



Full Length Research Paper

The Repertoires and Social Roles of Oromoo *Asmaarii*'s Performance

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Abstract

This study examines the literary content of asmaarii song lyrics and determines the type of entertainment it provides. It also attempts to shed light on its impact on Oromoo oral art, and their role on social interaction. The study aspires to making available an inciting prelude for students of literature, ethnomusicology, humour studies, anthropology and other interested groups. For this purpose, a significant number of asmaarii song lyrics mainly from the Maccaa Oromoo area have been collected through different means. Some were gleaned from published and unpublished manuscripts; while others from the author's personal recollection. Telephone conversations and written communication via the internet have also yielded some valuable data. The study indicates that the collected data contains the humorous and the non-humorous oral art material. Also revealed is the employment of four types of humour, namely: corrective, observational, scatological, and self-deprecating humour in the entertainment provision of asmaarii. The non-humorous lyrics are mainly praise songs of secular and non-secular affairs. The study also finds homology between the Oromoo people and people of the orient's custom of exalting their staple diets – buddeenaa and rice.

Key Terms: *Asmaarii*, humorous, non-humorous, lyrics, entertainment.

Axareeraa

Qorannoon kuni qabyee ogbarruu walaloota weedduu asmaariifi bashannana sabaaf kennan xinxaalurratti xiyyeeffata. Itti aansees, dhiibbaa inni og-afoola Oromoorratti qabuufi shora inni hariiroo hawaasumma irratti xabatu, kan baha-fagoo waliin waldorgomsiisee addeessa. Qorannoon kuni qorattoota ogbarruu, muuziqaa sablammillee, xin-aadaa (anthropology), baacoofi barattoota fedha qaban kaaniif jalbuusee, yookaan ittiin ka'umsa ta'uu dandaha. Kanaafis, walaloota weedduu asmaarii, caalaattuu kan Oromoo Maccaa biratti beekaman bifa adda-addaatiin funaanamaniiru. Hammi tokko, barreeffamoota maxxanfamniifi kan maxxansa eeggachaa jiranirraa kan funaanaman yoo ta'u, warri kaan immoo kan barreessaan kun qalbii keessaa qabudha. Bilbilaafi meeshaalee quunnamtii ammayyaatiins walaloonni hammi tokko funaanamaniiru. Akka qorannoon kun agarsiisutti, walaloonni funaanaman kun bakka lamatti hiramuu. Isaanis: aaf-ogina baacoofi miti-baacoodha. Akkasumas, akka qorannoon kun ifa baasetti, asmaaronni dhiyeessi bashannanasaani keessatti qomoo qoosaa afuriin fayyadamu; isaanis: sirreessii, daawwii yookiin akeekkii, booliifi of qumunsii. Sabni Oromoofi sabi baha-fagoo (far-east) midhaan nyaataaf (buddeenaafi ruuzii) kabaja hedduu ol-aana qabaachuudhaan walfakkaachuusaanii qormaati kun hubateera.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Asmaarii, baacoo, miti-baacoo, walaloo, bashanana*

1. Introduction

1.1 Asmaarii and Oromoo Oral Art

According to Jane Nandwa's and Austin Bukonya's definition, oral literature includes all expressions in the form of songs, recitations, and speeches whose production should be evaluated on imaginative and artistic scale. Proverbs, tongue twisters, cradle songs, puns, and jokes, etc. are all products of human creativity. The two writers define oral literature as: "those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression" (Bukonya, et.al, in Mwangi, 2019, p. 55).

Oromoo oral art, among other forms of presentation is expressed through songs that are mostly performed by an ensemble of participants, in which lead singers take turn, while the rest of the participants sing back in choir. Other oral art includes those that are performed around the fire hearth as well as outdoors; like tales, riddles, tongue twisters, etc. Similarly, songs are also performed by a group of singer outdoors as well as indoors depending on the occasion. *Masqala* and *Irreechaa* festivals which are celebrated annually are two good examples for outdoor celebrations; while child birth ritual could be one example for the indoors. Most of such group song lyrics and melodies have been orally transmitted all the way down to the present generation, some getting formal documentation and others not so lucky.

On the other hand, there are individual performers known as *asmaariis*; semi-professional entertainers that appear on festivities and other social occasions, performing songs and lyrics of their own creation and that of other *asmaariis*. Their oral art, as far as the knowledge of the author is concerned, does not seem to have attained the attention of researchers. The term

asmaarii, is a loan word from the Amharic language; which in turn seems to trace its root, like some Amharic words to the Arabic. In both Afaan Oromoo and Amharic language, it means a solo singer who plays a traditional one-string viola, locally known as *maseenqoo*. Even though the musical performance of *asmaariis* has been practiced in different parts of present day Ethiopia for centuries, however, since when it has been accounted a temporal musical tradition has been difficult to know. The late Prof. Ashenafi Kebede^a, in one of the musical journals published by Oxford University Press, attributes this difficulty to the unavailability of written documents or tangible evidence (Kebede, 1975, p. 52). The same could be said for the origin and historical birth of *asmaarii* in Oromoo society too.

1.2 *Asmaariis'* contribution and their socio-economic gain

According to Kebede's remarks, though entertaining is his main social duty, the *asmaarii* also plays numerous other roles. "He has been, as he still is in the rural areas of Ethiopia, a newscaster, social critic, clown, companion, political agitator, religious reformer, vagabond, poet, servant, and stroller (Kebede, 1975, p.53)." This is quite true for the traditional *asmaarii* of the Northern part of Ethiopia. However, for a craftsman that accomplishes all these social duties under a single title of entertainment, what he accrues as economic benefit and social status is quiet disappointing. The social position designated to *asmaarii* in that highly hierarchical and aristocratic society is far from inclusive; the attitude towards his profession as Kebede, 1975, p. 53 sheds light on is unfavourable and full of despondency.

The attitude of Ethiopian society towards the arts and crafts in general (with the exception of poetry), have been very negative. The secular arts and crafts including music are traditionally conceived to be specializations that should be left alone to the handicapped, the failures, beggars, lepers, slaves, loafers and others that comprise the lowest stratum of the Ethiopian class society. Whatever is negative in the minds of the Ethiopian people is more emphasized in *azmari* craftsmanship than any other aspect of the culture. Consequently, an Ethiopian parent would feel disgraced if his son becomes an *azmari*, though probably less so if he himself is one. And, generally speaking, no parent even an *azmari* would normally permit his daughter to marry one.

Traditional *asmaariis* had neither employment nor fixed salary. They usually sing in local beverage house where customers drink honey-mead and other home-made drinks. Sometimes they sing by repeating the lyrics the customer tells them, to verbally attack another customer, thereby becoming a medium for exchange of insults. The employment that often comes from the nobility was not on a par with the respect and economic privilege that their craft deserved. If employed by a nobleman, as Kebede notes, *asmaarii's* task primarily is that of an ordinary household servant (Kebede, 1975, p. 51). He further notes:

For the most part, the *azmari* led a nomadic life. They went from door to door, from one house to another, usually *tejj-bets* (honey-wine drinking houses), or from party to party (weddings, births, etc.). They moved from village to village, district to district. Sometimes a nobleman employed an *azmari* on a temporary basis in order to have the musician

^a Prof. Ashenafi Kebede (1938 – 1998): was well known Ethiopian composer, conductor, ethnomusicologist, historical musicologist, and a man of pen too.

accompany him on a long journey and enliven an arduous trip on a mule or by horseback. The *azmari* followed on foot, as did all the other servants, and ran behind the nobleman's mule. He entertained the master during and after meals, or when he camped for the night. If the *azmari* succeeded in diverting the master, the leftover food from the master's personal dish would be sent to him as a reward of appreciation (Kebede, 1975, p. 52).

On the other hand, in the Oromoo society, where the socio-political relation was traditionally less hierarchical and known as an egalitarian and democratic system, the social status of *asmaariis* is not different from any other member of the society. Though they are not many in number, their popularity and their influence on Oromoo culture could be justified by the fact that the lyrics of their songs from the by-gone times have been passing orally from one generation to the other all the way to the present, without any proper written documentation. It is not unusual to hear the lyrics of *asmaariis* songs being quoted during social interactions and attributed to them as: "... *jette asmaariin*" (...said the *asmaarii*). Some are part-time singers while others are nomads that move from one place to the other and cover long distances to look for an occasion where their performance is needed. Over all, they are mainly known for variety of songs they perform during holidays, festivities and other communal gatherings.

