Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved son and best friend, Moa (Raji) Daniel.

I love you so much!
Acknowledgements

Frist of all, I thank God for giving me this chance and helped me to complete this thesis.

I sincerely appreciate the patience and devotion of my advisor Professor Kjetil to help me during the research work.

My gratitude also goes to Tone Tonnesson and the faculty administration for understanding my situation when I passed through different problems and extending my study period at different time.

I thank all my family and friends who encouraged and supported me to finish this paper.
Abstract

This thesis deals with the impact of culture, social setting and religion on the status of women in the church and society. The study has been made in the Western Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

It explores the status of women in cultural social background of the community in the study to show its impact on the status of women. The study discusses also the history of introduction both Orthodox and Evangelical Christianity and their respective impact to the status of women.

The last two chapters of the thesis deal with the efforts that the women in the Synod have made throughout the church history to fight back these cultural, social and religious burdens and the positive results of their effort. The contemporary situation of the church in relation to women’s status has also been discussed and some proposals has been made to the contemporary African theologians (both Feminist and Charismatic theologians) depending on the findings and lessons learned from the research.
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research work except for the study acknowledged literature, which is cited. I have not submitted this work in whole or in part for the award of a degree or diploma in any other institution.

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Regatu Olana Negeri
Contents

Chapter One ................................................................................................................................. 6
  1.1. Introduction: .......................................................................................................................... 6
    1.1.1. General Background ...................................................................................................... 6
  1.2. Motivation and Problems Addressed in this Study ............................................................. 7
  1.3. Research Objectives ........................................................................................................... 9
  1.4. Scope and Limitations of the Study .................................................................................... 9
  1.5. Significance ........................................................................................................................ 9
  1.6. Methodology .................................................................................................................... 10
  1.7. Organization of the Study .................................................................................................. 12

Chapter Two: Culture and Traditional Religion of the People before the Introduction of Christianity to the Area .................................................................................................................. 14
  2.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 14
  2.1. The Status of women in the Traditional Culture ................................................................. 14
    2.1.1. The Gada System ......................................................................................................... 14
  2.2. Birth and Growth of Male and Female Children in the Traditional Oromo ..................... 15
  2.3. Traditional Oromo Marriages ............................................................................................ 18
    2.3.1 Ciissii: ............................................................................................................................ 18
    2.3.2. Buti (kidnapping): ...................................................................................................... 19
    2.3.3. Walgara (Sister Exchange): ......................................................................................... 20
    2.3.4. Dhaala (Levirate) ....................................................................................................... 20
    2.3.5. Hirpha .......................................................................................................................... 21
  2.4. Life after Marriage ............................................................................................................. 21
  2.5. Some Important Institutions that Help Oromo Women to Defend their Rights ................. 22
    2.5.1 The Rakoo Ritual .......................................................................................................... 22
    2.5.2. The Sinqeet Institution ............................................................................................... 23
    2.5.3. Qanafa .......................................................................................................................... 26
    2.5.4. The Atete Institution .................................................................................................. 27
  2.6. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 28

Chapter Three: History of Introduction of Christianity to the Area and Approach of the Missionaries ................................................................................................................................. 29
  3.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 29
  3.2. The Orthodox Christianity ................................................................................................ 29
    3.2.1. The Name ‘Ethiopia’ ................................................................................................. 29
    3.2.2. The History of Introduction and Expansion of the Orthodox Christianity to the Oromo Land ........................................................................................................................................ 32
3.2.3. The Orthodox Mission in Wallegga ................................................................. 33
3.2.4. Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 34
3.2.5. It’s impact on the lives of women ..................................................................... 35
3.3. The Introduction and Expansion of the Evangelical Christianity to Ethiopia .... 36
  3.3.2. The Evangelical Missions to the Oromo People ............................................. 37
  3.3.3. The Role of Oromo Women in the Translation of the Bible to the Oromo Language ... 42
Chapter Four: The Impact: Historical Analysis .......................................................... 43
  4.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 43
  4.2.1. Culture ............................................................................................................. 43
  4.2.2. Orthodox Missionaries .................................................................................. 46
  4.2.3. Lutheran missionaries .................................................................................... 46
  4.3. The Emergence Some Historical Movements with Some Women ..................... 47
  4.4. The Charismatic Movement in the Area ............................................................. 49
  4.5. Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 52
Chapter Five: Contemporary Analysis ........................................................................ 54
  5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 54
  5.2. Presentation of the Bible studies ...................................................................... 54
      5.2.1. Bible study with women prayer group. (Date 8th July, 2010, 4:00P) .......... 54
      5.2.2. Analysis of the First Bible Study ................................................................. 56
      5.2.3. Bible study with women choir ((Date Monday, 12th July, 2010, 4:00Pm)) .... 57
      5.2.4. Analysis of the Second Bible Study ............................................................ 59
      5.2.5. Bible study with the local Ministers (Date: Tuesday, 20th of July 2010, 2.00 pm) 60
      5.2.6. Analysis of the Third Bible Study ............................................................... 61
      5.2.7. Summary of the Three Bible Studies .......................................................... 62
  5.3. Reflection on the Analysis of the Bible Studies .................................................. 63
  5.4. Some Common Approaches of the Bible Interpretations .................................... 64
  5.3. How does the Church Deal with the Biblical Passages that Speak Against Women Today? 65
  5.4. General Summary and Conclusion .................................................................... 66
Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 69
  Published Sources ...................................................................................................... 69
  Unpublished Dissertations and Theses ..................................................................... 71
Chapter One

1.1. Introduction:

1.1.1. General Background

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the largest Lutheran Church in Africa and one of the oldest evangelical churches in the country. It was established as a church in 1959 with some 20,000 members. The name Mekane Yesus has the meaning of “the dwelling place of Jesus”. The church has 5,279,822 baptized and 2,465,637 communicant members according to the statistics of the church in 2009. (The EECMY website) The church has significant influence in the socio-cultural life of the people wherever it has been established. Western Synod, which is my project area and my birth place is the oldest synod of the church and has service year of more than a century among the people.

The issue of women and their position in the church and society has not been very important for the synod for the last decades. Because the culture in which the synod operates and the tradition of the church itself agrees on the fact that women have lower status than men and they have always been treated as inferior beings in relation to men. The aim of this paper is to search for the historical background for this problem, and the efforts made by few women believers and also, the change that has come in the church tradition as the result of the hard effort of these women. Before I put my detail objectives of the project, I would like to give brief description of the historical and geographical background of the church and the people.

1.1.1.1. The Synod

Western synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus is established in the western Wollega region of Western Ethiopia. The synod is the oldest Synod and used to be the biggest before it has been divided in to five synods because of the fast growth of its members and extension of geographical coverage that became problematic for administration. According to the statistics of the church in 2009, after it has been divided into different synods, the synod had 142,404 communicants and 311,456 members. (The EECMY web site) In addition to having the oldest congregation of the church (the
EECMY), the synod is known to be the first to accept women ordination. The first woman theologian, the first woman pastor and the first woman of one synod is from this synod.

1.2. Motivation and Problems Addressed in this Study

I was born and brought up in a Christian family and society. My father was a pastor my mother was a house wife. I have five brothers and two sisters. Our father taught as the Bible from our childhood and our mother brought us up in a very good Christian discipline investing her full-time to follow us up very closely since our father was very busy with his ministry. We were given equal opportunity with our brothers to go to school. And we helped our mother equally after school. So I did not experience any discrimination in my family because of being a girl. But the society in which I was brought up is not uniform in its approach to women and girls. Many families do not accept that women have strong potential like men to achieve something if they were given equal opportunities. Because this, the number of girls in my school was much less than that of boys. And the girls were not very effective in their school because of the heavy burden of work (collecting fire wood, fetching water, cooking, cleaning, etc.) after school while the boys have relatively good time to study their lessons. I always asked myself why this is happening, where is the source? and how to end this cultural, social and religious discrimination against women?

After I completed my training at theological seminary of the church, one of my assignments was conducting different workshops and trainings on empowering women and raising awareness against the harmful traditional practices and cultures. As a student of theology, my other assignment was teaching and training on the position of women in the church according to the Bible. I conducted many workshops, Bible studies and trainings around this topic. The two major obstacles of women’s status in the church and society that I experienced during my ministry are the strong patriarchal culture of the society and the patriarchal nature of the Bible especially the Pauline texts that speak against women.

When I started my studies here in the Faculty of Theology, I began to think how I could make more research around this area. Then Dr. Sarojini Nadar, once on her presentation about "Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Women in Africa" on 21st October, 2007 at UIO, TF, mentioned culture, social setting and religion as the three “unholy trinity” that has been the main causes for the violation and sexual abuse of women. She pointed out on her presentation, how these different aspects of African life styles work together to influence
the position and ministry of women in the church and society. I was deeply inspired by her presentation and started to think how it is working in the situation of women back home in my Synod. This enriched my vision of making a research in my church around this issue. Finally, I decided to look at the impact of this “unholy trinity” on the status of women in the Synod and the struggle of the women in the synod to fight against this “unholy trinity” from the historical point of view.

One of the major weapons that these women used to fight against this cultural oppression is Biblical texts that empowered them. On the other hand, because of the stories and the texts that open and lead to oppression, some scholars like Mosala looks the Bible as a product of historical record of different aspects of social struggles. Others like Daly concluded that the book has nothing positive to say about women. Sarojini Nadar seems concerned about the faith community for whom the Bible ‘remains to be central and normative for the way the people live their lives.’ to agree with these feminist and womanist scholars. She rather suggests post-modernist-literary method of interpretation than abandoning the book as nothing to do with faith.

I was born, grown up, educated and worked among these poor and oppressed women believers. So it is not difficult for me to understand Nadar's concern. Even though the patriarchal nature of the Bible has a lot to contribute for the oppression of women, these women made use of the texts of the Bible that supported them to rise up and fight against the cultural and traditional violation. They believe in the Bible as the book of hope for life. So it is difficult according to my conviction to ignore the belief of these communities. It is rather much better to think like Nadar to find a way to interpret it so that it will address the problem of this faith community.

In addition to this, different statistics show that Pentecostalism and charismatic churches are the fastest growing Christian churches among the poor and the marginalized communities around the world today. My church, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus can be a good example as it is the largest and one of the fastest growing churches in Africa.

So by taking the struggle of the charismatic women believers and theologians in the Western Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus for their right as a model, I would try to prove the idea of Harold Wells where he proposes converging these two ideologies so that they can work together for the same purpose.
1.3. Research Objectives

The major objectives of this research are:

1. To search the position of women in the culture and traditional religion of the community before Christianity.
2. To explore the history of introduction and expansion of Christianity in the area (Orthodox and Lutheran) by focusing their respective missionary approach so that to understand their contribution for the status of women in the community.
3. To explore the effort made by some women believers to fight against cultural oppression using the Biblical texts that empowered them and the result it brought for the improvement of women’s position in the church leadership.
4. To show the importance of influential women Christians and theologians to break the burden of oppression that has been put on them by culture and the church tradition.
5. To examine how these women challenged the church to reread and reinterpret some parts of the Bible today that was used as a tool to keep women in the lower position.
6. To search for the status of women in the contemporary ministry of the church

1.4. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has twenty one synods that operate in the whole country. This research has been done in one Synod.

This study depended mostly on historical findings. It is demanding to get documented history especially regarding the role of women in the history of the church. There are only the names of few women that have been recorded. There are very limited published materials regarding the cultural background the study area.

1.5. Significance

The significance of this study is hoped to be various in many ways. Few of them have been stated as follows.
By exploring the history of introduction of Christianity to the area, the research helps to show that Ethiopia has different history concerning Christianity from the rest of African countries especially when it comes to the status of women.

It introduces the contribution of some Ethiopian charismatic women theologians and believers who struggle their best through their profession and experiences for the better life of the poor women in the church.

The findings of the study is hoped to contribute to find common ground for African feminist theologians to work with the charismatic theologians in Ethiopia since they are focusing to address the poor and the oppressed women in the African society.

1.6. Methodology

This study is categorized under systematic theology since it deals much with historical development of the status of women. Primary and secondary sources have been used in the research process. Qualitative interview is one of the primary sources that have been included in data collection. This approach of collecting data usually involves direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis or in a group setting. It derives from face-to-face interviews, focus groups or observation.

Hancok (2009, 9), states that interviews can be highly structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Structured interviews consist of the interviewer asking each respondent the same question in the same way. A tightly structured schedule of questions is used, very much like a questionnaire. The questions may even be faced in such away that a limited range of responses can be elicited.

In addition, W. Lee, Thomas (1999, 62) states the use of semi-structured interview that it involves a serious of open-ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover. The open-ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. The study followed this way of interview so that it allows the interviewees to openly share their ideas as much as needed.

I made face-to-face interviews with four elderly men from different locations in the synod who are well-known in their knowledge of the culture and traditional religion of the people. Five of top leaders of the synod (two women and three men) were also interviewed in this
face-to-face interview to know the contemporary vision of the church concerning the position of women. I have also got an opportunity to make face to face interview with a priest from the local Orthodox Church to know the involvement of women in the church ministry.

In addition, focus group interview has been conducted with a group of six young men and women theologians and ministers, one congregation elders of seven members, one choir group of women. In the qualitative interview of data collection, focus groups generate data that are (a) related to the themes imposed by a researcher and (b) enriched by the group’s interactive discussion. Sometimes it is preferable to collect information from groups of people rather than from a series of individuals. Focus groups can be useful to obtain certain types of information or when circumstances would make it difficult to collect information using other methods to data collection. (W. Lee, Thomas, 1999, p.51)

I conducted Bible studies with the six young men and women theologians, pastors and evangelists of the church and with the women prayer group and women choir of the congregation on John 20: 11-18. I selected this particular text because it is one of the commonly used texts in the area to speak against women and also used to support women ministry and position in the church. The objective of the bible studies is to know how the women in the grass root level understand the particular part of the bible interpret it into their daily life. This helps me to understand in which way it affected their religious and social life. For the local evangelist, it helps to know how the Bible is being preached in the area. The evangelists are very close to the people than the people who are in the higher position of the church. They spend most of their time with the people. In the other direction, these evangelists interpret the bible according to the training they have got in the bible schools. So it helps me also how the bible schools or the higher level theologians understand and interpret the Bible. So I conducted the Bible studies having these objectives in mind.

The leading questions for the Bible studies were

1. What is the story about?
2. Who are the main characters in the story?
3. What was relationship of the characters with Jesus and how it was explained?
4. What do we learn from the characters and this story for our lives and church’s ministry?
Participation and observation is the other method used in the data collection of the field work. According to Hancock, Beverley, 2009, this technique can be used when data collected through other means can be of limited value or is difficult to validate. For example, in interviews participants may be asked about how they behave in certain situations but there is no guarantee that they actually be what they say they do. Observing them in those situations is more reliable. Observation can also serve as a technique for verifying or nullifying information provided in face-to-face encounter.

