradition was followed by Birhanu Zärihun, whose collection, Birr Ambar Säbäräliwä, came out in 1960. In these stories "He describes marriage culture among various nationalities in feudal Ethiopia."<sup>8</sup>

In the years that followed Sosit Ačaččir Tarikoč, Yäsimet Mästawät, Wäläla and Wädälayna Wädätač appeared. The reading public had also witnessed the production of stories in Mänän magazine before the 1966 Ethiopian revolution. Mulatu Gäbru was the prominent contributor to Mänän.

Pre-revolution short stories have pointed out oppression, prostitution, nepotism and the scarcity of job opportunities as the evils of the feudo-capitalist social system in Ethiopia. Love and marriage, duty and responsibility, obedience and moral rectitude have also been common subjects. In her MA thesis, which covers a period of 24 years (1949-1975), Olga divides the themes into three major categories: religion, love and marriage and social criticism.

The short story form, which gradually gained recognition in pre-revolution Ethiopia, has become popular today. The newspapers Addis Zämän and Yäzareytu Itiyopp'ya, the magazines like Goh and Yäkkatit and news letters as well as the different publications of various organizations and ministries have been instrumental in popularizing the genre.

Since the break out of the revolution the mass media and other publications, such as Birritu, Tele Näqarit and Zena Turizm, have been devoting some columns to publishing short stories with the aim of entertaining or instructing their readers. Whatever the purpose, the move has brought a favourable condition for the progress and development of the short story in Ethiopia.

The two publishing agencies: Ethiopia Book Centre and Kuraz, which were established after the revolution, along with private publishers have also been playing major roles in the growth of the story form. These publishers created a relatively encouraging

situation especially for beginner writers. Their output, with respect to short stories, was maximized particularly after 1979.

The production of short story anthologies from 1966-1978 has been much less than the post-1979 period. The anthologies in the latter period are almost four times that of the former.

The short stories that appeared between 1966-1978 range from propaganda and moral implication to the situation of the individual. Oppression, frustration, war, patriotism, pride, love and marriage, religion and moral values have been common literary issues. Literary studies made on the Ethiopian short stories have shed light on themes and styles. Olga's MA thesis is impressive in this respect. Besides identifying and analysing major themes in pre-1973 Amharic stories she has observed different styles. According to her the techniques used by our story writers are the narrative, the slice-of-life, the confessional, the surprise-ending and tight plot. Olga has also discussed at length the factors that hindered the development of the short story in our country. Her study, no doubt, provides a comprehensive understanding of the then short stories.

More than a dozen of senior essays written by AAU undergraduate students have also dealt with the technical aspects and contents of various stories put out in book forms, in magazines and newspapers before 1979. Seven of the essays evaluate post-revolution stories not studied by Olga. The rest were written on the works of authors considered in her thesis.

The senior essays of Yäṣagär Mitke, Sīlāṣ At'nafe and Täsfaye Abärra focus mainly on techniques and point out styles which are mentioned in Olga's study. The essays of Meri Jaifär, Täsfaye Goyte and Bayläyāñ Bäk'älä on the other hand examine themes. Meri and Täsfaye have identified social, cultural, economic and political issues raised in stories published in Yäkkatit and Zena Turizm. Bayläyāñ Bäk'älä's paper deals with the dominant themes of stories included in two books: Guzow and Hiywätna Mot. He has divided the common themes into three groups: love and marriage, war and the side effects of drinking. Moreover, he has discussed

themes such as loneliness, cheating, backwardness and the problems of bachelors as reflected in individual short stories.

Thus, more or less, each researcher has performed an important task to fill the gap in the study of Amharic short stories published between 1949 and 1978. What remains unexplored is the corpus of short stories produced after 1979.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

As is already indicated, there has been a great increase in the production of short stories especially after 1979. But no comprehensive study has been made on these stories. In fact comments have been expressed in newspapers; however, the comments are often fragmentary and general remarks about content and technique. They provide little insight into the major concerns of contemporary short stories. Thus, a fairly comprehensive examination of present-day short stories is needed to both reveal their significance and fill the gap in the study of Amharic short stories.

The present work is designed to make a thematic study of contemporary short stories. The scope of the study is limited to the Amharic short story anthologies produced in the post 1979 period. The study of themes is chosen for two reasons.

Firstly, the survey made for this research suggests that most of the post-1979 story writers give more prominence to what they say than to how they say it. They seem to use their literary works as a means of conveying ideas. They also seem to place their works at the service of society. To ascertain these requires a thematic study of their stories.

Secondly, in one way or another, a thematic study is related to the examination of character, plot, style and description of events because theme is often conveyed through these. As Katherine Hondius states:

The theme of a short story is often the incipient element in the creative process... The theme is what all action, description and characterization pivot around. The theme

offers an interpretation of all that happens, and it tells us, by way of fictional illustration that the experiences of particular people can lead to generalizations about human behaviour. The author,...,had more in mind than a simple retelling of a happening;...an underlying purpose, a comment on values, which will become known to us as we evaluate the situation and the character of the story.<sup>9</sup>

Since theme can hardly be studied without examining the other aspects, such a task can help to shed light on other related subjects.

This thematic study is mainly intended to identify common themes and show their causes and implications. By doing so the study will throw light on the purpose of writers in writing short stories. The thesis is also hoped to offer some understanding about the values, traditions, attitudes, progress, problems, fears, etc. of the Ethiopian society as reflected in post-1979 short stories.

The short stories that are to be traced here will be examined, interpreted and, when the need arises, contrasted with other works. No particular approach is used in the entire thesis as the main purpose here is to identify, discuss and reveal the implication of themes through the interpretation of characters or description of events in a story.

As a matter of course a variety of themes are treated in the post-1979 Amharic short stories. In most cases these themes are conveyed through characters. So a close study of characters has been vital in the process of indentifying the main subjects. The dominant issues are found to be moral values, love and marriage, political issues, change and fear.

Short stories whose dominant ideas pertain to the five major categories will be emphasized. The thematically relevant works of Awgicäw, Abärra, Mulugeta, Sibhat, Addam and Sälämon will be stressed. These authors have written different stories which go far back to pre-revolution era in setting and which deal with

topical events. Their works deal with the individual human condition as well as the social situation in both past and present Ethiopia. They also reflect the facts of life in both urban and rural Ethiopia. Thus, the stories of these authors are believed to be valuable in realizing the major themes identified here. The stories of other writers are also considered based on thematic relevance. Generally, about 35 short stories are treated in this thesis.

### 1.3 Definition of terms

The terms theme, moral, political, change and fear are defined as follows.

**Theme:** A work of fiction can reveal its author's belief, his criticism of life or other. It can also be a plain presentation of the facts of life, the success or failure of an individual or other subject. "The author, sometimes without any more intention to make it [the story] readable, willy-nilly offers a criticism of life."<sup>10</sup> A work of art is by no means bereft of ideas either suggested or directly stated. Ultimately these ideas make up the theme of a literary piece. Different researchers use the term 'theme' in such a way that suits their purpose. Hudson calls it "the germinal idea", Hondius names it as "the incipient element" while Cuddon defines theme as a "central idea which may be stated directly or indirectly." Like theme these alternative names or definitions remain in strong association with what is said or with the idea(s) embodied in a work of art. Likewise the term is used here to designate the underlying idea contained and developed in any literary piece.

**Moral values:** The term 'moral' "refers to a set or system of beliefs or rules about conduct."<sup>11</sup> Every society is said to have moral rules that serve "the promotion of social harmony."<sup>12</sup> Moral values include conducts, obligations, principles, rules, beliefs, etc. that are acknowledged by society as proper and right. As moral rules are set on the grounds of social interest they are subversive of

individual ideals tending to clash with the ideals of the larger social group. Deviant behaviour or individual aberration is tantamount to vice or immorality. In this thesis the term moral applies to values, deeds and ideals accepted by society as good and virtuous and expected to be respected by its members.

**Political:** The term "political" is linked with the relationship between classes, their ideological views and the questions of power, freedom, justice as well as equality. In this study the phrase "political issues" is also used to refer to the use of power to gain advantages by subverting the struggles of people for liberation or to administer people and transform their lives for the better.

**Change:** An instance of transition of society or an individual from one state to another. A better or worse transformation in life style, attitude, belief or values.

**Fear:** A state of emotional anxiety, dread or terror caused by a realization of danger. Fear also means cowardice or the state of being at a loss when one feels persecuted or insecure. Fear sometimes leads to despair, psychological disturbance or madness.

## 1.4 Pronunciation Key

Vowels

ä	närs	ኅርስ
a	ato	አቶ
u	mulu	ሙሉ
i	simot	ሲሞት
e	bet	ቤት
ī	sīm	ሲም
o	mot	ሞት

Consonants

č	čär	ቸር
č	čärräsä	ቸርራሳ
j	lij	ሊጅ
k'	Bäkälä	በቀለ
ñ	miññot	ሞኝት
p'	P'aulos	ዳውሎስ
š	Šume	ሹሜ
s'	S'iyone	ሲዮን
t'	P'etros	ፊትሮስ

Note:

Unless otherwise specified, all the time references in this work are according to the Ethiopian Calendar. Besides, except in one case all the translations made from different texts are mine.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DISCUSSION OF BASIC THEMES:

#### CLASSIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

There has been a great increase in the production of Amharic short story anthologies in the post-1979 period. Many of the anthologies consist of stories whose setting is feudalist or revolutionary Ethiopia. The past and/or the present day social, traditional and political conditions in the country have obviously served in the making of today's short stories. Through writing about the life styles, desires, activities, problems and situations of the people, present day Ethiopian short story writers have revealed a wide variety of themes. The themes can be classified into five major categories, viz, moral values, love and marriage, political issues, change and fear.

The distribution of these themes, no doubt, varies. Among the five dominant themes the first two are the most prominent. This underlines the concern of our authors with moral as well as love and marriage issues.

Political issues are raised in short stories dealing with the evils of the feudo-bourgeois social system, the conflict between the reactionary and progressive forces and some of the achievements of the 1966 Ethiopian revolution. The distribution of political themes is not less common than that of the last two major themes.

The theme of change is treated in relation with the transition of characters or society from one state to another. This theme is also reflected in works whose major concern may be politics or something else. Finally there is the theme of fear treated in a considerable number of short stories which provide accounts of man's emotional reaction towards death, threat and other challenges *of life.*

## 1. MORAL VALUES

Ethiopian short story writers have extensively written about moral issues. They often convey moral themes through dealing with the virtuous or vicious practices of characters. Thus, most short stories exhibit a great deal of narrative devoted to the expression of characters whose motives and deeds signify virtue or vice. The conflict between good and evil is also shown through the portrayal of oppositions between virtuous and depraved characters.

This section attempts to reveal the importance attached to such values as duty and responsibility, self control, honesty, faithfulness, courage, etc. In the majority of the cases the importance of good traits is shown through exposing the adverse outcomes of bad behaviour. The short stories "Bet Simot", "T'igu Yaradda Lij", "Mäčärräšaw", "Yä P'etros Wuläta", "Sim" and many others bear evidences to the hatefulness of unsavoury behaviour. In these stories we observe that evil provokes hostility and suffers due retribution.

Sälämon Lämman's "Bet Simot" (literally, "When a House Dies") depicts how an insensible father contributes to the disintegration of a family. The father, Ato Šume is educated and old. But age and education do not make him give heed to parental responsibilities. Ato Šume has always been causing troubles in the family. He has never been giving the amount of money needed for family expenses. Therefore, the mother, Wäyzäro Kabtiš, had to borrow money to feed the children: Suzi, Bäkälä and Tihut. As the father "gets out early and comes late at night,"<sup>13</sup> he hardly supervises the educational progress of the children or their daily activities. His complete failure to shoulder responsibilities had caused a disagreement between him and his wife, who accused him of troubling the family.

However, as she was already exhausted in the endeavour to run the house and raise the children, she died before she could do anything about him.

The pathetic death of the mother makes no sense to Ato Šume. It rather relieves him of her challenges, criticisms and accusations. After her death he totally forgets the children and continues spending money on special dishes, whisky and women. The innocent children, who are deprived of parental love, protection and guidance, get into indecent activities and misery. Tihut is forced to go round the neighbourhood in search of food and solace. Bäkälä engages in stealing and Suzi turns out as a street-walker. Like her father she dreams only of enjoyment and finds sexual partners through pimps. She even starts dragging young girls to sexual corruption. The wanton behaviour of father and daughter finally leads to their sudden meeting for sexual intercourse in a bar. The story ends by showing how each is struck dumb with horror at the meeting ground.

In "Bet Simot" the story of the dead mother which is rendered in a flashback technique helps to observe the difference between the past and the present situation of the whole family. When she was alive she struggled to manage the house and keep it intact. The mother was "the pillar of the house" and the binding element. Her death marked the beginning of complete disorder, insecurity and the loss of affection as well as hope in the family.

