

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

**THE IDEAL AND PRACTICE OF GENDER
EQUALITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY IN ADDIS
ABABA**

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THE IDEAL AND PRACTICE OF GENDER EQUALITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY IN ADDIS ABABA

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ABBREVIATIONS

BIC :	Bahá'í International community (a consultative office of the United nations from the Bahá'í community, situated in the United nations Building In new York, USA)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IGS	Institute of Gender Studies of the Addis Ababa University
LSA	the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of that specific locality (Kifle Ketema in the case of the Addis Ababa city)
NSA	the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region

These are definitions and some points for clarifications;

Abdu'l Baha: The eldest son of Bahá'u'llah and appointed as the centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'llah

Androcentric Male-centred

Bahá'ís the followers of the religion established by Bahá'u'llah

Bahá'u'llah the establisher of the Bahá'í religion

Bab The forerunner of Bahá'u'llah (who has declared the coming of Bahá'u'llah and also a messenger of God)

Feminism: a school of thought which comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women

Radical feminism: one of the feminism's schools of thought which alleges the sex/gender system or patriarchal system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression

Kifle Ketema an area regarded as an administrative geographical unit in Addis Ababa.

Patriarchy Rule of the Father

Sex/gender system a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the numerical representation and participation of women in relation to men in the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa. On top, it was also intended to single out the understanding of the community on gender equality and gender role issues in relation to the scriptures.

The thesis made use of qualitative methodology along with feminist research conception by making women participants at the centre of the research. The methods data collection employed were in-depth interviews, observations, Focus Group Discussions, and document review. Consequently, the data were organized into four themes. The first theme considered the representation of women and men in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The second theme, focused on the understanding of the given community on gender equality. The thesis then moved on to gender role issues, with the third theme whereas the fourth theme discussed aspects of participation of women in relation to men in the decision-making process of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Bahá'í community in the Addis Ababa.

The findings of this study demonstrated that even though the women's representation by numbers in the Local Spiritual Assemblies was considerable in comparison with their few numbers in the community, several factors-cultural and social as well as patriarchal ideology- hindered them from enjoying full participation in decision-making activities of their religious community. Besides, most of the impediments to women's participation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies and their religious community at large were related to the reality of the majority of women in Ethiopia except for the religious scripture, which gave them a relatively stronger basis to claim their rights.

In addition, the thesis demonstrated the lack of unanimity as to what the perspective of gender equality in the religion have distanced the community from more radical forms of change with regard to restructuring gender power relations. On top, the persistence of traditional gender roles in the families in the community, made it impractical for women to engage themselves fully in the affairs of their religious community as the men members.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This thesis is about the representation and participation of women in relation to men in the administrative organs of the Bahá'í religion (specifically in the Local spiritual Assemblies) and the understanding of the community on gender equality issues with specific reference to the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa.

The starting point for opting for this thesis was the researcher's experience as a follower of the religion for the last nine years and as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly in one of the localities in Addis Ababa for the last three years. During this time, the researcher has participated in the activities and the decision-making process, in the formal and informal discussions on the position of women in the religion as well as what should be done in relation with the implementation of the principles of the equality of women and men in the Bahá'í community. Thus, the researcher observed many different ideas and understanding on the gender equality issue as well as the decision-making process in the Local Spiritual Assembly, which in the researcher's opinion will be of worth studying.

Moreover, the researcher studied the representation and participation of women and men in decision-making in this religion is because of - its relative newness and new perspective in its administration and teachings with regard to the equality of women and men and their involvement in the administrative organs of the religion.

As Devake (1978) asserted, with regard to the position of women, religion is not only important for an analysis of it, but for understanding social change as well. Change takes place in the context of or in rebellion against a world shaped by a world view, with its notion of human and divine order. In leadership, for the most part, religious authority has long been the domain of men.

On the other hand, Donovan (2000) explained, With regard to religious practices in relation to the position of women, the societal structure plays a fundamental part in which case it's said to be that many societies are patriarchal. As feminists and many other social science scholars have stated, patriarchy is the power, governance and control of men, with all its roles, as a major cause for women's oppression.

The ideology of patriarchy is intertwined into the society's structure and institutions that one of it is the religious institutions. In many societies, for generations, women have contributed immensely to the survival of religion in the intensity of their religiosity as well as in transmitting religious beliefs to the next generation and also in some instances in having leadership positions in religious administration(Rosette: 1979).

The Ethiopian society like elsewhere in the world, women have been subjected to unjust discrimination and less or no place at the decision making power in their family, societal or religious roles. The neglect of gender in relation to religion and similar other issues has not been discussed in the open because of the thinking that it is immaterial or because of the individual's perception that it is an 'untouchable' subject or sometimes out of fear and at other times lack of knowledge (Eshetu, 2004). In addition, ironically enough, we see that religion/belief systems teachings forming the frame of mind of most of the Ethiopian society.

As Hirut (1998) stated that, many social science scholars agreed that societal values and patterns of social interactions significantly influence the religious views, and similarly religion has its own influence on the social systems as well.

Even though there are, many religions or belief systems in Ethiopia , the most notable are Christianity and Islam. Both religions were introduced to Ethiopia around the fourth and seventh century respectively from abroad while other belief systems like the 'Waaqa' concept were said to be indigenous to Ethiopia (Ta-ame: 1977).

This research studied the representation and participation of women in relation to men in the Local spiritual Assemblies and the understanding of the community on gender equality issues with specific reference to the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa. Thus, it examined the teachings on gender in the religion, the representation of women and men in the scriptures and structures of the religion at the local level through examining the representation, values, attitudes and practices within it. For this purpose, the research has studied the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa, one of the oldest Bahá'í communities in the country.

The Bahá'í community worldwide has representatives among 2100 ethnic groups residing over 20,000 localities in more than 300 countries and dependent territories. In addition, its political practice is derived from the detailed guidance stipulated in its scriptures (BIC: 2005).

The Bahá'í community in Ethiopia has its beginning in early 1933. According to the recent unofficial statistics from the secretariat office of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Ethiopia in the year 2005, it is estimated that there were 9,503 Bahá'ís representing more than 15 ethnic groups. From the 56 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Ethiopia of ten of them were in Addis Ababa.

The Founder (Bahá'u'llah) has stated that women and men are equal. Bahá'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas has proclaimed, "**Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God**"(Bahá'u'llah: 1863).

As a result, this research began with the analysis of the representation and participation between women and men in the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies mainly utilising qualitative studies.

It is also underlying assertion of this research that the structural study of the representation of women and men in religious administration is not complete without some consideration of both the levels of personal experience and the larger social context in which the religious groups operate. Thus, the thesis examines the community's perspective towards gender

equality and related topics. Moreover, it dealt with the teachings in the Bahá'í scriptures and its corresponding practices by the followers.

For this reason, this thesis utilized qualitative methodology as it 'attempts not only to understand the world, but also to understand it through the eyes of the participants whose world it is (Wilson: 1998).

As a result, it applied in-depth interviews, document analysis, participant observation and focus group discussions. The research made use of chapters and additional part for conclusion and implications.

The first chapter explains the background and the rationale behind the research. The second chapter is concerned with the Bahá'í history, teachings on gender and also the Bahá'í framework for decision-making. The third chapter has analysed religion, gender and patriarchy in addition to setting the theoretical framework for the study. The fourth chapter is about the overall research design and methodology.

The data discussed and analysed in chapter five looked at the representation of women and women in the Local Spiritual Assemblies in Addis Ababa, the perspective of gender equality and sexual division of labour and the decision-making process within the Assemblies. Ultimately, the thesis was summarised and implications forwarded followed by references and appendices.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The Bahá'í community in Ethiopia is one of the least studied religious communities. Furthermore, one of the core principles of the Faith is the equality of women and men. Because of the religion's relative newness to Ethiopia and its progressive teachings in aspects such as gender equality and the involvement of women in the religious administration.

Thus, this research is mainly concerned with analyzing the perspective of the gender equality in the scriptures and its praxis in the community's main decision making organs- the local spiritual assemblies with regards to representation and decision-making.

Accordingly, this research is formulated with the purpose of answering the following questions;

- ▶ How is the numerical representation of women and men in the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies in Addis Ababa?
- ▶ How does the community understand the gender equality in the Bahá'í Religion?
- ▶ How do these understandings influence the community's understanding of gender roles in the community and the Local Spiritual Assemblies?

1.3. The objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to assess the numerical representation and participation of women in the Bahá'í local spiritual assemblies and the understanding of gender equality in the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa.

The specific objectives are;

- ▶ To assess the numerical representation of women and men in the Bahá'í local spiritual assemblies
- ▶ To assess the understanding of gender equality in the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa
- ▶ To assess the gender role issues of the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa
- ▶ To assess the views of women and men in their participation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies

1.4. Significance of the Study

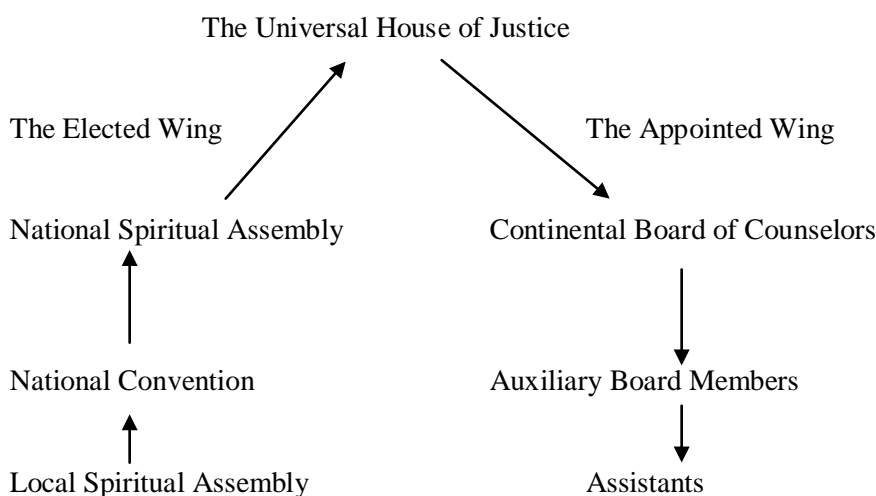
Based on the stated objectives, the findings of this study are expected to serve both practical as well as academic purposes. Thus, the researcher is hopeful of that the findings of the study will;

- Be used as a baseline or preliminary information sources for further researches on related issues in the Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa,
- Provide relevant information about the participation of women and men in the main decision making organs of the Bahá'í faith (the Local Spiritual Assembly) at the local level,
- Have its part to raise the consciousness of the research participants in the processes of the study.

The researcher did make search and couldn't come across another study on the gender equality teachings in the Bahá'í faith and its practical application in the Ethiopian context. Thus, this thesis will fill this gap and will be one of its kinds in the study of gender representation and participation in decision making of one of the religious communities in Ethiopia.