The research area is my birth place. I was brought up, went to school and started my church ministry in the area. Some of my interviewees were my former classmates at high school or colleagues at work. This was a very good opportunity that created openness between us so that they could talk freely what they really feel concerning the topic. In addition it helped me to understand what was going on. I attended three Sunday services during this time and observed the content of the sermon, the ministers and involvement of women the church service.

I used different secondary sources like unpublished church documents such as papers presented in different workshops concerning women’s ministry, some research papers and literatures written in the area of the Oromo culture and ministry of women in the church. From published materials, I included books that are written on the Oromo culture and traditional religion, history of introduction Orthodox and Lutheran Christianity and I read also books written by different African theologians like Nadar, Oduyoye, Phiri and others.

1.7. Organization of the Study

The study is organized in to five chapters as follows.

The first chapter is the introductory part that includes the historical background, Interest and motivation, objectives, significance of the study and methodology. In the second chapter, the culture and traditional religion of the community has been discussed deeply. This is will help the reader to know the strength of the culture that it took centuries for women to fight against it. The few rooms in which women exercised their freedom is also pointed out in this chapter. In the third chapter, I widely discussed the introduction of Christianity. I deliberately took long time on this section because I wanted to draw attention of the reader especially to the destruction that the Orthodox Christianity has brought to the
society. I wanted also to show the difference between the histories of introduction of Lutheran Christianity from that of the rest African countries.

The fourth chapter is the contemporary analysis part. In this chapter, I discussed the impact of both Orthodox and Lutheran Christianity. I will discuss also the effort of women to struggle for their right. The raise of charismatic movement by some women group and its outcome has also been discussed in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter is the contemporary analysis of the church. I discussed the findings of the Bible studies and interviews that are related to the status of women today in the church and society. The last part of the chapter is conclusion of the whole study where I proposed the ways by which all African theologians may come together to fight the yoke of the three ‘ unholy trinity’ that has been put on African women.
Chapter Two: Culture and Traditional Religion of the People before the Introduction of Christianity to the Area

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will make a detail discussion of the culture and traditional religion of the people so that one can understand its strength for women to come out of it. I will also show the few rooms in the cultural practices were women can exercise their freedom.

According to Jeylan W. Hussein, from Alamaya University, Ethiopia, the Oromo people are the largest single ethno nation in Eastern Africa and constitutes 40% of the Ethiopian population. They speak Afaan Oromo (the language of Oromo), which belongs to the Eastern Kushitic family of Afro-Asiatic phylum. Afaan Oromo is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa, surpassed only by Arabic and Housa Fulani. Outside Ethiopia, the language is spoken by thousands of other Oromo tribes in Kenya. (African study Monographs, cultural representation of Women in the Oromo society, October, 2004)

The Oromo have vast and rich oral tradition. Before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, the people had their own traditional religion which is known as Waaqefataa.

As it is in all African cultures, the strong patriarchal culture of the Oromo people hindered the women to go forward equally with men. This can be observed in the practice of traditional religion, cultural practices, in the daily social life and proverbs of the people. In this chapter, I will try to discuss this issue and also I will discuss some influential positions of women to struggle against this patriarchal influence.

2.1. The Status of women in the Traditional Culture

2.1.1. The Gada System

The Gada system is a very huge and complex social institution in which the traditional Oromo people manage their socio political and religious practices. It is beyond the scope this paper to discuss the Gada system in its fullness. I will rather describe it shortly and show the place of women within the system.

The Gada system is the social organization of the traditional Oromo people. It is a well-developed age-based grouping up on which the religious, political, economic and social life of the people were formed.
The Gada system has five Gada classes which have its own respective function and responsibility. These classes are, Birmaji, Horata, Michile, Dulo, and Robale. According to different sources, the first three grades concern with movement from non-male status with apprenticeship in military and economic roles; at the fourth and fifth levels that attainment of adult status correlates with the right to contract marriage, participate in the selection of a council and officers, and the responsibility of continued service; a Sixth climatic stage involves circumcision and full elder hood rank; and in three remaining stages elders serve as consultants, gradually retiring from the Gada. After completing the third class, one Oromo male can participate in the election of political authorities. These political leaderships are Abba bokkuu (carrier of the scepter holding a position similar to that of a civil officer) Abbaa Caffee (father of legislative assembly), Abbaa Alangee (attorney general), Abbaa Sa’aa (ministry of economy/finance), Abbaa Seeraa (a parliamentarian), and Abbaa Duulaa (war leader). Hussein (2004:4)

In this very important institution, the role of women is only preparing food and drink and conducting ritual practices during ceremonial practices like power transfer etc.

Daniel Deressa (2002: 44) describes that though women are important actors in the Gada rituals, they do not have roles in Gada classes.

This is one of the big reasons for the people not to consider women equal with men. And it is reflected in every stage of their life starting from birth. I would like to show the development of this discrimination stage as follows.

2.2. Birth and Growth of Male and Female Children in the Traditional Oromo

In Oromo, children are the most precious and valuable one can have in his/her marriage. The family lineage continues through male child and it is only the male child who can inherit his property after his death. A person with many children has more respect in the society. A woman that gave birth to many children has also special respect in her clan and community. While the one without a child is discriminated with the society. One of the reasons why the Oromo values woman is that she connects or binds the gosa (clan) she was born in with the other gosa (clan) through marriage, and as she gives birth to male children who can be a warrior, a good leader etc in the community and becomes the proud of his father and community.
One can see a huge difference when it comes to comparing the value of male and the female child. For example, according to my informants, there is one traditional way of expression of happiness which is called “ilillee”. This ilille is said ten times if the new baby is boy and five times for a girl baby. When neighbors visit the deessuu (deliverer) after blessing, they will ask her “maal deesse?” what have you begot? Then, if the reply is female, the visitors say “Haa ta’u garuma durbatu gurbaa illee fida” ”let it be the same female will/would bring male,” This is to console the wife and the husband. But if what she gave birth to is a male they bless saying "Kan biyya bulfatu haa ta’u" let he be one who governs the community. There are also other instances. If someone comes to the family where there is silence, as he enters the house, he asks "maaliif akka mana durbi itti dhalaltee callistanii teessu?" why do you keep quite as if a family to which a female is born? One can understand from this that, families who have a female child often are unhappy. The family that has many boys is much more respected than the family that has many girls.

There is also a special ceremony which called “shanan” that is conducted five days after delivery. In this ceremony, the woman who had baby prepares ‘sameta’ a traditional sauce made from barley flour and different special spices and butter. She prepares it one or two months before her delivery and packs it very well in two “okotee saametaa” two big special pots that are prepared for this purpose. One of the pots will be opened on the day she gives birth and served with the traditional porridge for the friends and relatives who come to visit her on her delivery. The Second pot is opened on the shanan ceremony. On the shanan ceremony, the woman invites all her neighbors, friends and relatives. The people who are allowed to eat the sameta and marga (porridge) vary according to the sex of the child. For example, it is said that the Sameta prepared for shanan of female infant would not be eaten by males. Informants believe that if a male boy eats Sameta prepared for female, after grown up and married, he might not produce a male child. Furthermore, even pregnant women are not allowed to eat female Sameta for it is believed that she may not give birth to male.

My informant told me that in some cases the woman will pass in special ceremony if she continues to give birth only to girl babies so that she could give birth for boy babies. If she still continues to give birth for a girl baby, the man has the right to marry another woman to have a boy baby. On the other hand the woman who gives birth for only boys has special honor. My mother told me also what she heard from her grandmother that the traditional people used to throw girl babies away if their number in the family is more than needed.
There is a saying concerning this, in one of the fairytale in the oromo it says “….Daaraa duwwaa haranii gatuu durbayu dhalanii gatuu…” which literary means “it is not only an ash/ garbage that one throws away but also an infant girl”. This shows that female child is almost valueless in the community while male child is highly valued. This is particularly strong when the baby is the first child to his mother. When a baby boy is born the whole village and close relatives rejoice. This is because a boy is not only a symbol of pride for his immediate parents, but also for his close relatives and the lineage as a whole. It is only the birth of a male child that would change addressing of the father. The birth of female child hardly makes it, even if she is the first child (hangafa) to her parents. According to Daniel (2002: 54) A father would take only the name of his son whether he begets second, third or fourth child. Addressing a person after the name of his daughter is an insult. My informants told me that in some areas, they go to the extreme that even when a man has no son, he takes the name of a horse preceded by abba rather than being called by the name his female child.

The children begin to perform their role according to their sex after some years. The girls start imitating their mothers in all their manners. Girls learn how to cook and serve future husband. When they start frequenting domestic work, boys begin to assume outdoor roles. After age 8, male and female fully assume their own roles, the former in the public and the latter in the domestic. Male children start herding cattle, moving with cattle for long, searching for pasture, hunting, farming, etc. On the other hand, females start milking and churning milk and other domestic tasks. Directing them into different tasks continues during their teenage years, too. Daughters are advised to speak slowly, walk slowly, avoid boys (even their brother) and at large are encouraged to remain calm and timid.

In the Oromo culture, one of the very important processes of preparing girls for marriage is circumcision. Even though the age and extent of the circumcision varies from area to area, most oromo people circumcise their daughter. The age varies from about 5 years old to 20 years old. In some areas a girl is circumcised few days before her wedding day. It is performed by old women who can rarely see in a dark room with unsterilized blade. No anti bacteria or anti pain is given for the girl to reduce the pain and bacterial infection. So it is extremely painful and very dangerous because it causes extreme bleeding and infection in many cases. The scar of the wound stays with the girl throughout her life giving her different complications during child birth and less desire for her husband. The main reason for the circumcision is, as I heard from many elderly people, is to make her calm and submissive for her husband. According to the tradition, it is believed that she will be
arrogant and disobedient if she is not being circumcised. Therefore, it is unthinkable and also a big shame for a girl to get married before getting circumcised.

Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to attend meetings with elders, ride mule, go for transhumance, manage proper herding and learn farm skills.

In this way the male enters the Gada class and begins preparation for his future performance to participate in all social political economic and religious affairs in the community. Daniel (2002: 27) states that women would never take part in the Gada class. They are not included in Gada through which they could have obtained public recognition. Gada class is entirely closed to females and is a male enterprise. There is a myth told after this. They say that if women enter the Gada Class, the cattle children and people will die. So it is only the men that can participate in the Gada process and rituals and have the right to directly attend all discussions and decisions made on the day to day life of the community.

My informants stated that every decision is made by men, including customary law (seera caffee). Therefore, having a son who has the right to participate in the Gada class and its Qixxee (assembly) is a pride to the father. Consequently, he prefers a son to a daughter who cannot be a member of a Gada class and who would never take part in the Gada assembly.

As we have seen so far the preparation of girls is only to be ‘good’ wives for their future husband while the boys prepare to be warriors, political leaders, religious leaders, etc. Their respect and status in the community depends on what they are expected to be in the future. So it is not difficult to identify their status in the community.

In the following topic I will discuss the how the Oromo girls continue to be abused and discriminated in the different ways of cultural marriage.

2.3. Traditional Oromo Marriages

There different ways of marriage in the traditional Oromo culture. These are:

2.3.1 Ciisii:

My aunt, the younger sister of my father, got married with this type of marriage. This type marriage is arranged only by the family of the boy without the knowledge of the girl’s family. It is performed when the father of the girl refuses to accept the marriage proposal from the boy’s father. The reason for the refusal can be because of lower economic status, tribes of lower status, if the boy is handicapped and etc. So if the girl’s father would refuse
the marriage proposal, or if he has refused already, the father of the boy will arrange this ‘ciisi’ marriage. He gathers few elders, some handicapped and deformed persons, take a branch of a tree called ‘Urgessa’ and goes to the girl’s home early in the morning while they are sleeping. When they arrive there they will call the name of the girl. When she replies the call they begin to beg her to be a wife for the boy. At this time, the father has no other choice than waking up and beginning to deal about the marriage. He cannot refuse the proposal in most cases because it is believed in the culture that if he refuses it, the deformed ad handicapped persons will curse him and the family would give birth only for handicapped babies in the future. So the father gives his daughter to the boy. My aunt told me that she remembers that painful day as it was today even though it was more than fifty five years ago. She told me that when her father allowed the marriage she cried and screamed for help but no one could rescued her. Her mother and younger sisters cried a lot with her. They tied her hands and eyes like a thief and put her on the horse. She went to her husband’s home and remained being a wife for the rest of her life because it is a big shame and could also cause a curse on the girl and her family if she divorces the marriage.

2.3. 2. Buti (kidnapping):

This is another type of marriage which is arranged outside the knowledge of the girl and her family. It is a forced marriage again when the father of the girl refuses the proposal or when the family of the boy knew that the girl’s father might refuse. The boy arranges strong people from his friends and relatives and waits for the girl when she goes out for fetching water, collecting fire wood, market etc. Then the boy will come with his friends and bits her seriously so that she could not resist. Then they will take her after they tie her hands, eyes, mouth and run away. Sometimes the girl will manage to scream to get help from her relatives. But they beat whoever comes to help her. In this way, the girl goes to the boy’s home and becomes wife for the boy for the rest of her life. The boy’s father sends elders with gifts to her family after one or two days and they get reconciled. According to my informants, the father of the girl cannot refuse to get reconciled because the girl can never come back home after she is once married.
2.3.3. Walgara (Sister Exchange)

Walgara is marriage by exchange of sisters. It is common in the south eastern Oromos. In this case, girls are compared on the bases of their physical maturity. But according to Daniel (2002: 75), the usual practice is that the family of the smaller girl has to Pay or give a number of cattle. This practice is called Irра kaa’a, literally to add upon so as to equalize the girls. The amount of Irра kayа is determined by the difference observed between the two girls. When the rituals and wedding of one who fitted for exchange takes place soon, the one who is promised to receive the youngest in the due time will perform the wedding and the rituals including rakoo (animal sacrifice) when she is mature enough for the marriage. This type of marriage was aimed with two things. One was aimed at minimizing the burden of gabbara (amount of cattle to be given), and the other was to make the relation between the two parties enduring in face of the departure of one of the martial partners by death. Two points are worth noting about walgara: firstly, it does not take into consideration the interest of the girls and therefore sometimes they are forced to marry men of unequal age and even who equal their father. Secondly, being immature they may not be able to claim their right’s in the home.