The mother character is exactly the opposite of the father. She was sober and had the sense of duty and responsibility. She bore every burden to overcome parental obligations. But the father has nothing of these traits. The contrast between the mother and the father provides a clear insight into what is expected of parents. Parents should behave like the mother character, who has won the admiration of her neighbours by virtue of her goodness. If they fail to do so, they will cause crisis in the family. Ato Šume's moral poverty and lack of self control has, for instance, led to the disintegration of the family.

The story also demonstrates how deviant behaviour incites

society to hate and isolate a person. This can be realized from the unhealthy relationship between Ato Šume and his neighbours. Having made sure that Ato Šume is not good to his wife and children, his neighbours label him as a useless "silly old man". They are not on speaking terms with him. Nobody trusts or sympathizes with him even in times of danger. The mere fact that the neighbours appreciate the mother character and despise the father is a clear indication to the vitality of maintaining good behaviour in order to win favour and support from others.

Moreover, he lives in a cobwebbed, dreary and dying house. The inactivity and the engulfing silence around the house together with the lack of action, conversation and contact in the life of Ato Šume symbolize his alienation from society.

No matter that he goes to bars and drinks, he hardly escapes loneliness. In bars he eats and drinks alone brooding on sexual happiness or on his suffering in the after-life. His hallucination about spiritual hell is a sign of guilt conscience, yet he does not intend to come out of meanness and start a decent life because he does not have the guts to decide.

Furthermore "Bet Simot" expresses how lack of control spoils children. Suzi and Bākälä manifest bad behaviour. They engage in condemnable practices such as prostitution and stealing and, thus, cause social problems. This is due to the absence of someone who can take disciplinary actions against them.

Sälämon's other story entitled "T'igu Yaradda Lij" (T'igu the City Boy) criticizes such social evils as laziness, extravagance, alcoholism and vanity. The story is about T'igu, who always boozes, suffers from bankruptcy, procrastinates office work and fails to use his time, knowledge and money even for his own good. He is not receptive to friendly advice and criticism. He gives no weight to official warnings. Thus, as his superiors could no more tolerate him, he gets fired from work and dies a disgraceful death.

The central character T'igu represents undesirable qualities like alcoholism and insoucians. Besides, he wears dirty clothes, loves flattery, borrows money even from shoe-blacks and never

clears his debts promptly. As he is insouciant he is a bachelor at about the age of 38.

In "T'igu Yaradda Lij" we observe how a purposeless life leads to criticism, ridicule and danger. For instance, prostitutes and drunkards glorify him for being a "noble" bachelor and a boozer. At such moments he feels important and magnanimous, though people make fun of and laugh at him. It is ridiculous to see him elevated and spend much as a prostitute sarcastically sings the following lines: "ሞገጃጃጃ፡ ጎጧ፡ ጎጧገገ፡ ምጋጋጋ፡ ጎጧ፡ ጎጧገገ / ምጋጋጋጋ፡ ስገገ፡ ጎጧ፡ ጎጧገገ፡" 14 (literally, "Why worry, why feel sorry/when T'igu the bounteous is with us.") The prostitute actually flatters him for his money. Apparently he often invites her only to borrow later. Even then he forbids his friends and superiors to meddle in his affairs. T'igu simply wants to live as he wishes and does not want to adjust himself to the surrounding. This is what puts him in an unfriendly situation.

In both the above short stories the author criticizes pursuit of momentary pleasure, lack of purpose in life and insouciance. He also shows how lack of control and engagement in depraved practices lead one to be ridiculed, despised and punished.

The society's attitude towards immoral people can be seen in what others say about T'igu and Ato Šume. In the eyes of his friends T'igu is "ሮገገ፡ ጎጧገገ፡ ምጋጋጋ፡" 15 (Cheap and valueless). The same is true of Ato Šume, who, to his neighbours, is "ሞገጋጋጋ፡ ጎጧገገ፡" 16 (literally, "an immature, silly old man"). Both characters are labelled as unclean and useless because they fail to manifest desirable traits. Besides, they do not distinguish between their "rights and obligations"<sup>17</sup> and fulfil what is expected of them. The individual is expected to control himself and follow acknowledged rules of behaviour; otherwise, he will suffer ridicule, isolation and other bitter experiences.

In the story "T'igu Yaradda Lij" the characters Assäfa and Zärihun are used to show that individuals can have a good social reputation when they respect values and fulfil their obligations.

The individual is, therefore, encouraged to conform to the morality of his society rather than pursue individual ideals which will result in tragedy as is the case with T'igu.

A perverted person may as well be litigated. That bad behaviour can lead one to be charged is justified in "Bet Simot". Ato Šume has frequently been taken to k'äbäle offices by his wife for incurring troubles in the family. Suzi has also been accused by the k'äbäle dragging chaste girls to sexual corruption. The conformity between legal social organizations and the society in the attempt to deter ignominious behaviour implies how an imoral act is, at times, considered as unlawful.

The tendency to live a life without rules that govern society is hardly possible insofar as an individual, like T'igu, works and lives with people whose values can have influences on him. The social milieu conditions and directs one's life by imposing rules on him/her. But T'igu as well as Ato Šume fail to understand this. Ultimately they suffer from criticism, ridicule and other direct or indirect punishment by society.

In another short story entitled "Mäčärräšaw" (The End) by Mulugeta Gudäta we observe the sad ends of the main character Hanna, who flirts with her notions of western styles and goes off the moral tracts of her society. The self asserted character Hanna says, "I know what is good for me,"<sup>18</sup> and denounces her old mother in whom the society's proper conducts are incarnated. However, her self assertion does not bring her any good. It pushes her to degrade herself to being an object of sexual pleasure to foreigners so as to achieve her dreams for material gains.

The story "Mäčärräšaw" portrays Hanna as a a woman of scandalous life because of a weakness to harmonize a sense of individual freedom with moral sensitivity and because of her teperamental dislike for the principles of her people.

All of the above short stories lay emphasis on the disadvantages of unsavoury behaviour. It appears that they are written to discourage people from depraved practices which are ruinous.

Showing liberty of conscience and violating patterns of behaviour can sometimes incur severe punishment as in "Yä P'etros Wuläta" by Awgičäw. The conversation between Ato Simion and Birk'näh in the story "Yä P'etros Wuläta" denotes unruly behaviour as a disease to society.

In this short story P'etros is spoilt on account of his friendship with the notorious Bäkälä. This worries Ato Simion, who dreams of making his son become a big man. The father, thus, sets out to save P'etros from bad activities like gambling and drinking. To achieve this end the father persuades Birk'näh to separate the two. Birk'näh, who loathes the gambler, drunkard and unruly Bäkälä, bargains with Ato Simion and then proposes killing Bäkälä as a remedy:

"....Afterall he [Bäkälä] is a disease to society and before many people contract the disease, he had better be done away with. You will rescue not only your son but also many others. And if it is to the benefit of many the death of a single person does not matter. Aboveall he is a tubercular."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, at times, severe punishment can be inflicted on those whose evil doings affect others. The harsh decision against Bäkälä reminds us of religious principles that drive christians to keep away from or get rid of something sinful. "Christians seek to avoid evil spirits and to fight them."<sup>20</sup> This religious desire sometimes motivates people to set out and defeat evil in the physical world. In principle Ato Simion and Birk'näh's agreement to kill Bäkälä, who "is a disease to society", is not far from this desire. It has to be noted here that in all the above short stories characters who go against the principles of society end unhappily. The sad ends obviously suggest that immorality is not rewarding.

As a matter of course, the portrayal of depraved characters like Ato Šume and T'igu serves to underscore the adverse results of bad behaviour.

Many Amharic short story writers depict characters whose deeds denote the harmfulness of depravity. They often seek to restrain people from vices like alcoholism, insouciance, egotism, vanity, corruption, and promiscuity. Regarding this Molvaer says: "Ethiopian authors are much more preoccupied with vices in man than with his virtues. What is counted as virtuous conduct is little more than to avoid vices."<sup>21</sup> Through writing about social evils authors attempt to deter viciousness and promote moral excellence as is evidenced in "Bet Simot". The short stories "Lijitu" and "Yä Mäjämäriyaw Mäsänakl" are also intended to dissuade people from indulging in lust, nepotism and the vile practice of bribery.

Abärra Lämama's short story "Lijitu" (The Girl) shows corruption as a major social evil. The story is told by a young girl whose life gets worse because of officials who are destitute of human feelings. The girl whose name is not mentioned throughout the story is a type. She is one among those whose endeavour to get a job proves futile because these days getting a job presupposes bribery and sexual or blood relationship with employers. Academic credentials or qualifications are not taken into account by unjust employers. Due to this the girl, who is from a poor family, cannot help being taken advantage of by everyone who promises a job.

The girl's experience helps the reader to get an impression of how every "honourable" official lies, gets a girl in bed and then turns away from her. No one keeps to his words because the main purpose of each employer is the satisfaction of his carnal interests. Thus, the girl, who has been tempted and duped by many, in the end, conceives from "one of the many day time husbands"<sup>22</sup> and returns home in defeat. And on her journey back home she tells her story in a low tone, a mood showing her disappointment. Nevertheless, she still remains indignant with the insincere officials for her narration sounds like an indictment against these people.

Employers, though no one of them features in "Lijitu", are presented as erotic and dishonest. They do not even hesitate to repudiate their children if girls happen to conceive from them. Sometimes the girls themselves do not make out who has impregnated them. For these reasons many girls are forced to have unwanted children or resort to abortion, prostitution or even suicide. In any case they cannot avoid shame and defeat.

The girl in "Lijitu" cries and speaks of her premarriage pregnancy as "gud" (shameful) because in our society illegitimate pregnancy is widely taken as a sign of involvement in dirty activities and is often the end to a good name. Traditionally, virginity is a girl's "kibrä nis'hina" (honour of cleanliness). Sex before marriage is considered base. This attitude is still maintained in rural Ethiopia and is not totally erased in towns, though "in towns, and especially Addis Abäba, sexual mores are more relaxed."<sup>23</sup> Ethiopians refer to the word sperm as "hatiat (sin) and the sex organs are often referred to as one's 'shame'."<sup>24</sup> This clearly implies the high importance attached to chastity.

The experience of the girl testifies that these days girls are treated as sexual objects by morally and ethically impoverished government officials. In the story "Lijitu" the author observes with regret the injustice meted out to young ones thereby expressing his views against corrupted officials.

In the story "Yä Mäjämäriyaw Mäsänakl" (The First Hindrance) Mulugeta Gudäta also gives us an impression about the moral corruption of higher officials and their negative effect on social life. In this story the employer, Āärinät, is depicted as lewd and unreliable. He offers jobs to those who offer him their bodies. But the character Zinaš rejects his offer soon after she learns that it entails sexual intercourse. The material benefit proves unacceptable to her conscience insofar as it involves soiling her body. Moreover, she wants to remain chaste and loyal to her fiancé. In this story the deeds of Āärinät are contrasted with Zinaš's for the purpose of portraying him as unsavoury and

"Inne Däjäne" reveals a great deal about human nature and interest. The character Agafari is suffering psychologically because he refuses to accept the hard truth of his impotence. If he accepted it, he would step down from his position as a husband which is a defeat to his manhood. Hence, he pretends to be an able bodied man and wants his wife to be loyal and faithful to him. But because the wife is not faithful, he punishes her so as to prove his strength - his manliness.

The paradox in the story "Inne Däjäne" is that neither the husband nor the wife wants a divorce. Divorce could have been a possible solution to the problem. Had they divorced, the wife would have freely sought sexual pleasure without wounding the husband's pride and without incurring further problems. It is surprising to see their staying together when there is no love, sympathy or respect between them.

Although it is plain that Agafari's sexual inability led the wife to adultery, she cannot be exonerated from conjugal infidelity. A wife is expected to be faithful to her husband regardless of problems she may encounter in married life. If she sleeps with another man for any reason the husband may feel humiliated and become jealous. Agafari is eaten up by jealousy and suffers from a feeling of being neglected. He cannot tolerate what his wife does against him. In view of this, his revenge may appear as a human reaction against the wrong done on him but his use of an innocent child as an instrument to injure or punish his wife is far from a human reaction. It is cruel for it is the victimization of a clean child who has nothing to do with the wrong doings of his mother. The story also pinpoints how sexual problems can drive people to evil doings.

Furthermore "Inne Däjäne" asserts the tender feelings of a mother to her child. In this story, the mother character, like Wäyzäro Kabtīs, who died in the fight for the good of her children, becomes insane as she sees her son being tortured.

The interest of parents suffering for the sake of their



In "Amist Sidist Säbat" the father character lives for his children. He does everything and is ready to give his life for their safety. Bärsufäkäd is a type of Christ in that he shows readiness to sacrifice his life and save others. In fact we hear Bärsufäkäd denouncing God but this is because he is madened by God's indifference towards the suffering of innocent children and because of God's irresponsiveness towards his plea for mercy.