They are self-taught musicians who picked the profession on the merit of the suitability of their voice for singing and their sense of humour. Here, it should be noted that what is meant by sense of humour is with reference to the three possible definitions given by Eysenck, which are: "conformist, quantitative, and productive" senses of humour. What is meant by conformist is when a person is stimulated to laughter by a situation that made others laugh. The quantitative describes a person's trait, such as getting amused easily and enjoying laughter more often than not. Finally, the productive, as the word itself indicates, defines a person's ability in producing humour to amuse others, by telling laughter eliciting stories or jokes, etc. (Martin, 1998). Obviously *asmaarii* seems to fit more in the third definition even though both the conformist and quantitative definition also are applicable to him. His main duty is performing variety of songs that are composed by him or other *asmaariis*. He is a social critic, a poet, a comedian, advice giver, and guardian of the social norms and conventions.

2. The repertoire of their songs

The repertoire of their songs could be divided into two categories: the humorous and the non-humorous. The non-humorous includes variety of praises, such as praise for God and Earth (*Waaqaa* and *Dachee*), praises for *buddeena*: a flat, wide, and fluffy kind of bread, a staple diet of most Oromoo families, praise to heroes, dead and alive, and praise to domestic animals for service they rendered to man. Most of their humorous songs carry messages that are related to social corrective. They seem to lay emphasis on humour as a medium of social reform through which exposure of certain individual behaviours they deem unacceptable (stinginess, cowardice, adultery, cheating) to mockery and ridicule.

However, before performing any song of entertainment the *asmaarii* gives precedence to enquiring after the wellbeing of both *Waaqaa* and *Dachee*; whose name more than often is invoked together whether in praise, in blessing or cursing. This notion of inseparability of the

two is the reflection of the Oromoo traditional belief that maintains a view that at the beginning “Waaqaa was laying close to *Dachee* fertilizing it with his rain” an image that Bartles (1990, P. 108) likens to that of a human couple, i.e. Earth being the wife and *Waaqaa* the husband. This very close relation, according to an Oromoo tale, finally came to an end when an arrogant and over satiated mule gave him a kick in the belly. *Waaqaa* got angry, and cursed her saying “May you become and remain barren, forever!” and receded to where he is today. It is interesting to note that two other people from two different African countries tell similar stories but with different reasons for the sky god’s recession.^b

The verbal greeting the *asmaarii* extends to *Waaqaa* and *Dachee* is not unique or divinity-targeting praise in content, but the same customarily greeting expressed by any two Oromos on meeting one another. However, it should be noted that in Oromoo society, greeting is not only a conversation opener or a lubricant to oil one’s way to a social interaction; it is a social situation where information about the wellbeing of the individual, the family, the community and the environment is exchanged. The detail of the greeting includes inquiry about and concern for each other’s health, and overall wellbeing of each other’s family. Enquiry after the wellbeing of property (cattle), the serenity of the vicinity and beyond is part of the greetings. In general, the Oromoo greet one another ecstatically.

2.1 *Asmaarii* Praise songs

The *asmaarii* glorifies *Waaqaa* (*Rabbii*) by singing His miraculous attributes; he exalts Him as an almighty, omnipotent creator in whose hands everything’s fate is; and finally he concludes his praise by beseeching Him about his own future. The following two lyrics popularly known among the Maccaa Oromoo of Western Oromiya are sang by *asmaariis* in praise of *Waaqaa* and *Dachee*:

^bAn article by the same author, initially under the title “*Miten Tavaseen Tuli Reikä ja Muita Afrikkalaisia Taruja* in *Kumppani* 4/1996 (Finnish cultural magazine) and finally “*How a Mule Cracked the Ozone, and other African Folktales*” in *Oromo Commentary* Vol. VII No. 1 1977), attempts to make an analogy between the causes of the Ozone depletion; - one of the causes for global warming, and the ancient stories from three African people that narrates why and how the sky god receded further away from the human touch.

Among other things, in the article is presented how the Somali and the Bini of Nigeria narrate similar story to that of the Oromoo, but with different reason for god’s recession. According to the Somali the cause for his recession was the work of two millet pounding women. Every time they raised their long-wooden shaft they unintentionally hit the low laying sky god and pierced many holes in it. That was what disappointed the sky god and made him recede up to where he is today.(Hange, A. Artan. *Folktales from Somalia*. Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1983)

The Bini of Nigeria narrates a different reason for why he receded. When the sky god was laying low, people did not need to labour at all. They just stretched their hand and cut a piece from the sky and eat. But sometimes they used to cut more than they could finish and throw the excess to the garbage; for which god gave them advice and warning. When they declined his advice and kept on their extravagant behaviour the sky god receded out of their reach. (Chinweizu, I. *Voices From Twentieth Century Africa: Griots and Town criers*, Faber and Faber, London 1988.)

2.2 *Faarsuu Waaqaa*

Ququrxamaa mukaa
Qurxamaa mukaadhaa
Dambii akka buqqee;
Dudubbataa dhugaa
Dubbataa dhugaadhaa
Jedhaa dhugumaadhaa
Rabbinagaan bultee?
Rabbi nagaan ooltee?
Bultaniin incaalaa
Ooltaniin itti aanaa
Yaa Rabbi situ caala
Kan garaan fittaalaa.
Yaa Waaqayyo hinroobdaa...
Yaa abbaa guungumaakoo
Roobdee magarsitaa
Jeejee dhidhimsitaa
Yaa abbaa hundumaakoo.
Baala midhaan goota
Muummees laga goota
Kuullees sa 'a goota
Yuuyyees nama goota
Ana iyyeessakee
Uumtee attam nagoota?

Praise for Waaqaa (God)

A broken wood
 A wood that is broken
 Sycamore like a pumpkin;
 Speaker of truth
 Speaker of nothing but the truth
 The one who speaks the truth
 Rabbi, have you had a good night?
 Rabbi, have you had a good day?
 Have-you-stayed-the-night-well is better
 Have-you-stayed-the-day-well follows
 O Rabbi you are the exceeeder of all
 O you, with an immense cosmic whole.
 O, God, you rain!
 O, my master of roaring thunder
 You rain and germinate plants all over
 And cast away hunger
 O, our cosmic father.
 You turn leaf into crop bumper
 A creek into a mighty river,
 Shimmer cattle with colour
 You turn a man to a cur;
 Me, your poor being...
 Lo and alack, what is my future?

As mentioned previously, according to traditional Oromoo belief, there exists a kind of marital relation between *Waaqaa* and *Dachee*. The rationale behind this is *Waaqa's* provision of rain and *Dachee's* germination of crops with the provided rain. The gratitude expressed in the lyric is hence for *Waaqaa's* provision of rain without which the germination of crops and bearing seeds or fruits is unthinkable; and by extension, without which the survival of human beings is at great risk because of the imminent hunger. The *asmaarii* marvels at *Waaqaa's* ultimate power that manifests itself in germination of plants and production of crops, in reproduction of cattle of different colour, in creation of rivers and creeks and also in shaping of human behaviour and personality; or in his up and down mobility on the social ladder.

2.3 *Faarsuu Dachee***Praise for Mother Earth**

The *asmaarii* personifies *Dachee*, portrays her as a compassionate mother with bountiful of wealth. He greets her and inquires after her situation not only like a worried son that enquires after his mother's wellbeing; and seems to take the inquiry a little further to the realm of philosophy. He expresses his wonderment about her contradicting character – her kindness as opposed to her meanness. He marvels with the paradox of her diametrically opposite nature of the way she treats her children; i.e. sustaining them with inequity but devouring them indiscriminately.