2.3.4. Dhaala (Levirate)

It is a type of marriage in which the wife of a deceased husband is inherited by one of his brothers. My other aunt was remarried with this kind of marriage after the death of her former husband. This practice is mainly intended to maintain the deceased man’s lineage. However, in case the deceased husband does not have brother, the chance goes to classificatory brothers. This kind of marriage disregards the interest of the widow. Moreover, the heir may not be her equal in age, being either old or young. There is no love in it but it is culturally loaded on the widow. However, in this kind of marriage, she can live with her children by deceased husband if she does not want, as long as she does not effectuate marriage outside the clan of her former husband, she can leave out the remarriage.
2.3.5. Hirpha

This type of marriage is a change brought about by death crises in the family. It is a custom whereby, upon the death of a wife, her kin gives the sister of the deceased wife to a widower. Brown (1980) states that hirpha is a marriage with a sister of a deceased wife and adds that the widower has the right to ask his the family of his former wife for substitution. As the term hirphaa implies, it is replacing sister of a deceased wife for no payment. Again such kind of marriage has a negative impact on the status of an incoming sister as a wife because there cannot be love between them and the widower may not be man of her age, being either old or young.

2.4. Life after Marriage

According to my informants, one of the main ceremonies, especially around the western Oromos, after the wedding is shanan. This ceremony is the first day when the bride comes out from her bride room and looks around her new house. During this day she makes traditional food called Marqa and invites the whole family (her mother-in-law, father-in-law, brothers and sisters of her husband and their families). These family members normally leave in the compound in the traditional Oromo culture. The bride gets also the chance to know all the families with whom she is going to live the rest of her life. After the ceremony, the mother-in-law prepares stick and robe for her son to tie his wife and beat her. Then she will be beaten so that she would respect and obey her husband and his family.

One of the important things the bride should be careful is about the names of her husband’s family. She should not call the name of her husband, his father and mother, his brothers, brothers of his father. This is very true also in the case of my mother. Even though the tradition is not common these days she insisted to continue with the tradition. She never called the name of her mother-in-law, father-in-law, brothers of father-in-law, the older sisters of my father etc. She called her father-in-law as goftaa ko which means my lord. And she called brothers of her father-in-law as gooftaa ko and adds the names of their first born to identify them. She called older sisters of my father as giiftii which is the feminine of lord.

So far, I tried to show the hostility of the traditional Oromo culture to women. One can understand that women are not considered as full human beings. They were considered as creatures that are created only to be used by men.
In the following I will discuss the few rooms in which Oromo women exercise their ‘rights' as a part of the society.

**2.5. Some Important Institutions that Help Oromo Women to Defend their Rights**

Even though the Oromo culture is very hostile to women in many aspects, there are few institutions that help women to defend their ‘rights’ accordingly. These institutions are Rakoo, siinqee, Ateetee, and Qunafaa.

**2.5.1 The Rakoo Ritual**

Rakoo is one of the important rituals that are performed during wedding in the oromo cultural marriage. My informants this ritual is one of the rituals that is laid down the Gada law.

The Rakoo ritual is performed after the wedding if the bride is virgin on her wedding day. So the ritual is that the bridegroom slaughters sheep and invites her families and relatives to his home and they will celebrate together. This is expression of honor to the bride and her families. Because virginity is very important in Oromo wedding until today even though it is not as strict as before. In the traditional Orormo marriage the bride has the right to send back the groom to her families if the bride is not virgin. Her families would be asked to pay back all the dowries they received from the bridegroom in addition to the punishment. On the other hand the bride will get gift of caws from her in-laws if she is virgin. This gift is one of the properties that she can own in the future.

The Rakoo ritual is performed only for the first wife even though polygamy is allowed the Oromo culture. So the Rakoo wife the legal wife and she have many better opportunities than the other wives. For example the husband has to have her permission to marry the second, third … wives. She is the one who has Siinqe with all its rights. It is the Rakoo wife who goes with the husband to some feasts and cultural meetings when it is necessary.

According to Daniel (2002, 42) Rakoo wife can fully claim right over her husband and vice versa. Apart from the reciprocal right on one another, both have equal right in owning and using of joint property. The Rakoo wife is known as niitii hangafa (eldest wife) and kallacha (forehead). And hence, she is known as “ta barree, (of large gourd), ta siinqqee (of decorated stick), ta waddeessa (male's marriage stick), ta umamaa (of nature)”.

22
So Rakoo is very important in support the right of women. The only problem of Rakoo that it applies only for the first women as it has been mentioned. My informants say that the rest of the wives have very lower status in the family. They have to respect and obey the Rakoo wife. Priority is given to her for example in service of food and drink, seat etc. They support her in household work like cleaning, milking, cooking, grinding, etc. This sometimes even creates difference between the children of the wives. Because the children of the Rakoo wife are superior in the family to the other children following the status of their mother.

2.5.2. The Siinqee Institution

In the oromo cultural marriage, Siinqee and Waddessa are the two important sticks that are given to the bride and the bride groom on the wedding day respectively by their mother and father. The sticks are prepared from a tree called ‘harroressa’. Siinqee is then, prepared by the mother of the bride from the harroressa tree. The mother cut the stick and decorates it in a fashioned way during the preparation for the wedding of daughter. On the wedding day, she gives it to her daughter after blessing her. Daniel (2002, 46) explains the process of giving the siinqee by quoting Gemechu as the mother gives it to her daughter during the blessing ceremony. As she bless her daughter in her turn, the mother holds one end of the Siinqee and the daughter the other symbolizing the tie between the mother and the daughter on one hand and the tie among all women, on the other. Siinqee symbolizes the respect and right of a married woman that has been provided by the Gada law. So Siinqee institution is according to my informants, the weapon by which Oromo women fight for their rights and function side by side with Gada system.

Siinqee has many important purposes in the culture of Oromo women. I will try to discuss few of them briefly.

2.5.2.1. Symbolizing Honor

According to Dirribii Damusee (2009, 105), Siinqe stick has a special honor. One cannot use it to keep cattle, riding horse, beating donkey, etc with siinqe like ordinary stick. It is not lawful in general to use the siinqee stick as ordinary stick. It is a symbol of honor for married women. A woman holds siinqee whenever there is some special event or ceremony. My informants narrates in the same way with Dirribbii that a woman holding siinqee stick
signifies that she is legally married and has some respect connected to it. For example if a man riding horse comes across a woman holding siinqe, he has come down from his horse for the honor of siinqee. And anyone who comes across a woman holding siinqee has to stop and give the way for the woman holding siiqee. Even one has to give the way first for a woman holding siinqee to cross a river before he crosses the river. If a woman is going a long journey like going to visit her mother and father from her clan, she holds her siinqee stick with her and no one will dare to attack her even if she is going alone.

### 2.5.2.2. Forming a Membership in the Solidarity Ritual

In Oromo, women are sometimes recognized as foreigners or strangers. My informants even believe that the reason why are excluded from Gadaa grades is because they came from other clans. Therefore, the women in the clan organize themselves under the siinqee sisterhood solidarity. They form this siinqee solidarity by coming out holding their siinqee, deeping the tip of their siinqee in the blood of a slaughtered sheep, and touching each other's forehead by the blood touched by their siinqee. It is making an oath to help and support each other until they die. They do the same when they agree to perform something in a group like siiqee rebellion etc.

### 2.5.2.3. Defending their Rights

One of the main uses of siinqee is defending the right and honor of women as it has been said. My informants say that siinqee safeguards the right of woman. For example if a husband violates the right of his wife that has been given to her by the culture, she grabs her siinqee and runs out of the house screaming siinqee scream (Iya siinqee) which is the mode of communication between Oromo women. Thus, when her rights are violated, a woman fights a battle with Siinqqee, to mobilize support. As soon as iyyaa siinqqee is heard, women must give up whatever they are doing. Even those who are breast feeding at the time of scream should let the babies cry and leave the house to join in the scream. This violation can be for example keeping her not to go to siinqee meeting which is given to her by the law or breaking her siinqee stick which is a big crime like killing the woman, etc. Then women in the village will join her holding their siinqee. Then the elder of the community will be sent to the women group to ask what the problem is. Then she will tell her problem. In the oromo culture women are considered to be honest and peaceful so if the
woman complains, additional witnesses are not required in order to punish the offender. Her words are trusted and taken at face value. So the person who violated the right of the woman will be punished accordingly. For example he will be asked to slaughter one of his sheep for the meeting etc.

Woman defend their rights also by abaarsa siinqee (siinqee curse). In this case, they raise their siinqee together and curse the person who violated their right. My informants points that a curse of women is believed to be very powerful because they are thought to be weak and innocents. In addition, raising their siinqee in solidarity makes the curse more powerful. Especially the curse of older women is feared since they are weaker than the younger once.

According to my informants, a woman cannot call for the siinqee help for example if her husband beats her. Because her husband has the right to beat her and she should be submissive for her husband and obey him in any case. One can understand from this that the culture is very strong that it gives women a very limited right in the society.

2.5.2.4. Praying to God

One of the duties of women holding siinqee is for prayer to waaga. Women have a regular meeting to pray to waaga. This is called atete worship. I will discuss about atete in the next topic. The women take their siinqee when they go out for prayer. They pray a barren woman so that she can have a child, they pray for the sick to be healed, they pray for the peace of the people and cattle, they pray for good weather, etc.

2.5.2.5. Peace Making

This role of the siinqee institute is very exclusive and makes the role of oromo women very special in the society. According to traditional Oromo, if there a conflict or war between two groups in a clan or between two clans, and if the women come and stand between the wars together holding their siinqee, they fighting has to stop automatically for the respect of siinqee. Thus they will bring peace between the fighting groups. In other hands, if a foreigner comes to fight the people to take their land or their property, the women will raise their siinqee and bless their soldiers before they go to defend the enemy. They bless them so that they will overcome their enemies and come back peacefully. They pray to waaga
until they come back that he will help and protect them in the war. So men will not go to war to fight enemy before they receive blessings and prayers from women holding *siingee*.

### 2.5.2.6. Mobilizing collective labor

In this case, whenever accidents like over flooding properties by heavy rain, someone’s house is caught on fire and destroys his property, the women in village will take their *siingee* to mobilize the community to help the person or the group. They mobilize the villagers to contribute what they can so that the person or the group will survive from the accident.

### 2.5.2.7. Gada power transmission

During the power transmission in the *Gada* system of the oromo people, it is the women with the *siingee* that blesses the persons who takes over the *Gada* offices. The newly elected officials walk under the *siingee* sticks raised up by women standing in two rows and touching the other tips of their *siingee* together.

So far I tried to show the importance of the *siingee* institution among the oromo people. One can observe from the above points that *siingee* is the room in which the oromo women will get little relief from the other cultural bondages. If there were no such cultural institutions like *siingee*, the oromo culture would have been one of the most horrific cultures against women.

### 2.5.3. Qanafa

*Qanafa* is one of the other institutions in the oromo culture in which they protect their rights. This institution works for breast feeding women from four to six months after delivery. Women wear *qanafa* for four months after delivery if the baby a girl and six months if the baby is a boy. *Qanafa* is a curved wooden material having a special shape and fashion. Woman wear *qanafa* on their forehead so that everyone can identify them that she has an infant of less than six months and she needs special honor and care for she gave birth recently. The special right and honor that women can get in the qunafa institution is that her husband cannot beat her or insult her during that period of time. He has to take a good care of her during that time. But if breaks the law and beats her, the woman can scream to
get help from the siinqee women. Then when the neighboring women hear her cream they come with their siinqee and ask her what happened. Then they have the right to bring the man to the elders so that he will be punished according to the gada law. According to Dirribi (2009, 58), the man bows down before the women with siinqee to ask for forgiveness for what he has done against his wife. The punishment can be slaughtering one of his best looking sheep or bull for the siinqee women. Sometimes he can also be beaten as well by the elders of the village if the case is very serious.

So, qanafa safeguards breast feeding women at least for some months from being beaten and being insulted with bad words by their husbands. Here, one can understand that women will not complain if they are beaten and being insulted in their normal daily lives other than qanafa period. It is believed as a norm in the society.

2.5.4. The Atete Institution

Atete is a spirit that comes upon women and worshiped by women in the oromo traditional religion. Women worship in the Atete spirit by making different rituals. My mother told me what she saw from her mother when she was a child that women come together from the whole village to worship Waqa in the atete worship. Her mother prepared a big feast for the atete ritual and make sacrifice for the atete spirit. The women who came for the ritual pray and sing and dance calling the Atete spirit to upon her mother. Then the spirit comes upon her and she began to scream and jump etc. then the women prayed to the spirit for their children for their cattle and for the barren women so that they will have a baby etc. Lastly they eat and drink and go back to their home. This kind of atete ritual goes to every woman in the village at some interval like every four month. In this gathering women also discuss about their lives and share information about each other because, it is also another social mechanism by which they defend the violation of their right caused by nature and/or men. In the gada law, women in the neighbor come together and elect their leading committee of eight members among themselves. So in the atete worship, they elect their committee based on their age, best knowledge of the ritual etc. The duty of this committee is hearing from the women in their member about their ‘problem’ bring to the elders. Some of these problems can be mistreatment and offenses that can cause atete rebellion like for example beating of wife with qanafaa and/or husband who absented his wife from women gatherings. Thus an offended wife calls atete outside her house ululating "illi-illi-illi" until neighbors come and join her. If they consider she has a cause, they join in until all the
women of the neighborhood have assembled. Then, the offended wife would declare her
grievance and the women either directly proceed to atete or more usually take an
appointment for another time. The offender is made to be present on the occasion and asked
if he has committed the offence. The husband who admits his guilt
Will apologize for his act and scarify sheep for the gatherings. Then reconciled with his
wife, he gets back to his home.
So, atete is a public gathering of women and it has religious, familial and social function
among the traditional oromo women.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to explore the cultural back ground of the Oromo people in relation to
the place and role of women in the culture. As tried to mention at the beginning of the
chapter, my aim is to show the tremendous difference how the culture brings up men and
women from their birth. It has been observed that the culture nurtures the boys/men
mentally, psychologically, and physically from their childhood to explore their potential so
that they can be their best. At the same time women/ girls are discriminated, mistreated and
abused in all stages of their lives so that they can only be considered and function as the
property of men. I tried also to show the few limited rooms where the women get a little
relief from the cultural bondage. Again these institutions are strictly limited and controlled
by the gada law which is led men.
Even though most of the cultural norms that have been discussed so far are not in practice
in my study area today, the mentality that considers men as superior to women and women
as inferior to men is still reflected in many aspects even in the church. Thus, this is one part
of the three ‘unholy trinity’ that the women in the study area are still fighting to achieve
their God-given freedom I will discuss this in detail in the fourth chapter.
Chapter Three: History of Introduction of Christianity to the Area and Approach of the Missionaries

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I tried to discuss the social, cultural and religious life the people and that of women in particular before the introduction of Christianity. The severity of the burden that the culture and social setting of the traditional community put on women has also hoped to been well described. In this chapter, I will look at the introduction of both Orthodox Christianity and Evangelical Christianity. The aim of this chapter is to explore the changes and contributions (weather it is positive or negative) that the Christianity brought to the status of women in this community. During the study, I understood that the missionary approach of both Orthodox and Lutheran Christianity has made a remarkable contribution for both positive and negative impacts that they brought to the status of women. Thus, I will discuss the history of introduction of both Christianity by emphasizing more on the way they came to the people to communicate their messages.