1.5. Scope of the study

In order to make the study more manageable, its scope is delimited to the study of the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa. Moreover, from the organs of the religion the focus is on the Local Spiritual Assemblies that are the main organs for decision making at the local level. This study is delimited to the study of the Bahá'í scriptures in relation to gender and administrative issues with its practice in the living community of Addis Ababa. The structure of the Bahá'í Administration is as follows;



1.6. Study area/population

The Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa is one of the oldest and well established Bahá'í communities in the country and it was established in 1933. The study is conducted in Addis Ababa city where there were 978 adult Bahá'ís (National Teaching Committee statistics; 2005).

The study focuses on the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa, because of two reasons. One is, there are significant number of Bahá'ís in Addis Ababa and is possible to find Bahá'ís who were followers for so many years than in other places in Ethiopia. Secondly, it is convenient for getting the participants and studying them closer.

CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND DECISION MAKING

2.1. History

The Bahá'í faith was founded more than a century and half ago in 1844. The founder of the religion was Bahá'u'llah (Arabic word and is translated as “the Glory of God”) and its followers are called Bahá'ís. There are six million Bahá'ís in at least 233 countries and dependent territories. More than 2,100 different ethnic groups are represented in the International Bahá'í community. According to the 1992 Encyclopaedia Britannica book of the year, the Bahá'í Faith has become the second most widespread religion next to Christianity (BIC: 1992).

The Bahá'í Faith, like Christianity and Islam, is an independent world religion with its own religious and social laws and practices. Bahá'u'llah, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í faith, was born in Iran in 1817. He claimed to be the latest messenger sent by God. Bahá'ís believe that while all religions have been ordained by God, the social teachings of religions have varied according to the needs of the age in which a prophet appears. The central theme of the Bahá'í message is the establishment of the unity of humankind in a single global society. This necessitates the establishment of a world government, the achievement of universal education, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, and the attainment of full equality of men and women. (Momen: 1989). Other teachings include the harmony between religion and science, compulsory education to all, independent investigation of truth, elimination of all kinds of prejudice and many others (BIC: 1992).

The Bahá'í faith has its own scriptures, administrative order, laws and ordinances. The predecessor is called the Bab, and the prophet founder is Bahá'u'llah and Abdu'l-Bahá is the centre of the covenant. The international governing council for the Bahá'í community, is the Universal House of Justice which is situated in Haifa, Israel.

The fundamental principles enunciated by Bahá'u'llah is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that divine revelation is a continuous and progressive process , that all the great religions of the world (such as Christianity, Islam, Jewish, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism) are divine in origin , that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same , that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary , that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions present successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society (Ethiopian Observer:1961).

The Bahá'í community in Ethiopia is part of the international Bahá'í community. It has its beginnings in 1933 when an Egyptian Bahá'í named Mr. Sabri Elias came and taught about the Faith among Ethiopians (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia: 1983) .

The first Ethiopian Bahá'í is believed to be Azmatch Seyoume Gebriel. It was in 1934 that the first Local Spiritual Assembly (the local governing body of the Faith) with nine elected members was formed in Addis Ababa (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia: 1983). At present it is estimated that there are around ten thousand Bahá'ís representing more than fifteen ethnic groups. There are also some 56 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Ethiopia, of which ten of the Assemblies are present in Addis Ababa (NSA statistics: 2007).

2.2. The principle of equality of men and women

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, proclaimed the equality of a man and a woman (Bahá'u'llah: 1863). Bahá'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas has proclaimed, “Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God”.

Moreover, Abdu'l-Baha, the centre of the covenant of Bahá'u'llah and the sole interpreter of His teachings, said

“The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.”(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: 1987).

Moreover, the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing council of the Bahá’ís of the world, noted:

“The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.”(Universal House of Justice, 1985).

Moreover, the Bahá’í writings envisages that the realization of the equality of women to men is a prerequisite for men to excel, **"As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs."** (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1970).

“The world in the past has been ruled by force and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting, force is losing its weight, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the

masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.(Ibid)

The Bahá'í Writings contain the image of humanity as a bird in which one wing is woman and the other man. Unless both wings are strong and well-developed, the bird will not be able to fly. The development of women is considered vital to the full development of men and is seen as a prerequisite to peace.

This understanding of the implications of the Law has far-reaching effects in light of the fundamental Bahá'í principle of the equality of the sexes, and should be borne in mind when the sacred Text is studied. That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature and makes possible their complementary roles in certain areas of the life of society; but it is significant that it was stated that in this Dispensation :

"Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced." (Bahá'u'llah: 1863)

The Bahá'í teachings spell out a number of elements that pertain to the emancipation of women. These include the rights of women to be respected as human beings, to be accorded civil and legal rights equal to those of men, and to have these rights protected by the society.

Bahá'u'llah (1867) as cited in Women (1990) explicitly states that women enjoy **“a station and rank on the same plane”** as men. His son Abdu'l-Bahá likewise, indicates that,

“women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element”.

He also called to attention to the fact that

“Divine justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven.”
(Abdu'l-Bahá: 1995).

The Bahá'í writings mandate that women be accorded equality of opportunity in education and employment that they be given the right to vote and to participate in government, and that they experience equality in all departments of life. To deprive women arbitrarily of these rights and privileges is considered both immoral and unjust; it has a detrimental effect on the individual woman's sense of self and her peace of mind, perpetuates attitudes of dominance and superiority in men, and undermines the **“moral and psychological climate”** of society (Universal House of Justice, 1985).

The Bahá'í writings, furthermore, underline the important role of the family as the environment in which attitudes are acquired-attitudes that can be either harmful or conducive to peace. Abdu'l-Bahá saw the family as a microcosm of the family of nations. He called attention to the impact of the psychological climate of the family and the effects of the behaviour of individual members on the peace and security of the whole. The Bahá'í writings present specific practical provisions for promoting the equality of women and men; for fostering the development of full partnership and for enhancing women's capacity to serve as social agents for the common good concerning the education of girls and women; on the station of motherhood; and the involvement of women in the professions and their participation in religious life and social administration (BIC: 1986).

In the words of Abdu'l-Bahá, (1982)

“...it is well established that mankind and womankind as parts of composite humanity are coequal and that no difference in estimate is allowable, for all are human”.

The achievement of equality requires that women have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities by obtaining education and participating in all fields of human endeavour.

Great emphasis is placed on education in the Bahá'í faith as a means of promoting the advancement of women. The Bahá'í writings affirm that many of the differences apparent between women and men, the differing functions assigned to them, and the inequities that persist, are due to the fact that women have been deprived of education and the opportunity to develop those skills that would enable them to participate fully in society. Commenting on the situation of women, Abdu'l-Bahá (1982) stated:

“...if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions, they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without no doubt education will establish her equality with men.”

The Bahá'í Faith not only upholds the principle of universal education, but it accords priority to the education of girls and women. The writings specify that, under certain circumstances, preference be given to the education of girls. Calling attention to the responsibility of parents to educate all their children, Abdu'l-Bahá clearly states that the training and culture of daughters is more necessary than of sons, for girls will one day be mothers, and mothers are the first educators of each generation. If it not possible, therefore, for a family to educate all the children perhaps due to limitations on available resources, preference is to be given to daughters, thus opening the way to terminate the process by which ignorance is transmitted from one generation to the next through mothers deprived of education.

As Effendi (1963) quoted in the Universal House of Justice (1996) on the role of mothers in the bringing up of children;

“The task bringing up a Bahá'í child ... is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training that a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development....”

In relation to the role of the husband, the teachings also indicates that a

“Corollary of the above responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband – a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife” (Universal House of Justice: 1996).

While the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of his family, it must be noted that this function is not inflexibly fixed and can be adjusted to suit particular family situations. There is nothing in the Bahá’í teachings to preclude a wife from assuming the role of major breadwinner or a husband from taking the principal responsibility for care of the children and of the home, if the couple chooses to do so. Likewise, while mothers have the chief and primary responsibility to be the first educators of the next generation, they were not excluded from participation in the home making activities (Universal House of Justice: 1996).

In addition the use of Bahá’í consultation within the family cements the practice of equality between the marriage partners and accords women a full voice in the family decision making. The Bahá’í writings contain the following provisions for the resolution of conflict when unanimity cannot be reached between the spouses:

“there are ...times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer from his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other” (Universal House of Justice: 1996).

The Bahá’í writings envision future societies in which women are participating **“fully and equally in the affairs of the world,”** as the **“peers of men.”** At the same time, it is evident in the Bahá’í writings that equality does not imply sameness, that **“equality of status does not mean identify of function.”** Most notably, great value is conferred on the role of motherhood (Abdul-Baha: 1982).

Moreover, the Bahá’í writings state that women in the past were unable to reveal their potential for the benefit of the society for lack of opportunity;

“In this dispensation.’ one of the potentialities hidden in the realm of humanity was the capability or the capacity of womankind. Through the effulgent rays of divine illumination the capacity of woman become

so awakened and manifest in this age that equality of man and woman is an established fact...at last this century of light dawned, the realities shone forth , and the mysteries long hidden from human vision were revealed.’’(Abdu'l-Bahá :1982)

The message of this put a challenge for individual women to “**recognize and realize**” their own latent potential in every degree of human accomplishment ; but even more significantly , the emergence of womankind as a full coequal and complementary partner with mankind so that human civilization will take the next vital step forward (Schoonmaker:1985).

2.3. Women in the Bahá’í Faith

Nearly every religion has its paradigm of the "ideal" woman. In Hinduism this has been Sita, the perfect wife who remains faithful to her husband at all costs. In Christianity, the most eminent woman is the Virgin Mary, symbol of motherhood. Islam has Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, who models the roles of mother, wife, and daughter together.

In the Bahá’í Faith, there are a lot of women who were regarded as the great teachers of the religion. Tahirih is not in the theological sense the most important woman in Babi-Bahai history; that distinction belongs to Navvab, the wife of Bahá’u’llah and Bahiyih Khanum, his eldest daughter. Of the first figure, however, very little has been written in English. Bahiyih Khanum is much better known, since she served as the de facto head of the Bahá’í community several times. She usually had been depicted as playing a supportive role in relation to the appointment of Abdu'l-Bahá as the head of the Bahá’í world and later Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Bahai world prior to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Bahiyih Khanum has not attracted as much attention as Tahirih, about whom numerous biographies exist. Tahirih is, in a word, a legend, and as such plays a much more important role among Bahá’ís as the paradigm of womanhood. Both in Iran and other countries, her name is probably the most popular Bahá’í name given to girls.

However, the paradigm of womanhood for the Bahá'ís across the world is Tahirih, who was one of the 18 'letters of the living' appointed by the Bab (the predecessor of Bahá'u'llah).