Dache naganan ooltee?
Yaa ishee niiti Waaqaa
Irrikee midhaani
Jalliikee bishaani

Dache did you have a peaceful day?
 You, wife of *Waaqaa*,
 On top of you is grain
 Beneath you is water,

<i>Du'aan sirra ciisaa</i>	Inside you the deceased lying
<i>Jiraan sirra fiigaa</i>	On top of you the alive running
<i>Yoo sitti awwaalani...</i>	We bury in you, both poor and rich
<i>Nan ajaayee hin jettu</i>	You never complain of stench
<i>Sirra yoo qotani...</i>	If we plough you for our food
<i>Nan madaaye hin jettu</i>	You never complain of the wound
<i>Gara baldeettii koo...</i>	My tolerant mother
<i>Ati nagaan ooltee?</i>	Did you have a peaceful day?
<i>Ati nagaan bultee?</i>	Did you have a peaceful night?
<i>Dache yaa dinqitu...!</i>	O, you wondrous Mother Earth...!
<i>Jaartii garaa meeti</i>	Lady full of treasures to amass,
<i>Sirra qonnee nyaanna</i>	We farm and nurture from you;
<i>Jiraa keenya baatta</i>	Alive, you carry and sustain us.
<i>Yaa sugeessitukoo...</i>	O, our satiating mother;
<i>Sirra horree yaasna...</i>	On you we reproduce and flock in mass
<i>Du'aa keenya nyaatta</i>	Deceased you devour us
<i>Yaa gumeessitukoo!</i>	O you, our ultimate accommodator.
<i>Sooressa abbaa shittoo...</i>	The perfume soaked rich
<i>Natti urgaaye jettee</i>	For his aroma and scent
<i>Ofitti fudhattee</i>	You take him into you;
<i>Hiyyeessa abbaa cittoo...</i>	The scabies-infested, poor-snitch
<i>Natti ajaayee jettee</i>	Never complain of his stank
<i>Deebistee hin gashitu</i>	And you never return him back
<i>Yaa wal qixxeessituukoo!</i>	O, you, my equaliser!

2.4 A Humorous Incantation

As much as they beseech and praise *Waaqa* and *Dachee* with a strong conviction and with a soft and sweet melody, they also give a quick, non-melodic monologue; that sounds more of a humorous incantation than a serious prayer from a devotee or strict worshiper. And yet, the humorous incantation is a supplication for protection against a variety of strange natural disasters ranging from an untameable opposite sex; to wear and tear that comes with age, and to vanishing of the whole race *in toto*. Here is an old piece from my own recollection:

<i>Ababbaraa farda baraa</i>	A frenzy horse that time brings
<i>Jeejee fagaara qaraa</i>	Famine with a sharp bottom that stings
<i>Kan afaan qorshee caccabee</i>	She with broken calabash for a mouth to argue
<i>Kan abbaan gorsee dadhabee</i>	One who her father's advice could not subdue;
<i>Hantuutaa karaa taa'ee sirbu</i>	A mouse that dances on the road side
<i>Nama manasaa taa'ee najibbu</i>	A person who hates me from where he resides;
<i>Qoraattii dhoqqee keessaa</i>	A thorn in the sludge
<i>Badii galgala keessaa</i>	Disappearance of the later age;
<i>Qalqala maruu</i>	Coiling up skin-bag
<i>Galgala baduu</i>	Vanishing in old age sag;
<i>Qullubbii tumuu</i>	From onion pounding
<i>Muxuxii dhumu</i>	From totally vanishing
<i>Nu baraarii yaa Waaq!</i>	- Save us all; O God!

2.5 Praise for a Legendary Hero

One of the data collection methods employed for this project was telephone conversation with Oromos from different walks of life including researchers with strong academic credentials. Some provided me with new lyrics and their historical background; while others provided me with the missing parts of the few lines I already know and helped me make it whole. For instance, the following two lines of folk lyric have been lingering in my memory for many years now, without knowing who authored them or when and why they were authored. Here they are:

<i>Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa nama balaa</i>	Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa is a brutal cutthroat
<i>Akka re'ee ciibsee nama qala</i>	He slaughters a man like a goat

Luckily, a respected and well-established intellectual from Addis Abeba University, kindly told me that the lyrics are about an Oromoo resistant named Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa who is said to have lived during the initial phase of Emperor Haile Selassie's reign in the then province of Kaffa, in Limmuu area. Hasan is said to have revolted against the Emperor, claiming that he does not deserve to be reinstated to his throne after running away and staying in exile in England for a period of five years (1936-1941), leaving the people of Ethiopia to the mercy of the Fascist Italian occupying army. The Emperor's government raised a militia unit from the neighbouring provinces to crush Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa. Finally, Hasan was captured and hanged; or "turned into a beehive" as the *asmaarii* in the following lyric puts it; making an analogue between the way the local farmers hang beehives on tree branches and the method applied to eliminate Hasan. The lyric reads thusly:

<i>Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa nama balaa</i>	Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa is a brutal cutthroat
<i>Akka re'ee ciibsee nama qala</i>	He slaughters a man like a goat
<i>Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa hinfakkaataa</i>	Looks like Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa, he who there stands
<i>Dimotfooriin harkaa hinaddaataa</i>	A <i>Dimotfour</i> gun shining in his hands
<i>Egaa yaa surree koo hardha manacaata!</i>	Woe is me; what a day of ruin for my pants!
<i>Yaa nugusaa dhuguma mootanii</i>	Your Majesty; you are undisputable ruler alive
<i>Kan Hasaniin gaagura gootani</i>	For you turned Hasan into a beehive
<i>Utuu gaagurri Hasan dammeesse</i>	Had Hasan's beehive made honey as awaited
<i>Jimmaa fi Leeqaa wal balleesse.</i>	<i>Jimmaa</i> and <i>Leeqaa</i> ^c , one another would have annihilated.
<i>Hasan Abba Tibbaa yaa boxollee</i>	O Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa, the adorable
<i>Kankee duuti natti hin tollee</i>	Your's death, for me is unpalatable
<i>Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa yaa shaashaatu</i>	Hasan Abbaa Tibbaa the jovial and the glee
<i>Duutee badde anaa nyaatu.</i>	You're dead and wasted; devoured be me.

The lyric is flavoured with scatological humour and sarcasm. The *asmaarii* claims that the very looks of Hasan is so terrifying such that he is going to wet his pants. He deprecates himself in order to highlight Hasan's brutal nature. Moreover, the *asmaarii*'s appearance as a double faced actor is evidently seen. In the first few lines he sings about the cruel nature of Hasan, whose horrifying appearance even from afar brings panic and makes the pants wet; while he praises the power of the emperor who subdued him; though he turns the method (hanging) he chose to punish Hasan into sarcasm. Soon after, he comes out of the concealment he was in and shows his true face when he expressed his sympathy and sorrow for Hasan's demise. He sings how the

^c*Jimmaa Abbaa Jifaar* and *Leeqaa Naqamtee* were two sub-provinces during the Emperor Haile Sellasie's reign.
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death of Hasan “the jovial” made him uncomfortable and even goes to the extent of wishing to die on his behalf. ^d

2.6 Praise for domestic animals

According to Finnegan’s observation, in eastern and southern Africa one of the subjects of praise poetry is cattle and other inanimate things (ibid. p.111). In Oromoo society, this custom of praising cattle and other domestic animals is performed by the *asmaarii* as well as the farmers who keep these animals. The *asmaarii*, for instance, begins his praise by extending his greetings and gratitude to domestic animals, taking into account the service they render to man, and critically questions what man would have been without their service. Here are some praises for domestic animals that the late Aseffa Tuuchoo documented:

2.6.1 *Farsuu wadala harreef*

Yaa wadala harree
Atis nagaan bultee?
Haadha fardaa kortee
Gaangoo nuu dhalchitaa
Sooddootti achi kaattee
Soogidda nuu fiddaa
Situ soogidda baataa
Nutu taa’ee nyaataa;
Attaam nagaan bultee?

Praise for male donkey

O, you, the jackass
 Did you have a peaceful night?
 You mount the mare
 And a mule you beget us
 You travel to *Soddoo*
 And salt you bring us
 It is you who carry the salt
 But, it is we who sit and dine in fact.
 Did you have a peaceful night?