One can question the relevance of making detail discussion of this history. But I am deeply convinced that it is very important to show the difference between the histories of introduction of Christianity to the country and that of the rest of African countries. Moreover, it is very important to disclose the hidden history about the country and its unification (the Ethiopian version of colonialism) in addition to leading the reader to the main topic since it has direct and indirect contribution to the status of women.

3.2. The Orthodox Christianity

3.2.1. The Name ‘Ethiopia’

The history of introduction and expansion of the Orthodox Christianity to the area is directly connected to the history of unification of the Ethiopian empire according to many of the historians. Sinton mentions this idea by relating the expansion of the Coptic Orthodox Christian in this country by saying “Ethiopianism” or (Amharaization,). (Sinton, 46) Before I go to the detail discussion of this topic, it is really helpful to begin with brief presentation of the name Ethiopia.
We know that the term Ethiopia is found in the Bible in many places. The problem is, the exact location and explanation of the term has no single answer. As a result, it is difficult to point out where it is really supposed to be located in the course of history. Because of this, the relation between the biblical ‘Ethiopia’ and the modern nation called by this name is ambiguous. In the Old Testament, ‘Ethiopia’ refers to Cush as we read from Gen10: 6, Ichron1: 8, Isa 11:11. The Hebrew term ‘Cush’ is referred to the land south of Egypt and its Greek version reads the territory as Ethiopia. During the early middle kingdom period, the term ‘Cush’ was to designate a small area between the 2nd and 3rd waterfalls of the Nile. During 1570-1160 BC, the term was to describe as far south, up to the modern south Sudan. As a result the modern Encyclopedia concludes that it is misleading to think that the Ethiopia of scripture is the same territory as that of the modern times, which in an earlier period was called Abyssinia. (Encyclopedia Britannica on line, Ethiopia)

Ethiopia as it is now known on the map is a nation found in the horn of Africa bordered by Sudan from the West; Eritrea and Djibouti from the north; Somalia from the East and Kenya from the south. Some try to describe it not as a nation but as an empire found in East Africa with the history of not more than one century. Before the 2nd half of the 19th c, the name Ethiopia had been referring to the northern parts of the present day Ethiopia. It was referring to the land only inhabited by the Tigreans and Amharas. Some sources describe these people as immigrants from the Arabian Peninsula during the time when the Arsacida were extending their sway in Arab and the power of the Ptolemy was declining in Egypt. They belonged to the Sabean tribe who engaged in the gold and spice trade between Arabia and Roman Empire. After their move to this part of Africa, they founded the country that has been referred as Abyssinia. The descendents of this immigrants form a minority of the Ethiopian people even today. (Catholic Encyclopedia on line, Ethiopia)

When we come to the history of the formation of modern Ethiopia, some try to relate the beginning of Ethiopia to those Sabeans who crossed the red sea and settled in the present day Ethiopian northern highlands. Desaleng Mengesha, quotes Theshale Tibebe and refers it to the history of Ethiopia as it began with the indigenous Cushitic people like Agaw and Beja. Before the formation of the modern Ethiopia, the Christian highland was divided into three. The first was Tigre, which had been controlled by Axumite dynasty and of course had been exercising their power on their neighbors during the middle ages. The second was, Amhara, which had Gondar as its capital comprising the provinces of Begemider, Gojam
and Dmbeya. The third was the province of Shoa and Ifat, which was characterized as an independent Sovereign, the government having descended for many generations in a right line from father to Son. There had been fighting and conflicts among these kingdoms. (Desaleng Mengesha, 2004, 9)

Again, according to (Pankhurst, 1968, 2), On Feb. 7, 1855 Kassa of Qwara in Gonder was crowned as Emperor Tewodros II. As he became an Emperor, he took up the idea of the unification of Ethiopia very seriously. Pankhurst describes Tewodros’ coming to power as the fulfillment of the old legendary prophecy, which was widely believed during that time. The old legend says that the king called Tewodros would one day appear who would rule justly and righteously, wipe out Islam and capture Jerusalem. Tewodros took at least the 2nd claim to capture the territories around though his attempt to capture Jerusalem was not evident. Soon after his coronation, the ambition of this emperor even of turning the waters of the Nile to another channel and thus to ruin Egypt was recorded. (Pankhurst 1968:9) But he was able to gain control only over Tigre, and Shoa. And the empire had divided again after his death.

After Tewodros, Menelik reigned as king of Shoa in 1865 and after 1889 as Emperor of Ethiopia. Again he took the unification of this country as a mission. He took the advantage of his military success on Italy in 1889 that gave him enormous local and international prestige. He was able to put the rival powers in Tigre and Gondar under his domain. After having the northern territories under his control, he began his raid southward. ( Desalegn Mengsha, 2004, 9-10)

Greenfield states that the southern territories range from primitive communal societies to states with powerful monarchs, like the kingdom of Kaffa, Wollayita, Jinjaro, Jimma Abba Jiffar and the five states of Gibe Oromo that emerged in the 18th and 19th Century. These states and kingdoms came under the control of the northerners turn by turn under the principle of unification but having Christianity as a mask and Amharization and colonization at its back. Some try to describe Menelik’s territorial expansion policy as a participatory in the ‘scramble for Africa. (Greenfield, 1965:96) Because this reason, most Ethiopians, especially the Oromo, agree with Pankhurst when he says that the modern Ethiopia dates only from the reign of the Emperor Menelik II. (Pankhurst 1968, 2)
3.2.2. The History of Introduction and Expansion of the Orthodox Christianity to the Oromo Land

Orthodox Christianity is the first foreign religion that has been introduced to the area. Before its introduction, the people had their own traditional religion which has been discussed in the previous chapter. According to Asafa Jalata, before the colonialism, the Oromo administered themselves democratically at local, regional and pan-Oromo levels through periodically elected leaders who served for eight year terms. (Asafa Jalata 1998, 84) It has been mentioned above that Christianity came to the people with the great expansion of Abyssinian Empire from the North to the rest of the country. From its inception, the Orthodox Church having become the state religion was associated with the state principles. The close relation between the Orthodox Christianity and the state helped the expansion of both at the same time. In the course of the Abyssinians expansion, the Orthodox faith was also being imposed up on the subjects. According to Eide, the mass conversion in Wollega by force through mass baptism is one of the examples. The resistance to the Orthodox Christianity would result in imprisonment. The people accepted Orthodox Christianity in order to escape from imprisonment. (Eide 2000, 46) Asafa Jalata explains the result of opposition to accept the religion more deeply when he says a few of the conquered nations, such as the Arsi Oromo, Wallaita and Kaffa were literally uprooted and sold into slavery as punishment for the stiff resistance to the conquest. (Asaffa alata 1998, 84) and Bungula Irko says, On his campaign to the southern kingdoms, Menelik massacred a tremendous number of Oromos in Arisi and Jimma under the musk of religion using the Shoan Orthodox Oromos against the other Oromo areas. (Bungula Irko 1999, 14) The spread to the West follows also the same situation. Eide, on the research he made on the Western part of the country among the Oromos says, “After the conquest in the 1890s the Amhara governors put the Orthodox Church in a favoured position. On the Orders of Menelik II clergy were given shares of the expropriated land in the south. The Orthodox Church therefore became landowner. 3% of the total land and about 5% of the arable land belonged to church on the reason that the clergies were in charge to collect taxes, and were, simply seen as part of the power structure of the provincial hierarch. However opposition by the peasantry, including, for example resistance to baptism, which was seen as part of the Amhara religious dominance, forced Menelik II to order Ras Gobana (governor of Shoa) to enforce his authority on the area.” (Eide 2000, 46) Again Asaffa Jalata states the
same history by saying the Amhara-dominated state expropriated more than three fourth of Oromo Lands, distributing them among the Amhara settlers, and introduced the most oppressive feudal system of exploitation forcing the Oromo to work for the new masters. Orthodox Churches were built and given Oromo Lands and services to convert the people and promote Amharic cultural domination. (Asaffa Jalata 1998, 84) He continues to mention the serf were not only obliged to pay rents (about a third of their produce) for the use their expropriated lands, and taxes (another tenth), but also had to offer the best animals to their new masters on holidays and other important occasions like weddings. Also the subject people were forced to provide labor for their new masters, building their homes, their fences, cultivating their lands and herding their animals, and generally serving their needs.

3.2.3. The Orthodox Mission in Wallegga

The introduction of the Orthodox Christianity was in the very similar way to the other Oromo regions. According to Gustave Aren, Nigus tekle Haymanot of Gojam had been instructed by the Emperor Yohannes to bring under his jurisdiction ‘all lands to the of the river gibe’. Around1881, he sent his general Ras Deresso across the Abbai (Blue Nile) to subject the Horro and the Guduru to his sway. Proceeding westward, Dereso subjugated one Oromo tribe after another. (Gustave Aren 1978, 377) Aren describes how the history went forward that Dereso met a group of delegation led by Dibaba Bakare from Leqa Eastern Wollega, taking large supplies of food and drinks for the Dereso’s army, who offered him a friendship on behalf of his brother Moroda Bakare. The purpose of the offer for the friendship was to avoid Dereso’s military occupation and enslavement of the people. Moroda Bakare was ruler of Wollegga at that time. He took the power from his father Bakare Godana. Bakare was appointed as a ruler of Leqa during Teworos’s time. In this way, the friendship worked well and Moroda was baptized together with his foremost men at Digga outside Neqemte. He was granted the position of Dejazmach. In this way Churches began to be founded in different areas because, as Aren explains, Every Amhara Governor would be accompanied by his father confessor (yenefs abat) that saw to it that churches were founded and the people urged to become Christians. (Aren1978, 378). However, Moroda allowed to the local governors and the people when they preferred their traditional religions from Christianity. Minilik was not happy with it and he sent Gobana
Dache to Leqa to enforce them. As a result Kumsa Moroda, the Eldest son of Moroda was sent to Miniliks court where he learnt Amaharic language and little Gi’ize, was baptized and given Amharic name Gebre Egziabiher. And the first church was built in Wollega, Neqemte that dedicated to Virgin Mary. His brother Dibaba Bakare built the first Orthodox Church in western Wollega, at Bodji in 1880 and again, Kumsa Moroda who had moved his residence from Neqemte to Nedjo, built Kidane Mihiiret at Nedjo. In this way Minilik forced Moroda to accept Christianity and Wollega had accepted the Orthodox Christianity as the rest of the Oromo land.

3.2.4. Conclusion

It can be well observed from this history that the Orthodox Christianity came to the people with mask of unifying the country which was the colonial agenda of the Amhara. The people accepted Christianity not by understanding its message rather the religion was imposed on them by force as a means of colonization. The invasion affected the social, cultural, economic and religious life of the people.

The social and cultural misery that encountered the people is also immeasurable. The largest loss was the Gadaa System. The traditional Gadaa System, which is a unique system, by which the Oromo administered themselves democratically at local and regional level through periodically elected leaders who served for eight year terms. It has assemblies that make laws for the people being led by Abbaa Gadaa (the President). There are other officials who were elected under Abbaa Gadaa that performed specific tasks like performing legislative tasks, at the assembly, conducting campaigns, serving as judges and legal experts, and leading in rituals and prayers.

The Oromo people lost this precious treasure. Asafa Jalata states that the conquest eliminated Oromo self-rule and independence, reducing them to inferior subjects under the empire. This means that in most regions, the Oromo Gadaa democratic rule and the few emerging liberal Oromo monarchies were wiped out and replaced by a respective alien naftagna rule. (Asaffa jalata 1998, 85)

The Qallu, the religious leader (the high priest) in the Gadaa System, lost its original function and position. The institution has been changed to ancestral rites and spiritism as a result of reaction to the Orthodox Christianity. This type of Qallu institution is found even today in different areas of the Oromo people, but their function is totally different from the Original Qallu of the Oromo people. Kumsa Boroo identifies this ‘Qallu as ‘Qallu sobaa’
(False Qallu). According to Kumsaa Boroo, this Qallu identified himself with god. He told the people that he has the authority to kill or to save people. He threatened the people by claiming his authority over everything. The people threatened and worshiped him. They sacrificed the best of their harvest and their cattle. When someone dies from the village he claimed that he killed the person because of his disobedience and tells he would do to them unless they wouldn’t give whatever he asked for. He inherited the property of the person who died including his wife. He took many wives of other persons by claiming the spirit ordered him to do so. He raped women threatening them by his spiritual power. He has his own special days in a week and the people obliged to worship that day every week unless he claims to destroy their harvest kill their children. In general, according to Kumsaa Boroo, this institution of false spirit destroyed the economic, religious and moral life of the people and became the main tool for the colonization of the Amhara. (Kumsaa Boroo, 2009, 152-154)

The economic misery that the people encountered is also countless. They had been transferred from land owner to peasantry life. As I tried to point out previously, their new masters took their properties in many forms. Aide says the peasants’ share from their own harvest varied from quarter to half of the total harvest. In this way they were kept only in subsistence level. The land tenure patterns transferred surplus from the peasants’ to the Landowners by means of high rent. They had no surplus from their labours and being generally insecure; they had nothing to invest and lacked any motivation for investing. The land owners on their side used their surplus on luxurious consumption or investment in enterprises other than subsistence farming. The result was, according to Aide, an almost complete lack of agricultural development. (Aide 1996, 50) In addition, celebrating many holydays in the name of saints and angles not only destroyed the culture of hard work among the people but also introduced the culture of preparing and drinking too much alcohol and making unnecessary feasts which in turn, destroyed the economic and social life of the people.