Tahirih

Tahirih is the most well-known woman in Babi - Bahá'í history. She had been the only woman from the 18 'letters of the living' (the first disciples of the Bab). Moreover, she has been known as the great teacher of the Faith and in her boldness and courage to confront the oppression of women in the 19th century Iran with her writings. This poet of nineteenth-century Iran, far from being a dutiful daughter, continually opposed the theological positions of her father, Mulla Salih, a prominent Muslim cleric of Qazvin. Neither is she admired for her success as a wife and mother, since her estrangement from her husband resulted in her forced separation from her children as well.

For Tahirih, removing the veil was primarily an act of religious innovation. Tahirih's activities created much controversy within the Babi community itself. They regarded Tahirih's behaviour as scandalous and unchaste. For this reason, the Bab gave her the title by which she is now known, Tahirih, meaning the "pure." Finally the governor intervened. She was taken to a garden and strangled to death. Her body was thrown down a well. Her last words (perhaps apocryphal) are reported to be. **"You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women"** (A'zam:1979).

2.4. The Activities of the Bahá'í world on gender equality

In the Bahá'í perspective, the support to women as social actors is objectively fostered by its institutions. Gatherings known as women assemblages were first called by Abdul-Baha in 1909 at a time when women in the east generally lacked both the opportunity for education and any kind of a life outside their home (Tarzadeh: 1988). Women's meetings have continued relevance in places where women have been socialized to be silent and deferential in the presence of men. The major significance of these assemblages was to

enable and encourage women to actively participate in the affairs and administration of the religion.

Some progress in the emancipation of women and the achievement of full equality between the sexes regard has been made, but it must be accelerated, with the help of education and widespread attitudinal change encompassing policy makers and planners as well as the people at large (BIC, 1987).

Moreover, the Office of the Bahá'í International Community is situated in the United Nations New York Office with an advisory role and one of its main departments is the Office of the Advancement of Women. This office has branches in different countries including Ethiopia which is known as the Bahá'í External Affairs Office. The main responsibility of the office of the advancement of women is to create awareness on policy and international law issues at the international level and national level. The Ethiopian External Affairs office was established in 2001. Since its establishment, it has worked on the issue of gender equality in the country through collaboration with the government ministries, non governmental institutions and other religious institutions on various areas concerning the equality of women and men.

In addition to the activities of the Bahá'í External Affairs Office , the then Bahá'í women committee was vital for creating the awareness of the Bahá'í women in the community through building the confidence of the women through participating in public speaking among themselves and served as a forum for expressing their views. However, the women committee is non-existent at the time of making of this research because of the restructuring of the different committees and boards in the administration.

2.5. Overview of the Bahá'í political framework

2.5.1. Administrative Structures

The nature of the leadership in the Bahá'í religion is that a religious community without clergy. The emphasis is on group leadership, as opposed to individual power runs throughout the Bahá'í administrative system, which has two branches: one composed of councils elected to govern: the other composed of individuals appointed to advice.

The Bahá'í administrative system functions under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, its international governing body. The Bahá'í administrative system consists of elected local and national Bahá'í assemblies (councils) guide and coordinate the activities of the Bahá'í community. The administrative system also includes individuals who are appointed to provide a vital counselling and advisory function to the Bahá'í assemblies and to the members of the religion (Effendi: 1968).

The appointed wing includes a group of counsellors for each continent and the Auxiliary Board Members and their Assistants at a national level. An important role in the development of the Bahá'í community is played by institutions that are composed of individuals of high rank who are appointed by the Head of the religion (the Universal House of Justice). These individuals operate at the international, continental, and local levels of society. Their functions include the provision of advice, encouragement, and counselling to Bahá'í assemblies and community members in their endeavour to practice the teachings of the faith. A survey conducted in 1995 showed that the proportion of women serving in the capacity in the international realm is 62 percent; at the continental level, 34 percent are women; while the proportion of women operating at the local level is around 47 percent (BIC:1995).

On the elected wing from the Universal House of Justice (at the global level) it goes up to National Spiritual Assemblies and Local Spiritual Assemblies which will be elected by secret ballot by every member of the community who has attained 21 years of age and who is a resident of the specific locality (Ibid).

With regard to the participation of women in religious organization and administration, the Bahá'í faith has no priesthood and no ecclesial structure. The religion calls for women to be fully involved in all aspects of life, including the organization and administration of religion. The founder, Bahá'u'llah explicitly defines a role for women in religion. Women are not simply confined to teaching and ministering to the spiritual needs of women, they are called upon to operate “amongst women and men” in religious administration (Bahá'u'llah 1997).

Hence, in the involvement in the administrative institutions, the Bahá'í writings propagate the involvement of both men and women with one exception. Women cannot be the members of the Universal House of Justice (Effendi, 1968).

Thus, even if women can be involved in the administration of the Bahá'í Faith whether in the elected part or the appointment part, they are excluded from membership of the supreme governing body (the Universal House of Justice) of the Bahá'ís of the world (the Universal House of Justice: 1988). Women were excluded explicitly from membership in the Universal House of Justice with reference to the laws specified in the main holy book of the Bahá'ís (the Kitabi-Aqdas). Though this exclusion has been a point of discussion, Bahá'u'llah had said that the reason of women's exclusion will be apparent in the future. Moreover, the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated on May 31, 1988 explained that:

“... the important fact to remember is that in the face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women.”

2.5.2. Election and the decision -making process

Women and men alike are elected to membership of Bahá'í Local and National assemblies. In voting for members of these assemblies, Bahá'ís are expected to consider,

“without the least trace of passion and prejudice , and irrespective of any material consideration , the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty , of selfless devotion , of a well-trained mind , of recognized ability and mature experience”
(Effendi:1995).

The Local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by Bahá'ís, and every declared believer of 21 years old and above should regard as his sacred duty to take part in election (The NSA of British isles: 1950). The Bahá'í faith eschews the use of quotas, election campaign or any other means to bring about the appearance of equality in institutional composition.

With regard to the participation in decision making of the elected members, they are encouraged to make decisions through consultation and not to be possessive of their own ideas, but to offer their views with an attitude of detachment, presenting them as a contribution to the group as it strives to reach its conclusions. Decisions are made in the light of spiritual principles. They reflect the group understands of the truth of the matter under discussion and its efforts to arrive at a solution that is equitable and just. Such decisions are willingly supported not only by all those involved but also by the community as a whole (Effendi: 1995).

Essential to the consultative process is its atmosphere, and the freedom that each participant has to express his or her views without fear of being belittled, humiliated, insulted, or ignored. The ingredients of such an atmosphere are the acceptance of the oneness of humankind and the equality of the sexes, and recognition of the importance of courtesy and respect in all manner of human relations (Ibid).

Steady progress has been reported in the increase of the proportion of women serving on Bahá'í administrative institutions, with well designed surveys being carried out to measure this progress. In 1997 it was found that 32 percent of the members of 172 Bahá'í national assemblies were women, with Europe and America having the greatest proportion (40 percent) and Africa having the lowest proportion (17 percent)(Khan A. & Khan P.: 1997).

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

3.1. Religion and Religious conceptions of gender

Religion does not have a fixed and universally accepted definition; rather it is based on some intuitive ideas of which behaviours should be considered religious. It is therefore difficult to delimit and define religion in any precise fashion. Various philosophers and scholars had views on the issues of religion, its importance and related issues. Marxist school of thought asserts that religion is one of those social institutions that are dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society. They also added the observation that Christians believe that god created man in his own image whereas the truth is that man created God in his own image. Religion is, therefore, a reversal of the true situation because it is a product of alienation (Hamilton: 2001).

Consequently, both Karl Marx and Frederick Engels considered religion is a kind of consolation for the people like a kind of consolation one gets from drugs which give temporary relief and at the sense of blunting the senses and having undesirable side effects (Marx & Engels: 1957).

On the other hand, Max Weber argued that religion could be a means of transforming existing relationships. Weber did acknowledge the multiplicity of factors that could conspire to cause social change, but his central concern was that,

“Men’s conception of the cosmic universe, including those of divinity and men's religious interests within such a conceptual framework could influence or shape their concrete actions and social relationships (Weber: 1963)”

Weber also argues that there is no known human society without something, which modern social scientists would classify as religion. This view that belief in the supernatural is universal has been completely confirmed by modern anthropology. Weber's primary interest is in religion as a source of the dynamics of social change, not religion as a reinforcement of the stability of societies (Weber: 1963). This view of Max Weber is unique in that he saw religion as a means of social change while many other scholars keep the point of view that religion is one of the forces that maintain the status quo.

Devake, (1978) articulated religion has both progressive and reactionary forms which shaped almost every major conflict in the world today. Accordingly, religion is both a problem where its structures of dominance have oppressed women, as well as a solution where its vision of liberation or equality has generated powerful movements for social change.

Though the views and definitions on religion may differ, it is undeniable fact that religion has governed human actions for eons. In the past it was the society's main source of law and social control namely the ten commandments, Moses's law, the Bible, the Quran, Buddhism's five precepts, and the laws of Manu, governing and guiding daily life and bring a tacit reminder of the power of the invisible world (Carroll: 1983).

As some argued, with regard to the position of women, religion is important for understanding social change. Change takes place in the context of or in rebellion against a world that is shaped by a world view, with its notion of human and divine order. In leadership, for the most part, religious authority has long been the domain of men (Devake: 1978).

On the other hand, Religion and social change, for some is a mixture of oil and water (Hadad & Findly: 1985). Even if it is one of the few ways of releasing a transforming vision necessary to radically change people and societies, it is not the case when it comes to women. On the other hand, Garry & Pearshall (1989) argued that religion has been a powerful institutional force in the marginalization and devaluation of women not only in its rituals but more profoundly in its underlying myths, dogmas and conceptual schemes.

3.2. PATRIARCHY IN SOCIETY

Patriarchy is a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they also are united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination (Kolmar & Bartkowski: 1986).

Many studies provide different explanations and theories concerning how and why the status of women and men are different in today's socio-cultural settings of a given society. Generally those explanations have their own dimensions mainly from the biological and socio-cultural aspects; and from political and economic aspects in certain cases. Thereby, commonly identified explanations on the above issues are as follows:

Zinn (2000) describes that one of the factors for the rise of the subordinate status of women has a biological explanation. The advocates of biological determinism argue, "**Anatomy is destiny**". In line with this explanation, Bond (1993) also states that there is something genetically inherent in men's nature that makes them naturally dominant, while women are biologically remained as subordinate to men. Along with this, the tasks and roles assigned to them are related to the anatomically based explanations.

On the other hand, Jackson (1993) has explained gender disparities purely as the social construction that both women and men are behaviorally flexible. The way men and women behave in any particular social setting is a result of a socially constructed circumstances rather than anatomy. Furthermore, as Baerenda (1994) states, gender is a learned behavior related to one's sex, rather than genetically determined inherent traits. Therefore, the differential treatment that both girls and boys receive through the socialization process from their families and the rest of the society ascribed them into different social and economic status and roles.

Similarly, socialization, according to Richter (1991) described as the process by which individuals acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of a group and a society.