While being grateful for the service the ass renders to the community and sympathetic for not being paid enough for its service, the *asmaarii* does not mention its place in mythology, in which the ass has strong presence and features. The ass in the annals of legend and mythology is portrayed, mostly not only as a beast of burden but rather as a sacred animal, as a religious symbol, as a major character in numerous folktales and fables of many European, Asian, and the Middle East countries. According to *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* the ass was associated with Palm Sunday and Saint Nicholas. It was the main feature of the Feast of Fools, a commemoration held in some parts of Medieval France in January 14, of the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt, Mary and baby Jesus riding on an ass. The ass has also been at the centre of religious controversy. A paragraph from *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* has the following to say:

Greek and Latin writers accused the Jews of ass-worship and later made the same accusation against the Christians. These accusations probably originated in the misconception that the Jews worshiped Dionysus to whom the ass was sacred. The ass was the religious symbol of the Gnostic sect of the Sethinai, and is traditionally sacred animal because of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem upon an ass. The dark strip running down its back crossed by another at the shoulder was given to it because it carried Christ. (Leach et, al. 1984, p. 83)

Its body parts were believed to be having curative element. In Medieval Europe, the squeezed juice from its fresh dung was used to treat eye ailment, its hoofs to treat gout, and its blood to predict the

^dThe phrase “*anaa nyaatuu*” or “*biyyoon anaa nyaatuu*” litrary means “let the soil eat me;” is expressed upon hearing grief or something touching.

future etc. The *asmaarii* praise song for the ass does not reflect much about its feature in Oromoo mythology.

2.6.2 Faarsuu gaangeef

Yaa gaangoo giraancee
Atis nagaan bultee?
Bagaa nuuf jiraatte
Situ mootii baataa
Otuu ati hinjirree
Attam taana laataa?

Praise for the mule

O the gray mule
 Did you have a peaceful night?
 Thanks, for being here for us
 It is you who carry the chief-lord
 Had you not been here, o God!
 What would have happened to us?

As the last line of the praise lyric above indicates, had the mule not been around, the question on whose back the feudal lord would have been carried from place to place seems to weigh heavy in the mind often *asmaarii*. It is a question of a sarcastic nature prompted only by a man who has experienced a bitter social relation, such as the one between an armed settler colonialist and a serf, a relation that is characterised by brutal exploitation. The *asmaarii* wonders, had the mule not been around to serve as a beast of burden who would have carried all the heavy loads; including the chief lord. And that is a reason enough to be grateful to the mule and underline the importance of the service it renders to man.

2.6.3. Faarsuu Kormaa indaanqoo

Praise for the Rooster

As some mythological and historical records show, in addition to its being a universal symbol of the solar energy, the rooster enjoys a strong symbolical representation in almost all religions of the world. For instance, in Christian tradition it symbolises Christ, and light (Linsley, 2016, 1 Martins, 2015, 2). In Islam, as M.A. Carrillo notes it symbolises the angel: “The Prophet himself asserts that the white rooster is his friend because it announces the presence of the Angel.” In addition he remarks that: “The Prophet is said to prohibit cursing the rooster, which calls to prayer.” Carrillo further notes that, while the Chinese based on its appearance and character believe the rooster symbolises what is known as the “five virtues”; that are related to civility, military, courage, kindness, and confidence; the Japanese, associate its chants “with the raucousness of the deities, who lured Amaterasu, Goddess of the Sun, out of the cave where she had been hiding (Carrillo et.al, 2014, p. 2).”

Like the other cultures mentioned above, the Oromoo *asmaarii* sings about the rooster’s close connection to God; whose language is be known to it. In addition the point he mentions in his song is the rooster’s polygamous nature and contradictory behaviour of rummaging in the garbage during the day but proudly alighting above all others during the night: a little nearer to the heavenly home.

Yaa kormaa indaanqoo
Atis nagaan bultee?
Kosii keessa demtee
Raammoo haadhaa oolta;
Guyyaaa namaa gadii
Halkan namaa oli
Hin qottu, hin gabbartu
Niitii kudhan fuutaa
Shantama dhashita

O rooster, the male fowl
 Did you have a peaceful night?
 You roam in the garbage
 And scratch for warms and rummage
 During the day you are below us
 At night you alight above us
 You neither farm nor pay tax
 But yet you marry ten
 And sire fifty

<i>Baaritti achi haasofte</i>	You talk beyond the seas
<i>Barii lafaa himtaa</i>	And forecast the cockcrow
<i>Afaan Rabbii beektaa</i>	God's language is to you be known
<i>Lafa barii eegdaa.</i>	And you wait for the coming of dawn.

The polygamous nature and its managing a big family with no income from farming seems to mesmerise the *asmaarii*, probably whose family life like most farmers' is from hand to mouth. According to the *asmaarii* the rooster's morning chant which is generally believed to herald sun rise, and the assumption that it comprehends the heavenly language, makes the rooster God's errand messenger that announces to humanity the disappearance of darkness and the appearance of light.

Such animal praise songs bring to mind the laws and regulations enacted by Booranaa Oromoo Gadaa leaders of the bygone ages' against the maltreatment of domestic animals and the care that should be given; especially the enactment by Yaayyaa Galee Anno and Yaayyaa Goloo Goboo. The law, by Yaayyaa Galee Anno obligates the owners to take cattle to pasture and water wells, and take care of the calves. Yaayyaa Goloo Goboo's enactment declares that, even though horses and donkeys are individually owned, they are communal property that every clan member should look after their wellbeing. Goboo's enactment grants individual members of the community the right to bring to the attention of authorities any owner who abuses and maltreats horses and donkeys, so that these animals are taken away from him and given to others who could handle them better (Ujulu, 2018, p. 24).

3. Praise for *buddeena*

Different cultures have developed different attitudes and regards towards their staple diet. Some elevated it to a higher level of socio-cultural strata; while others consecrated it. For instance the sanctity of rice, in Japan according to *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (Leach, 1984, p. 938) is so high such that next to the emperor, it is the most sacred of all things on earth. Furthermore, among the ten classifications of mankind Gautama Budha, the primary figure of Buddhism made, while he himself comes first, rice comes second, and the counterpart of hell comes tenth. The Balinese people think that rice has soul similar to that of man and is called by the same cognomen.

The same dictionary notes that in Sri Lanka a rice farmer before sowing the seed should ceremonially be clean and prayers should be said over the seeds. It further notes: "At all points from the breaking of the ground to the final consumption of the grain including sowing, cultivation, reaping, threshing, measuring, storing etc., supernatural advice is sought and followed (ibid: p. 937). In Southern China, where rice is the staple food, "Have you eaten your rice?" is equivalent to the common sentence "How do you do" used for greeting (ibid: 9, p. 38).

The association of wheat with divinities; such as the goddess Demeter of the Greeks or with Ceres, the goddess of harvest of the Romans or its later attachment to the Christian Virgin saints St. Vulgan in Ireland Notre-Dame Pantiere, Our lady the Bread Giver in France, are also mentioned by the dictionary.

A similar practice is observed in Oromoo, even though they do not pay homage to a single particular grain but they revere *buddeenaa*—the traditional flat and wide bread, mentioned previously - in general, from whatever cereal it is made. The Oromoo express the loftiness of *buddeenaa* by equating it with the highest authority. They say *buddeen mootii dha*; which literally means *buddeenaa is king*. By extension, *buddeenaa* is synecdoche, i.e., one small portion of the whole livelihood. In some Oromoo society *buddeenaa* is a symbolical representation of profession or employment. “*Buddeen baafateera*” means he has earned a living or a trade; or *buddeen furdaa nyaata* literally means “He eats fat bread” which figuratively is “He earns a big salary.”