Christians believe that divine power is infallible. God is the symbol of love, charity, mercy, justice, goodness and other virtues. "God is man's helper."<sup>29</sup> Christians pray to Him, tell Him their troubles and seek His guidance and help. They confide in Him and trust that He will not let them down. However, if He turns a deaf ear to their repeated pleas for mercy and help and if He appears to be indifferent to human tragedy, they may feel desperate and eventually lose hope in spiritual faith.

In the character Bärsufäkäd we witness that when a man who badly needs the Lords' help experiences His indifference, "färihagziabher" (the fear of God) ceases to prevent him from confronting God. Bärsufäkäd is not afraid of His wrath when he says: "He [God] deserves accusation"<sup>30</sup> for His cruel silence towards the painful death of helpless children. The father character obviously feels strong indignation against the Lord for the latter has not proven to be the idealized symbol.

The practice of attributing success or failure to the will of God is a common feature of Ethiopian christians. Thus, Bärsufäkäd's attribution of his difficulties to execute responsibilities to the will of God cannot be surprising. It rather shows his deeply ingrained belief and great confidence in God, Who, in fact, renders no help when he needs it.

Bärsufäkäd personifies the virtues of love, selflessness, protectiveness and sacrifice. He is an ideal father who undergoes terrible ordeals for the sake of his children. In the story "Amist Sidist Säbat" we see the importance man gives to virtues and feel his strong desire to successfully carry out obligations.

The attitude of parents towards their children is vital in many respects. The significance of parental love and care can be realised from what happens to parentless children such as Suzi and Bäkälä in "Bet Simot". Likewise in the short story "Yä Aradda Lijoc" by Mulugeta there is much evidence about parentless children getting into indecent activities.

"Yä Aradda Lijoc" (The Children of Aradda) is a partial depiction of the life of street boys in Addis Abāba. As they have no one to fear, they involve themselves in bad habits like smoking, stealing and killing. A society of young delinquents is, thus, formed. In this story the author portrays the character Abärra to show how some street boys incur social problems. Abärra is characterized by aggressiveness and cruelty. He defies social order. He kills and beats people to rob their money. He has no human feelings because he "has grown in crime and lives in crime."<sup>31</sup> He delights in making others, even his friends, suffer.

"Some times, if he wishes, he gets up in the middle of the night, wakes up all the other hooligans and troubles them. What delights Abärra on earth is tormenting others who cannot combat against him."<sup>32</sup>

Abärra's hateful appearance: the long scar on his face, his tangled hair and his frightening voice also signify his cruelty. Due to his behaviour, street boys fear him. The police, on the other hand, look for him. The fact that aggressiveness and causing trouble to others are not acceptable is shown in what the other character, Habtamu says. Habtamu, though a street boy, remains decent and clean because he hopes to go back to his house. He has been tolerating Abärra but one day it happens that Habtamu could no more stand Abärra and therefore confronts the latter. Habtamu expresses his disgust and disapproval when he says:

"Yes, it is too much! Nothing is worse than this. We toil all day only to pay to you at

night. Moreover, you beat as all. How much can we bear?! Yes, it is too much! Too much! Too much!"<sup>33</sup>

The quarrel between Habtamu and Abärra ends in Abärra's falling in the hands of the police.

In the character Abärra we see how hateful it is to be a sadist, taking delight in cruelty. Thus, we can not sympathize with him when he is caught by the police while writhing to death. We rather share Habtamu's attitude that goes: "He [Abärra] has got what he deserves."<sup>34</sup>

Such social problems as delinquency, stealing and street-walking originate from lack of parental supervision and care towards children. Children who are given proper upbringing will be bound with parents and manifest praiseworthy traits like loyalty, honesty, politeness and decency. They will also be grateful and support their parents in old age.

The short story "Sim" (Name) by Däräjä manifests how an affectionate child guards his parents against degradation, oppression, and seduction. This story enunciates that righteous children cannot live to see threats to the pride and mores of their family, neighbours and society. In "Sim" the character, Täsfaye, takes a risky move to assail the evil character Kostre. Täsfaye's courageous embarkation brings an end not only to the problem of his family but also to the problem of the whole village.

In the story "Sim" we also notice how the denial of deserved treatment provokes hostility and tempts the injured party to retaliate. In fact, the villagers in the story exhibit great power of endurance in a painful situation but such a graceful act proves impossible to Täsfaye, who is overcome by a sense of justice while punishing or revenging evil. The author seems to favour punishment as severe as the injury suffered. However, every writer does not encourage revengefulness because it may sometimes lead to an extreme type of wickedness as in "Elzabel".

"Elzabel" by Addam Rätta relates the story of a young couple

whose marriage breaks on account of the husband's hatred for society. The husband, Paulos, has a grudge against his superstitious society, that branded his mother "budda" (evil eye) and tormented her to death. He grows up with a sense of hatred, pitilessness and vindictiveness. His good natured wife becomes his first victim. He intentionally hurts her because he identifies her with the society. Although he knows that she is positive towards him, he looks down on her and finally absconds with their child from her. As Paulos has sworn vengeance, he does not seem to stop victimizing even innocents or those who love and care for him. He is, therefore, cultivating ill-will and cruelty which kindled in him animosity towards people. Evidently he grows as wicked and irrational as the superstitious people who tortured his mother and whose deeds he hates most.

Contemporary short story authors often favour virtuosity. In most Amharic short stories we observe that praise is due to characters who, by doing what is expected of them and by showing willingness to stand and fight for the good of people, contribute to the promotion of social life. Tigist and Zäwugä in the story "Addisuwa Närs" are ideal in this respect.

The short story "Addisuwa Närs" (The New Nurse) by Mulugeta has a bearing on one of the droughts that caused distress and death in the life of many Ethiopians. The background of the story is the pathetic condition of drought victims gathered at Koräm. A medical team headed by Bitäw is in charge of helping and rehabilitating the impoverished ones.

The story gives accounts of what the characters say, do and desire to do. The team consist of Bitäw, Tigist, and Zäwugä, whose duty is to reform the situation of the victims for the better. However, all of them do not work in unison for the success of the mission. This is due to Bitäw, who places personal interests above social responsibilities.

Bitäw is characterized by selfishness, sexual lust and impiety. He makes fun of the victims and attempts to discourage the other team members. He lingers wickedly while the rest devote

their time, energy and knowledge to the service of the sufferers. What Bitäw says about himself describes his egotism and wickedness.

Shall I tell you the truth? I came here because it was an order, because I must win my bread. I yearn to return to Addis....I am not born for Koräm, for this hell of a place! Do you want to know what I'm dreaming of? Draught beer,...Nyala Hotel. The fragrance of Nyala bar ladies sweeps my nose. The noise, the music, the dim light, the gossip with one of the bar ladies...Oh! What shall I say?<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, when someone brings him food from Addis he hides it to eat alone. As regards his position he misuses it to fulfil personal desires, such as wooing Tigist, the new nurse. The plan of action he designs is totally intended to his advantage instead of the victims'. Surprisingly enough, at the end of the mission, he demands a salary increment for the "service" he had rendered at Koräm.

Tigist and Zäwugä are the opposite of Bitäw. Their ideal is work. They show readiness to die in the service of the victims. Zäwugä says: "It is imperative to make sacrifice. Let us die just a bit."<sup>36</sup> We observe the two winning the love of the victims, like Ymär, by virtue of their benevolence. At their young age they do not dream of their budding love so much as they do of working for the success of their duty. They have nothing to save from the drought victims, whose pain they share. Tigist, for instance, cries with them. Tigist and Zäwugä generally manifest good traits which the author suggest as proper and right.

In the story "Addisuwa Närs" the author Mulugeta provides a sharp character contrast between Bitäw and Tigist as well as Zäwugä and draws a clear demarcation between right and wrong. In the story Bitäw personifies egotism and inhumanity, whereas the rest are the representations of charity and selflessness.

The author's social concern in "Addisuwa Närs" is plain enough. He is concerned with the need to overcome the problem of

drought victims. He emphasizes the idea that life ought to be lived for the service of others. He conveys his idea through the altruistic and courageous characters Tīgīst and Zāwugä, who play an indispensable role in reforming the situation of the starving.

Tīgīst and Zāwugä are clean and perfect. They do not plot against Bitäw, who offends them in many ways, because they do not intend to return evil for evil. Besides, they are forgiving. In fact in a fit of anger and self defence Tīgīst has scratched, bitten and called Bitäw "Ass! Animal!". Though she does not deliberately do this, the truth in what she says cannot be overlooked for it rebukes animal desires.

Showing much interest in food, sex and other physical desires is an act of "näwr" (indecent). Everybody is expected to suppress or control physical desires. Failure to do so reduces a man's status to the level of an animal (awre). The Amharic word "awre" signifies dirt, savagery and inhumanity. Animal behaviour is assumed to be the trait of people driven by individualistic impulses. Ethiopian authors forward incisive criticisms against people manifesting animal qualities. A passage in Fik'ir Eskä Mäkabir points out such a short coming as blameworthy.

What distinguishes him [man] from animals is the fact that he can control the characteristics he has in common with animals: hunger, greed, sexual lust and the like. If he, driven by hunger, must eat everything he desires, if he, driven by greed, must have everything he sees, if he, driven by lust, fulfils the act of adultery with every woman he desires, he has stopped being a man and becomes an animal walking on two legs.<sup>36</sup>

[trans Molvaer]

Falling prisoner to desires is a sign of degeneration. It degrades one's reputation in society. Our authors attack this behaviour with the aim of inducing readers to preserve traits that can serve for the good of both the individual and the society.

The thoughts and activities of an individual are often seen from the vantage point of society. A depraved individual incites

the society's anger against him/her. The complete isolation of Ato Šume and the killing cahрге against Kostre are instances of this harshness. An individual can win the acceptance of others, if he upholds social ideals and shows commitment to carry them out.

More often than not, virtuous characters are portrayed as well motivated and as unwavering beings. For instance, those who have a sense of duty and responsibility show qualities like concern, determination and courage. They devotedly work towards the fulfilment of duties and are ready to undergo a series of tests.

Tigist and Zäwugä go on to serve the hungry without being disheartened by Bitäw's injurious behaviour or by the hard task they carry out at Koräm. They remain optimistic, charitable and tolerant. Such traits are what most Amharic story writers want the Ethiopian people to have.

The fact that virtuous characters are unwavering in their nature is valuable in the success of their undertakings. The hard task in "Addisuwa Närs" comes to a successful end due to the moral strength of the altruistic characters. This justifies the vitality of maintaining and upholding proper conduct in a situation that requires so. The extreme idealization of virtuous characters, such as Tigist, Zäwugä and Woyzäro Kabtis, has a straight forward didactic purpose. It is meant to promote goodness in our society.

To sum up, many contemporary Amharic short stories that raise moral issues are intended to check the spreading of bad traits in our society. They attack blind flirtation with western ideals, purposelessness, pursuit of momentary pleasure, personal choice, corruption and other pernicious behaviours. The main purpose of the moral stories is to show the principal importance of morality in regulating man's behaviour and promoting social life. They also express that conformity to what is required by custom or tradition is essential for a sane relationship between people and for their well being. Therefore, individual aberrations, which directly or indirectly affect others, like family members and neighbours, are highly opposed. The stories obviously serve as a means to an end.

The importance attached to moral standards in post-1979

Amharic short stories is the most persistent theme as it is in different genres of Amharic literature written to promote moral values. As Gerard states: "In a general way, Amharic novels and plays are very simply designed to condemn evil and extol virtue by showing that God always ensures the punishment of the sinners and the reward of the virtuous."<sup>37</sup> Though we hardly observe God's interference to ensure justice, Gerard's observation holds true insofar as Amharic stories intend to correct bad behaviour and praise good conduct. They plainly stipulate that maintaining moral values is in the best interest of the public. More often, the authors' moral stance is consonant with the society they portray in their writings.

## 2. LOVE AND MARRIAGE

The second dominant subject in post-1979 Amharic short stories is love and marriage. As regards the treatment of these two issues what Thomas Kane said 17 years before applies to contemporary story writers. Kane said, "Probably the favourite subject of writers in Amharic is love, and since love is rarely thought of without marriage,..., they may be considered as one theme."<sup>38</sup> More often love and marriage are treated hand in hand. They are, therefore, discussed here together as the same theme.

In this section we will observe how the theme of love and marriage serves to reflect the importance of love for marriage and family formation. We will also see the different attitudes of people towards love and marriage and the complications arising out of the issue under discussion.

"Antänäh", "Woyra Sîr" and "Muššîraw" are among the Amharic short stories that portray love affairs leading to an engagement or a union between two lovers. These stories assert love as a real emotional involvement and as a major force for marriage.