Patriarchal society uses certain facts about male and female physiology (chromosomes, anatomy, hormones) as the basis for constructing “masculine” and “feminine” behaviours that serve to empower men and disempower women. In the process of accomplishing this ideological task, patriarchal society manages to convince itself its cultural constructions are somehow “natural” and therefore that one’s “normality” depends on one’s ability to display the gender identities and behaviours society links with one’s biological sex.

According to Tong (1998) Patriarchal society uses rigid gender roles to keep women passive (“affectionate, obedient, responsive to sympathy and approval, cheerful, kind and friendly”) and men active (“tenacious, aggressive, curious, ambitious, planful, responsible, original and competitive”). Thus, the way for women to dispel men’s unjustified power over women is for both sexes first to recognize women are no more destined to be passive than men are destined to be active, and then to develop whatever combination of feminine and masculine traits best reflects their individually unique personalities.

PATRIARCHY IN THE EHTIOPIAN SOCIETY

The Ethiopian social structure is one which anthropologists call patriarchy. It literally means ‘the rule of the Father’. Patriarchy is a social system characterized by male domination. Patriarchy is referred as to almost any form or instance of male dominance (Kandiyoti: 1999).

While we look into the Ethiopian situation, Anthropologist I. M. Lewis (1961) used the Ethiopian state as an example of a highly evolved traditional African state with a clear separation between the institutions of religion, the state, and the army (Berhane Sellassie in Mikell: 1997).

Because the Ethiopian population is diverse, Ethiopian women experience a number of variations in gender roles. Ethiopians speak about 120 languages clustered under eighty major groups and hold Christian, Islam, Judaic, and polytheistic religious beliefs (Berhane Sellassie in Mikell:1997). Status differences are evident across gender, ethnic, economic and political roles. In the traditional Ethiopian state, the majority of women were invisible producers of goods and providers of services (Pankhurst: 1990).

However, in the history of Ethiopia, women by and large have been in the inferior positions compared to that of men. They are highly subjected to gender based oppressions (Eshetu, 2005). Moreover, Markakis (1975) emphasized women in Ethiopia were not given equal opportunities with men to participate in the political, economic and social spheres of the country. Their contributions in the development of their country were devalued. They were not given equal rights to hold positions both at the private and public spheres almost in all socio-cultural settings because of the tradition that has been playing an integral part of the history of the country,.

3.3 PATRIARCHY IN RELIGION

There is no doubt that religion or religious teachings play an important part in most people lives. According to Renzetti & Curran (1995) first, virtually everyone seeks to understand the purpose of their existence as well as events in their lives and environments that seem unexplainable. Religion offers some answers to these puzzles, thus giving meaning to human existence and easing somewhat the psychological discomfort caused by life's uncertainties. Second religion provides its followers with a sense of belonging for it is not practiced alone, but rather in a 'community of believers' and finally, religion lends order to social life by imposing on its adherents a set of behavioural standards.

Men and women have separate and very clearly defined rights and obligations under Jewish law. The orthodoxy requires that men preserve and carry on Jewish tradition through communal worship and daily prayer at specified times, and especially through religious study. Women in contrast, are exempt from these religious duties on the ground that

fulfilling them would interfere with their primary roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers (Hein (1985) as cited in Garry & Pearshall: 1989).

There is considerable evidence that the leadership of the early Christian movement was shared by some women and many men. Both served as missionaries and teachers of the faith. Within the first hundred years, however, an all-male hierarchical structure was firmly in place. Feminist biblical theologians emphasize there is no evidence that Jesus was a sexist (Renzetti & Curran: 1995).

Today, many Islamic leaders maintain that men and women hold equal status, although they are quick to emphasize that this equality does not derive from sharing the same privileges and responsibilities, but rather from complementarity of their roles. Men are the undisputed heads of both the sacred and secular realms, including the household. Women, in contrast, are largely confined to the private sphere, the home, but even there, they are not in charge. Their duties are to serve their husbands, to keep house, to bear many children, and to instruct the children in the ways of Islam (Haddad: 1985).

Somewhat a different notion is there when we analyse the indigenous religions of Africa. African religions are “part and parcel of the whole fabric of African cultural life” (Carroll: 1983). There was the rule of queens and queen mothers in the southern African region and similar systems of female rule and power sharing with men in West Africa. This was also the case in east Africa. There were powerful women leaders, queens, and empresses in African history. In the indigenous system, pro-female values were encouraged through songs, folktales and myths to motivate, on the one hand, the tender values of love and compassion, and on the other, competitiveness in economic pursuit of women, to feed their children. The African indigenous religion is the most active and protean aspects of cultural transformation (Rosette: 1979).

This can be seen from assertion that the domestic-public dichotomy has no ‘universal form’ that there was no this dichotomy for African women. Because African societies were constructed upon a corporate base that emphasized kinship, women had unique political

opportunities, but they are also experienced social pulls from their other domestic and public roles in the economy, religious realms, and social life in general (Mikell: 1997).

While we look at the Ethiopian situation, the percentage of the Ethiopian population according to religion as it was stated in the 1994 population and housing census of Ethiopia is that orthodox (50.6%), Protestant (10.2%), Catholic (0.9), Islam (32.8%), others (0.9%), traditional/indigenous (4.6%) and unknown (0.1%).

3.4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist theory is based on a series of assumptions, one of which is that women's and men's experiences are different and that the world is not the same for women and men. It also assumes that the oppression of women is part of the way the world is organized. (Jaggar & Rothenberg: 1993). Generally, feminist theories are based on the assumption that situations and experiences are diverse in different cases - like in different geographical and cultural contexts.

And from the various feminist theories, this research has opted for the radical feminist theory. Radical feminism insists the sex/gender system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression (Tong: 1998). And the following points are its main claims;

- Women's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society
- Women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate and cannot be removed by other social changes such as abolition of class society,
- Women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims , qualitatively as well as quantitatively , although the suffering may often go unrecognized because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressors and the victims,
- Women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.

Radical feminism draw attention that the very concept of femininity as well as women's reproductive and sexual roles and responsibilities often serve to limit women's development as full human persons (Tong:1998)

Radical feminist theory found its fullest articulation in two primary texts that appeared in 1970: Kate Millet's *sexual politics* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of sex: the case of feminist revolution*. Another important later work was Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: the Methatics of Radical Feminism* (1978).

One of the first radical feminists to insist the roots of women's oppression are buried deep in patriarchy's sex/gender system was kate Millet. In her *sexual politics* (1970), millet argued that sex is political primarily because the male-female relationship is a paradigm for all power relationships:

“social caste supersedes all other forms of inegalitarianism: racial, political, or economic, and unless the clinging to male supremacy as a birthright is finally forgone, all systems of oppression will continue to function simply by virtue of their logical and emotional mandate in primary human situation.” Because male control of the public and the private worlds constitutes patriarchy, male control must be eliminated if women are to be liberated.”

Millet (1970) in "Sexual Politics" articulates that how patriarchy (male supremacy) became an ideology;

"When one group rules another, the relationship between the two is political. When such an arrangement is carried out over a long period of time it develops an ideology."

According to Millet's view, patriarchal ideology is that of male supremacy, which conditions women to exhibit male-serving behaviour and to accept male serving roles. Millet argues that this ideology permeates every aspect of culture and touches

every aspect of our lives even the most personal. Moreover, Millet sees the family as the main source of ideological indoctrination. It socializes the "young... into patriarchal ideology's prescribed attitudes toward the categories of role, temperament and status.

Firestone (1970), in her book "the Dialectic of sex", argued that there is a casual relation between the material biological base and the ideology of female subjugation. Thus, the female reproductive function is the reason for the gender division of labour upon which patriarchy and its ruling ideology, sexism, are constructed.

Daly (1978) presented a view on how to discover the creation of a world other than patriarchy; since women are cast in a false, veiled realm, which must be destroyed in order for the truth of women's being to emerge. Daly also argues about the role of language as one of the factors for the role and prevalence of patriarchy such as through stereotypes. Thus, Daly proposes language engendering as one strategy to tackle the prevalence of patriarchy through stereotypes in the socio setting of a society.

Daly also seemed interested in reinterpreting traditional feminine traits. Daly insisted that positive feminine traits such as love, compassion, sharing, and nurturance must be carefully distinguished from their pathological excesses, the sort of masochistic feminine "virtues" for which they are frequently mistaken. For example, to love is good, but under patriarchy loving can become, a form of total self-sacrifice or martyrdom (Ibid).

The work of patriarchy has its manifestations – ideological, institutional, organizational, and subjective-accounting not for continuities but also change over time (Kolmar & Bartkowski :1986).

3.5. FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF PATRIARCHY IN RELIGION

Within the radical feminist framework, feminist spirituality/theology draws on women's experience as a basic source of content as well as a criterion for truth. The use of women's experience in feminist theology therefore explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions as based on male experience rather than on universal human experience (Ruether: 1993). Feminism claims that women are too among those oppressed whom God comes to vindicate and liberate. There is no question that patriarchy is the social context for many religious revelations and that this social context has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels (Ruether: 1993).

In relation to patriarchal culture and representation, Davies and Elder (2006) note that women do not have the power to voice their interests and make decisions on issues affecting them. Thus, without this power to define their interests, women are susceptible to accept the definitions and decisions made by others. In this regard, most women who accept the ideas and values of patriarchal ideology are more likely to accept it and reproduce it in their work rather than challenge it (Donovan, 2004).

Generally, in addition to the issue of women's representation in decision making of religious administration, one should also look at the concept of under-representation. George Gebner (1972) cited in Tuchman (1979), stated as much as representation signifies social existence, under representation also indicates symbolic eradication.

Moreover, according to Schmidt (1990) Gender orders and the ways that difference in power relations supports social domination of gender relations. Hence, the critical principle of feminist spirituality is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore appraised as not redemptive. The naming of males as norms of authentic humanity has caused women to be scapegoated for sin and marginalized in both original and redeemed humanity (Ruether: 1993). Some feminist theologians, like Mary Daly, argues even the idea of a male representation of God reinforces patriarchy and the oppression of women. Mary Daly has said "if God is male then the Male is God" (Daly: 1991).

CHAPTER IV – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Methodology

In order to attain the aforementioned objectives of this study, the researcher have used qualitative research method. The researcher opted for qualitative study since it is used to study research participants with unique and meaningful human situation and interactions. Moreover, the qualitative methods are not based on fixed and rigid procedures providing the researcher with a set of strategies to organize, collect, process or interpret data.

Flick (2004) states that qualitative research claims to describe life worlds from the in side out, from the point of view of people who participates. By doing so is seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to process, meaning, pattern and structural features. Patton (1990) said qualitative method enables the researcher to study in-depth and detail: “it permits the evaluator to study selected issues in-depth and detail”.

On the other hand, quantitative research method focuses on quantification of data. It focuses on “how much”, that is, measuring the reactions of a number of people, which represent the whole study, to a number of questions set by the researcher. Thus, the focus is on the generalization of the findings to the whole population (Patton, 1990).