The reverence for *buddeenaa* starts right on the farm plot, before it appears on the dining table. As a teenager, I remember watching how farmers including my father performed the custom of pouring libation on the farm field before the annual harvest. The libation included a bunch of the fresh harvest, homemade beer, and sacrifice of a lamb. Members of *daboo*, - an *ad hoc* group of farmers for co-operatively participating in farm work, such as clearing farm field, farming, weeding, harvesting and storing – later after the day’s work eat, drink, and sing homage to *buddeenaa*, and sing praise songs for the cattle. Here are few lines of lyrics of such a song:

3.1

<i>Nooruu yaa buddeenaa</i>	Reverence for you <i>buddeenaa</i>
<i>Yaa buddeen dhirsa dhiiraa</i>	O <i>buddeenaa</i> , the husband of man
<i>Buddeen guddisaa koo</i>	O <i>buddeenaa</i> that brought me up
<i>Buddeen maaf tuffatu?</i>	Why underestimate <i>buddeenaa</i> ?
<i>Maxinoo cuffatu</i>	A mouthful bite of it we take
<i>Farsoosaa unatu</i>	A cottage-beer of it we make
<i>Maatii ittiin bulfatu</i>	A family we sustain with
<i>Boqqolloo isa molgoo</i>	The curved up maize
<i>Bisingaa isa okkoo</i>	The hook-like sorghum
<i>Daagujjaa quqummee</i>	The oval-like ragi
<i>Xaafii qoxol diimaa</i>	The <i>xaafii</i> with red spikelet
<i>Garbuu isa jorooroo</i>	The slender and elegant barley
<i>Farda koottee baasaa</i>	Makes the horse gallop faster
<i>Jagna onnee kaasaa</i>	And the brave more braver
<i>Nooruu yaa buddeenaa warqee koo</i>	Reverence for you <i>buddeenaa</i> , my gold
<i>Sumaaf yoona geessee nabseen koo</i>	Because of you my life is so far sustained. ^e

As mentioned earlier, in the above lyric *buddeenaa* is revered for sustaining human life in a simple and clear term, regardless of what cereal it is made from. The shape and looks of different cereals are also endeared. However, in his praise for *buddeenaa*, the *asmaarii* performs, probably as an introductory song, an aphorism that embodies more than one implication. In the four lines presented below the importance of *buddeenaa* in life is not presented in simple and ordinary terms, but it rather picks a philosophical view to further assess

^eSource: Rev, Birrii. Fiixee, (2012): *Seenaa fi Aadaa Oromoo Wallaggaa*, Dambii Doolloo, Ethiopia.
Zealelem, *The Repertoires and Social Roles of Oromoo Asmaarii’s Performance*

its multiple effects vis-à-vis the established social norm of the Oromoo society. Let us take a look at the aphorism the *asmaarii* presents, and try to explain its content:

3.2

*Badhaasaa Calqanii,
Badhaasaa Calqanii
Kan buddeen ajjeese,
Madaasaa hin argani.*

Badhaasaa Calqanii
Badhaasaa Calqanii
If one that is killed by bread
No wound can be seen on the dead.

A closer look at the four lines gives us multiple of meanings. The first line “*Badhaasaa Calqanii*” is a personal name either inserted as a historical subject to be remembered as a victim of *buddeena*, or just to create a tonal parallelism with the last line of the lyric; a literary style frequently seen in Oromoo folk poetry.

What the two last lines reveal is the gist of the message, which is death caused by *buddeena*, without inflicting wound, and with no trace of blood. In another word the lyric holds two paradoxical messages; i. e. the two powers that *buddeena* possesses; – the power to sustain life, and the power to deprive of it. It contains a double message; what the lack of *buddeena* entails hunger and starvation *pari passu* with what excess consumption (gluttony) brings; which is death, in both cases. The third and implicit message that it carries is the manner in which *buddeena* is earned. Since *buddeena* also implies a livelihood; the manner and ways in which it is earned determines the moral standing of the individual. Therefore, the third important message is whether the livelihood has been earned in a dignified, honest, and acceptable way that the well-established social norm dictates, or in undignified, dishonest, opportunistic and immoral way; because for the *asmaarii*, who also plays the role of a guardian of social norms and values; those who earn their livelihood in the latter fashion are dead to the society. *Buddeena* has killed them without inflicting wound, and with no trace of blood.

The *asmaarii* continues delivering his performance in which he elevates the status of *buddeena* above everything beneath the sky and above the earth.

3.3

*Gadi buutee uddeellaa, kooraa gaabi sadii
Nooruu yaa buddeena, gooftaa Waaqi gadii
Warri buddeen quiffee, jaarsaa fi jaartinillee
Gola keessa fiigee didibbee xabata
Warri buddeen dhabee, misirroon kaleessa
Kaloo keessa fiigee si jibbee xabata
Taraa wal aboota,
Akka ilmaan jaldootaa*

A downward crupper, saddle with three cotton blanket load
Reverence to you *buddeena*, you are a king next to God.
Those satiated with *buddeena*, even grand-dad and grand-mum
They run around in the inner room and play drum-drum
Those who lack *buddeena*, even the bride and groom
They run in the field and play I hate you; I hate you
And strike each other with a fist, boom and boom
Like the offspring of the baboon!

For *asmaarii* without *buddeena* love, marriage and honeymoon are unthinkable. The motionlessness of human emotion is captured in the following lines:

3.4

*Eegan hunda faarsee
Takkan buddeen faarsaa
Kan Waaqni nuu laatee*

Since I have praised all
Let me praise *buddeena* once
That *Waaqaa* granted us

<i>Koorichaa, koorichaa,</i>	Saddle, saddle
<i>koorichaa gaangoo dha</i>	That saddle of a mule
<i>Wanti Waaqaa gadii</i>	Of all that is under <i>Waaqaa</i>
<i>Wanti lafaa olii</i>	Of all that is above the earth
<i>Guddaan buddeenuma.</i>	<i>Buddeenaa</i> is the greatest.
<i>Yaa buddeen gabbataa</i>	O <i>buddeenaa</i> ; the plump
<i>Namni yennaa si quufu</i>	When satiated with you
<i>Utaalee xaphata</i>	Men play and jump.
<i>Jaarsaa fi jaartiinillee</i>	Even old men and women
<i>Aarrisaa filata</i>	They comb their grey hair
<i>Shushubbee taphata.</i>	Dance to <i>Shushubbee</i> ^f fanfare.
<i>misirroon kaleessaa</i>	The yesterday's bride
<i>Yennuma sini dhabdu</i>	When she fails to get you
<i>Dhirsaa dhiiftee baati</i>	Runs away from her husband;
<i>Gaafa guyyaa shanii</i>	Just on the fifth day
<i>Eega wal fuudhanii</i>	Of their matrimony
<i>Wanti nyaataan dhibnaan</i>	For lack of something to be eaten
<i>Gola keessa kaatuu</i>	They run in the inner room
<i>Uleen walqabatu.</i>	Strike each other with a broom.
<i>Gaafa halkan sagalii</i>	On the ninth day
<i>fayyaa wal baqata</i>	Both are on their own way
<i>Walitti hindubbatu</i>	Never talk to one another
<i>fiirmaa walii laata</i>	They annul the signature.
<i>Edaa yaa buddeena...</i>	So... O you <i>buddeenaa</i>
<i>miilli dhala namaa</i>	Human being's legs
<i>sumaan jajjabaata.</i>	Are strengthened by you.

In general, the *asmaarii* praises *buddeena* as quintessential straightener of that part of the human body that shrinks and wrinkles easily. And finally, he extends gratitude to the farmer, who produces this powerful master next to *Waaqaa*:

3.5

<i>Sibiilla dookaye</i>	A shapeless rough iron
<i>burruusatu finiinsa</i>	A hammer makes it sweat
<i>Ija boolla bu'e</i>	A sunken eye-ball
<i>maddii qoqoncoore</i>	Puckered cheeks hanging to fall
<i>hudduu shushuntuure</i>	Wrinkled buttocks that loll
<i>buddeentu diriirsa</i>	<i>Buddeenaa</i> stretches them all.
<i>Gabaree yaa qottu</i>	O the man that ploughs; you the farmer
<i>Hojiin sittaa haa toltu</i>	Blessed be your life and labour
<i>Jabaadhuu nuu qoti</i>	Be strong and keep on farming
<i>Waan ittiin jiraannu.</i>	So that we could keep on living.