In the short story "Antänäh" the author Niguse Ayälä depicts how two young lovers succeed in getting engaged despite the problems they face. Antänäh, the title character of the story, is

in love with S'iyone. Antänäh's mother is against his relation with the girl. Although she has no good reasons, the mother always nags at him. She advises, insults, curses or threatens Antänäh so that he would desert S'iyone. However, Antänäh does not listen to his mother. He rather tells her: "...I love her [S'iyone], I trust her, I will never leave her."<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile S'iyone conceives from him. And this incurs a further disagreement between mother and son. The situation also enrages S'iyone's father, who swears to kill her. S'iyone's pregnancy becomes the most worrisome thing to everyone in the story.

Because of the pre-marriage pregnancy S'iyone is threatened by her father while Antänäh is forced by his mother to disown the child. But the young lovers prove rebellious. For instance, instead of executing his mother's idea, Antänäh breaks off his relation with her, writes a letter about the case in point and gives it to S'iyone's father, who instantly reads and learns Antänäh's real concern for S'iyone and forgives them. He even promises to support them till they stand on their feet and get married.

The story "Antänäh" demonstrates love as a strong emotional urge which bounds two sexes together. People bound together by love cannot be easily separated because they are "a branch of one body and soul."<sup>40</sup> Antänäh prefers his lover to his mother for he does not think of a life without her. Thus, when one is in love he is ready to defy everything in favour of the loved one. In "Antänäh" love causes mutual concern and a strong yearning for a union in marriage. Such a yearning cannot be calmed down by parental discouragement or threat. This is because a true love relationship gives courage and enables lovers to remain faithful to each other.

Friendship based on emotional attachment is full of passion and happiness. In the story "Woyra Sir" [Under an Olive Tree] the character Zähara becomes heartbroken and cries bitterly on the occasion of her separation from her boy friend, Ebrahim, and her

wedding to Kāsīm, who she hates. The marriage is arranged by parents; nevertheless, she feigns to be sick and manages to come back to Ebrahim without being deflowered by Kāsīm. Zāhara is not willing to see herself sleeping with another man except Ebrahim. When she is with the latter she is passionat and joyful. She is also frank and open to him and has nothing to reserve from Ebrahim. She allows him to do whatever he likes with her body.

The fact that Zāhara forbids Kāsīm to touch her body, reserves her virginity for Ebrahim and makes a secret arrangement of marriage with Ebrahim shows that marriage contract between men and women should follow a natural course of love. Concluding marriage without having a passionate feeling for each other is troublesome.

Imposed marriage or marriage in the absence of love often results in compunction or regret, emotional distress and divorce. The adverse results of loveless unions are dealt with in the stories "Mahlet", "Addisu Hilīm" and "Yätäkäfaffälä Libb". Through revealing the bad outcomes of unions characterized by the absence of emotional attachment, these stories assert that love is significant in marriage.

In the story "Mahlet" the author Addam Rätta portrays the problems of a young lady Mahlet, who runs away from her first husband Šāgaw. Their marriage was arranged in the traditional way in which love is counted out as unimportant. The parents of the young people swore by word of God and agreed on the marriage of their children. Mahlet was in fact against the agreement but she was defenceless.

The narration of "Mahlet" is rendered by way of Mahlet's reminiscences of her distressing experience of marriage and sex. As she is beautiful, an artist chooses her for a model and she agrees. Thus she sits in a studio and the painter starts his work. While the painter paints her portrait her mind wanders to the past and she remembers how she was forced to marry, how she was seduced and how she screamed. As she remembers, her face wrinkles and her body moves. The artist, who does not know what is in her mind, begs her to sit perfectly. But Mahlet would not listen. She goes

on thinking about her next sexual experience. The second man was also a brut. He compelled her for sex without her consent. Finally Zämänä, her present boss, did the same as the other men. In the struggle to defend herself from Zämänä, she was wounded on the forehead, which she touches and, thus, interrupts the work of the artist.

The facial expressions and bodily movements, that result from Mahlet's sad memories of the past are clear indications of the traumatic effects of loveless marriage and seduction. No one has ever kissed or treated Mahlet as a person with feelings and emotions. This has made her to develop a negative attitude towards men.

Forcing girls to satisfy sexual desires results in making them think of men as frightening muscular beings with no tender feelings. Marriages or sex by compulsion is hardly successful or desirable. It causes a negative attitude towards the opposite sex. The fact that Mahlet wants the painter to paint a slender femalish man as her partner shows her desire and search for a soft, tender and loving man.

In "Mahlet" the author reflects on the defencelessness of young ladies in a society where children are wedded by order of their parents and where men treat women as subordinates. He also shows the absence of the practice of appreciating beauty. For instance, except the enlightened character İstifanos, nobody tells Mahlet the power of her beauty in evoking the emotion of love, which she always yearns for. This indicates how physical beauty and attractive features are overlooked in a culture where passion and love are less important in the process of choosing a partner.

The side effects of loveless marriage are also dealt with in "Addisu Hîlim" and "Yätäkäfaffälä Libb". These stories project the negative consequences of deciding to marry with a view to finding solutions for personal problems.

"Addisu Hîlim" (The New Dream) by Awgičäw Täräffä relates

the story of husband and wife belonging to different age groups. Young Elsa accepts Ato Tässäma's offer of marriage as a way out of personal problems. She thought marriage would relieve her from boredom and from being a burden to her family. But her idea proves naive and she gets into more difficult problems as the old man neglects and dominates her soon after she has had children by him. He drinks, comes home late at night, pays little attention to her and beats her. Elsa becomes utterly lonely and melancholic. She happens to repent her decision to marry. We here notice how unwise it is to marry an untrusted fellow. At this point Gäbru tempts Elsa to sexual intercourse which she does not resist.

The extra-marital affair between Gäbru and Elsa goes beyond a mere sexual contact and the plot of the story develops on this line. The narrative becomes more gripping as Gäbru decides to marry Elsa, whose emotional problem fills him with compassion. Meanwhile the old man finds the two together and confronts them. And with this the story reaches its climax. The story ends in the death of Gäbru in an attempt to save Elsa from a shot by her husband.

"Addisu Hilim" asserts that love causes passion, happiness and hope whereas marriage without love leads to distrust and infidelity. To show the significance of love the author gives a contrasted description of Elsa's relationships with the two men. The contrast points out that a woman is genuine, unreserved and free if only she is handled properly. The fact that Elsa appears to be lively after going through the monotonous married life clearly evidences the impetus love gives to start life all over again.

A wife needs to be treated as an equal and with care. She hates to be beaten. Force does not make her remain submissive or faithful. A forced wife can easily be driven to frustration and to seek refuge in another man's bosom because she wants an outlet from the pains of a depressing state.

The importance of tender feelings for marriage is also stressed in "Yätäkäffälä Libb" [A Split Heart]. In this story young Eleny, like Elsa, marries a rich old man leaving her boy

friend, Biniam. Her motives for getting married can be seen in the following lines:

What does it matter if I marry him for a short while? For the sake of my mother? I can use his wealth to support my mother and to continue my education. As to my relation with Biniam I can maintain it secretly. I will never have a child by this old man.<sup>42</sup>

She thought her alliance with the old man would not thwart her plans. But none of her dreams materializes. The old man, on the other hand, marries her without telling her that he is a divorcee and has children. Apparently each has been dishonest to the other right from the beginning. As time goes on their relationship deteriorates for the husband becomes abusive. He despises and insults Eleny as if she was not his wife: "You daughter of a poor...thanks be to me, I pulled you out from misery."<sup>43</sup> Moreover, he beats her. Disheartened, Eleny now searches for Biniam and implores him to rescue her from maltreatment and sufferings of an almost solitary life.

Both "Yätäkäffälä Libb" and "Addisu Hilim" shed light on marriage alliances that are reduced to sexual liaison because of the absence of "spiritual union" between couples. In each case neither is ready to give himself/herself to the other. These short stories also bring out the desire of husbands to confine women to the house and to make them dependent as well as submissive especially after children are born.

Old men seem to believe that bearing a child breaks a woman's spirit and leaves her at their mercy. For instance, Ato Tässäma neglects Elsa and becomes unfair to her after she bears. But he still wants her to obey him. This indicates how some husbands want to act as they wish without giving due consideration to their wives.

The two stories "Addisu Hilim" and "Yätäkäffälä Libb" depict the situation of the wife as quite disappointing. She enjoys no right that the husband does not grant her. She suffers quite a good deal of oppression especially when she has no emotional ties with the husband. Under no circumstance is she expected to offer resistance or take counter action. If she does, she will incur further suffering. But should the male make mistakes they are supposed to be overlooked by the female. The fate of the wife is simply to tolerate mishandling so as to avoid

divorce at least for the children's sake: "Ours is a false marriage. It is for the sake of my children that I live with him. Otherwise, he does not want me,"<sup>44</sup> says Elsa in "Addisu Hilim".

Sex, no doubt, plays a vital role in determining one's position in married life. Husbands enjoy maximum right and have upper hand in the family by virtue of their sex. A husband is rarely accused of weaknesses or unjustness. When Eleny accuses her man of unfaithfulness Biniam tells her that "anyway a man will not be criticised even if he errs but everything a woman does is magnified. What can you do?...it is the custom."<sup>45</sup> Thus, custom is sometimes attributed to the oppression of women, especially wives, in our society. However, these days, anything that favours male supermacy is proving unacceptable, at least to the conscience of young ladies like Elsa and Eleny. And as male superiority leads to family crisis, the fight against it is a just one.

The desire to be superior to women or to be privileged on account of sex reminds us of Maugham's short story entitled "The Colonel's Daughter". In this story the husband character, George, who has not been faithful to his wife says, "I do not deny that I have had a bit of fun now and then. A man wants it. Women are different."<sup>46</sup> But in reality women are not different. It is why George's wife, like Elsa, commits adultery and makes him worry about his self-respect and about being ridiculed.

Considering women as people whose job it is to meet the needs of husbands and please them is simply an irrational attitude. It testifies to men's selfishness and the prejudice in favour of male chauvinism. Women are fond of being loved and treated as an equal instead of being prohibited and criticised. Elsa and Eleny represent women's hatred of authoritative husbands and harassment. Harassment leads wives to desperation and then to extra marital relationships.

The absence of the practice of discussing and fighting out problems is partly responsible for a deterioration of the relationship between wife and husband. The constructive effects of discussing problems and encouraging each other are

indicated in Sälämon's story under the title of "Dibibikoš". The couple, in this story, live a happy life because they understand each other, have the same interest and are in the habit of solving problems together.

Accepting a wife as an equal and treating her with love and care are of paramount importance in married life. It is also necessary to consider and try to gratify her desires including sex. Lack of sexual satisfaction can lead to trouble. In "Wätmääd Yägäba Wätmääd" a wife becomes adulterous for her husband could not satisfy her sexual desire. The husband gets angry and kills her.

The short stories that bring out the problems of marriages characterized by lack of emotional attachment, deserved treatment and frank relationship serve to discourage the practice of getting married without making sure that each is positive towards the other.

The causes of marriage are not only love, parental imposition and a need to overcome financial problems. A sexual contact resulting in pre-marital pregnancy does also entail the question of marriage.

Although sexual relationship before marriage has become common practice, especially among the young in towns, pre-marital pregnancy is still a subject of criticism, ridicule and backbiting. To avoid such bitter experiences girls or their parents sometimes take the humiliating task of imploring men for marriage soon after conception. This situation is portrayed in the short story "Yä Rahel Särg" [The Wedding of Rahel] by Mulugeta.

In the story "Yä Rahel Särg" Ato Kahssay learns that his daughter, Rahel has fallen in love with and conceived from Zäkarias, who has no interest in her except carnal desires. The father curses Rahel for frustrating his dream of giving her hand to a man of better position. Nevertheless, he reluctantly agrees to just wed her to Zäkarias in order to escape unpleasant criticism. He does so with a plan to divorce her soon after the wedding. Thus, Ato Kahssay immediately sends mediators along with 2000 Birr to persuade Zäkarias.

In fact as vividly shown in the stories of Bîrhanu Zârihun and others the custom is that the future husband sends go-betweens to the bride's parents to get their consent and approval but, here, as Zâkarias has no intention of taking Rahel as a wife her parents are forced to persuade him; otherwise, they will suffer unfriendly criticism because of their daughter's shameful pregnancy. Besides, Rahel has been threatening her mother saying that she will marry no one but Zâkarias, her first love. Whatever the case the nominal marriage ends up in divorce by the intervention of Rahel's father. The imposed separation is not welcomed by Rahel though it gives a relief to Zâkarias.