The qualitative research paradigm, according to Merriam (1988), stresses on socially constructed reality while the quantitative paradigm assumes that there is a single reality, the world out there, and independent to the social environment. In describing its nature, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to qualitative research as being the world of lived experience.

With this understanding, since the aim of this study was to meet the aforementioned objectives from the lived experiences of the stated community and to understand the social phenomena in-depth through the participants’ own interpretation, qualitative research

method was taken as a relevant method for this study. Simultaneously, in this study, the qualitative research method was reinforced with a feminist research approach due to the researcher's need to look the stated issue from the feminist research conception.

In fact, a feminist research conception has criticisms on both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. These criticisms are justified through various reasons, and call the former two paradigms as traditional, masculine and androcentric in their nature (Reid, 2004). Thus, one of the main driving forces to conduct a feminist research with a feminist conception is to address the constraints that have been common in the above masculine research trends (Lather, 1988).

Hall (1993) stated that in traditional research, women have been largely excluded from producing knowledge. The traditional research approaches are also criticized by the feminists for its emphasis on universalization of human experience from the dominant androcentric point of view (reinhartz, 1992). Feminist researchers again expose the inadequacy of androcentric research because of its inaccurate and incomplete representation of human experience when women are muted (Marguire, 2001).

Bearing the above points in mind, feminist research conception aims to address the androcentric biases inherent in traditional research, through its own research framework. Reid (2004) argues feminist research as a conceptual framework that enables the researcher to understand women's multiple perspectives. Its aim is to build knowledge that would be able to change the conditions of women's lives, both individually and collectively (restock and Pennel, 1996). Feminist research is also identified by Reid (2004) as a tool for exploring and pursuing opportunities for social justice and societal well-being. Its goal is to address the voice of women and to deconstruct the dominant masculine and androcentric approaches in exploring the reality on the ground.

Another important point in feminist research, according to Lather (1988), is giving important attention and value for the research process that one goes through the research as equal because of the research. She stresses the role of the process that one uses in conducting the research as very crucial not only to recognize women's participation and to

arrive on reliable result, but also to raise consciousness of the women who participate in the research (Lather, 1988).

Therefore, as it has already been stressed and reinforced by Marguire (2001), feminist research framework is a tool that involves a particular way of looking at the world and thinking about research and research participants. Finally, in a way of pulling down the above facts, Reid (2004:39) described feminist research:

“...as a research approach to understand factors that perpetuate women’s low social , economic and political status , to appreciate the diverse and often disparate ways that poor women negotiate their lives and to respond to social injustices through advocating collective action and social changes.”

The study used data triangulation methods to increase the magnitude and validity of the information. Thus, document analysis, participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used in the data triangulation.

4.2. Research Design

4.2.1. Sampling population and techniques

The participants for the in-depth interviews and FGDs were selected among the Bahá’í community in Addis Ababa. Moreover, sampling in qualitative research is conceptually different from that of the quantitative research that uses sampling for representativeness and generalizability on the basis of probabilistic procedures. Thus, the researcher used purposive sampling, and participants were selected when they were believed to be a source of pertinent data for this study. Due to this fact, sampling in this study was a process of activity seeking those highly informed persons for the aforementioned objectives of the study.

The number of interviews and FGDs were, therefore, determined by the extent to which additional data was required. With this understanding, both women and men were selected for the in-depth interviews and FGDs with regard to their experience in the involvement of the administration of the religion in the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa.

4.3. Instruments and Methods of Data Collection

4.3.1. Document review

Secondary data which are relevant to the study, were gathered from valuable literature sources dealing with the Bahá'í scriptures and institutions in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia. The researcher has done document review on the Bahá'í literature related with gender and decision making. Thus, Local Spiritual Assembly minutes, Bahá'í scriptures, journals, books and newspaper articles were analysed.

4.3.2. Participant observation

The researcher used observation to realize the interaction and level of power relation between women and men, on the activities and decision-making process in the community by participating in the settings in different events; deepening classes (lectures given on Sundays in the Bahá'í gathering place), spiritual assembly meetings and holiday celebrations.

Thus, the researcher observed and recorded what people do and say during these events attended by adults while participating herself. The researcher has also observed the research participants' reactions and informal discourses within the community. With this regard, the researcher's insider status was an ample opportunity to be an active observer of the issues being studied.

4.3.3. In-depth Interview

In an in-depth interview 8 participants, four women and four men who are members of Local Spiritual Assemblies were involved. The data collection made use of interview guide

instruments. The instruments were transcribed in Amharic language and then translated into English. The guide was also tested for possible wordings and questions. The interview questions were semi structured interview types since it has become the 'principal' means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives (Reinhartz: 1991).

Besides, repeated interview was used to build fuller picture on the issue. The researcher used audio recordings, while obtaining the interviewee's permission beforehand.

The researcher always began interviews by explaining that only she would hear the tape of the interview, that the tape will be destroyed after it is transcribed it and that she would not use interviewee's names or any identifying details in the study (Reinhartz:1992)

4.3. 4. Focus Group Discussion

In order to find out more and to engage the Local Spiritual Assembly members in a fruitful way and as part of the reciprocity process two focus group discussion one with men and another with the women was conducted. Each focus group was composed of four participants comprising young and old age groups. This was done because of the researcher's observation that they will be freer to discuss their views in a single sex group. The moderator for each group was the same sex person other than the researcher.

During focus group discussion, experienced note taker and recorder were involved. This in turn facilitated the researcher to verify her interpretation based on the observations made. At this point, semi structured type of questions were used.

4.4. Method of Data Analysis

The researcher used the tape recorded interviews, focus groups, hand written field notes, and participant observation. Moreover, non-verbal cues were also included. After transcription, the data was organized in a number and a secure file was kept to link pseudonyms and code numbers to the original informants. Similarly, names and other identifiable material were removed from the transcripts.

Moreover, the researcher used data triangulation (the use of variety of data sources in a study). In doing so, an attempt was made to see the point of convergence and divergence in the perceptions and interpretation of women and men participants on the research question.

Information was collected from consenting participants and familiarization with the collected data was done through listening to tapes, making memos and summaries were done before formal analysis. Then coding was done which was followed by identifying themes in defined categories.

In order to keep the reliability and validity issues, the researcher applied data triangulation and respondent validation by giving feed back the findings to the participants. The study used data triangulation methods to increase the validity of the information. Thus, the data triangulation helps to gain a fuller perspective on the situation that is investigated.

The collected information were recorded using a variety of formats that is text based (field notes, transcribed interviews, observation notes and personal diaries). Text based data was supplemented by audiotape.

For some of the objectives the investigator employed content analysis and descriptive thematic analysis. By content analysis, it is to categorise the qualitative data quantitatively and subjected to statistical analysis. And with Thematic analysis, the researcher gave particular code to all units of data to be extracted and examined in more detail.

4.5. Standards of Quality and Verifications

In analysing and generating the data, the researcher tried to understand it from different points of view. However, for the qualitative data, it is impossible to verify or validate qualitative data according to a procedure or format since the researcher is the instrument. In other words the researcher's is aware of and interpretation as well as his/her judgement is one of the instruments in undertaking qualitative data.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

Most ethical concerns in qualitative research revolve around issues of consent, confidentiality, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the data. Thus, attention was given to the ethical issues especially to the ones discussed consequently as summarized.

Informed consent – the investigator made access to the study population through key actors and institutions. The investigator also built trust and got permission to study the population according to the design. In due time the research participants were told about the purpose and scope of the study, the type of questions which were likely to be raised, the use to which the result would be put, the anonymity of the participants and the extent to which their utterance would be used in reports. Participants were also given adequate time both to consider their participation and ask questions on the researcher. Participants were also informed and given the opportunity to withdraw from participation as well as to refuse answering any question, which they didn't think that they would be asked during the consent.

Misrepresentation and misinterpretation – this risk was minimized through close supervision of the investigator by the respective advisor as well as through validation with some key persons/institutions who were actively involved in the process. In addition the participants were asked to comment on the summarized theme at the end of the session.

Confidentiality – the interviewer/observer employed the absolute confidential way of identifying a particular participants' information, without revealing it to a third party.

CHAPTER V- ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the data generated from the participant observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and document review. The study focuses on examining the representation and participation of women in the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa. Thus, the Local Spiritual Assembly members and in some instances other community members were taken for the study. This included 16 individuals involved of which 4 women, 4 men were participated in in-depth interviews, and 4 women and 4 men were involved in 2 focus group discussions. Besides there was also participant observation in the community's different activities and document review on the members of the 10 Local Spiritual Assemblies from 2004 to 2007.

The data was organized into three major themes, as focusing on the objectives of the study. The first theme is about the numerical representation of women and men in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The second theme, conversely, focuses on the understanding of gender equality and gender roles in the community. The third theme mainly focuses on the participation issues in the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

5.1.1. Demographic Characteristics of the In-depth Interview Participants

In the in-depth interview 8 research participants, were interviewed. These interviewees were composed of: four women and four men who have been Bahá'ís for long years and at the time of the study were Local Spiritual Assembly members in different localities in Addis Ababa.

Concerning the age of the interviewees, they were in the age bracket of 32-60 years old. Regarding their sex, four of them were women and the other four were men. Regarding their marital status, three of the women were married and one woman divorced while three of the men were married and one single. Concerning their previous religion before converting to the Bahá'í religion; the three women from orthodox Christians and one woman from protestant. While one man is a born Bahá'í (his parents were Bahá'ís), another from Islam and the rest two from the orthodox Christian. Concerning the educational background of the interviewees: the four women were from diploma to PHD and from the men, one has finished high school education and the other three were from diploma – degree levels. More elaborate information could be found in the in table two of the appendix part.

5.1.2. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants of the Focus Group Discussions

In the two focus group discussions 8 Bahá'ís, 4 women and 4 men who were members of the community were participated. The FGDs were conducted in a single sex groups which have mixed age group (youth and old people).

Concerning the age of the FGD participants, the men were range from 21-80 years of age while the women range from 24-65 years of age. Regarding their marital status, 2 of the women were married, while one is a widow and another single. From the men, two of them were married while one was single and the other a divorcee. Concerning their previous religion before converting to the Bahá'í religion was the two women from orthodox Christians and one woman from catholic, and another from protestant. While one man is a born Bahá'í (his parents were Bahá'ís), the other two from orthodox and one from catholic. Concerning the educational background of the interviewees; the four women were from high school graduates to degree and the men from diploma to graduate degree. More elaborate information on the demographic characteristics of the focus group participants could be found in table three of the appendix part.