4 .Faarsuu bookaa

Praise for Mead

Daadhii, and *bookaa* are the two names that the honey-mead is known by in Oromoo society. It is a beverage of a special occasion, when compared with cottage beer or *farsoo* as it is called. The praise for *daadhii* or *bookaa* is not for the beverage *per se* it is rather a wrapping for the

^fShushubbee: A kind of dance.

expression a deeply set emotion, a message for transmitting to bring to the attention of the society a social problem. The following two stanzas are certainly praise for honey mead. The second two lines carry a message that call for unity, and awareness to the importance of cohesion and loyalty to one's own social entity.

<i>Daadhiin gad wixxisaa</i>	Mead is in a mad-rush to loom
<i>Gorduuba dhufuufi</i>	And come to the living room
<i>Buustuutu ol ittisaa</i>	But the pourer is the preventer
<i>Bor duuba dhguufi</i>	To drink it alone later
<i>.....Ko' yaa daadhii!</i>Come on; O honey mead!
<i>Daadhiin gurraattidha</i>	Mead is colour black
<i>Yoo dhugan diimtuudha</i>	But red when drank
<i>Calaaqisaa hin dhftuu?</i>	Don't you come shining bright?
<i>Akka ija biiftuudha.</i>	Like the sun's glowing light.
<i>.....Ko' yaa daadhii!</i>Come on; O honey mead!
<i>Kiiramuu, Kiiramuu</i>	Kiiramuu, Kiiramuu
<i>Kiiramuun wal loltee</i>	The Kiiramuu have quarrelled
<i>Dachaa Warabitti,</i>	In <i>Waraab's</i> plane land
<i>Diigamuu, diigamuu</i>	Scattered, scattered
<i>Diigamuun hin tollee</i>	To be scattered is bad
<i>Dachaana walitti.</i>	Let us together stand
<i>.....Ko' yaa daadhii!</i>Come on; O honey mead!
<i>Musee Kumbul beektaa?</i>	Do you know Mr. Kumbul?
<i>Faranjicha tokkoo</i>	The one from the foreign land
<i>Dhagaa bittinneessaa</i>	He scatters the rock with his hand
<i>Kan firasaa jibbee</i>	One who hates his own relatives
<i>Halagaa leellise</i>	And praises his non-relatives
<i>Harkaan of xinneessa</i>	Brings disgrace on himself.
<i>.....Ko' yaa daadhii!</i>Come on, O honey mead ^g

5. *Asmaarii* as a peace advocate and a social critic

Individuals could rise from poor communication and misunderstanding. Verbal abuses and harassments can also cause conflicts depending on human mental makeup. Some people are insensitive towards verbal abuse such that they deal with it in a humorous way. Others are not. Massimo Pigliucci in his summary of William Irvine's, *A Guide to the Good Life*, provides us with two humorous responses by two classical philosophers, - Cato and Socrates - to the insult hurled at them. He writes:

Cato was pleading a case when an adversary named Lentulus spit in his face. Rather than getting angry or returning the insult, Cato calmly wiped off the spit and said, "I will swear to anyone, Lentulus, that people are wrong to say that you cannot use your mouth!" Or consider this: "Someone one came up to Socrates and, without warning, boxed his ears. Rather than getting angry, Socrates made a joke about what a nuisance it is, when we go out, that we can never be sure whether or not to wear a helmet.

The problem is, not everybody treats verbal abuses and put-downs with humour or with acquiescence. Some prefer to pay back with a cudgel, while others brandish a sword. And not

^gSource Prof. Tesema Ta'a.

everybody is Cato or Socrates either. What is depicted here is that humour also serves as a sort of defence mechanism, the type that Freud characterises as “that allows one to face a difficult situation without becoming overwhelmed by unpleasant emotion (cited in Martin 1988, pp.18-19).

Since *asmaariis* play other roles besides entertaining their audience; in between their songs they insert few lines of lyrics that carry words of wisdom and messages of advice against conflict inciting social elements like verbal abuses, and unnecessary comments, that might bring the cudgel into play, which is to the disadvantage of the *head* whose complaints reads as follows:

5.1

<i>Amaan, amaanii, Amaan, amaanii.</i>	Peace, peacefully; Peace, peacefully.
<i>Hamaan afaanii, hamaan afaanii</i>	Mean is the mouth; mean is the mouth
<i>Dubbate na rukuchiisa</i>	For the speech that it made
<i>Jedhe mataanii</i>	I get beaten up says the head.

The *asmaarii* at times prefers an indirect method of hinting at new phenomena by shedding light on the negative sides of newly introduced commodities that were not previously known in the Oromoo day to day life: And he does that under the guise of narrating their positive side; like the previously not existing bravado and hullabaloo a coward demonstrates after having a sip or two of *araqee*; the ever blaring propaganda dissemination on the radio etc.

5.2

<i>Araqeen maal balleesse?</i>	What is it that <i>araqee</i> ^h did wrong?
<i>Lugna goota fakkeesse</i>	Except making a coward appear a hero
<i>Shinshiniin maal balleesse?</i>	What is it that <i>shinshiniin</i> ⁱ did wrong?
<i>Beera mucaa fakkeesse</i>	Except making an old women look like a girl
<i>Baatiriin maal balleesse?</i>	What is it that a pocket light did wrong?
<i>Halkan guyyaa fakkeesse</i>	Except making the night shine as bright as day
<i>Raadiyoon maal balleesse</i>	What is it that the radio did wrong?
<i>Soba dhugaa fakkeesse.</i>	Except making a lie look like the truth.

As a social critic, *asmaarii* makes it his duty to give a piece of his mind for those who waste their hardly earned income on drinking that home-made spirit locally known as *katikaalaa*.

5.3

<i>Katikaalaan nama daarsaa</i>	<i>Katikaala</i> ^j impoverishes a person
<i>Hindhugin yaa ilma jaarsaa</i>	Don't drink it, o son of a wise man! ^k

And he has an advice both for those who have insatiable appetite for wealth as well as for those who amassed and lost their wealth; or *addunyaa*; a term *that* might have been borrowed from the Arabic language. In Oromoo, it mainly means wealth. It also means the good fortune of going up and the misfortune of coming down the socio-economic ladder. According to the

^hAraqee: The word is from the spirit (drink) called *arak* or sometimes spelled *arrak*, or *araq* in Arabic.

^j*Katikaala*: Home-made spirit.

^kSource: Ayele Tamiru 17.07.2019

asmaarii world view getting conceited about this unreliable, coming and going *addunyaa*, to which he attaches a feminine gender, is not advisable.

5.4.

<i>Addunyaan galaana</i>	Good life is like a flood
<i>Namarraa godaanaa</i>	It floods in and floods out
<i>Yommuu dhufuuf jettu</i>	When she is about to come
<i>Dallaarra marsiti</i>	The fence she circles
<i>Yommuu galuuf kaatu</i>	When she is about to depart
<i>Dallaa caccabsiti</i>	The fence she shatters.
<i>Adunyaan hin koorinaa</i>	Of good life do not be a conceited freak
<i>Adunyaa konyee hin guunne</i>	Good life that does not fill the palm,
<i>Deemtee muumme hin dabarre</i>	Dose not travel beyond the creek
<i>Adunyaan Garbuu tabbaatii</i>	It is like on-a-hill-top barley farm.
<i>Guddatee ganyaa dhoksaa</i>	Hides a mare when grows tall
<i>Jigee hindaanqoo mul'isaa</i>	Exposes chicken when suddenly fall. ¹

Asmaariis are also keen observers of the effect of certain governmental policies on the society and individual members. One good example is an *asmarii's* take on the aggressive cultural assimilation policy implemented by successive Ethiopian states. The policy implementation made Amharic the official language of the country and created a wide chasm between the few literate and the majority illiterate. As a result, those who learned to speak the official language and accepted the Orthodox Christian faith by dropping their traditional religion has gone through some sort of social mobility that made their day-to-day life remarkably different from the common town dweller. This created a chasm that was not previously there and brought to existence a “we” and “them” notion among the members of a society. In some places, the opportunistic stand and pretentious attitude of some of those Oromoo cultural turncoats did not escape the satirical treatment of the *asmaarii*. Here is one from Western Oromiyaa, Gimbii town, (446km from Finfinne – Addis Abeba) about a literate Oromoo named Fayisaa Gootaa, who according to my informant, Ayele Tamiru, changed his name to Abbaatee Fissahaa, (Father Fissahaa) and became an Orthodox priest and later elementary school teacher, for which he was awarded a service medal. A local *asmaarii* known by the name Abbaa Kaarruu came up with the following satirical song:^m