3.2.5. It’s impact on lives of women

It is not difficult to imagine the heaviness of this burden when it comes to the women’s life. They became the poorest of the poor. They laboured more to feed their family. As wives of peasants, they served the wives of their masters fetching water, collecting firewood, and cooking as it has been mentioned previously. This doubled their daily work load.
According to Jalata, while adult males mainly performed outdoor duties requiring more physical labor, women were forced to perform domestic services including grinding grain, cooking and fetching water. They were frequently raped and humiliated by their masters. (Asaffa Jalata 1998, 85)

They lost their *siinqe* properties because of the change of the system and the severity of the poverty. In addition to the physical abuse that the landlords committed to them, the priests preached the conservative Jewish culture and tradition that tells women are inferior creatures to men. Women were given separate place in the church when they come to worship. They were told that they were impure during their menstrual period and kept outside the church compound. They were reached from the Bible that women should not speak in public and they should learn from their husbands. The women were told to be obedient and submissive to their husbands without any question.

The few women institutions where the women exercise little freedom like *Siinqee*, *Qonnaafaa*, and *Ateetee* were weakened and nullified along with the weakening of the *Gadaa* system. In general the introduction of the Orthodox Christianity to the area took away the identity of the people by imposing the Amhara culture on them with the agenda Amharization. It strengthened the cultural burden on women and left them to be servants of servants.

3.3. The Introduction and Expansion of the Evangelical Christianity to Ethiopia

It is much beyond the scope and the aim of this paper to discuss the detail history the introduction of Evangelical Christianity to Ethiopia. Yet, it is worthy to make a brief overview of the history that leads to the main topic of this study. Therefore, after making a short description of the history in Ethiopia in general, I will go a bit deeper when it comes to my main focus (the Oromos in Wollega, Western Synod) to identify the approach of the missionaries and their impact to the life of the people and to women in the area in particular.

According to (Aren, 1978: 35), the earliest protestant missionaries to Ethiopia were the German Peter Heyling (1634) (Arenn, 1978:35) and- from Church Missionary Society (CMS)- the Swiss Samuel Gobat (1830) (Aren, 1978:55) and the German Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1837) (Aren, 1978:36). Their vision was to revive the EOC by their teaching. However, the then Ethiopian rulers were more interested in industrial military and
diplomatic services than their religion. In addition, they did not want the interaction of other form of Christianity with the Orthodox Christianity because it was already became a state church which was their mask of colonization.

But the movement was not ended. Rather it continued in other form. Launhardt (2004: 22) states that in Northern Ethiopia some renewal movements among the clergy of the EOC had taken root, leading to reading the Bible in the vernacular (Amharic instead of `Ge’ez`) and teaching the salvation through Christ alone. In addition to this, protestant missionaries had been engaged in educational and literary work trying to assist the Ethiopian Church in the witness among Muslims and followers of Traditional Religion.

Launhardt (2004:22) discusses the result of this movement that “The renewal movement that had started among the clergy in the northern part led to the formulation of an “Evangelical Association”. This brotherhood had been formed for mutual encouragement and support. Their spiritual father was the above mentioned German lawyer, Medical doctor and theologian Peter Heyling, who worked in Gonder between 1634 and 1652.” This movement continued for two centuries spread I some parts of the country.

3.3.2. The Evangelical Missions to the Oromo People

The vision of reaching the Oromos came to the minds the missionaries that were working in Ethiopia (the then Abysinia) in1800. This was because the strong resistance from the Orthodox Church that encountered them to go forward. Most of the Oromo land was not occupied by the Abysinia government at that time and therefore the Orthodox Christianity was not reached the area. Dessaleny (2004: 26) discusses the history of those first visionaries to reach this people by saying “It was in the midst of the attempt to reform the Orthodox Church that the vision appeared to go out of the Christian highland to un evangelized areas. Another approach was needed to be designed and new endeavour needed to be made. Then Johann Krapf (1810-1881) came with a vision to reach the Oromo with the Gospel of Christ. He was born and grew up in the pietistic tradition in Wurttemberg, Germany. He studied theology at Basil and after short service in Wurttemberg; he met a missionary, Rev. Peter Fjellsted by whom his missionary interest was renewed.”
Again according to Seyfenebelbel (98:7), quoted by Desaleny, the CMS commissioned Krapf to Ethiopia and he arrived in Shoa in 1837 during the reign of SahleSilasie, the king of Shoa. Soon after his arrival, Krapf got acquainted with the Oromo people. He had read about them from the writings of Ludolf during his preparation for departure to Africa. He was much attracted to What Tellez told about them in comparison to the German tribes. Krapf made a research on the Oromo culture and religion. He got an opportunity also to travel with the king (Nigus) Sahlesilasie. He could also observe the king’s campaign against the neighbouring Oromo Gada confederations for control.

Krapf became more interested in the oromos when he studied and explored their life situation. Then he began to learn their language in which he was able to print a material on the language entitled ‘An Imperfect outline of the elements of the galla (Oromo) language’ in 1840. Thus, he became the first person to translate parts of the Bible in to afaan Oromo (Oromo language). His approach to the Oromos and mainly his literary concern for the people was not liked by king Sahlesilassie. The king suspected him of becoming an obstacle to his expansion policy among the Oromos. He also wanted to make those under his control to become members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and those outside he wanted to subject. (Harms 1999:339) As a result, he banned him of entrance in to Shoa as of 1842. This expulsion gave Krapf more opportunity to spend time with the Oromos.

According to Arén (1978:72), the more he learnt about them he happened to predict that ‘in time might the Oromos become for Africa, what our Germany became for Europe.’ His idea was in terms of evangelism. If the Oromos once converted to Christ, they would have an important mission to fulfil in the horn of Africa. His comparison with German in Europe was meant in terms of their role and social impact. Their solidarity, large number of population, and political system inspired him of their importance once converted to Christianity against the influence of Islam in the horn of Africa.

Krapf took the idea to Europe and propagated that missions would be initiated to take up the task. The response came from the two prominent mission organizations in Europe: German Hermannsburg Mission and Swedish Evangelical Mission. It was the German Hermannsburg mission who took the first action. Their first missionary attempt was to reach the Oromo people Kenya (the then south Africa) because they knew from Krapf’s experience in Ethiopia proved that it was impossible to try through Ethiopia because of the resistance from the governors.
This missionary group of 18 people travelled from Hamburg in Germany on Atlantic Ocean round Africa to Zanzibar. It was after almost four months, the sailing boat reached Zanzibar in April 1854. The area was under the control of the Arab rulers who were mainly engaged in Slave trade. They were told to proceed to Mombassa where they were refused of further travel without written permission from the sultan. The first missionary attempt to the Oromo failed in this way.

The second group had to sail in search of the intended goal, to reach the Oromos in East Africa. This time the intension was to follow the same route but to go a little further from the previous hit towards the north. Then river Tana or Juba was to be followed in search of the people in focus but first arrival at Somali coast was essential. A group of six people were able to come as far as Somali coast but the search for river Pokomo (Tana) was in vain. Then the attempt to find the Oromo became impossible that the group returned to Mombassa and later joined the previous group at Durban, South Africa. (Harms, 1999:44) During this time, the Swedish Evangelical Mission also started to find way to reach this people. They got information about suggestion to reach this people from Bishop Gobat of Jerusalem that the mission could consider East Africa, particularly the Oromos south of the Christian Abyssinia (Ethiopia). He later warned the mission from entry to Ethiopia because of the then political situation and failure experience he had got during his stay there. Rev. J.L. Krapf reinforced the earlier suggestion encouraging the mission to reach the Oromo region. He specified the region outside of Tewodros’s sphere of influence mainly south of the Abay River which could be reached through Eastern Sudan. (Terfassa 1999:8)

On their arrival, they got a brief description about the situation in Ethiopia by Werner Munzinger, the French vice-consul. He briefed them that Tewodros’ crumbling empire would make their travel to the Oromo land inconvenient. Instead, he advised them to begin work among the Kunamas. After long and hard labour in Kunama, the missionaries returned to Massawa in 1870. Arén puts “humanly speaking, the first Swedish missionary enterprise on Africa soil seemed thus to have failed” (Aren, 1978:148)

The proposed route by Krapf in the way of Sudan to reach the Oromo land seemed impossible because of the Muslim zeal and Egyptian colonial politics. Proceeding to the Oromos through the highlands of Ethiopia was also impossible because of the political situation. (Aren, 1978:149)

Again according to Terfassa (1999:9), Lager and Lundhal determined to stay in Massawa to wait for instruction from Stockholm and at the same time to explore the possible ways.
While waiting for the convenient pass to the destination, the missionaries did not sit idle. They established themselves at Massawa and opened a school for the training of the indigenous evangelists who were to go for the intended plan. The school was also served as the relief station for the freed slaves in providing food, clothes and lodging. It was getting students mainly from the liberated slaves. These freedmen would become an important tool in their plan to reach the Oromos beyond the Abay. The Swedish Evangelical Mission made repeated expeditions from Massawa to reach the Oromos.

The first expedition was held in 1877 by a group of indigenous evangelists. Interestingly, one of the evangelists was an Oromo woman called Ayantu and they were hardly successful that they reached the Oromo people after seven years hardships and long journey.

The second expedition was held in 1881 which included other Oromo young men and women with the Swedish missionaries. This was planned in line with the suggested route to be taken, from Massawa via Khartum and succeeded in reaching as far as Famaka. The group came as close as few days journey to Wollega. The journey was not successful for they were hindered entry from the border of Sudan by the deceitful advice of a German governor in the service of the Egyptian government. They had to return to their station in Immekulu, near Massawa after losing two of their friends on the way. (Terfassa 1999:21)

The third expedition again included Oromo young men and women in 1884 and were not successful because they were refused to pass to Jimma by the Ethiopian governor Menelik. Therefore, the missionaries had to return to Massawa. (Aren 1978:475)

The mission continued to fulfil its vision making one more expedition in 1893. This time the trial was made through the south via the way of Somali coast. Their aim was to inter in to the Oromo land from the south. They were able to come as far as Harar, where they were permitted temporary stay by the governor of the area, Ras Mekonnen. The permission excluded any attempt of teaching or preaching but only a stay for waiting a travel permit from the emperor. Their case became one of the minor issues to catch the emperor’s attention. The area was under political unrest as the newly included territory in the empire. The missionaries’ travel in the empire was also suspected of causing religious tension. So they were refused permission even to pass to Jimma. The fourth expedition to the Oromo land by SEM missionaries came to an end in October 1896. (Arén 1978: 381-382)

The mission became successful on its fifth attempt. This group of three men and two women who made up the fifth expedition were namely Gebere Ewostateos with his wife
Gumesh, abba Geber Egziabher and Daniel Debela with his wife Tiru. (Terfassa 1999:20) They arrived at Boji, Wollega in 1898 and started their missionary work.

The translation of the Bible to Oromo language during this missionary attempt is one of the more interesting histories that have been accomplished by those indigenous men and women missionaries. I would like to briefly describe the involvement of some Oromo women in this historical work.

Onesimus Nesib was the man who had the vision and took initiative to this work of translation. He was an Oromo man who was captured and sold as a slave at his early age when he was five years old. He met the Swedish Evangelical Mission at Massawa after many years of slavery. His Abyssinian master brought him to Massawa with many crowds of slaves to sell him to the Arab slave merchants. At that moment the SEM had already settled at Massawa in a search for the Oromo People and Onesimos’ arrival here was of much importance in the mission planned to be realized. So they bought Onesimus with many other slaves that came from different areas of the empire and let them free. They opened boys’ school at Massawa one year after the arrival of Onesimus. The school was intended from its beginning to train students from different ethnic groups in Ethiopia as to equip them to become evangelists among their respective people on completion of their study. Hika was among the first six students. (Terfassa 1999:9)

In this way Onesmus became free. He went to school at massawa. After five years of study at Massawa, Onesimos was given an offer to go to Stockholm, for further training at Johannelund mission institute. Lundahl writes, “I would like to send an Oromo boy called Onesimos to Sweden. He is about seventeen years old … and has proved very faithful and lately in particular has shown evidence of real spiritual life.” (Terfassa 1999:11) He arrived in Stockholm in July 1876 after one-month journey. His exposure to the new context enriched him with a lot of experiences. He got training in different languages like Swedish, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He was also offered studies in Bible, church History, General science and Geography. After finalizing his study for five years, he was awarded Diploma in teaching in 1881. On completion of his study in Sweden, Onesimos was preparing to leave for Africa. (Arén 1878:249)

Terfassa (1999: 26-27) states that It was soon after his return from Sweden that he began to translate materials in to Afaan Oromo. The preparation of materials in Oromo language would be of great help if the mission succeeds to the destiny. He first translated two religious works in 1883, ‘Man’s heart’ and ‘100 songs and Hymns’. He continued with the translation of Luther’s Catechism. He also prepared an Oromo hymnbook in 1886, which
he made use of in his teaching at the girls’ school at Massawa. The great work of translation he did was the Oromo Bible. It took him 13 years to finalize.

3.3.3. The Role of Oromo Women in the Translation of the Bible to Oromo Language

The translation of the Bible into Oromo language was not the work solely ascribed to Onesimos. Terfassa says that the translation of the Bible in to Afaan Oromo was done as a project in a decision where a group of people took part as an assignment. It was of course a major task for Onesimos as a leader of a group and responsible for the work. (Tersfassa 1999:27) In his work of translation, Onesimos had got other Oromo friends who were of main help. Aster Gano, an Oromo girl who was originally from Illuababor is worth mentioning. Her name is repeatedly mentioned in connection to Onesimos and in the history of EECMY in general. Much of her life process resembles Onesimos’ in many ways. She was from the same area, Illuababor, captivated to slavery, liberated and educated at Massawa, took part in the work of translation and later travelled to Wollega, worked at Nakamte until her death like Onesimos. Her contribution in the translation of the Bible and other materials as well as her missionary travel to Wollega is among the remarkable works she achieved. Agne Nordlander comments the role of Aster Gano in the translation of the Bible into Afaan Oromo as recipient of great worth by saying ‘It rightly bore the name of Onesimos Nesib, but it is evident that much credit for the final structure of the language out goes to his young female assistant, Aster Gano. (Nordlander: page 6) In this way, the translation of the whole Bible was completed in 1899.

After completing the translation of the Bible, Onesmus and his co-workers, two women called Lidya, and Atser Gano, and also other Oromo evangelists arrived at Boji in 1904 with their Oromo Bible. They joined the group which has established in the area and started preaching the Good News to the people. As it has been mentioned in the previous topic, the Orthodox Christianity has already been expanded in the area at that time. They got a very good welcome from the community despite the strong resistance from the then representative of the government and Orthodox priests.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the impact of this mission on the lives the people and that of women I particular in chapter Four.
Chapter Four: The Impact: Historical Analysis

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, I tried to explore in detail the cultural social religious history of the people I relation to their contribution to the status of women. In this chapter, I will discuss how this three ‘unholy trinity’ (the social cultural back ground and the introduction of Christianity) influenced the lives of women to exercise their God-given human rights and freedom in the church and society.