5.2. The Representation of Women and Men in the Bahá'í community and in the Local Spiritual Assemblies

The results of the document review with regard to statistics on the Bahá'í population and the representation of women and men in the Local Spiritual Assemblies has been mostly presented by using tables, charts, and percentages. From the secondary data taken from the 10 Local Spiritual Assemblies existed at the time of doing this research in Addis Ababa Bahá'í community, the number of women was less than the men in the LSAs. The data was taken from 2004 to 2007 for accuracy since before 2004 the Local spiritual Assemblies were divided according to the zone division in the Addis Ababa city Administration that made it difficult to compare the progress with the current division with 'kifle ketemas'. At the time of taking the data , there were 56 Local Spiritual Assemblies all over Ethiopia of which ten of them were in Addis Ababa (statistics from the secretariat of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia; 2007).

5.2.1. The Distribution of Bahá'í Population in Ethiopia

The recent statistics on the Bahá'í population in Ethiopia was of the year 2005 for the reason that the last data entry was made in 2005 and other recent data was not available.

Table 1: the Distribution of the Bahá'í population in Ethiopia*

Ethiopia	Adult men (21&above)	Adult women (21&above)	Total adults	under 21 years of Age	Total Bahá'í population**
Addis Ababa	712	139	851	127	978
Afar	12	2	14	3	17
Amhara	13	6	19	-	19
Dire Dawa	7	3	10	4	14
Gambella	1246	415	1661	248	1909

Harar	2	2	4	-	4
Oromiya	1691	124	1815	441	2256
SNNPR	2798	694	3492	605	4097
Somali	1	-	1	-	1
Tigray	38	10	48	8	56
Total	6520	1545	8065	1438	9,503

*Unpublished statistics from the secretariat of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia, 2005

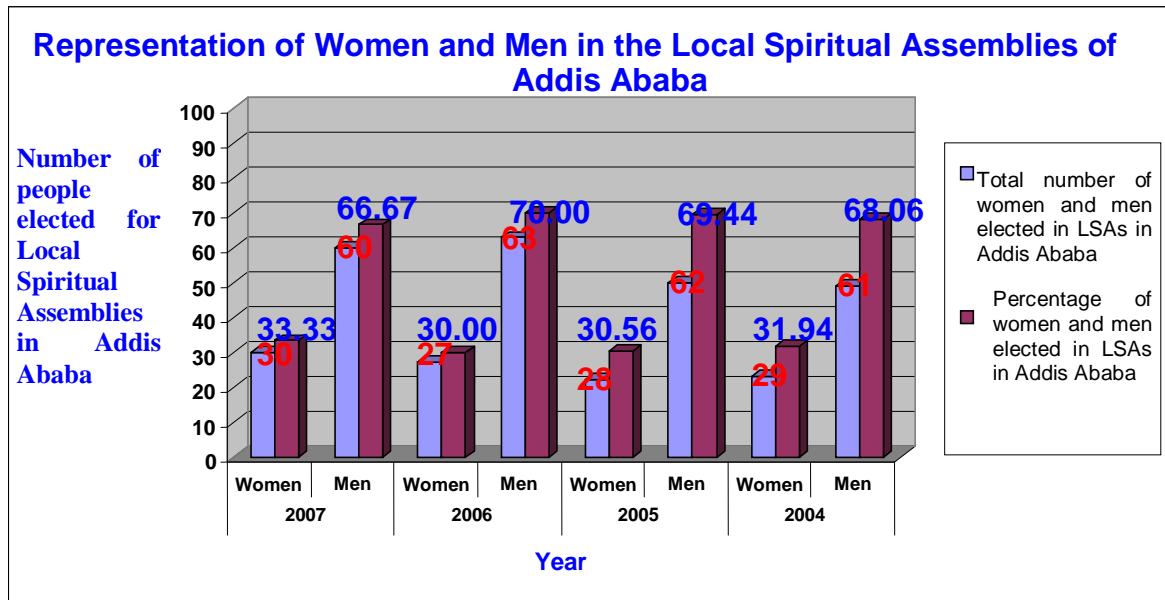
** The total number also included those who were under 21 years of age

Whilst the majority of the Bahá'í population was situated in Somali, Gambella and SNNPR regions, a significant number of Bahá'í population was observed in Addis Ababa. In the proportion of women Bahá'ís to men Bahá'í population in Ethiopia, which were 21, and above years of age (the eligible age to elect and be elected in the Local Spiritual Assemblies), the most significant gap in proportion was observed. The results indicated that the number of adult women Bahá'ís 1545 (19.15%) while the Adult men were 6520 (80.5%) of the Bahá'í population eligible for election. Of the total Bahá'í population in Addis Ababa 21 and more years of age, the women comprised of 139 (16.3%) while the men comprised 712 (83.7 %) which showed a big gap.

5.2.2. The Representation of Women and Men in the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly in Addis Ababa

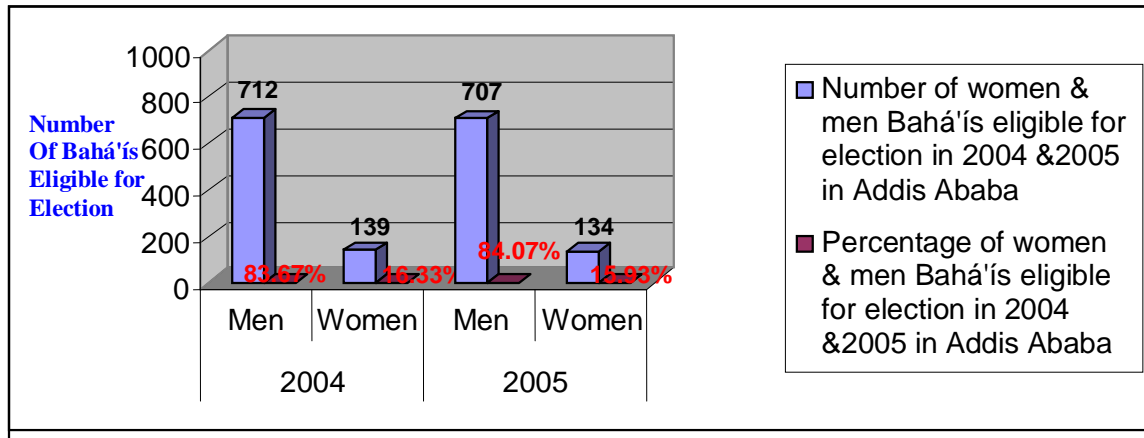
In this section, the main focus would be on the numerical representation of women and men Bahá'ís who were elected to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the 10 localities in Addis Ababa from 2004 to 2007 in comparison with the total population eligible to be elected (21 and above years of age) in Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa.

Chart one: Representation of women and men in the Local Spiritual Assemblies in Addis Ababa



The number of the local spiritual assemblies in Addis Ababa at the time of the study was ten; each having nine members. Hence, the total number of local Assembly members for one year was 90 members as it can be depicted from the above chart. As it was shown in the chart, the total number of elected women in the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies of Addis Ababa in 2004 was 29 (31.94%) while the men were 61 (68.06%). In 2005, the number of elected women was 28 comprising 30.56% of the total members of the Assemblies while the men were 62 (69.44%). In 2006, the number of elected women was 27 comprising 30% of the assembly members while the men were 63 (70%). In addition, in the last recent election in 2007 too, steady progress was shown and the number of elected women were 30 consisting 33.33% while the number of men was 60 (66.67) from the elected members of the Assemblies.

Chart two: the number of women and men Bahá'ís (21 and above years of age) in Addis Ababa in the year 2005



The most recent statistics done on the Bahá'í population in Addis Ababa was in 2005 and it was the reason why comparison in this study used the data on 2005. The most recent statistics taken on the Bahá'í population of Addis Ababa found was that of 2005 was 851 in which the number of women (21 and above years of age) were 139 (16.33%) and the men 712 (83.67%). The statistics for the 2005 was the latest that was being used by the Bahá'í community to this day. While we look at the number of women and men Bahá'ís who were eligible for the election process in 2004 were 814 out of which 707 (84.06) were men and 134 (15.93%) were women.

Thus we can see from the above statistics that the difference in the membership of women to the religion was not that big, thus, the percentage of Bahá'í women who were eligible for election in the Addis Ababa community were ranged from 15-17%.

The statistics demonstrated a big gap between the number of women Bahá'ís and men Bahá'ís eligible for election. This was true nationally, where the percentage of women Bahá'ís 19.15% while the percentage of men Bahá'ís was 80.85% as well as in the Addis Ababa community women comprised 16.3% whereas the men comprised 83.7% of the total Bahá'í population eligible for election. In addition to the less number of women in the community, 75% of the women participated in in-depth interview and FGDs said that they became Bahá'ís after their husbands were converted to the religion. While the men asserted that most of them were the first Bahá'ís in their family.

Though the number of women in the community showed a huge gap, their representation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies based on their number showed that the women were well represented. Accordingly, in the last four elections, the representation of women was from 20% to 35% while their number in the community ranged from 16 to 18%. From this figure, it can be concluded women were well represented in the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Addis Ababa compared with the total number of women eligible for election. This is because while we took for instance in 2005, the percentage of women Bahá'ís was 19.5 and their representation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies was 24.4% while the percentage of men Bahá'ís was 80.5% while their representation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies was 75.6%. Similarly, in 2004 the percentage of women eligible for election were 16.33% while their percentage in representation in the local spiritual Assemblies was 31.94%

Conversely, the issue of under or over representation, by itself may not show fair participation in the decision-making. Even if equal or over numbering may show something quantitatively, the quality or what is within can be showed qualitatively. Accordingly, it is of ample importance to analyze the community's understanding of issues related with the gender equality concept and the decision making process.

5.3. Analyses of Data Related to the Perspective of Gender Equality

On issues related to the equality of the sexes, all of the research participants said they believe in equality since it is one of the core principles of the Faith. Then again, the commitment to gender equality does not necessarily show what shape that equality should take. This is true for the fact that the meaning and implications of sexual equality are as much contestable among gender scholars (Philips: 1994, 205).

Nonetheless, there seemed to be differences on how the research participants view the equality concept and how it should be practiced in every day life. Both the women and men participants of the study commonly used the phrases 'complementing one another', 'equal rights' and 'it doesn't mean sameness' in order to express what they think of the equality

principle in the Bahá'í faith. Most of the men participants focused on the 'not sameness' issues and the women on 'equal rights'.

For instance, a 42 year old woman described the gender equality by using the words equal opportunity for both men and women in every aspect.

To address equality both women and men should understand that they are equal in the sight of God. If they understood this, there is no mathematical definition on how to go about it. However, I believe that both should get equal opportunity in every aspect...

On the other hand, another woman interviewee held the view that; for her the very point of equality issue in the Bahá'í Faith was giving opportunity for women to be educated and then the equality will come. This was because the Bahá'í scriptures depicted the reason why women lag behind is lack of education.

The very point of equality issue in the faith is giving opportunity for women to be educated and then the equality will come. It says the only reason that women lag behind is because of lack of education. If a woman/girl child has got education, there is no even an argument about equality. And the only reason that men look superior is firstly the world did believe in force/masculinity. Now the world is shifting to mind power. And the power of the mind can be won through education. So it is about giving the opportunity to be educated to women.