"Yä Rahel Särg" reveals differences between the attitudes of the old and the young generation towards love and marriage. Traditionally marriage is solely arranged by parents. Traditionally Children have no right to choose their partners. They may not even know who they are to marry. Contacts between the bride and the bridegroom and love or passion towards each other are ruled out as unimportant.

To old people marriage "meant an alliance between two equally wealthy families. Parents were, therefore, very scrupulous over the choice of partners for their children. Negotiations for a marriage contract were carried out through elders..."<sup>47</sup> This tradition still lingers on. However, it is facing oppositions by the young generation. This is because of the influence of modern values that cause attitudinal changes. The young generation is used to new trends such as watching cinema, going to dancing parties and reading love stories. These trends encourage them to love and sexual contacts against the will of traditional parents and thereby express opposition to old practices like arranged marriage. What Rahel's mother says can explain this. She says: "Present day children prefer to marry a person of their own choice, not of their parents'. What can be done? It is the time."<sup>48</sup> So values are changing with time. However, the old have found it difficult to tune themselves even with harmless modern values. This is shown in Ato Kahssay's attempt to impose his principles on his daughter.

"Yä Rahel Särg" also presents the different attitudes of

need no one's interference. The need to act independently has made it difficult for parents to have control over their children.

The short story "Antänäh" shows the insignificant role parents play in the decision of their children. Different short stories indicate that uncontrolled contact and free sexual intercourse often put children and parents at odds. Antänäh, for instance, breaks off his relation with his mother because she tries to dominate over him and meddle in his affairs.

The loss of control over children accentuates change in social relations. For good or bad the old order is gradually but *reluctantly* giving way to new trends of love and marriage. Therefore, traditional ways of match-making are being abandoned.

The relaxation of sexual mores has dual effect: it is advantageous insofar as it brings a good relationship and understanding between opposite sexes. It is also disadvantageous for it invites promiscuity and an unwanted conception which endangers many young girls. As our society considers pre-marital pregnancy as base and as it is troublesome to bear an unwanted child, girls resort to abortion in order to avoid social criticism and other problems. It goes without saying that abortion leads to serious health problems, if not to death. As shown in "Yä Čänägäfä Biir" the effects of abortion may even incur a psychological disturbance.

No matter that sexual intercourse before marriage may be dangerous, delay in making physical love can disappoint young girls and drive them to denounce a love relationship.

In "Sinibit" [Farewell] the girl Abäbäč gets sulky with her boy friend about a trifle and finally deserts him simply because Niguse fails to make love to her. Niguse seems to exercise platonic love, which has become laughable among young ones. Having high regard to or worshipping a girl friend as a goddess puts boys at odds with their girl friends. Niguse considers Abäbäč as pure and more than blood and flesh. He does not dare to take her to bed. To him this means corrupting purity. His attitude makes him to be considered as backward, naive, impractical and foolish by friends. It also results in Abäbäč's

becoming bothersome and grouchy. This shows that going to bed before marriage is no more objectionable and has become common practice among the young. Nevertheless, by revealing the attitudes of the character Niguse, the author Awgičāw gives us an impression that the new generation has not completely done away with traditional sentiments of counting sex as a dirty and corrupting practice.

The author also brings to our notice that girls are not yet in a position to express their sexual desires. Abäbäč has a strong sexual desire but she keeps quiet and expects her boy friend to approach her. Girls are not in the habit of expressing their attitude towards sex and their desire for it, perhaps, for fear of being considered as lewd or vulgar or because of coyness. Fear of any kind to forward proposals for sexual intercourse is the direct influence of tradition in which sex is taken as immodest and thus inhibited.

In Ethiopia there are nationalities where sexual mores are not relaxed. This is due to a very strong influence exerted by custom. For example, in the Gumuz and Gambela nationalities a girl is strictly prohibited from having intimate contacts with a boy. The marriage traditions of the two nationalities are almost the same. This is justified in the short stories "Ufanča" and "Dur Yabäbä Fik'ir". In each nationality a boy can marry a girl of his choice if only he has a sister to be given in exchange for his future wife's brother.

In these nationalities a girl can have secret love affair but not sexual contact. Her marriage to her lover largely depends on her brother's agreement to take her future husband's sister as a wife. This is particularly important among the Gumuz. In the Gumuz nationality, even after marriage, if either of the brothers-in-law wants a divorce, he has the right to bring an end to the married life of his sister. Evidently a sister is always subject to the will of her brother.

Gumuz girls are means of marriage for their brothers. A boy having no sister will remain a bachelor unless he manages to elope with or to abduct a girl.

In Abdu Rahmäto's short story entitled "Ufanča" the title

character and Fišalia start a love affair with infatuation. When they become ripe for marriage they learn that they cannot live together for Ufanča has no sister. Hence, they are forced to discontinue their secret love affair as her hand is to be given to Ubamta, who has a sister. Fišalia hates Ubamta but she has no right to refuse.

In the event of Fišalia's marriage Ufanča resolves that custom will always deny him the right to find a love-match. Therefore, he decides to run away to town believing that civilization will offer a solution to his problem.

The problem faced by Šibabo and Yarmia in "Dur Yabäbä Fik'ir" is almost the same. In both nationalities the female is in a disadvantageous position. Tradition affects females negatively. It also affects the life of sisterless boys. Custom is, thus, the major barrier to love matches in the Gambela and Gumuz nationalities. The backward way of decreeing or depriving the right of marriage is taken by some like Ufanča, as injustice.

Ufanča believes that love, marriage and family formation are things that one must experience in life. He says, "As a human being I am not inferior to any other man. Like anyone I should have the right to love, to marry and to have children."<sup>50</sup> Apparently the strong desire for love, marriage and family formation motivates him to set his mind and run away from his people's "backward culture". What he has heard from people, such as merchants, has played a part in encouraging him to oppose and dissociate from an imprisoning culture. Ufanča has heard that in towns one is not required to have a sister in order to find a wife. Thus, in this story marriage culture in town is suggested as a solution to the denial of marriage right by custom.

The other barrier to a wishful engagement between opposite sexes is religion. Love affair between followers of different religions is taboo. This is shown in the short story "F'ire" [Seed] by Daglas P'et'ros. In this story the author presents how religious sentiments affect the relationship between Säada, a muslim girl, and G'irmaye, a christian boy. One day Säada and G'irmaye, as the latter puts it, "commit a mistake", that is, they

make love. Säada conceives and bears. The situation causes a clash between Girmaye and his father, that considered his act as sacrilegious.

Girmaye's father incriminates him for making his (the father's) house filthy and eventually repudiates him. The father also refuses to accept the child till he has been baptized and given a christian name. Säada undergoes similar experience. She is even forced to leave the child with Girmaye and desert him. Love affairs or sexual contact between persons of different religions could, therefore, lead to excommunication and suffering.

"Fire" illustrates the narrator character's, Girmaye's, emotional distress and bitterness because of the impact religion has had in changing the course of his life.

By and large, post-1979 Amharic short stories point out the various causes of and barriers to marriage in Ethiopia. Some of the causes are love, pregnancy and a desire for material gain. Parental influence can also bring about a marriage alliance. However, marriages that take place due to parental influence or any other motive than emotional yearning often lead to emotional distress, misunderstanding, and unfaithfulness. Such problems usually have distressing ends like family crisis. Disparity of age and lack of sexual satisfaction are also causes for failure in married life.

As a matter of course traditional concepts of marriage are being rejected by people who give priorities to emotional involvement in choosing a partner. This has obviously put traditional people in disagreement with the young. However, the fact that choosing one's own partner has become a common practice among the new generation indicates that traditional ways of match-making are not favoured.

Our authors are in favour of marriage on the grounds of emotional attachment or mutual trust. By manifesting the positive attitudes of lovers towards each other or by showing the adverse results of loveless marriages they assert love as a major factor for healthy relationship and success in family life.

### 3. POLITICAL ISSUES

Expressing political views is not a new trend in Amharic fiction. Despite the fact that "Ethiopia's press,..., is not known to print anything that might adversely reflect on the government,"<sup>51</sup> some authors like Abbe Gubäñña, have published works with political ideas during the reign of king Haylä Sīlasse. Pre-revolution political writings are said to include historical works that reflect the Ethio-Italian war and the border conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia with the aim of showing the attitude of Ethiopians towards colonialism, freedom and unity. "Works with historical themes served political purposes in as much as they served to promote patriotism and a feeling of unity."<sup>52</sup>

However, as there was strict censorship it was difficult for authors to reflect actual political realities, such as the ideological differences and the struggle between the ruling and the ruled people, in Ethiopia. The strong hand of censorship seems to have discouraged writers from reflecting the injustices meted out to the masses, the riots of students, the 1953 coup attempt and other events, which were probably suitable subjects for authors who sought social and national reforms.

Post-revolution fictional works that deal with the problems of the past social system give impressions about how difficult it was to speak or write about the evils of the feudal system and seek political reform. In fact before the revolution Abbe, Haddis and some others had managed to produce works which provide an insight into the suppression and exploitation of the people and the discrimination practiced against them.

After the eruption of the 1966 revolution many authors have published poems condemning oppression and staged plays exposing the sufferings of the Ethiopian people under the rule of the emperor. Short stories have also been published with the aim of reflecting the brutality of feudal lords and the maximum right they enjoyed while the masses were living a life little better than that of slavery. Writers like Mulugeta Gudäta, Abärra Lämman and Sälämon Lämman are among those who attempted to show the subjugation of the masses. However, the freedom authors

Except for some wooden chairs the house is empty and is not safely guarded.

In the story many of the workers including Abärra are bare footed. They have little to feed themselves. They are generally exploited and dominated. It is this deplorable and worsening condition that arouses them to fight against the exploiting people represented by M. Bogossian and Captain Atlabačäw.

The leader of the underground movement, Abärra personifies the dream of ordinary workers and their firm stand, unbreakable physique and spirit. Although he is not educated, he is sagacious and is quick to understand the necessity of waging a class struggle in order to do away with despotic rule. This is why he takes the initiative to agitate and organize fellow workers, who eventually elect him as their trade union leader.

Abärra foresees that the liberation of workers without organized struggle at the national level would be impossible and, therefore, he embarks on the formation of confederation. Meanwhile one of the appointees of the trade union, Gulämma - the turn coat character - informs the captain about Abärra's political activities. With this a counter action to suppress the rightful demands of the workers begins. The serious conflict between the two groups ends with the police force killing Abärra without arbitration, an instance showing the inhuman and undemocratic nature of the feudo-bourgeois system in Ethiopia in the 1950s. Nevertheless, as indicated towards the end of the story, no violent repression could prevent that socio-economic system from being abolished and substituted by a revolutionary system, which materialized Abärra's dream.

Although the story "Yä Abärra Hassab" is published long after the happening of the incidents it portrays, the author has attempted to recreate the political realities of that epoch. The political opposition between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction is shown in the context of the historical situation in Ethiopia in the 1950s.

Ethiopia, whose history is said to be "the bitter struggle between the ruling class and the oppressed classes"<sup>53</sup> had experienced a coup attempt in 1953. "Yä Abärra Hassab"

implicitly shows the aborted coup d'état to have given an impetus to worker, student and peasant uprisings. The story presents the revolution as the cumulative effect of social unrest all over the country.

In "Yä Abärra Hassab" the author forwards an incisive criticism against the feudo-bourgeois regime, which favoured wealthy white people much more than the poor citizens. He shows that the majority of the Ethiopian people are not entitled to a fair trial in a court of law, to get some education and also to other human rights. The white exploiters, like M. Bogossian and M. Vaskin, are, however, treated with care. They accumulate money through exploiting "cheap labour" in Ethiopia. Besides, the whites are not accused even if they victimize native Ethiopian's, like Abärra, who rise up with a view to transforming their life and build the nation. The author Mulugeta does not only criticize the past political system, which is characterized by private ownership, exploitation of man by man and despotic rule. He also shows the victory of the masses over the feudo-bourgeois system and articulates "the materialist view of history - that history is on the side of the proletariat."<sup>54</sup> The author's ideological position- his partisanship with the workers- is plain enough. In the closing paragraph of the story the other vanguard character, Tadios, who is released from jail, freely walks to the east and feels that he is stepping to tomorrow with the new system that puts an end to his political imprisonment of twelve years. And with this Mulugeta heralds the coming of a new system - socialism- which, he asserts, will do away with all types of human degradation.

In another story entitled "Yäkkatit" [February] Mulugeta deals with the tense political atmosphere in both urban and rural Ethiopia in the mid-1960s. In "Yäkkatit" the Haylä Sīlasse regime is personified by a brutal big farm owner, Dīfabačāw, who fires farm labourers without any pay and who evicts poor peasants to annex their small plots of land to his big farm. The brutality of Dīfabačāw pushes his tenants to violence and eventually burn his house. The burning scene accentuates the transformation of the struggle of the working class people from underground

movement to an open fight.