¹Source: Anonymous

^mMy informant Ayele Tamiru from Gimbi, Western Oromiyaa, has the following to say about Abbaatee Fissaa: Abbaatee Fissaa (Fayissaa Gootaa) was born in Gimbii, in a village called Cuuttaa during the reign of Minilik. During that time, Fitawraarii Amantee Bakaree, a local chief, built a church of Saing George and brought a priest by the name Abbaa Wolde Elias from Gojjam. Abbaa Wolde Elias in addition to the church service started teaching how to read and write, and the Ge'ez language to small children, among whom was Fayisaa Gootaa. Fayisaa, when he gets back home from school began teaching to local children of his clan (Tosiyoo) all what he learned during the day at school. During the reign of Lij Eyaasuu; Abbaa Wolde Elias noticed Fayisaa's effort and sent him to Gofjjaam so that he could further study the Orthodox faith. During his studies in Gojjam his name was changed to Fissahaa. After completing his study and ordained as a priest he returned to Gimbii during the reign of Queen Zawdituu and gave up his church service to begin teaching children. He pursued his teaching job both during Haile sellasie reign; and during the Italian occupation. He was a teacher in a modern school built by Dajazmach Gebere Egziabher from grade 1 to 8. In 1971 (E.C) for the service he rendered was given a golden medal by Dajazmach

5.5.

<i>Botoroo yaabeen jigsaa</i>	I climb <i>Botoroo</i> and cut it
<i>Dhirsaa giiftii Sannaayit</i>	The spouse of lady <i>Sannaayit</i>
<i>Nooruu yaa Abbaatee Fissaa.</i>	Greetings! O father <i>Fissaa</i> .
<i>Abbaate tamaartanii</i>	O Father, you became literate
<i>Mangistii gargaartani.</i>	And supported the government.
<i>Abbaatee mataa shaashii</i>	O father, whose head is in a turban
<i>Yaa michuu Dajjaammaashii.</i>	Bedfellow of the man that govern.
<i>Abbaate hin malattani</i>	O father, you cunningly planned well
<i>Kan shaashii marattani</i>	That, you wrapped your head with a veil
<i>Masqalii qabattanii</i>	That you clutch the cross with your palm
<i>Dawwitii dagamtani.</i>	That you read and recite the psalm.
<i>Daakaa galaanaas beektu</i>	You know how to swim in the lake
<i>Afaan amaaraas beektu.</i>	The tongue of the Amhara you speak
<i>Kobbortaa gaarii qabdu</i>	You have a nice overcoat, indeed
<i>Eessaa nu jalaa qabdu!</i>	No wonder, us, you don't heed.

6. *Asmaarii* on Adultery

Until recent times, adultery in many countries has been considered one of the serious crimes to be dealt with, with severe punishment; and was condemned as an immoral, antisocial and criminal act by all the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as well as Hinduism. The severe punishment for committing adultery was usually for the women, and occasionally for the man, and the penalties ranged from banishment, mutilation, torture to capital punishment i.e., death by hanging, stoning etc. Some countries implemented public humiliation of both sexes instead of physical elimination. According to a Wikipedia Documentⁿ, such punishments have gradually fallen into disfavour, especially in Western countries beginning from the 19th century.

The following statement is made at the risk of being proven wrong, due to the unsuccessful effort this writer made to collect verifying evidences. So, here I go! There is no doubt that adulterer and adulteress have existed in the past, and do exist in the present Oromoo society too, but the kind of severe punishment mentioned above is unheard of. *Gadaa* as an open and a democratic system, neither promoted nor condemned adultery; it is practiced in a hidden way with the assumption that it is unbeknown to others; and especially to the spouse. And that makes the matter a risky business and adventurous for the adulterer. However, because of its familial and societal repercussion when such relation becomes known one of the following two things might happen. The spouse might take personal measure, or bring the case to the attention of the traditional authorities. The traditional authorities assess the familial and the societal damage the relation had brought; and in addition, the character and social standing or reputation of the adulterer. Based on their findings, they fine the adulterer with few heads of cattle, to be paid to the spouse. And, I stand to be corrected, if a researcher comes out with a better result.

Figre Sellasie Habte Mariam. Later he became a pensioner and died in 1985 at the age of 93 (May honey mead fill his cemetery).

ⁿ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adultery>

The *asmaarii* captures the situation of the adulterer and makes a mockery of it; a performance that could be categorised as corrective humour; a construct that combines wit and ridicule as its tools to elicit laughter. The French philosopher, Henri Bergson evaluates corrective humour from its educative aspect, and as a tool of betterment of harmful individual behaviour that otherwise would have called for “punitive measures”. He further characterises the laughter caused by corrective humour as “...a social reaction which punishes and puts down deviant elements in man's behaviour and in various events (191: 70).” Ziv Avner concurs with Bergson’s views and elucidates the emotional impact of such mockery on a perpetrator. He notes that “...the fear of becoming a target for mockery should be sufficient to prevent a person from again committing the deed that has led to a punitive reaction (1988: 357).” Similarly, Ruch, and Heintz (2016:2) assert that exposure of failures or inappropriate behaviours to mockery and laughter shame the individual as well as the group to improvement.

The *asmaarii* turns this excursion of the adulterer to the island of love and bliss into a frightening adventure for other would be adulterers and a laughter eliciting phenomenon for his audience. The *asmaarii*’s mockery on adultery is expressed in the following lyric of one of his songs:

6.1

<i>Siyii taa'ee natti raaju</i>	While, you were telling me the wonders untold
<i>Anaa taa'ee sitti baacu</i>	While, I was selling you the jokes unsold
<i>Dhufekaa abbaan galma keetii!</i>	Here arrives your husband, o my God!
<i>Dhufekaa abbaan galma ijaare</i>	O, here arrives your abode's builder
<i>Kan gaaddidduun mana caale.</i>	Whose shadow is than the abode bigger.
<i>Ol adeemuuf gooda hamaa dha</i>	I can't run up, I am out of breath
<i>Gadi adeemuuf ol adeema;</i>	I can't run down, that is where he is!
<i>Harka tokkoon buta baataa</i>	He carries a machete in one hand
<i>Harka kaaniin guca baata</i>	and, a torch in the other
<i>Butasaatiin na butuufi</i>	To snatch me with his machete
<i>Gucasaatiin na gubuufi</i>	To burn me with his fire;
<i>Dubartiin mala hin wallaatu</i>	For a woman is clever and able
<i>Gola gaangee xob na godhi</i>	Snatch and throw me into the stable
<i>Balfaa gaangee natti aguugii</i>	Cover me up with that hay, indeed
<i>Qiccaa daadhii natti guuri</i>	and, feed me drops of honey-mead.
<i>Huubaan makii gadi na baasi</i>	Take me out, mix me in hay
<i>Bishaan alaa nama nyaataa;</i>	Let the river take me away.
<i>Yaa tumtuu gama Wiinsaa</i>	O the blacksmith at <i>Wiinsaa</i> , yonder
<i>Edaa lubbuun nama fiigsaa</i>	A tormenting life gives the spur.
<i>Jedheetan yaada Disaasaa;</i>	Thus, I rain on me thoughts of despair
<i>Disaasaa kee ittuma dhiisi!</i>	Never mind my thoughts of despair
<i>Bishaan lapheetti na biifi.</i>	Spray my chest with water, o quick!
<i>Bishaan kan kee ittuma dhiisi</i>	Then again..., better forget the water, I think
<i>Aannan lapheetti na biifi.</i>	Just spray my chest with that milk
<i>Aannan kan kee ittuma dhiisi</i>	Then again..., forget your milk, my sweetheart
<i>Laphee gubbaa gad na ciisi</i>	Just, come and lie down on my chest
<i>Nafsee duwvaa gadi na dhiisi</i>	And set my life free to fly
<i>Nafseen duwwaan kan Rabbii tii.</i>	For it belongs to the God in the sky!