Another woman also explained that women and men are equal in the sense that they have equal rights and it doesn't mean that they should be the same. Thus, for this woman gender equality in the religion was best understood to be equal rights for women and men without being the same.

Bahá'u'llah has said that women and men are equal. He said men and women are like two wings of the bird, so if the women wing is weak then even the men can not reach where they want and all of the humanity. That is why we are not improving that much at this time while the women are in the inferior position. Not only the women but also the men in this community should get the awareness about this equality principle. However, I believe that it's ours (women's) responsibility to empower ourselves, to engage ourselves in the activities of the community.

Another man interviewee understood the gender equality as to mean spiritual equality. Along with went on disapproving that many people's thoughts about physical and intellectual equality deceived us like the biological differences of muscles between women and men.

Many people think about physical and intellectual equality. But spiritual equality is a good way to express it. Because if we think about physical equality; there are so many things which deceive us because women and men have differences. Accordingly, what is important is the important is the spiritual equality...

On a question posed for the same man on what he meant by spiritual equality and how this equality is in real life situations, he responded; "**equality is a virtue of the soul**" and thus, it depends on that individual to make it grow with prayers and readings from the scriptures.

Equality is the virtue of the soul, so it is manifested if the individual did cultivate that virtue. It is gained but by reading the scriptures in the morning and night not necessarily by being educated.

One of the dilemmas in this view would be that is gripped in an extreme abstract level like the 'spiritual equality' without any suggestion on how it is applied in the every day life of the community. Every opportunity to work for the gender equality would be in the hands of the 'conceptual plane' in which no body will be responsible or accountable to make it

practical. It seemed that the community is perceived as a worshipping community and not embraced social change hand in hand.

Similarly, another man shared his insights regarding the meaning of gender equality in the Faith as 'spiritual equality'.

"For us, equality of women and men is a matter of Faith and not a matter of profession or intellectualism". Consequently, by interpretation, when a person becomes more spiritual, the inequality issue will be solved thus other actions other than spirituality are not taking us anywhere.

Generally, the women interviewees related the equality issue with their every day life and on what should be done at the practical level. Accordingly, they shared their insights on what should happen on the ground for instance the need for education, equal opportunity, equal rights and complementing one another.

Thus, from the in-depth interviewee participants, the women participants were overwhelmed on their understanding of the gender equality in the scriptures in terms of education and participation in decision making, which was more of on actions taken on a visible way. Then again, there was a visible difference from men participants who thought the gender equality issue in terms of the spiritual plane rather than on the visible practical issues at hand.

5.4. Analysis of Data Related to Decision-making and sexual Division of Labour in the family

The decision-making in the family in patriarchal society is the sole power of the husband and the wife owe obedience. In addition, this structure is confirmed with the notion that the husband is the 'head of the family'. With this regard, the interview participants did gave their understanding on who is in charge of the family decision-making in their religion's view and the practical situations in their everyday life.

With regard to their understanding of the decision-making in the family from the Bahá'í religion's perspective the two (women and men) focus group discussion participants agreed on the idea that the husband and the wife are the joint decision-makers and there is no concept of a husband as a head of the family in the Bahá'í Faith. Even though, the in-depth interview participants have the same idea that the husband and the wife are the joint decision-makers, most of the women interviewees said that mostly men are the decision-makers in their family affairs. On the other hand, the men interviewees were differed in their opinions that the two of them said that they decide family matters jointly with their wives while another married man said that in most cases he is the decision maker.

Accordingly, one married woman shared her insight that it is not the case in practice in their families. On this regard, one married woman stated the reality in her home as follows:

I understand that family decision making should be done in consultation of the husband and the wife. However, this is difficult in practice because in our society in general the husbands are the main decision makers. For instance, the family is totally represented and known by my husband's name. Even in the Bahá'í community, when our family is mentioned, it is said like 'Mr somebody's family' and the wife's name is not mentioned. I understand this is because of what we have in our society that husbands are the sole decision-makers. We have a long way to go on this regard...

With regard to issues of gender roles, the research participants gave their understanding on how it should be. Moreover, their views ranged from somewhat 'keeping the traditional roles' to the 'eradication of the gender roles' at all. The women interviewees stressed on the word 'no role difference at all' while the men agreed on that there should not be strict role division by sex except in cases where there division necessitates because of the biological difference between women and men for the specific role of women in cases of child rearing and related activities.

In discussions and in-depth interviews with women participants, their arguments clearly justified the issue of the manifestation of patriarchy in their family life. The male participants in general, disclosed their argument on the same issue as a matter of difference on responsibility and the biological role of women related with procreation of children.

Concerning whether there is a role difference for women and men in the Bahá'í Faith, a woman from in-depth interview asserted:

I don' think that there is division of roles by sex in the Bahá'í faith. Everyone should do what he/she is capable of. Thus, both the husband and the wife should support each other.

Another woman participant said that rearrangement or redefinition of the traditional gender roles is inevitable for making the other teachings of the Faith with regard to the education and career of women:

Equality in the Bahá'í faith is not all about men going to the kitchen and doing house hold chores. It is not just that; it is beyond that . The role question will certainly come because equality means giving the opportunity of education to women; to broaden their knowledge and experience. All this things need time. Time needs role shift or rearrangement of the traditional roles. So for me to get an education and to develop my career there must be someone who will cook for me in the kitchen for my family and my children should be attended by someone. So it is not for the sake of men doing household chores but it is sure that the issue of who does the dishes, to who take care of the children will be a means to achieve what women were deprived of. Since all the house hold chores have a question of time and people all have 24 hours a day.

The same woman also stated about the role that women should have in the nurturing of their children:

Even though both the husband and the wife should share the household chores, the woman is more near to her children during infancy, so it is about valuing her contribution to the nurturing of the child at that time. And in the Faith, nurturing children is given highest value and it is one of the purpose of our creation. Therefore, in relation to mothering, it should be given more value.

In the above woman's account, the issue of sharing the household chores between the man and the woman came out of the necessity because in the Bahá'í faith women are expected to be educated and to engage in professional fields. However, when it comes to mothering, instead of going for the sharing of the nurturing, she opted for giving great value for the women's primary role in the nurturing of children.

Thus, the women participants were much more concerned with the idea that there is no division of labour by sex in the Bahá'í teachings and that both the man and the woman should share any responsibility with the household chores. Whereas, the men participants in most cases raised the issue of women's role as different from men for reasons related to the nurturing of children. As one man, interviewee described it:

Women's role has its own natural law. Thus, different roles are expected since there are biological differences between men and women.

On the other hand, another man participant added on saying:

Though there should not be such thing as women's or men's work, it is obvious that there are chores which are more prone to one sex than the other. However, there should not be strict role difference between them.

In most cases, the arguments by the research participants on the biological differences of the two sexes in relation to division of labour revolved around the idea that women do give birth, breast feed, and that entails the related activities of child rearing which also requires doing most of the household chores like cleaning, nurturing, cooking and the like. Hence, patriarchal ideology, according to Millet (1970), exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or masculine, roles and women always have the subordinate or feminine ones.

In contrast, the women participants were saying that there is no sexual division of labour in the scriptures, and apart from the giving birth and breast feeding; the nurturing of children and any household chores are the joint responsibility of the woman and the man in the family. But most of them agreed that there are some biological differences which in turn require the taking care of the mother for small children. However, most of them did not agree that a woman's place is at home. Alongside, the closeness and primary role of women in relation to the nurturing of their children at early years is provided in the Bahá'í scriptures. One of the writings was read;

"The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í Writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother while the corollary to this is that the financial responsibility for supporting the family rests with the husband.(Abdul-baha:1921) "

With this regard to this stipulation, a woman interviewee argued:

"In the scriptures, it says it is preferable if the mothers have more roles in the nurturing of children, however, it doesn't say it is obligatory. Thus, I don't think this stipulation by itself shows that there is a division of labour by sex."

Despite the arguments about the sexual division of labour in the scriptures, all the women and most of the men research participants agreed, the traditional roles of women and men is

the reality in their families. The reason that was given for this practice by a man who believed that there was no strict division of labour by sex is as follows:

Though I believe that both women and men should share the household chores, I don't do household chores because I was not used to it previously. Thus, my wife does the household chores. However, change is very gradual so may be in the future generations it may happen...

Most of the men said they don't share the household chores with their wives. In addition, according to their view motherhood is a greatly valued occupation in the religion; however, it seems that because of the motherhood role of the women, the men avoided other household chores by justifying the chores are related with taking care of children. Furthermore to the question why they did not participate in the household chores, most of them answered that, equality is not about whom the household chores do; and understanding of equality of the sexes to be about kitchen work is undermining the concept.

Whereas, a woman interviewee shared her frustration on the above account saying that:

Everybody in this community is conscious but the problem is practicing it. Otherwise, everybody talks. Most men are not willing to share the household burden. Moreover, always when this issue is raised, the men defend their position by saying that 'change is gradual'. However, change would not come out of the blue. It needs effort and commitment...

The above finding has something to tell for itself that the women were mainly concerned with the notion that there should not be a gendered role division while everybody does what s/he can with few exceptions who said that nurturing children and related activities are naturally given to women than men. However, when it comes to practical situations, most of the women said that they are doing the nurturing of children and taking care of the household chores together with their home assistants (domestic workers). Hence, according to Tong (1998) Patriarchal society uses rigid gender roles to keep women passive.

The Bahá'í writings envision a society in which women are participating “fully and equally in the affairs of the world,” as the “peers of men.” At the same time it is evident in the Bahá'í writings that equality does not imply sameness, that “equality of status does not mean identity of function.” (Abdul-Baha: 1978). Most notably, great honour is conferred on the role of motherhood. Moreover, when a woman is fully occupied with raising children, the husband has corresponding responsibilities for financial support of the family. However, the father also shares the responsibility for educating his children. However, it also stipulates that roles and allocations of responsibilities are not fixed in the Bahá'í writings; all such decisions in the family are to be made through family consultation. And neither the husband nor wife is permitted to “unjustly dominate” the other (Effendi: 1943).

In most instances, when a discussion about roles was raised, the issue of mothering was given much more focus than how to share the other household chores. They used mothering, “**most valued occupation**”, as a pretext to impose all burdens household or societal on women. Moreover, when a kitchen issue was raised, they avoided discussions saying that “**equality is a big concept, don't make it frivolous by demeaning it as only as kitchen work**”. In this saying, there are two fundamental understandings, one is that in their understanding, the household/kitchen chores are devalued and secondly this saying goes against the truth that everybody's life is dependent on how that person passes each day and that contains the everyday life and at the end all their life on this earth.

The exaltation of motherhood gives rise to two problems in relation to equality, one highly subjective and the other a matter of implementation. The subjective problem is that reverence and protection of motherhood has often been used as justification for keeping women socially and economically disadvantaged. Moreover, history and experience showed that any distinction in treatment between men and women was used to justify female inferiority.