"Yäkkatit" also projects the political roles played by university students, who get organized under political circles, stage demonstrations demanding "land to the tiller"<sup>55</sup> and agitate the lower class people to rebel against subjugation and degradation. The students take to political struggle so as to bring an end to poverty, backwardness and illiteracy. The active involvement of the educated ones is shown as a major factor in developing the struggle to its climax during the month of Yäkkatit in 1966, which, the author believes, is the dawn of a new life for Ethiopians. The unavoidability of the 1966 social and political reforms is stated in the closing line: "...outside the house the village is brightened by the sun of Yäkkatit."<sup>56</sup> This was the month in which the 1966 revolution erupted. In short the story "Yäkkatit" is written to show how political injustice leads to mass mobilization, which, in Ethiopia's case, puts an end to the revered monarchical power. In both the above stories the author recounts events pertaining to historical reality and uses them to glorify the struggle of the working class people and progressive forces.

The dehumanizing effects of the imperial rule are also dealt with in "Wäy Addis Abäba Wäy Aradda Hoy!...". This story is composed of two letters of which the first is apolitical. But the second one, whose date of writing is T'irr 10, 1957, bears evidences about the vulgarities of the then political system.

"Wäy Addis Abäba Wäy Aradda Hoy!..." evinces that the King reserves absolute power in his hands and rules the people with severity. While the life of the people in Addis is characterized by poverty, beggary, theft, crime and violation of human rights, the ruling system tries to hide these realities from the world. For instance, on the eve of the meeting of African leaders, beggars are gathered and confined at Lambärät, where they starve to death. Dilapidated houses are also painted white to mislead the heads of state about the harsh social realities caused by the King's rule.

In the story the King's appearance is obviously in contradiction with the reality. The author ridicules the

government's deeds in the following lines: "If the visit of African leaders caused that much killing, what would happen to Addis, if white kings came?"<sup>57</sup> The author is generally sarcastic about the rulers and sympathetic to people living in ignorance, destitution and degradation. He praises the patriotic struggles of students to topple the King and bring social reforms in Ethiopia. However, the type of change aspired by students is not expressed in the story. The author himself does not forward any suggestion in this respect. In this regard the author Awgičāw differs from Mulugeta and Sälämon, whose political stories suggest socialist revolution as a solutions to the multi-faceted problems of their society. Mulugeta's short stories "Yä Abärra Hassab" and "Yäkkatit", for instance, portray characters and themes taken from the working class people in order to depict the tragic life of the masses and show their struggle for freedom, justice and equality as the only way out from exploitation and repression. Mulugeta glorifies progressive forces that contribute to the abolition of despotism and the break out of the revolution. The fact that the author sees the revolution as a liberating force indicates the influence of socialist realism on the author and his clear propaganda purpose.

Little is written about how the military force had come to power. However, that it had abolished domination and exploitation are dealt with in short stories whose setting is revolutionary Ethiopia.

In its early periods the revolution has been seen as a liberating force by such authors as Mulugeta and Sälämon. The short stories "Habtam Märet", "Yäbälg Zinab", both by Mulugeta and "Dibibiköš" by Sälämon are demonstrations of the political and the economic advantages won by the lower class people. In these stories the new system is shown not only as an end to the violation of human rights and to exploitation of man by man but also as a beginning for reform in political, economic, social and cultural aspects.

"Habtam Märet" [Fertile Land], published in 1980, depicts the situation of peasants in the early periods of the revolution.

The setting of the story is a small village in southern Ethiopia. In this village, like in the rest of the country, peasants have come to own farm lands. They also enjoy equal rights and have formed peasant association to defend their rights from remnant reactionary forces like Shiek Abdulrahman, who was a land lord.

Shiek Abdu, who is alarmed by land reform represents reactionary forces who get revolutionary people killed with the idea to subvert the new government and to reinstate themselves in former positions. The clash between the Shiek and the peasants accentuates the contradiction between reactionary forces *and* progressive forces that culminates in the victory of the latter. In this story poor peasants are presented as the strong arms of the revolutionary system.

Mulugeta sees socialism as a means to a prosperous life for peasants. His story "Yäbälg Zīnab" [Little Rains] describes the fact that peasants handle their own affairs and that they dream of a better life in socialism for which they are laying the ground through forming collective farms.

As a matter of course the socialist ideology advocated by the revolution has not only caused clashes between peasants and land owners but also between bureaucrats or higher officials and labourers.

Sälämon Lämna in "Dībībīkōš" [Hide-and-Seek] attempts to reflect the bitter relationship between revolutionary workers and bureaucrats. In this story the author uses the character Arägaš as a tool to propagandize the viability of the system to the masses.

Arägaš Adäm rises in life after the eruption of the revolution. She learns that the revolution is the only way out from ignorance, backwardness, exploitation, inequality and all other forms of injustice. Therefore, she decides to guard the system against saboteurs such as the factory manager, whose motive to oppose the revolution is dubious. The author simply uses the manager as an antirevolutionary character so as to portray the conflict between progressive and reactionary forces and thereby prove the strength of the former in defeating the latter. The story is written to promote the cause of the

revolution. The pure propaganda purpose in "Dibibiko፩" has made the story sound more as a propagandistic pamphlet than a short artistic piece.

Despite what workers, peasants, soldiers and other patriots have done to defend and speed up the progress of the revolution, it has not progressed smoothly. The stories "Kästu", "Zätänänñaw Dose" and others indicate that corrupt individuals using power to win personal benefit have contributed to the spreading of unjust practices as nepotism, power abuse or political corruption. The revolution, which began with the implementation of progressive policies such as land reform and equal rights for all Ethiopians irrespective of race and gender, has thus been facing problems before it transforms the people's life and builds the nation on the socialist line.

It is mentioned in "Kästu" [The Arrow] that a National Control Committee (NCC) has been formed to discourage political corruption. But as the investigations of the NCC "have been leading to one bureau"<sup>57</sup>, which the author declines to mention, the investigators are hard put to deter corruption. Obviously the bureau must have been sacrosanct to criticism or accusation. Hence, except for some achievements the NCC cannot succeed in taking major actions against corrupt officials. In view of this it can be said that a new class of exploiters has somehow evolved during the revolution, which was believed to redeem the people.

The revolution, which is glorified for making progresses at its initial stages, has not continued as it had started. There have been pervasive practices of nepotism, bribery, embezzlement, and other forms of injustices, which are signs of stagnation during the revolution. The mere fact that there are no Amharic short stories critical of the revolutionary regime also implies stagnation.

In point of fact some authors have shed light on power abuse, political corruption and the absence of equal job opportunities in socialist Ethiopia. However, it is individual characters who are blamed for the vile acts and not the system at large. In fact as there has not been freedom of press it

would be difficult to forward criticisms against the government that has assumed itself as "democratic". That the revolutionary government wanted no mention of its political failings can be understood from the banning of Oromay a novel by Bāalu Girma.

As has been indicated above, among the political stories published after 1979 some completely focus on the evils of the feudo-bourgeois political system with a note of condemnation while others express the positive outcomes of the revolution.

The dictatorial rule, which is discussed in Atfīto Mātīfat, a recently published book, is hardly implied in post 1979 short stories. This is perhaps because of the fear of dangers such as faced by Bāalu or because of the strict censorship that has been exercised during the revolution. It follows, therefore, during the revolution political short stories would be produced provided that they promoted the causes of the revolutionary system or the political activities of the government. Thus the political stories fail to paint a true picture of the political situation in Ethiopia during the revolution.

#### 4. CHANGE

The theme of change is common in Amharic short stories which, in one way or another, reflect the effects of education, western influence, urbanization and political upheaval on the life of the individual or society in Ethiopia.

In the previous sections of this chapter an attempt has been made to shed light on the areas of change in Ethiopia as depicted in contemporary short stories. Gradual changes have been occurring in the values and marriage tradition of the Ethiopian society. There have also been changes in the economic structure as well as the administrative system of the nation. Short story writers have pointed out the impacts of such changes on personal and social life with the purpose of encouraging desirable directions of change and restraining undesirable ones.

In addition to the political and other stories that show the transition of society or characters from one condition of life to another, the issue of change is raised in the short stories

"Wäy Addis Abäba Wäy Aradda Hoy...", "Firäduñ", "Mulu Libs", "Mäčärräšaw", "Halima Šärifon Yagäbač Flät" and "Ančabo".

In "Wäy Addis Abäba Wäy Aradda Hoy!...", which is composed of two letters, there is evidence about the uneven development of the nation and its people. The two letters written by the main character Awgičäw give accounts of urban life as opposed to rural life.

The main character has some church education and a rural background. He leaves his village mainly to get rid of embittering farm work and comes to Addis with a view to living comfortably. But his dream would not come true. He, therefore, writes two letters to inform and thereby warn his younger brother about city life.

From what he writes in the first letter, which is not dated, the disparity between rural and urban Ethiopia is obvious. The countryside is characterized by the absence of modern schools, electricity, highways, clinics and modern ways of farming.

The main character Awgičäw walks for a full day to reach the small town of Däjän, where he gets on a lorry and headed for Addis. At first sight Addis appears to him as a colourful and much lighted city surrounded by black embroidery like the fringe of a mourning dress. The black colour surrounding Addis signifies darkness and sleep from which the character desires to emerge out. The light on the other hand refers to the totally new environment he is coming to. Here he sees electric light, beautiful villas, modern tall buildings and asphalt roads for the first time in his life. However, the fascinating appearance of the city has come to mean nothing as the country boy is soon disillusioned about the bewildering realities of city life.

The accounts included in the first letter accentuate the clear cut differences between the appearance as well as reality of country and city people. In the character Awgičäw rural people are presented as traditional and backward. He has nothing in common with city people either in appearance or character. In appearance Awgičäw is far behind: he wears sheep skin and shorts and is bare footed. But in morality he is better than the "kindly christian people of Addis"<sup>58</sup> who disregard custom and do





bored of everything,"<sup>62</sup> and longs to return to his village, that is, to dissociate himself from the ways of the city and the consciousness of its people, who appear to him as "cannibals". His preference of the countryside to the city evinces the importance attached to clean and perfect life.

Awgičāw cannot adjust himself to the overall consciousness of city people because he has been brought up in a totally different environment where people still retain values that are beneficial to each other. However, this does not mean that the whole society in Addis is corrupted because we see some good people of whom students are the most significant. They fight for the well-being of the masses, whose life is characterized by stagnation, destitution, disease and insecurity.

The story "Wäy Addis Abäba Wäy Aradda Hoy.." also implies that country people live in ignorance and backwardness. Their work on the farm is hard and tiring. It is to avoid hard work that some, like Awgičāw, migrate to town. Modern means of production seems unknown to farmers. Country people are traditional and superstitious because their contact with modern ways is remote. Attending schools, working in government offices or travelling by modern means of transport are not thought of in the countryside, especially during the reign of the emperor.

As shown in the third section of this chapter the situation of the exploited masses has called for a change in the economic and administrative structure of the nation. Apparently the reactionary government was removed and substituted by a revolutionary system, which has, no doubt, brought about some changes in the life of the multitude with regard to education and social relationship.

The political change in Ethiopia has been accompanied by land reform and abolition of exploitation. These progressive policies have been implemented to mark an end to a life of ignorance, backwardness and stagnation. The new government's major aim was to advance the nation with the motto "Ethiopia First" through mobilizing, organizing and educating the oppressed masses and thereby transform their lives. To realize the anticipated goals a programme to literate the masses has been

not entertain : "yägziabher ingida" (God's guest or a traveller).

The protagonist, who, in the beginning, is laughed at for wearing a "däbällo" (tanned sheepskin) describes himself as a dancer among mourners. His life among the people of Addis some how makes him despise his clothes, an evidence showing environmental influence on the character. However, Awgičäw is not favourably impressed by city life because the achievements of the city with regard to material advancement and urbanization are beneficial only to those who have "money and power". The rich, have become "färänj" (western) "in looks, table manners and clothings". But the majority live in misery and degradation. Many resort to prostitution, brigandage, crime, beggary and other social evils so as to make a living.

In Addis people do not trust or sympathize with one another. Each is suspicious of the other because modern ways have disunited them by encouraging an extreme type of individualism. Thus, the city's material growth is not accompanied by spiritual development. The fact that modernism bereaves people of their good qualities is plainly stated as "if a town grows up and becomes a place of too much dance it [its people] will not even fear God, let alone sympathize with each other."<sup>59</sup> Urbanization is, therefore, attributed to the unfavourable changes in the spiritual and social life of city people.

In the second letter, too, Awgičäw recounts the facts of life in Addis with disappointment. Unlike the first the second letter is dated. This indicates the character's awareness of the importance in specifying time. The letter presents the city as the house of "prostitutes, swindlers, thieves and gangsters."<sup>60</sup>

"Robbery, false reassurance, insulting and glaring fiercely at each other, quarrelling with or killing each other, bribery and mistrust seem the manners of the city."<sup>61</sup> All these are in fact the side effects of urbanization as well as harsh political system that is fought by students, the main forces of progress in the story.