4.2.1. Culture

The burden of culture is still heavy on women in many parts the Oromo region. Women are treated not better than animals. Husbands consider their wives and daughters as part of their properties.

I would like to share a very touching story about three Karayu girls as an example that I saw myself during my field work with one local NGO coordinating a project called ‘Awareness Creation and Empowering Karayu Women’ in 2003. Karayus are one clan of the Oromo ethnic group in Eastern Ethiopia. They practice the nomadic life style. In Karayu culture, women are considered as properties of men. They don’t have their own right or say. Men are owners and leaders of the family. The division of labor among them is totally unfair. Girls work hard works like fetching water and fuel wood from distant place. When karayu girl reaches the age of 12-13, her father has the right to give her as a wife to anyone he likes without any consultation with her or her mother.

I saw this in one family during my field work among this community. The girl’s name was Hawi and they lived close to the camp where I lived. She used to visit me occasionally because I used to tell her to go to school.

One evening we heard a loud screaming voice from Hawi’s house and we went out. Hawi’s home was surrounded by men with their horses dancing outside. Hawi was terribly screaming from inside. Then we were told that Hawi’s father, Mr Roba was giving her to an old man as a wife who was in the age of 70’s (Hawi was about 13-14 at that time). He received many cattle as a dowry in return. Hawi and her mother had no information about this before. It was the sole decision of Mr. Roba. So her mother, her younger sister and friends were terribly crying with Hawi when the old man put her on his horse and took her to his place dancing and shouting in joy. It was extremely painful for me to see that kind of suffering on girls while it
was joy for the men. No one of them considered the screaming of the girl. The culture and the social setting have made them to enjoy the agonizing pain of their child, sister, mother and wife.

The old man had many children from his two other old wives. Hawi’s duty was then to take care of the children and all the old people in the house including the old man. It was her duty also to take care of the cattle. It is not difficult to imagine severity of the burden that Hawi leads in the rest of her life.

I picked Hawi as an example to show the daily lives of women in the community.

The experience of Medina and Galo is the other story that touched my life. These two girls, Medina 13, Galo 12 were in the first class in the school which the organization I worked for built for the community. Galo and Medina lucky enough to hear the rumor that their fathers were going to give them for one old man and a disabled old man respectively. These young girls fled from their families. They went into one cave which was in a big hill far away from where they lived. The climate of the area was very dry and very hot since it is located in the Great Rift Valley that crosses Ethiopia. The cave is very scary for those young girls because it has different kinds of snakes and other wild animals. But for the girls, it was much safer than staying with their families and being given to a disabled old man at that age.

They stayed in the cave for more than two weeks experiencing a terrible hunger and fear of the wild animals. Finally one of their friends informed me the situation and I informed it to the local police. The local police found them alive in the cave but very weak because of suffering. After investigating and solving the problem, my organization took the girls to take care of them. They stayed at the girls’ hostel which was built for the karayu girls and continued their school peacefully.

It is the duty of women in karayu to build temporary huts where they live while they move from place to place. Women go into forests and collect wood and grasses from a distant location for the construction of huts. They fetch water from a very long distance place. I know a woman who gave birth alone in a dry, windy, dusty and hot bare field while she was fetching grass to the calves from a very distant place.

The above story shows hostility of the culture and social structure of the society on the lives of women. Islam is the dominant religion in Karayu beside their traditional Oromo traditional religion. The practices and traditions of both religions are other burden to the women rather than helping them.

When I come back to my research area, it is more than a century since Christianity has been introduced. Therefore, most of the cultural practices that have been mentioned in the previous
chapter have been replaced by Christian traditions. The status of women is much better than other areas. But the influence of culture is still strong in the social lives of the people. The value that the society gives for men and women is still different. The superiority of men is observed family lives and decision making areas in the community. Women are encouraged neither to participate nor to speak in public. Jallate states that the superior character of men in the society pressed the women to be submissive. It hinders them from developing their way of thinking which leads to the loss self-confidence\textsuperscript{1}.

The word ‘woman’ is a derogatory word in the mentality of many people. The expressions like ‘women’s talk’, ‘women’s work’ are occasionally used to degrade the value of women. The cultural influence still struggles in the minds of the people to accept women as equal as men. Therefore the leadership areas in the church and in society are dominated by men.

In some families, it is the husband who gives decision on everything. Women are always dependent on their husbands.

I would like to mention some proverbs that I collected from my informants during the field work. These proverbs are still told in the society today to degrade women.

1. \textit{Dubartiif i harreen ba’aa hin dadhabdu} (women and donkeys do not get tired of carrying a heavy burden)

   This proverb is used to say that even though women invest much of their energy and time on tedious and exhausting daily routines, they should not complain about that. Donkey has not right complaining of heavy burden because it is the reason why they are needed.

2. \textit{Dubrtiin beeka hinqabdu beeka deessi malee}. (Women are not wise but give birth to wise.)

   The society uses this proverb to tell that women do not have any wise idea to be consulted, or to be trust and given responsibilities. But women give birth to wise men that can be trusted to take responsibilities.

3. \textit{Fardaa fi dubartii abbaatu leenjifata}. (It is the responsibility of owner, the husband, to tame his wife and his horse)

   Here, the proverb shows the full right of the husband over his wife to put her under his control by any means he can as he does to his horse. So women are obliged to be under the total control of their husband.

\textsuperscript{1} Jalate 200:2
4.2.2. Orthodox Missionaries

As it is well recalled from the previous chapter, the Orthodox missionaries came first to the area to introduce Christianity. They came with the military invasion of the Amhara government to occupy the people and their missionaries worked hand by hand to expand the invasion. They preached the conservative Jewish tradition of the Old Testament that brought another heavy burden to the lives of women. Women were (and still today) not allowed to enter the church compound during the menstrual period because they are considered as impure according to the Old Testament Tradition. They have to cover their heads when they enter the church and seat at separate place from men. They cannot speak in public or lead the worship. They cannot be elected in any leadership position in the church. They cannot take part in any decision making positions. The only place reserved for them is preparing food for different ceremonies in the church and singing. All the Old Testament and New Testament texts that talks against women were literally applied in the doctrine and teachings of the missionaries and it still works today. One of the Orthodox priests whom I interviewed during my field work told me that according to the Bible, it is the man who is the head not the women so they cannot be leaders the Bible tells about them that they should be submissive and obedient to men.²

As the result, women in the church experience heavier oppression even today because; the teaching and tradition of the church became additional tool for the patriarchal community to oppress them.

4.2.3. Lutheran missionaries

Foreign missionaries had come after the introduction and expansion of the Orthodox Church. Since their introduction is closely related with colonialism, their legacy is very painful in many African countries. The fact that the Swedish and Norwegian Lutheran missionaries had no colonial agenda when they came to the area makes the history different from the rest of African countries. Moreover, in contrary to the fact that the former missionaries of the Orthodox Church were all men, there were women among the European missionaries and this made one difference in the minds of the host community. One of my informants expresses the difference this approach has made in the minds of the people saying “The missionaries were

² Oral interview with one of the Orthodox church Priest in the area
both men and women when they came and preached the Gospel to us. We heard the message from both of them. They also did not make difference between our men and women. They addressed all of us accepted all of us equally. They told us the message of Jesus that he invited all human beings to his kingdom.”

As it has been observed from the previous chapter, there were two native girls among the missionaries who came to introduce Lutheran Christianity these were Aster Gano and Lidya. These women were colleagues to Onesimus Nesib, the other native man during his missionary attempts with the foreign missionaries. These women were sold to the missionaries as slaves to be liberated and became their colleagues in the missionary work to their people (the Oromo people). They brought Lutheran Christianity to the land of Oromo for the first time. Onesmus and Aster Gano are well-known in the history of Christianity in Ethiopia especially to the Oromo people. They translated the Bible to the Oromo language in 1898. The translation of the Bible contributed a lot for the expansion of Evangelical Christianity in the area.

These foreign missionaries, first of all, started their missionary work by freeing the slaves which is the central message of the Gospel. They freed slaves, educated and equipped and sent them to their own people to preach the Gospel of freedom.

In their messages, they addressed both men and women. Even though they came from patriarchal culture at the time, they did not ignore the importance of considering women for the fulfillment of their mission. So, they recognized women also as the member of the society. They organized them in different groups and taught them about childcare, hygiene health etc. The women were recognized equally as men for the first time. This made a big difference in the lives of the women. The missionaries encouraged and helped some girls to be enrolled to the schools which they had opened in different areas. The missionaries established schools, clinics, hospitals and built some infrastructures and ways of communications. They trained women as teachers, nurses, midwives etc. Women started to enjoy their talents. They used this opportunity and rose up to prove their capacity to change their lives and status.

4.3. The Emergence Some Historical Movements with Some Women

As a result of the efforts made by these domestic and foreign missionaries, few girls went to school and most of them who attended the school, later became strong fighters of the cultural

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3 Temesgen Oda: Oral interview
violation against women. This was the beginning of the history for women in the area to speak and fight against the burden that had been put on them for centuries. Among others, Dasi Ebba and Dinqe were the first women who attended the missionary schools and later became teachers and preachers in the church. These women with some other fellow women from other areas fought the cultural obstacles their whole lives. They organized themselves in the church to discuss about their daily affairs. They encouraged each other to send their daughters to school. In Dembidollo they contributed money and established schools so that their children would get access to the modern education. The missionaries trained some women to be their translators when they communicate to the society.4

This is a huge change for the cultural setting at that time. In the Oromo culture, women cannot stand and make speech before men. The same is true in the tradition of the Orthodox Church that has been preached before the coming of the missionaries. But the missionaries chose the reverse approach; they chose the neglected to address the master. It is well documented and recalled on other history about the missionaries approach to the neglected and marginalized people in the area that they used also Gidada Solan, the father the former Ethiopian President, Negaso Gidada. Gidada was a blind boy from a very poor and neglected family. The missionaries found him on the street while he was begging for his daily bread. They taught and equipped him so that he became the first native priest in the area. Gidada’s son, Dr. Negaso Gidada, became an outstanding figure for the whole nation.

These women, who have got attention of the missionaries, had also made a huge positive impact on raising awareness against the cultural barriers and empowering of women at the time. They organized themselves in the church and studied the Bible. Galate5 told me that they read the stories of women who followed Jesus, the stories of Marry Magdalene, the stories of the Samaritan woman etc. and encouraged each other that God can use them also to do great things regardless of their cultural and social barriers. The women in Western Synod also have the same story. Even though I met some of in my childhood, I was not fortunate to interview those women from my birth place. Because, they were passed away while I was in high school. I interviewed Rev. Feqadu Wayessa, one of the first pastors in the Synod; he said

4 I met one of the old women in Dembilo in 2001 during my field work in the area. The woman was one of those women whom worked with missionaries as a translator.
5 Galate was one of the «feminist» women in Western Wollega Bethel Synod. She was one of the first women groups who met the first missionaries in the area. I interviewed her in 2001 while I was preparing a paper “Contribution of women in the development of the history of the Synod”. I presented the paper on workshop for the ordination of Women.
“These women used their Bible as a weapon to speak for their rights.” Even though they didn’t have any theological education, they used Biblical stories to encourage each other and to speak against the cultural and social oppression on women. As a result, According to Feqadu Wayessa, they made a huge impact in some of the series problems like the different cultural marriages in the area; that has been discussed in the previous chapter, for example, butii (abducting), hawii, and others were considered in the church and had been denounced by the church.\textsuperscript{6} The issue of polygamy was also the other topic concerning women and the assembly made a decision that from that time any member of the church is allowed to marry only one woman in its resolution in 1972.\textsuperscript{7}

This does not mean that women have enough roles in the leadership and decision making levels of the church. The deep rooted patriarchal culture and the social setting of the people which have been discussed earlier are still resisting women to reach the intended goal. The conservative Jewish tradition of the Orthodox background and the deep rooted patriarchal culture were together with some parts of Pauline letters that talk about women, became big obstacles to go forward especially in the rural area and at grass root level of the church. Women were rarely elected in church administration as elders. There were only men who were allowed to attend theological schools until the time of revival of the church in the last two decades. I want to discuss the charismatic movement and its results in relation to women’s position in the church as follows.

4.4. The Charismatic Movement in the Area

Under this subtopic, I will discuss the contribution of Charismatic movement in the area for the improvement of the women’s position in the church. I found the research of Dr. Nadar very helpful and exemplary to this discussion. She states the importance of giving attention to the women in the Charismatic churches rather than ignoring them. Her research was made on one of the Pentecostal churches in South Africa. The EECMY is one of the fastest growing churches in Africa. Charismatic movement is one of the reasons for the fast growth. Since charismatic churches have some common natures with the Pentecostal churches, I found some points in common with the researches of Nadar to be raised with the women in the Synod.

\textsuperscript{6} Rev. Feqadu Wayessa: Oral interview (He is one of the first pastors in the synod)
\textsuperscript{7} Rev. Feqadu Gurmesssa: oral interview (He served as president of the Synod 1994-1998)
She starts pointing the importance of giving attention to these Pentecostal/Charismatic churches by saying “If we want to listen to women’s voices and see their visions of being church, then we need to listen to all the women’s voices and see all the women’s visions that belong to all the churches - and not simply those churches which happen to belong to a particular conciliar body. This is even more particularly true if we want to talk about the church in Africa, which I would argue is much more Pentecostal than we might imagine”.

“the multiple ways in which women experience being church need now to be shared, explored and reflected upon”,

I would like to share the experiences of the women in the Synod based on the idea of Dr. Nadar. I am strongly convinced that they have made one a history that can be shared.

During the communist regime (1973 – 1989) in Ethiopia, the regime closed churches and imprisoned pastors and evangelists. It was at this time when some charismatic women emerged from different areas of the Synod. Nuritu Ayana, one of the organizers of this group in my congregation, states the story like this “They organized a secret prayer group in their homes. They prayed for the pastors and their families. They encouraged the youth groups in secret to be strong and to keep their faith.” During this secret prayer and Bible study, many young women and men inspired with the Holy Spirit.

They witnessed that the received the Spirit and many of them received the gift of prophecy, healing, preaching and teaching. So many women became preachers, prophets and healers. In this charismatic prayer group, one of the young girls heard a call from God for ministry and decided to attend a theological school. She was a clever young girl who understood her Bible and confronted the men who were on the church leadership at that time and became the first woman to join the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in 1972 with other men. Her conviction and brave decision made historical progress concerning the ministry of women in the church. During that time, all of the men who were studying at the Theological Seminary had to be ordained as pastors while it was a great challenge for church to ordain Bekure with them. The issue about the role of women in the church was raised for the first time on the meeting for discussion in 1973 and new resolution has been made. The case of this young girl, Bekure Daba, was the main reason for the topic. Then the church assembly began to discuss

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8 Sarojini Nadar 2001:354
9 Ibid
10 Nuritu Ayana: Oral interview (Nuritu is one of the first evangelists in the synod. She served as an evangelist for the last 35 years.)
11 Ibid
were to put Bekure after her graduation. Because of this reason, the church began to conduct different workshops, meetings, Bible studies and sharing experiences with the sister churches in Europe and US. Many researches were conducted and many papers were written and presented at different levels of the church against and for the ordination of women.