The second problem was on how to implement this idea of motherhood with equally participating in the public arena and in decision-making. This difficulty seemingly tailor made to enforce a permanent division of labour between those women who care for children and tend to homes and those who produce income in the formal economy and have

a voice in public affairs. In addition, to do all these works at the same time will be at great personal cost to the women if not impossible.

Thus, the allocation and role share in the family should also look at the ways of giving the time and resources for women to be educated and develop their career. This is also true that in the Bahá'í writings, a great emphasis is given to the education of women and their involvement on the fields which were used to be of "men's domain."

Mostly it is said in conservative religious communities, a woman's place is the home. However, as more women enter into the public sphere, they are less inclined to accept male authority. Yet most men are raised in families where women did take care of home and children and in which the father was seen as a head (Manning: 1999:124).

The focus group discussion results showed that the women who work outside the home, had difficulties in balancing their role at home and work in addition to their responsibilities in the Bahá'í administration. This doubling of duties creates tremendous stress for these women. This is because most of the women participants are still fulfilling their traditional roles at home in addition to their professional work and their role in the Assemblies. As Debeauvoir (1985) cited in Jain (2005) one of the basic problems of a women is the reconciliation of their reproductive role and their part in productive labour.

However, this view can be seen that if equality is undermined when it is related with kitchen issue showed that how the kitchen work (supposedly women's work) is undervalued which in turn take the reaction that who does it is also undermined. Bonner et al (1995:3) claimed that 'Women's work is 'valued' or judged and criticized in a variety of ways, but nearly always within the context of patriarchal culture and its norms. Therefore, women's role has been undervalued through the years. Women are subordinated not because their traditional roles are unimportant. The widely prevalent attitude is that women are consumers than producers. Yet, women's labour in production and reproduction is fundamental to the maintenance of economic systems (Leacock et al, 1986:6).

5.5. Analyses of Data Related to Participation in the Local Spiritual Assemblies

Most of the men and women research participants had views that women's participation in the decision making has shown progress through the years despite women are underrepresented. Only one woman participant said the reason for fewer women in the assemblies is because of less number of women in the community. However, others said the reason was the cultural influences in the society; most women in the community did not come into the front to be visible in the community that in turn was responsible for this less number in the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

However, the research participants have also shared their experience that most of the elected women do not express ideas in during meetings in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. A woman participant who is also a member of one of the Local Spiritual Assemblies said;

In these meetings, women do not give ideas as the men: this is because we are not used to public speaking. Moreover, we are afraid that our ideas might seem silly. It is mostly the men who speak as any idea came to their mind.

However, another man participant who was also a member of the Assembly argued that silence could not be a sign of inequality in participation;

I don't think speaking is a sign of equality and silence is of inequality. It is the women who do the most important things like preparing and serving the refreshments .They even help committees in organizing its ideas. We always think about expressing ideas in public. Nevertheless, showing love by itself is a service. Many women do fruitful works and they have more energy than the men do.

In addition, with regard to the assignments given to women and men members, the research participants indicated that the men were involved on assignments, which require reading and presentation of ideas while women were assigned to their traditional role of serving

refreshments and organizing events. Besides, in the Sunday deepening class that was a permanent program for the whole Addis Ababa community, the men made presentations to the community while the women sat and listen.

Hence, even is there was no under representation of women in the Local Spiritual Assemblies given the less number of women in the community; there was still invisibility issue for women. Many of the women and men research participants claimed that mostly men were nominated for assignments like organising or public speaking while women were assigned for preparing and serving refreshments and the beautification of places for events. Besides, from the observations made in the deepening and firesides (teaching activities), it was mostly men that do the public speaking. Furthermore, the men had the upper hand in contributing ideas during community gatherings.

Contrary to the above findings, another man interviewee said;

Expressing ideas in pubic may not be a sign of equality. For instance showing love by itself is a service. Even if there are few women, whom express ideas in meetings, most of the women prefer to do what is decided in the meetings.

Nevertheless, most of the women interviewees were not in agreement with the above point of view. One woman interviewee on the reason why women were taken back in expressing their views in meetings said,

Most women do not speak in the meetings because of lack of confidence on their background or they may fear the other people in the meeting are more educated than them that they fear giving their ideas. and even if the Bahá'í process of consultation is respecting each other's idea, sometimes some people may undermine ideas which in turn make us that our ideas may also be undermined.

Moreover, another woman participant in a focus group discussion who is a member of Assembly in one of the localities said

" ...you can even see how most women and men talk in meetings. Sometimes, you have to look straight into the eyes of others while you speak. However, this is difficult for women because of how we brought up."

Several factors are probably at work that would result in the outcome of the less quality of participation of women in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. One that was often cited is the lack of self confidence and lack of experience on public speaking and others said the fear of their ideas might seem trivial.

5.5.1. On the Need for Empowerment of Women in the Community

In relation to the issue whether a specific effort is needed for the enhancement of the participation of Bahá'í women in the Local Spiritual Assemblies, most of the women participants said that there is a need while the men participants argued that the women's increased participation would come gradually through time.

A woman participant described this issue as follows;

Few women are active in this community. In addition, most of them lack the experience and skill to participate fully in the leadership of their religion. Thus, special efforts should take place focusing on women and educating the men on gender equality. Change can not come without making an effort.

In contrast, another man participant argued that special efforts focusing on gender equality are not necessary.

There is no affirmative action in the Bahá'í faith to give priority to women. Action or special effort is needed when people do not believe in gender

equality but the Bahá'í community accepts equality so there is no need for special focus on women.

The principle of the equality of the sexes is necessitate that measures should be taken to foster the greater participation of women in Bahá'í administrative service, especially in areas where women are restricted by traditional practices. Measures should include mentoring and special training programs for women in skills like consultation, planning and the conduct of meetings, and educational initiatives directed at men to change attitudes and foster the appreciation of the value of women's contribution to the community.

Summary and implications

The Bahá'í religion offers a relatively stronger scriptural basis for women's rights or a richer history for women to draw on. Yet cultural barriers, rigidity of certain administrative structures, conceptions of authority, and literalistic interpretations of scripture have at times militated against the ability of women to obtain full equality within the Bahá'í community. Whereas all Bahá'ís in theory believe in the equality of men and women, there is no unanimity as to what that equality means. In many instances Bahá'í conceptions of equality have distanced them from more radical forms of change with regard to restructuring the gender power relations.

As it was noted in the analysis of findings, there are less women in the Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa than the men, however, compared to their number the women are overrepresented in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. thus, even if the gender differences in thesis community with regard to religious conversion is in need of a further study, this study did made an understanding of how women in the community experience their representation in the administrative organs of the faith and also on their understandings of the practicalities of the gender equality concept of their religion in their every day life. On the other hand, it also tried to capture the views and understandings of the men Assembly members with regard to the above issues.

As well, the findings confirmed women were more concerned with the practice of the gender equality principle with regard to roles and their everyday experience while the men were worried more about the spiritual meaning of the equality than its practice in the every day life.

However, in the researcher's view the perspective of equality in the scriptures does not refer solely to the spiritual plane, for Bahá'í scriptures explicitly state that there should be "no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation." They further assert, "Women will enter all the department of politics." Yet the understanding of this principle varies considerably among Bahá'ís. Many supported a higher evaluation of

women's traditional roles, particularly in family life, but foresaw little change in the roles themselves.

Moreover, few women research participants called for a fundamental transformation of the very structure of relations in community life, which would incorporate values from Bahá'í scriptures. Thus, in conclusion, the following implications are put on view with;

- Taking into account the big gap in the number of women and men Bahá'ís in the community, a further study on the religious differences in religious conversion in the community should be done.
- That a deeper consultation and discussion on the gender equality principle of the Bahá'í faith and its practicalities in the community's life should be given more emphasis.
- There should be empowerment mechanisms for Bahá'í women in issues of assertiveness to exercise full participation in the decision -making affairs of their religion

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Appendix 1

Table 2: composition and distribution of in-depth interview participants and their demographic characteristics

Age category	Male	Female	Total	%
31-40	2	2	4	50
41-50	2	1	3	37
51-60	-	1	1	25
Total	4	4	8	100
Marital status				
Married	3	3	6	75
Single	1	-	1	12.5
Divorced	-	1	1	12.5
Widowed	-	-	-	0
Total	4	4	8	100
Level of Education				
9-12 grades	1	-	1	12.5
Diploma	1	1	2	25
Degree	2	2	4	50
> degree	-	1	1	12.5
Total	4	4	8	100
Previous religion				
Orthodox	2	3	5	62.5
Islam	1	-	1	12.5
Protestant	-	1	1	12.5
Catholic	-	-	-	0
Had Bahá'í family	1	-	1	12.5
Total	4	4	8	100

Appendix 2

Table 3: composition and distribution of the FGD participants and their demographic characteristics

Age category	Male	Female	Total	%
21-30	1	1	2	
31-40	1	1	2	
41-50	1	1	2	
51-60	-	-	0	
>60	1	1	2	
Total	4	4	8	100
Marital status				
Married	2	2	4	
Single	1	1	2	
Divorced	1	-	1	
Widowed	-	1	1	
Total	4	4	8	100
Level of Education				
9-12 grades	-	1	1	
Diploma	1	2	3	
Degree	2	1	3	
> degree	1	-	1	
Total	4	4	8	100
Previous Religion				
Orthodox	2	2	4	
Islam	-	-	0	
Protestant	1	1	2	
Catholic	-	1	1	
Bahá'í Family	1	-	1	
Total	4	4	8	100

Appendix 3

This interview guide is presented to generate pertinent data concerning issue related with the representation and participation of women and men in the Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa. It is my belief that in generating data for research purpose due attention should be given to the ethical issues. Accordingly, the following ethical considerations are presented to be discussed with research participants ahead of getting into the actual interview.

- Your participation in this study is on voluntary basis
- You have the right to withdraw, to change your ideas and to ..it your recorded ideas
- While the information you give belongs to you, the interpretation totally belongs to me
- Your anonymity and confidentiality of your information holds the heart of this research ethics.

In-depth interview questions

3. Demographic information
4. Why did you become a Bahá'í?
5. Your involvement in the Bahá'í community
6. How is your interactions with other religions followers, your relatives and within your family
7. What is your role in the family? / What does an ordinary day looks like to you? /what do you do in an ordinary day?
8. what is your understanding of the equality of women and men in the Bahá'í faith?
9. How do you see the Bahá'í election process?
10. What kind of people do you think have the high chance to be elected for spiritual assemblies by the community?
11. If she/he is a member of the spiritual assembly or any of the committees-how does you make decisions in your assembly/committee?

12. What is your role during meetings? How often do you go to meetings? What are the hours of the meetings?
13. How often do you read books, articles- religious books, messages and others related to your religion or in other areas?

Thank you for your cooperation!