The accounts included in the two letters, that make up the story clearly show Awgičäw's disillusionment. What he experiences in the city dismays him. He says, "Oh, now I am

carried out at the national level. How this programme has changed the condition of a poor woman is dealt with in "Mulu Libs" by Wägayähu Täbäjä.

In the story "Mulu Libs" the author reveals the significance of the literacy campaign in transforming life for the better. In this story a woman regularly attends basic education programme in her locality and gets out of the habit of counting days by figuring out holidays. After learning how to read and write, she becomes a government employee and gets free from a degrading life as a daily labourer. Thus, education transforms her life for the better.

The literacy campaign has also encouraged some members of the traditional society to challenge backward values and fall into conflict with society. Täsfaye Birhanu's story "Ančabo" gives an impression about the title character's clash with his people because he questions and denounces the marriage tradition in his nationality.

Ančabo is from the Mursi nationality in which boys are required to undergo a physical contest and girls are forced to split their lower lips before marriage. Ančabo has always been against these harmful practices. He has sworn to fight and free his society from such backward values. Nevertheless, his courageous fighting starts only after he passes through the literacy programme.

The actual conflict between Ančabo and his father as well as his people begins when the boy openly declares that he would not combat with other boys so as to marry Gazär. In fact he has been exempted from the combat, but he still refuses to take Gazär as a wife because she does not attract him. At this point the father becomes desperate and attempts to kill him. Eventually Ančabo walks out of the house and shows his strong hatred for the harmful practices of his people.

Ančabo argues that people must inherit only the advantageous values and not whatever is handed down from ancestors. He says, "...How should harmful customs be inherited? The errors of grand fathers ought to be corrected by fathers. And children, on their part, should come out of the faults of fathers. What I take as

good is such a practice."<sup>63</sup>

The story does not in fact show Anċabo's success in convincing his people about the importance of abandoning harmful practices. But the fact that the boy rebels and, at least, gets rid of the combat business are signs of the beginning of change in the Mursi society, where conservatism, superstition and backwardness have been dominating.

Those who absorb new ideas through attending modern schools are mostly shown as the harbingers of change in society. This is reflected in the story "Halima Šārifon Yagäbaċ Flät" [The Day Halima Married Šārifo] by Wägayähu.

Halima is educated up to grade six and is interested in reading. She knows the importance of having an acquaintance with a future husband. Šārifo on his part has more or less the same interest and experience as hers. Both are familiar with some aspects of modern ways. Due to this, though their marriage has been arranged by parents, they manage to get introduced to each other and discuss their wedding.

Finding no meaning in giving a big feast, wearing amulets and putting on other unnecessary ornaments on a wedding day, the bride and the bridegroom decide to persuade their parents against their traditional and superstitious practices. This causes conflict. However, the contradiction is settled peacefully and the ceremony turns out to be pleasing for all the villagers. In this story the author, Wägayähu, anticipates a radical change in marriage tradition. To achieve his purpose he uses the character Halima as his mouthpiece. Through her the author expresses the need to do away with valueless customs and traditions. He also shows us how education enables individuals to change the lives of their people for the better.

The possibility to rise in life and become civilized through learning is best depicted in Abärra Lämman's short story "Fîräduñ". In this story we hear of Work'yant'fu's steady academic progress leading to changes in attitude, behaviour and way of life. Her husband, a teacher by profession, makes a kind of verbal report about the past and present situations of Work'yant'fu. In the early periods of their marriage she has

worried him much because of her rural background. She was illiterate, superstitious and naive. She was so ignorant of modern life styles that her husband, Niguse had to deal with her patiently and carefully.

The husband actually plays the role of a teacher in the life of his wife. His advice, instructions and corrections have been of paramount importance for her present achievements. Her introduction to city life and people, their manners, thoughts and activities, has also been useful in narrowing the gap between her and Niguse, who represents modern education and people.

At present Workyantfu, who is an eleventh grade student, exhibits improvements in house management and in personal as well as social relationships. She explains scientific concepts with precision and argues reasonably. Her life is an example of a complete departure from backwardness. She has turned out to be "a child teaching labouring to her mother."<sup>64</sup> The evidence in the following lines testifies her progress.

Previously if she saw a baby Fiat car or any automobile, Workyantfu would implore me to steal and bring it to our house so that she could breastfeed and bring it up; but today....She studies automechanics in grade eleven. She explains to me that a car could not stirr up if it was not supplied with fuel and oil or if its gears failed to operate...She tells me so because she feels my career as a language teacher has little to do with physics and chemistry.<sup>65</sup>

This short passage shows Workyantfu's progress from darkness to light and accurate understanding. Modern education helps her emerge out of a laughable situation and develop confidence in herself. Workyantfu used to eat sugar for breakfast and lunch but now she advises her children against using much sugar, which, she believes, is bad for health.

"Firäduñ" reveals that modern education and styles help people to acquire new ideas and to adopt new surroundings. Education transforms life for the better. It helps to develop self confidence. The story also presents the disparities between rural and urban ways to indicate that country people have remained traditional while people in towns are advancing.



However, in this story there is evidence about the opening of schools in villages, like Yidno. This implies that the all round differences between villages and towns are not likely to remain as they are. The marriage contact between Niguse and Workyant'fu and the latter's steady progress in academics and life can be taken as the down of contact with urban ways and advancement in the life of rural people. Teachers seem to be agents for this advancement.

Education is often considered as the way out from backwardness. The type of education the Ethiopian youths prefer is "western education". Awgičāw Tārrāfä in his short story "Skolaršip" portrays a young student Abäbä, who identifies civilization with America. In the story the character Abäbä wants to study medicine in the States. He chooses to study science because he is sure that "in our country there are few scientists and, thus, science has not advanced."<sup>66</sup> He dreams of contributing to the development of science in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian youths do not have a similar attitude towards western values. Some, like Abäbä, are selective and want to take advantage of western ideals which are rewarding. But others like Hanna in "Mäčärräšaw" simply flirt with notions of western values and fail to accept their own society.

In the short story "Mäčärräšaw" [The End] by Mulugeta, we observe how a blind admiration for western styles leads to tragedy. In this story the character Hanna represents benighted young girls who easily succumb to happiness gained from music, dancing, drinking and sex.

Hanna sees nothing more valuable than objects of trivial luxury. It is painful to observe her totally engrossed in absurd day dreams of:

Skyscrapers-very tall buildings,...,  
beautiful white people. Much lighted roads  
- big luxurious automobiles. Drinks, music,  
sex, dance, cinema, American dollar - a lot  
of American dollar, clothes, new fashion,  
Hamburger, Coca-Cola, Holly Wood, actors,  
singers, make-up...<sup>67</sup>

To satisfy her fascination for material values she degrades herself to an object of sexual pleasure to foreigners: blacks, whites and Arabs.

Although Hanna's mother advises and warns her against the dangers of indiscriminate sexual relationships, Hanna is not receptive. She rather forbids the mother to meddle in her affairs: "I do not care for anybody! From now on I am not a child. I know what is good for me. I do not need anyone's advice. Enough!"<sup>68</sup>

Thus, she asserts herself and wants to act independently. In point of fact it is the exposure to western styles through contact with foreigners that encourages Hanna to denounce her mother in whom the society's morality is represented. However, western influence that encourages Hanna to assert herself has not been rewarding. It only makes her exhibit deviant behaviour and go off moral tracts, thereby **falling** into disagreement with her people. It causes her personal ruin because Hanna falls to misfortune, shame, frustration and finally dies in misery.

The disagreement between the young Hanna and her old mother is a reflection of the conflict between traditional and modern values. Gerard says, "Western insistence on individual freedom and personal choice was bound to challenge the assumption underlying the old order of things."<sup>69</sup> In one way or another the challenge often ends up in the defeat of those who defy their own social mores.

The story "Mäčärräšaw" depicts the evolution of Hanna to a scandalous life and tragedy because of a weakness to harmonize a sense of independence with moral sensitivity and because of a temperamental dislike for the principles of local people. Failure to value the local condition and make use of western standards that suit Ethiopia's case has bad outcomes.

Close contact with pleasure loving foreigners can make one injudicious and have dreams that could not come true. Hanna, for instance, has been living in a dream world. She has not been standing on her feet. She never thought of living in Ethiopia, let alone leading a life of misery. This is why she easily breaks off. Western styles can, thus, impair the moral of the

young generation and make it impractical. A blind admiration for western standards is, therefore, undesirable.

Amharic short story writers of the post-1979 period have brought out some of the areas of change in association with their impact on the life of the individual Ethiopian or the society. Changes have occurred with respect to urbanization, education, political administration, economic structure and values. But not all of these changes have exerted positive influence on the life of the people.

Urbanization is not objectionable insofar as it causes material advancement. But the beneficiaries are not the masses. Besides, urban growth is not accompanied by moral and spiritual growth. Hence, it is not highly acclaimed.

As regards the change in the economic structure, land reform is the major achievement. Exploitation is also abolished but whether or not the economic changes have pulled the people out of poverty is not discussed at large.

The authors seem to agree that after the revolution many Ethiopians have made an impressive progress in the field of learning how to read and write. Education is generally seen as a positive force of change in Ethiopia. And educated people are considered as agents of change. There is a wide belief among authors that the acquisition of new ideas through attending modern schools will help to dissociate from harmful customs that are prohibitive to advancement. Changes observed in marriage traditions are, for instance, in line with this belief. Our story writers encourage changes that serve for the common good of their people.

## 5. FEAR

Fear is a prevalent theme especially in short stories designed to give accounts of man in the face of drought, war, death and other challenges of life. During war and drought, for example, victims exhibit different emotional reactions. Some stand courageous while others are overcome with fear or terror. The courageous show readiness to endure pain and emerge

successful or, if the worst comes, to die in dignity. But those who dread the aftermath of war or drought seek to avoid danger in any possible way. We witness this fact in the short story "Yä Kosso İřät" by Niguse Ayälä Täka.

"Yä Kosso İřät" gives an impression about what happened in the town Dire Dawa during the recent war between Ethiopia and Somalia. As the town is shelled most dwellers find it hard to calm down because they cannot bear the thought of losing their lives and their children. Hence, they become jumpy and take to their heels. Terror and disorder reign over the town. However, amid this turmoil some, like the patroit character Baša Kälkay, have remained calm and courageous. Baša considers fear and fleeing as shameful. In the event of the war he fights bravely so as to defend, his country and people.

"Yä Kosso İřät" presents man's reaction in the face of war and his desire to avoid danger either through fighting against or through fleeing from an endangering enemy. In this story we observe the devastating effects of war and its impact on the emotions of people. War causes a sense of insecurity, anxiety or helplessness which in turn leads to an extreme type of fear such as a complete loss of hope, even of ordinary common sense and the rational faculty.

Panicy characters are sometimes the images of man's hatred of forces that annul his dreams or desires and bereave his life of all meaning. The situation of most drought victims in the stories "Addisuwa Närs" and "Adäraw" is in line with the foregoing statements. In these stories victims migrate from their villages with a view to rescuing or sustaining their lives. Though time bound, drought changes their dreams to nothingness and drives them away from places where they were born and brought up.

Death is mostly dreaded and taken as "kifu Tälat" (worst enemy) because it paralyzes man's strong desire for long life and/or permanence in this world. The short story "Motna Agafari İndäřaw" by Sibhat is a vivid presentation of the terror death causes in man and the latter's vain attempt to flee from death.

In "Motna Agafari İndäřaw" [Death and Agafari İndäřaw] an

author character visualizes Agafari, a sixty-six-year-old man running away from death. In dream or reality the old man rides on a mule to keep a distance from anything related to death. Agafari never dismounts his mule unless he is reassured in the following way:

"Is everything all right in the district?"  
 "It is all right."  
 "Has no one died in the area?"  
 "No."  
 "Isn't there someone sick?"  
 "Oh, no."  
 "No announcement of death?"  
 "No."  
 "Well," says Agafari and dismounts his mule.<sup>70</sup>

As he is driven out of his wits Agafari is unable to think calmly and realize the fatality of a mere cough or a similar other incident.

The old man's reactions to the subject of his fear are best shown in what he dreams while lying prostrate in an unconscious state of mind. One day it so happens that Agafari gulps a mouthful of "čälla" (local beer), coughs and then faints. Before regaining consciousness, he dreams of his death. In his dream he attempts to escape using a "mäšob Kidan" (cover of an Ethiopian food table) to shield himself from death, which chases and awaits him everywhere. The dream is a comic incident in which the old man boasts while using a "mäšob kidan", which is a typical article of women (Ethiopians at times use the word "woman" to mean coward). The boastfulness together with the "mäšob" shield signify his being at a loss about what he should do. The use of a "mäšob kidan" as a shield has a particular importance in the story for it symbolizes womanliness.