The movement had been supported by the spread of charismatic movement after the fall of the Communist regime. The pastors and leaders of the church could not deny the potential of the gifted women who preach prophecy and pray for healing for the sick.

According to my informant, these gifted women are respected not less than the church leaders in many areas. They influenced the discussions and decisions that the church makes concerning women. It opened a big opportunity for women to participate in the Bible studies and workshops that was conducted at all levels of the church concerning the position of women in the church. During this time many people that oppose the ministry of women in the church became convinced. The majority of the members of the church accepted the ordained ministry of women. 

Finally, the church accepted the ordination of women in her resolution which was made in 1997. Bekure was ordained to be the first female pastor in the history the church on May 16, 2000 in Western Synod of the EECMY. As Dr. Nadar said about those women in South Africa, the women in the synod also occupied the ordained ministerial position for the first time. The event opened door for many other women to come to their real call of ministry in the church. The church continued to teach her members to have the right understanding of some Bible texts. As a result, many women preachers came to the pulpit and different leadership positions at different levels. Many women joined the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary and graduated to become teachers, leaders, and ministers. It helped them also to confront the challenges that come from their respective societies. Two years after her ordination, rev. Bekure Daba was elected to be the first Woman Synod President in one of the Synods in the history of the church.

In this way the charismatic movement in the synod helped women to go one step forward in their struggle for their rights and liberation. The role of the Spirit is understood in the context of the church that the one that equips and empowers those who are neglected and powerless so

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12 Rev. Indalu Menkir: Oral interview (He is a vice president of Birbir Dilla Synod. He is one of the top church leaders who supported women in the church from the beginning to struggle for their rights.)
13 EECMY website
14 www.Wfn.org,
15 Nadar explains on her research that from submissive and silent position, the women occupy now the ordained ministerial position. Nadar 2001:357
that they can fulfill the purpose of their creation. And God’s purpose for all humanity is
equality and freedom. It is because of this reason that many women felt equipped enough to
preach and serve as men in all fields of ministry. They felt fully empowered by the Spirit so
that they can participate in the full service of the church. Nadar again, quotes Fowl and
describes the role of the Spirit as follows:
“The Spirit’s role is to guide and direct the process of continual change in order to enable
communities to abide in “the true Vine”, in the various contexts in which they find
themselves”

This became true in the lives of these women.
This historical achievement opened door for many women to respond to their call. Thus the
rest of the synods accepted ordained ministry of women. And many women came to the
leadership positions of the church at different levels.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter tried to analyze the historical impact of the three ‘unholy trinity’ and the struggle
of the women in the church to fight these obstacles. I tried to show that most of the hostile
cultural practices for example different the different types of forced marriage, circumcision of
female etc. have now been ended in the study area. But the mentality of the people to accept a
woman equally with man is still the area needs more to deal with. We saw also the impact of
the tradition and doctrine of the Orthodox Church in the area. It supported the cultural
tradition to oppress women. The Lutheran Christianity came to the area after the expansion of
the Orthodox Christianity. Therefore the members of this Church are converted from the
Orthodox back ground. So they reflect their doctrinal back ground in the church especially
when it comes to the position and ministry of women. Most of the people that resist women to
come the right position are those people that have strong doctrinal background and knowledge
of the Orthodox Church. This is reflected on the people in the church at all level. Rev. Indalu
Menkir says “One of the major obstacles for the ministry of women in the church is that the
people come to this church with their old mentality of orthodox background. They expect
women to be silent and submissive as they do the Orthodox Church. They quote the Bible
texts that they have learned in that church to support their ideas. But we are working hard to

16 Ibid : 365
bring our members to the contextual understanding of these passages so that they understand the will of God for all humanity.”

The historical reality that the approach of the Lutheran Missionaries brought about has also been marked. They used the local language and the native people to communicate them. They gave what they have without asking anything in return. They addressed both men and women equally. They created a huge awareness among the people against the harmful cultural practices. They educated, empowered and equipped the women to rise up and use their God-given talents and capacities.

The women used this opportunity and advanced forward to struggle for their freedom from the bondage of cultural setting and religious traditions. This movement was promoted by the Charismatic movement and moved the status of women one step forward to their goal. Here, I want to underline that the church is operating in the patriarchal community. So there are still many steps to move forward to end the discrimination and oppression of women in the church and society.

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17 Indalu Menkir : Oral interview
Chapter Five: Contemporary Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will make analysis of the Bible studies that conducted during my field work. The Bible study has been conducted with the ministers and two women groups. The analysis of this Bible study will help to observe how the church interprets and preaches the bible today in respect of promoting women’s position in the church.

5.2. Presentation of the of the Bible studies

5.2.1. Bible study with women prayer group. (Date 8th July, 2010, 4:00P)

It was conducted in the prayer room behind the church. The leader of the Bible study was one of the evangelists of the congregation. They have regular meeting on Thursdays for prayer, bible study and making different handcrafts for income generation of the congregation. There were sixteen participants in the group. The evangelist came like 10 minutes before the meeting and I met her. We were talking about life because we used to sing in the same choir she is now married to one pastor and have one three years old boy. She told me that she is enjoying her ministry in the congregation and specially the time she spends with women group. She told me about them that they are very energetic to work together and they are very eager to hear and share the word of God every time.

This group includes the women from different status. For example, it includes from age of 35-68, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, many children and childless, widow etc.

Two women came like 3 minutes after 4: pm and knelled down for prayer. One came next with a very small baby. The rest came one by one and the evangelist asked one of the women to conduct prayer. After the prayer everyone sat down and we sang one song. She introduced the bible study text for the day (John 20: 1-18) and asked three women to share and read it.

I had already given her some leading questions to the evangelist so that she can lead the program. I used to attend this kind of program whenever I go to my village when I in Ethiopia. So it was not very much strange for to see me in the program and all of the women have
already came to my home to greet me when I came home two weeks before. The leading questions were: (use the code E= the Evangelist, W= the women and G= the whole group

5. What is the story about?
6. Who are the main characters in the story
7. What was relationship of the characters with Jesus and how it was explained?
8. What do we learn from the characters and this story for our lives and church’s ministry?

Discussion

E. What is the story about?

W1.1 -The story is about resurrection of Jesus
W.1.2. Revelation of Jesus to Mary
W1.3. About the empty tomb and resurrection

E. Who are the main characters in the story

W1.4. The main characters are

W1.5. Jesus, Mary, Angels
   (Baby cries and everyone’s attention diverted)
W1.6. Jesus, Mary, and the other disciple, peter

E. What was relationship of the characters with Jesus and how it was explained?

W1.7. The relationship of Jesus with the characters is the peter and the other disciple were close friends of Jesus and Mary was the one whom he had forgiven her sin.
W1.8. What we see from the text is that Jesus is more closer to Mary than the other two disciples. (Some shake their heads as a sign of agreement)
W1.9. Mary was also one of the women who followed Jesus.
W1.10. We can see in this particular passage that Jesus wants to pass one important message. That is he chose Mary to hear the good news of resurrection before anyone and wants his other disciples to hear from Mary. For me this is a big message from the text.

W1.11. But why did he do that? (One woman asked)

W1.12. According to my understanding, Jesus knows every ones heart and it was Mary who came first to find Jesus in the tomb she showed her love by walking alone in the dark
night to find her Lord. But the other disciples were probably sleeping when went back told them what happened.

W1.13. The other woman agrees says I think this Mary is the one who washed his feet with perfume and dried it with her hair. And she continued to show her love respect for her Lord that by taking all that risk for herself in the dark night and went out to find him.

W.1.14 Jesus wanted to confirm to the disciples and every one that he wants also women for his mission that is why he gave the great good news for the world to marry.

E. What do we learn from the characters and this story for our lives and church’s ministry?

W.1.15. I learn from passage Jesus is raised from the dead conquering the power death. As he told in the parts of the Bible He has power in heaven and on earth. I feel much secured believing in Jesus and walking with him for the rest of my life.

W1. 16. As women in almost similar culture with Mary, that does not give place for women, this text makes me to love more and serve Jesus more. Because, as it was to Mary, he broke all the social and cultural barriers and revealed himself to me. As women he gave us this key message of the New Testament to tell to the world. He came to us when we were isolated because of the culture and different barriers but he came and healed us washed our sins away and chose as to be his messengers despite whatever we are surrounded with.

W1.17. I learn from life of Mary that she did not consider all situations at the time that Jesus was buried and his tomb was being kept with two strong men. The disciples were afraid of the situation and sitting inside their home. But she went out alone in that dark night to find him. This shows the deep love she has for him. Jesus knew that her heart is broken for him and because this he revealed himself to her. He told her to go to tell the Good News of his resurrection.

W.1.18. I learn that no matter what, the situation, the society, poverty… says, Jesus wants my heart and if I surrender myself for him, I will see him more and get more victory over whatever obstacle that hinders me to go forward.

The program was closed with prayer and we went home.

5.2.2. Analysis of the First Bible Study

This group of the Bible study is women of different status. Majority of them are very poor and widows. We observe from their response that they fill more secure and peaceful when they follow Jesus. They told that the fact that he overcome death and declared his power
over heaven and earth. Being a widow and poor they have no security for their life they are considered as weak and destitute. No one give them recognition in any position. So their lives are filled with fears and worries. It is because of this reason that one of the widows respond to the last question saying: I feel much secured believing in Jesus and walking with him for the rest of my life.” (W.1.15.)

They also enjoy their recognition by Jesus. These women came from the Orthodox background where they were told to be silent and submissive. They had never got the chance to sit in this kind of group read the Bible But here; they say that Jesus broke all barriers to find them. They got recognition by the head of the Church. (W1.16) This love of Jesus made them to rise up and serve Him regardless of the cultural and social barriers.

5.2.3. Bible study with women choir ((Date Monday, 12th July, 2010, 4:00Pm)

This group meets every Monday at this time for training songs, prayer and Bible study. This group is slightly different from the former group because most of them can read and write. Some can even preach during different services of the church like small cell groups and Bible studies in the villages. They wrote their own songs and they were preparing to produce their first album the time I met them. The educational background, age, economic level of the group is different. Some of them have many children, some are widows with 2-3 children, few are old widows, and some are relatively educated and have good income and live relatively good life with their husband and children. Some of these women came to the program their small kids. I always remember from this group the young woman called ‘Dinque’, she is a widow with two children 10, years old boy and 4 years girl. She and her 4-years-old daughter are HIV positive and her husband died of HIV Aids three years ago. She was one of the very active women during the Bible study. She is the one wrote most of the songs which the choir was preparing to produce in album. The group meets at the choir training room behind the church building. My text and leading questions was the same with the former group (John 20: 11- 18)

The Bible study began with prayer and singing one chorus. The evangelist divided the text in to three and asked three volunteers to read it. They read it

The leading questions:
W.2.1 About resurrection of Jesus

W.2.2 About revelation of Jesus to Mary

W.2.3 The empty tomb and resurrection of Jesus

E.2.2 Who are the main characters in the story

W.2.4 Jesus and Mary, Angels
W.2.5 Jesus, Peter, the Angels
W.2.6 Jesus, and Peter, Angels
W.2.7 Mary

E.2.3 What was relationship of the characters with Jesus and how it was explained?

W.2.8 All of them were followers of Jesus and they spent long time with him before his death.

W.2.9 Yes, all of them were followers of him but here, one can understand that Mary felt more responsible and decided to go out to find him in the tomb.

W.2.10 She refused to sleep while her teacher was in the tomb and went to find him to anoint his body with perfume. This shows me how much her heart was broken by his love.

W.2.11 She went back and woke the other disciples up so that they go out and find him. But there were only Peter and the other disciple who joined her to the tomb.

W.2.12 Jesus revealed himself to Mary first sent her to the disciples so this shows me that Jesus is more close to Mary even than Peter.

W.2.13 He made the first conversation with Mary after his resurrection before any one. This shows he is closer to them.

E.2.4 What do we learn from the characters and this story for our lives and church’s ministry?

W.2.14 This text is a great text of reformation for my life and ministry. It helped to change the way I look at myself. It built self-esteem in my heart. Because, the story of resurrection of Jesus is the greatest breaking news in the world. And this was told by Mary. Jesus deliberately did this to show how important women are in the proclamation of the gospel. He created women and knows the great capability he has put in them to do whatever mission they are given. So I tell myself that I can go beyond the culture and social setting around me that tells me I am not as capable as men. Jesus proved this first in the life Mary and it became true also in my life.

W.2.15 The story resurrection of Jesus is much more important for women. We can see in the four Gospels that the story of resurrection is told with the story of women who went out
to find him in the impossible conditions. It is true that Jesus has done many revolutionary acts during his ministry concerning women when he allowed them to follow and learn from him, when he talked to them, when he healed them from their diseases. In this text, he approved that one of his great mission was to free the oppressed ones from their bondages. Women have been oppressed with the culture and society in our setting. This message is for us so that to be liberated from the bondage of culture and social setting that oppressed us for centuries. He called out appointed Mary for this great good news before anyone to show that she is capable to take this big responsibility as the other disciples.

W.2.16. Jesus is just in his action and he came to bring justice on this unjust world. It is because of this that he revealed himself to Mary first. If it was according to the culture or the social context, he would have chosen to reveal himself first to the other disciples, but because of his just character, he revealed himself to the one who seek him most, who showed him her love by taking difficult risk of culture and the situation to find him. So no matter the situation, Jesus is close to the ones who seek him to help them to walk over whatever barrier they may face to go forward in their lives.

The program was concluded with Lord’s Prayer on 5:30 and everyone went home.