Agafari's dream reveals a psychological anxiety caused by a threatening enemy, which is unavoidable. In the dream Agafari desperately endeavours to deal with both evil and holy spirits so as to seek protection and materialize his desire of staying in this world, where there is "light, air,...and beautiful ladies."

Abuna Täklyä (the saint) preaches to Agafari that "death is nothing. We were sown from the sky. We sprouted on earth and

during harvest time we would be collected to the sky. What is frightening about this?"<sup>71</sup> But Agafari does not take heed of the saint. He rather begs to be left as gleanings and declines the saint's offer to take him to paradise. Here we notice how man (though he may be religious) is not willing to accept a priceless offer at the risk of his life in the world.

The hard facts of life, like death, can easily expose man's uncertainty and doubt about salvation. No matter that religion is assumed to have "emanipated man from the fear of death,"<sup>72</sup> the assumption does not apply to everyone. Spiritual belief does not help Agafari to face death with courage. It does not even make him long for paradise.

The character Agafari is the personification of a psychological terror resulting from the thought of being deceased. In him the author has portrayed "man's struggle not to be destroyed."<sup>73</sup> The deal with Kōrit' (an evil spirit) is part of the struggle not to perish. Agafari promises his soul to Kōrit' provided that the latter kills death. Though ridiculous, the promise is a desperate attempt to get an arch enemy killed. In fact the old man appears to be worried to the extent of failing to measure the gravity of his promise.

The story "Motna Agafari İndäšaw", in which dream is mixed with reality, has helped the author to reveal the inner desire of man to be immortal. The author uses "day dream and reality,... dream and nightmare not to make the real ambiguous but to make the real more clear."<sup>74</sup>

Sibhat has also portrayed another character İtye Altaye, in the title story, who worries about her fading beauty and old age. The old woman speaks about the futility of life but she hates to die. The unwillingness to view death as part of life shows how much "it is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our life here on earth."<sup>75</sup> It is not only death which is inconceivable to the human mind, there are also other things that occur to man as gruesome. A rejection by someone loved is, for instance, frustrating. Such a state is at times dangerous.

In the short story "Yätäkätäfäč Siggeräda" a young

university student who is refused by a girl fails to see any meaning in either learning or life. His mind could not find any means of overcoming the problem. He becomes helpless and then decides to stab and kill the girl. Despair can, therefore, be dangerous to the extent of affecting others and changing the course of one's life or his attitude towards everything.

A desperate or a frightened person may also lose confidence in himself and be taken advantage of. The loss of confidence often results from a feeling of being lonely, insecure or endangered. Such a feeling can in effect make one submissive or act against his/her will. This can be realized from the short story "Elzabel" by Addam Rätta.

In "Elzabel" the author reflects on the psychological disturbance of the wife character, Sälamawit. she refrains from responding to the evil done on her. She knows that she is neglected by her husband but she simply tolerates him. Sälamawit avoids confronting and quarrelling with him lest he should desert her and she should find no one to turn to.

In another story entitled "Bälïhu Cïstaw" an old lady takes advantage of the parentless child Bälïhu, who is haunted by a sense of being discovered ever after he stole food from a rich man's house. Bälïhu panics when he hears the name of the rich man's guard, Tolla, who has sworn to kill him. Knowing this condition a woman makes Bälïhu perform an arduous task only to chase him away by calling Tolla's name when the boy claims payment.

It torments Bälïhu to think of an adult always at his back. Due to this fact his life has turned out to be purposeless and frustrating. Children every now and then call Tolla's name just to laugh as the little boy flees in horror. To Bälïhu the name Tolla means an imminent danger but the children do not understand his problem. No one, child or old, is ready to solace and cheer up Bälïhu except laughing at and exploiting his labour. And this in effect leads the boy to lose confidence in others and to withdraw from them.

The story "Bälïhu Cïstaw" reminds us of the common practice of using frightening as a means to restrain children from bad

habits or to make them obedient to their elders. In our society children are required to accept what elders tell them. If they refuse or show any sign of reluctance, parents or elders will threaten them by calling the names of evil spirits, frightening animals or persons. This method of frightening sometimes leads to undue submissiveness. It may also result in the development of a sense of withdrawal from anything related to the scaring subject. In view of this it can be said that threat is used as a means to an end in our society. In "Yätäkätä'äfäc S'iggeräda" Sälämon says: "He who loved and he who is mad are the same."<sup>76</sup> He also threatens S'iggeräda by saying that, "...the last hour has come,"<sup>77</sup> In so doing he intends to terrify and make the girl submit to him. Apparently she has been scared though not to the extent of giving in.

An extreme form of fear reflected in short stories is paranoia or mental disorder resulting from a feeling of being discovered or persecuted. Two stories "Bäšitänaw" and "İtemete" are geared towards the manifestation of paranoid characters.

In "Bäšitänaw" [The Patient] the character Bözabh is involved in embezzlement which eventually leads to his having a guilty conscience. While there is no one around him Bözabh hears many people gossiping just under his ear and sees many eyes staring at him. The eyes are "small-big-white-black-red...angry-laughing-questioning-mocking..."<sup>78</sup> He cannot stand them. Thus, he breaks down and starts to talk nonsense. Actually his talks are related to his deeds though not in a straight forward manner. Bözabh is a victim of his own error, which petrifies him with terror originating from a thought of persecution for the mistakes committed.

"İtemete" by Abärä Lämna is also about a paranoid old woman who keeps herself in a dark room. She seems to believe that living alone in the room can keep her safe and sound.

İtemete, the title character, fears day light and keeps away from people who she calls "unclean". She is on good terms only with her featherless hens, whose language she "understands". The woman suffers from a mental disturbance. One can observe this from the following lines interpreted from the speech of the hens

by the woman: "... 'Take care! Be very careful. Your enemies are still after you' is what they are saying to me. Oh! where can I go? Where should I run?... Oh! Oh! Oh!"<sup>79</sup>

The woman attributes her fearful state to her sister-in-law, who had tacitly insulted her long ago. She also says that the whole world has launched a perilous war against her. She feels that the war involves "a bomber plane and many armed people encircling and firing at her."<sup>80</sup> Thus her fear or madness does not seem to have a clear and definite origin. She is rather overtaken by fear of the unknown. The irony is that she is troubled in the same dark and quiet room where she keeps herself in isolation and where she seems to be safe and sound. The absence of enough ground for the woman's fear and abnormal state of mind makes her situation mysterious; however, one can see her extreme fear and helplessness from her words and deeds. A sense of fear can possibly be accounted for one's manifestation of a baffling character.

If fear (be it rational or irrational) results in a psychological disturbance, it is likely to cause a physical inability such as sexual impotence. In the story "Yāmalāda Tīla" a young man whose fear of loneliness and darkness affects his sexual desires, faces a "psychological problem". The serious problem is that he cannot make love in the absence of light. Therefore, he starts to develop hatred for the opposite sex. Were it not for one understanding girl who encouraged him, he would remain disturbed with his emotion of fear.

"Yāmalāda Tīla" [Morning Shadow] reflects the unpleasant outcomes of the emotion of fear when it causes an unceasing anxiety in the life of a person.

Different causes of fear and its after effects are pointed out in current short stories. War, drought, death, loneliness, a memory of some bad incident, the sense of being discovered after committing mistakes and the state of being rejected or neglected are among the causes of panic. People obsessed with fear or despair can lose hope in life and fellow men. They can alienate themselves or even end up committing a serious crime against individuals. Thus, the short stories that have fear as

their theme show that the sense of insecurity can often be dangerous to both the frightened individual and to those who are directly connected with and have something to do with his/her sense of fear.

CHAPTER THREECONCLUSION

Ethiopian short story writers of the post-1979 period have raised various issues pertaining to the ideals, standards, beliefs, attitudes, desires, fears, problems, progress, etc. of their society. The practice of writing about the values and conditions of society is not, in fact, unique to present-day authors. It has been common since the publication of Yä Gulälew Säkäram, a modern Amharic short story published in 1941. Ethiopian short stories have continued to be expressions of socially accepted ideas and also changing values which underline progress or which incur conflicts between the old and the young generations. The fact that many short stories are devoted to the treatment of social, moral and other realities is a clear indication of the intention of our authors to place their literary pieces at the service of society.

A good number of Amharic short stories produced in recent years have moral implications. Authors dealing with moral issues hope to achieve correction of individual aberrations and set certain past norms as permanent. The moral short stories are obviously designed to deter social or moral evils such as egotism, lack of purpose, insouciance, hedonism, adultery, delinquency, corruption etc. Blind flirtation with western ideals is also condemned because such a tendency is believed to cause hostility among people and negatively affect social life. Thus, much weight is given to the manifestation of values and patterns of behaviour that are meant to promote a harmonious life in society.

The other theme emphasized in current Amharic short stories is love and marriage. This issue is often treated with the aim of reflecting contemporary practices of love and marriage. Arranged marriages in the traditional way seem to be no longer acceptable especially in towns. Parents are losing control of their children and evidently they have little power to decide on the affairs of children, who have come in contact with new trends

of love and marriage. Love is depicted as a major force for marriage. Emotional yearning between opposite sexes is attributed as a vital factor to mutual concern and success in married life. Marriage alliances due to parental imposition or due to desires to overcome personal problems often lead to trouble, disappointment and unfaithfulness.

Now-a-days, in towns, it is a common practice among the young to choose their own partners and have premarital sexual relationships. Backward and harmful marriage cultures, like the ones among the Gumuz and Mursi nationalities, are facing oppositions from young people who have become aware of the value of modern marriage practices. The fact that primitive and feudal traditions of marriage are undergoing change is plain enough. Not only this but also the age-old relationships between husband and wife in which the latter is subordinated are changing. Wives do no more passively watch chauvinistic attitudes. In some way or another they show their disapproval of treatment as an inferior. They want to be taken care of and to be treated as an equal.

Amharic short stories of today also deal with political issues that have a bearing on the administrative and economic structures of the nation in both the pre and post-revolution periods. Most political short stories focus on the evils of the feudo-bourgeois socio-economic formation in Ethiopia. The dehumanizing effects of the system are shown to have provoked class struggle between the dominating minority and the exploited majority. Some factory workers and university students have been vanguards in the fight against exploitation, inequality and injustice. The struggle got wider and stronger in the mid 1960s. It was this historical political fight against subjugation that largely contributed to the abolition of the reactionary government and its replacement by a revolutionary state. However, except for few major achievements, like land reform and literacy campaign the revolution has hardly transformed the life of the Ethiopian people for the better.

Although some stories present the revolution as a liberating force, no convincing evidence can be found about the

revolutionary regime granting human and democratic rights in the country. Yet stories have been written with the purpose of popularizing socialist ideology and, thus, serve the purpose of the new system. Such stories are designed for mere propaganda. The absence of short stories critical of the revolution shows how the system was undemocratic. The absence of freedom to portray a clear picture of political facts during the revolution has perhaps been a factor that forced our story authors to dwell much on moral and love-and-marriage issues.

Change is another common theme in the post-1979 Amharic short stories. Trends of exercising free will, disregarding customs and choosing partners are, for instance, signs of change in the values of the Ethiopian society. There are short stories that give impressions about how urbanization and the introduction of modern values have affected traditional ways. In urban life, for instance, we observe some material growth without being accompanied by spiritual growth. Individualism, crime, prostitution, beggary, corruption, and uneven development are common in Addis. The ways of the city are, therefore, bad in relation to the countryside.

Attending modern school or education is asserted as a vital means of acquiring new ideas and transforming life for the better. It is assumed to be the way out from backward and superstitious beliefs.

The other dominant theme is fear. Man has a number of things to worry about. What frightens him most and permanently is the thought of death. Man's transitional fears are caused by drought, war, the sense of being discovered after committing mistakes etc. Be it permanent or temporary, if fear leads to despair the situation can be dangerous not only to the individual but also to those around him. A frightened or desperate person often fails to reason out and make sound judgements about his situation. His thoughts and actions can be abnormal. The outcomes of such a state are often unpleasant.

The post-1979 Amharic short story writers mainly focus on the message they convey. They raise vital social issues with the purpose of indicating their implications on social life. This

shows the strong desire of contemporary story writers to place their works at the service of society. In most short stories plot construction and style are not given so much importance as theme. However, this does not hold true to a few authors like Sibhat and Addam whose short stories are distinguished in method of presentation. The trend of giving importance not only to theme but also to the other aspects of the short story which is observed in the works of the two authors and in a few individual stories of some other writers gives an impression that in the decades to come the Ethiopian short story will achieve increasing maturity.

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DECLARATION

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

Name Messeret Abeje

Signature 

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date of submission 13 - 7 - '92