5.2.4. Analysis of the Second Bible Study

This group consists of the poorest widows like Dinqe and the women that have relatively better life. Here they made very common response about the relation of Jesus and Mary. They believe that Jesus was closer to Mary than the other disciples. The reason they give for this is that she went out to find him in the darkness without fear because she loved him more than the other disciples. Then he revealed himself to her first. Then they made theology that Jesus is more for women. One of them responded to the second question saying: “He made the first conversation with Mary after his resurrection before any one. This shows he is closer to women.” (W.2.13.) The other woman described that the whole story of resurrection is more important for women. She explained that the story of resurrection in four of the Gospels has been told with the story of women. She told that this was because one of his great missions to come to the world was to liberate them from the bondage of culture and traditions that oppressed them to exercise their freedom. She concluded that he gave the greatest good news of his resurrection to Mary because he knows the capability that he put in her when he created her that she can fulfill his mission.
Likewise, he appointed women for great mission despite of the circumstances that surrounded them. (W2.14)

5.2.5. Bible study with the local Ministers (Date: Tuesday, 20th of July 2010, 2.00 pm)

This bible study was relatively more theological because the participants have more knowledge and experience in their ministries concerning the text. The leading questions were also shorter and more theological. The participants were four women evangelists who have three years training in bible school and three men who have the same training. They have different years of experience in their ministries but all of them have served as evangelists for more than five years. We met in the office of one of the evangelists.

We started the program after we prayed with one of the evangelists. We shared the verses among as and read them turn by turn. I proposed the leading questions and every one accepted to discuss on them. (I used the same code as the previous one to identify the question and the response.)

E.3.1. What was the socio-cultural context in which the story has taken place?
W.3.1. The story had taken place among the Jewish community who were conservative to their tradition and Mosaic Law.
W.3.2. The story had taken place among the patriarchal society where women have lower status than men and male always seen as superior to women.
W.3.3. In that community women and children are not considered as full person as men.
W.3.4. The witness of women was not considered as full witness in court in that community or the witness two women was considered as one full man.
E3.2. What is the main issue (point) of the story?
W3.3.5. There are two breaking news in this text. The one is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his revelation to Mary. These are greatest incident in the story of the New Testament according to me. Because if Jesus had not resurrected, there would have not been Christianity today and if he had not revealed himself first and to Mary and had not sent her to tell the message to the disciples, there would have not been the right understanding concerning the place of women in the Christian church today. That means the story dramatically explained the status of women in the sight of God and restored it to its original place.
W.3.6. The main point of the story is obviously about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That was the great mission for his coming to the world. He told about this to his disciples at different times but they did not recognize it.

W.3.7. There are two great points in this story, the first one is the resurrection of Jesus itself and the second one is his revelation to Mary and sending her to tell the good news of his resurrection to the disciples which is revolutionary change according to the culture of the time.

E.3.3. How can we interpret it into our today’s religious and socio-cultural context?

W3.8. The context in which the story had taken place is similar to our socio-cultural context today where women have not equal status with man. In the story, we have already seen the key message of Christianity which is resurrection is being given to women first to be proclaimed. That means women are worthy and faithful as men if not more, to receive this ground breaking message from the Son of God to the world. So it tells us that we should look at our culture and give the proper place for women according to the teaching of this message.

W.3.9. When we look at the way Jesus came to the world, the paths that he used had always great message about women. The good news about his birth was first told to women; He came through Virgin Mary; when he was crucified, there were women who followed him until the cross; there were women witnesses when he was buried; and there were women who see him first after his resurrection. This all stories tell us that one of the great message of Jesus to this world is specially to the patriarchal community is that women have great value as men if not better in front of him. He devoted himself to teach the society that they are very important for his mission. He used every opportunity to bring them up to their right status. So we have to speak against the cultures and traditions that consider women as inferior to men and work with him to bring them to their right position which they are given by God.

Everyone had similar conclusion and the bible study has ended by short prayer.

5.2.6. Analysis of the Third Bible Study

This group described the historical context of the text was in the Jewish community who were conservative to their tradition and Mosaic Law. They explained that they are patriarchal society where women have lower status than men and male always seen as superior to women. (W3.3.1&W3.3.2)
When they were asked what the story was all about, one of the girls responded that it consisted two breaking news. One was resurrection of Jesus and the other was his revelation to Mary. She said “These are the greatest incident in the story of the New Testament according to me. Because if Jesus had not resurrected, there would have not been Christianity today and if he had not revealed himself first to Mary and had not sent her to tell the message to the disciples, there would have not been the right understanding concerning the place of women in the Christian church today. That means the story dramatically explained the status of women in the sight of God and restored it to its original place.” (W3.3.5) This show that this young ministers believe that status women that has been destroyed by tradition and culture has now been restored with the resurrection of Jesus and his appointing women to tell the biggest good news of the New testament. The response of the other young minister was very similar but more explanatory. He explained the importance women in Jesus ministry starting from the story of the birth of Jesus he said,” When we look at the way Jesus came to the world, the paths that he used had always great message about women. The good news about his birth was first told to women; He came through Virgin Mary; when he was crucified, there were women who followed him until the cross; there were women witnesses when he was buried; and there were women who see him first after his resurrection. This all stories tell us that one of the great message of Jesus to this world is specially to the patriarchal community is that women have great value as men if not better in front of him. He devoted himself to teach the society that they are very important for his mission. He used every opportunity to bring them up to their right status. So we have to speak against the culture and tradition that consider women as inferior to men and we have to work with Jesus to bring them to their right position which they are given by God.” (W3.9) One can understand from this that this young ministers are already convinced that they should fight the cultural and traditional barriers so that women should come to their right place in the church and society. The similar stories of Jesus in the Bible are one of the strongest tools to speak against the patriarchal community.

5.2.7. Summary of the Three Bible Studies

The above three Bible studies show the way the women and young minsters in the church understand and use the Bible to overcome the cultural and social problems that encounters their daily lives and ministries. I would like to emphasize on two main points out of it.
The first one is the way they understood the historical context of the text and apply it to their own context. Both the women group and the ministers told the context of Mary is similar to the context of that of the women in the church. Mary was neglected by her community because of her sin and her sex. They pointed out that the women in the church are also neglected because of their social status for example being widow or being poor and moreover, because of their sex. Everyone who attended the Bible study explained the strength of the socio-cultural context of the community against the liberation of women.

The second point is how the text empowered them to move above their socio-cultural context. It is very inspiring to watch the happiness and joy on their face when they explained about their recognition by Jesus. They feel their liberation in following Jesus. The story constructed self-esteem in them as one of the women said during the discussion. She said “It made me to change the way I look at myself. It built up self-esteem in my heart.” (W2.15) The made them secured and empowered to fight for their freedom.

The good progress about the church is that the young ministers and theologians are today speaking against this patriarchal bondage in every occasion they may get. The Biblical stories are their main foundation to go forward for this struggle.

5.3. Reflection on the Analysis of the Bible Studies

The aim of the Bible study was not to make a detail exegesis and different forms of interpretations. Rather it is to show how the church uses the stories of the Bible in relation to promoting the status of women.

Yet I would like to reflect on some common points these contextual interpretations of the women in the Synod have with the African Feminist interpretation of the Bible. Oduyoye says that “African women do theology with their whole beings: rural women walking for water and firewood, cooking meals, caring for children; urban women working in shops and I the market, everywhere in Africa women proclaim through their lives a courageous hope in the goodness of life in the midst of incredible poverty and oppression.” The lives and testimonies of these women approves this that they celebrate the freedom they experienced in reading believing those stories of Jesus in the midst of severe poverty and patriarchal discrimination. Oduyoye calls Jesus as “the boundary

18 Rakozy 2004:17
breaker”\textsuperscript{19} to show the way African women believe in Jesus as friend, healer and advocate that came to them breaking all the cultural, social and religious boundaries. Many of the repeated response of these women during the Bible study is that Jesus broke the boundary of culture and religious norms and came to them to empower and equip them for his ministry as he did for Mary. As it has been discussed, these women believed to be very important in the sight of God. One of the responses was “women are worthy and faithful as men if not more” (W3.8) this shows that Jesus revealed to Mary and gave her the greatest message of the New Testament before any one. He did it to them also because he considered them like men if not more. So according to them they are as worthy and capable as men to participate in part of service and ministry. Again this is very similar with the expression of Nasimiyu when she explains that the role of women exceeds the maternal role. She says “Jesus today recognizes the African women not just as a nurturer of life but as one who participates fully in the life of the church as theological teacher, catechist, biblical interpreter, counselor, and as one called to restore the church and humanity to the initial inclusiveness, holistic and mutual relationships between women and men.”\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{5.4. Some Common Approaches of the Bible Interpretations}

Since one of the aims of this thesis is to find common grounds between the Charismatic and African Feminist Theologians, I would like to draw some points that may help to show these similarities depending on the experience of the Bible studies. In fact, some concepts that are used by some African feminist theologians used to express their interpretation differ from the way the church approaches the Bible. For example as it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, the church approaches the Bible as a word of God that is written in the context of certain culture, language, geographical location and time. Therefore the church approaches this word of God by rereading and reinterpreting in its context so that it can express the will of God to all humanity which is equality and freedom.

Yet, we find many similarities between the way these women interpret the Bible and the African Feminist theologian interpretation. One of the big similarities is that both look at their Bibles through the eyes of African women. This is one of the three main areas where the Concerned Circle of African Women Theologian (CCAWT) Phiri describes this saying

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Oduyoye 1996:113
\textsuperscript{20} Nasimiyu-Wasike 1989:131}
“the roles and images of women in relation to men in African culture, with especial emphasis on the rituals in rites of passages, an analysis of the interpretation between African culture and Christianity and its impact on African women: and reading the Bible through the eyes of African women”21 By reading the Bible through the eyes of African women they draw out empowering and equipping these women to achieve their liberation.

The other similarity is that one of the five tasks for African women’s theology is that they consider the Gospel to be “a sharp cutting edge to our culture in order to transform and restore the wholeness”22 It is character of the Gospel that the church teaches to restore women to their right position that has been destroyed by cultural bias concerning their humanity.

Nasimiyu mentioned two more points concerning the tasks of African women’s theology. These are “to awaken people to critical reflection so that they do not accept tradition simply as given. To critically undermine “established sinful order” and renounce all that dehumanizes people in African culture”23

It is the task of the church also to create awareness among the people on the harmful cultural traditions that oppress and dehumanize women. The church also applies contextual and historical criticism to interpret the texts that speak against women.

5.3. How does the Church Deal with the Biblical Passages that Speak against Women Today?

The understanding and teaching the church to these Biblical passages has been changing since the last two to three decades. According to Rev. Bangu,”This change has been observed in connection to the charismatic movement in different areas of the synod.”24 Even though the fact that the Evangelical missionaries had involved women in their missionary had built a remarkable foundation in the status of women in the society and church, the strong patriarchal mind and the strong conservative Orthodox background of the church members put a big impact on the way the church interprets these Bible texts for the last decades. The texts have been one of the big obstacles for the liberation of women.

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21 Phiri 1997: 71
22 Nasimiyu 1993:26
23 Ibid
24 Rev Bangu: Oral interview (he is a leader one parish in the synod and one of the ministers who support and women to come to their right position in the church.) There are many young ministers like him in the church today who support women’s struggle against the socio-cultural bondage.
But after the charismatic movement that brought the case of women’s ministry for discussion as it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the church started to find the contextual interpretation of the passages so that it does not contradict with the rest of the passages that support women. Many church leaders and theologians, men and women, made researches on these passages. They wrote different papers at different levels of the church against and for the women’s ministers depending on these texts. Different intensive workshops had been conducted and a number of discussions had been steered both at Evangelism and Theology Committee of the church. The church dealt with these passages very thoroughly for years after which the exegetical and theological examination with historical contextual interpretation of these passages had been accepted. Therefore, today no one uses the texts on pulpits as before to speak against women. This makes the church the only Christian church in the country that accepted the ordination and full ministry of women in the church equal with men.

5.4. General Summary and Conclusion

Here I would like to make the summary of whole study and make final conclusion. First, this thesis tried to explore the cultural background of the people in the study area. The severity of the culture in relation to women’s life hoped to be well described and understood. The few cultural institutions in which women get relief from the cultural oppression like Siinqee, Qanafaa, Atee, has also been mentioned. Secondly, the history of the introduction of Christianity has been discussed by making especial emphasis on the approach of the missionaries to the people. This way, the colonial approach of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to has been described with its impact to the social, economic and religious life of the people and to that of women in particular. The history of introduction of the Lutheran Christianity has also been discussed pointing out the approach of the missionaries were different from the rest of the other African countries. These missionaries had no colonial agenda with them. Rather, they approached the people by liberating slaves, educating, and equipping them sent them to their own people that were under bondage of sin and colony to preach the Gospel of freedom. The fact that they approached women equally with men and involved them in their missionary work and the remarkable change it has brought to the status women has also been mentioned.
Thirdly, the impact of this historical background in the status of women has been described. As part of the three ‘unholy trinity’, the socio-culture of the people has been examined. The thesis tried to show the deep-rootedness of the culture. Especially the mentality that shows the superiority men over women and its impacts on social and daily lives of women is determined.

The impact that the Orthodox Church brought to the social, economic and religious lives of the people has been pointed out. The missionaries enslaved the people taking away all what they had. The enslavement was heavier to women because the enslavement doubled their daily work load oppression. Moreover, the conservative Jewish law and literal application of the Pauline epistles that speak against women has been preached by the church that resulted to more discrimination and oppression of women.

The positive impact that brought about by the Lutheran Christianity has been discussed. They did not discriminate women; rather, they approached women to educate and empower them. As a result, some great women that can fight for their freedom had emerged. These women made many historical developments on the status of women in the church and society.

The emergence of the Charismatic movement in the area by few women has also been marked. This movement started with few women who studied their Bible in secret during the communist regime of the country. The spread of this movement all over the Synod made another big historical change on the place and ministry of women in the church. As a result of this movement, many charismatic women emerged who felt to get gifts of the Holy Spirit to preach prophesize and take in all other parts of the church ministry. This forced the church to consider this issue and make different workshops and Bible studies which led to the historical decision to accept the ordained ministry of women. And the church is the only church in the country that accepted the ordained ministry and full participation of in all positions of the church.

Two points are worthy to be underlined here that made the church to come this far in the progress of struggling for women’s right. The first one is the historical background of the church. Even though the church has been established in hostile culture that oppresses women and in the conservative tradition of the Orthodox Church, the approach of the Lutheran missionaries made a very remarkable foundation on the status of women. Secondly, the charismatic movement in the church has made a dramatic progress on the position of women in the church and the way the church interests the Bible specially, those passages that speak against women.
The contemporary analysis of the church has also been described through the presentation of the Bible studies. The contextual Bible studies has been presented, analyzed and reflected on. This way the power of the Biblical stories to empower women to go beyond their situation to fight the socio-cultural and religious bondages has been remarked.

Finally, some common points that the church shares with the African feminist theologians has been marked. This can bring the church and other charismatic churches also with the African feminist theologians together so that they can build up on their common tasks to fight for the right of African women from the bondage of the three ‘unholy trinity’.
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