A relation between the adulterer and the adulteress sometime takes an unexpected turn and becomes an absurd situation. The adulterer, instead of treating his lady as a partner of love and

bliss rather acts totally out of his sphere of influence and attempts to control, set norms and even punish her; an aberrant situation that originated the following popular proverb. It reflects a similar situation and other incongruities that arise from problems and consequences that one brings upon oneself.

6.2

<i>Harkaan idaa:</i>	What a self-inflected debt
<i>Namaa hin qotuu,</i>	He neither farms for you
<i>Namaa hin loluu</i>	nor fights for you and protect
<i>Sanyootu nama hidha!</i>	But an adulterer imprisons you yet!

The kind of entertainment the *asmaarii* provides includes impersonation. However, he does not imitate or copy others, in the real sense of the term; rather he attempts to play act others imagined performances, like that of the adulterer presented above. He makes a mockery of certain imagined or real happening that he believes failed to measure to the established social norm. In the following lyric the *asmaarii* assumes the behaviour of a disappointed bride and vents her complaints on how the groom lied to her about the non-existing wealth he boasted about when he coaxed her to marry him. The *asmaarii* brings the maiden sexual interaction of the bride and the groom to the scenario which from the bride's perspective was a murder attempt on her life by the groom and her mother-in-law; rather than an unforgettable first night of a honeymoon; but of course, she gradually changes her attitude, as the following lyric tells:

6.3

<i>Mucaa boddosee ija kuullee</i>	Buxom baby with eyeliner
<i>Birriin okkotee shan guute</i>	I have five earthen-pot-full of silver
<i>Jedhee sossobee na fuudhe</i>	So he said and inveigled to marry me
<i>Yeroon okkotee harka kaa 'u</i>	But, when I put my hand inside the earthenware
<i>Barariin ukoo na guute</i>	Cockroaches filled my armpit, I swear;
<i>Yeroon boorsaasaa harka kaa 'u</i>	Inside his pocket when I put my hand
<i>Rigaa shantamii shan fuudhee</i>	Fifty-five toothpicks is what I find.
<i>Kan na dhibe kan haadhasaa ti</i>	His mom is a surprise, yet still
<i>Sabbata mudhii na hiiktee</i>	From my waist she untied the girdle
<i>Ilmashee gadi natti dhiiste</i>	And let loose her son on me, for the kill.
<i>Gara bariitti achi guuree</i>	So towards the dawning of dawn
<i>Aggudduu lafatti dhiibee</i>	To the ground pushing his toes down;
<i>Hadutuuf gadi natti dhiibe</i>	He shoved it in me murder-intent, so to speak
<i>Ciiseen ilaale akka raatuu</i>	I lay down there and watched like a fool, so to think
<i>Turee mi 'aaye akka baaduu</i>	But after a while it turned sweet, like skim milk
<i>Anoo hinduune galatasaati</i>	I didn't die thanks God; what a surprise!
<i>Wantichoo safarasaa ti.</i>	Actually, that thing is just a matching size.
<i>Torbee boodaa...</i>	A week later.....
<i>Gajaraa na harka buusee</i>	He put a machete in my arm
<i>Laga bunsaa naa buuse</i>	And sent me to his coffee farm
<i>Waggaatti gombisaa lama dhaabnee</i>	A year later we built two granaries, what a joy
<i>Mucaa ilmaas dalga baannee.</i>	And sideways we carried a baby boy.

7. Why the *Asmaarii* chose his profession

Zealelem, The Repertoires and Social Roles of Oromoo *Asmaarii*'s Performance

For the *asmaarii* introducing himself, particularly the reason why he chose this occupation is one way of eliciting humour. He sings in a tone of self-deprecation, while indirectly exalting others whose trade benefits the society. The more he tells a story of himself depicting it as much unfortunate as possible it appears as much incongruent as possible. He plays the role of an eccentric as well as that of a dolt. Occasionally he takes a grain of certain substance from his pocket and rubs it against his *maseenqoo*'s string for a better tone and sound. The curiously watching youngsters ask him what the substance is; to which he responds: "It is a leopard's eye-goop (rheum) that I plucked while the beast was sleeping".

He attempts to appear as eccentric and as hopeless as possible in how he tried his hand at many occupations but could not succeed. For instance, how he tried to be a farmer but failed because the ox that pulls his plough smeared him with mud; so he gave it up. A clerk he tried to be but his eyes couldn't see through the murk; and even sought advice from others, but some turned him down while others gave him the wrong advice. He would have remained a hopeless good-for-nothing fellow had he not one day grabbed his lance and chased and killed a dik-dik and made himself a *masiinqoo* out of its skin and became an *asmaarii*. Ever since the *masiinqoo* is hanging down from his neck and rests on his chest; and he proudly claims that the dik-dik that runs away from others, as for him it plays on his chest. He thusly sings his rather funny mini-bio that is filled with lame and exaggerated excuses; in other words deprecating himself in order to elevate and praise those hardworking men of different professions:

7.1

Qurupheen orma caakkaatti baqatti

Anammoo lapheerraa na xabatti

Qoteen nyaadha jennaan

Sangaan dhooqqee na dibe

Hordaan rom'ee na dide

Barreesseen nyaadha jennaan

Ijatu arguu na dide

Sobeetan nyaadha jennaan

Ollaan baaltii na hime

Namni waasi na dide

Maali malli koo jennaan

Nagadeen nyaadha jennaan

Harreen fe'amuu dide

Teephni qax jedhee cite

Malli koo maali jedheen

Beektuu durbaa gaafadhe

Isheenis akkas jette:

"Ganama dibbeen xaxa

Galgala sirban dhaqa

Sodaa ababbaafaan rafaa

Kuni maal lafallafa

Beenu karaan si haffaa"

Jettee nyaarashee buttee

Anaan garaa na kuttee.

From others the dik-dik runs to the forest

But with me she plays on my chest

I tried to farm and feed myself

But the ox smeared me with dirt

The plough shaft shook and resist

I thought of earning a living as a clerk

But my eyes couldn't see through the murk

I tried to earn a living as a liar

Tattletale neighbours killed my desire

Men refused to be my guarantor

What should I do, I pondered

To earn a bread as a merchant I hit the road

But the donkey resisted the load

Alas; the breaking of the leather strap no one forebode!

What could be the solution, I said

From a wise girl I enquired

And thusly she answered:

"In the morning I tangle my drums

I go dancing when the evening comes

I go to sleep for fear of my father

What is it that you jabber?

Go away, you have still road to cover."

Her eyebrows she knit, saying that

And made me give up in fact.

Maali mallikoo jedheen
Beekaa tumtuu gaafadhe
Innis akka naan jedhe

“Ganama tumaan tuma
Guyyaa cilaattiin guba
Qottuutu na gaafata
Maarshaa labsiisuufi
Qonyee na marsiisuufi
Ati dhuftee dhaabbachuun
Jiruu na hiiksisuufi
Malakee maalan beeka”

Jedhee nyaarasaa butee

Innis garaa na kutee.

Maali mallikoo jedheen

Beekaa faaqii gaafadhe

Beekaa faaqii gaafannaan

Innis akkas naan jedhe:

“Fardatti kooraan hodha
Koortuuf makaddaan hodha
Natu miidhagsa soddaa
Ganama duugaan duugaa
Guyyaa sareerraan eega
Kun maal dhaabatee seeqaa
Narraa geggeessaa Leeqaa!”

Jedhee nyaarasaa butee

Innis garaa na kute

“Kottu malan sii malaa”

Jedheetu na deebise

Barcuma na teessisee

Akkas jedhee na gorse.

“Qalqalloo qarshii shanii
Gabaa baatee bitatta
Harree wadala korma
Qarshii shantamaan bitta
Fuutee Kurmuukiin lixaa
Warqee isa dheedhii fidda

warqeen dhabame

Busaa goromtii fiddaa
Galtee ittiin dugdaa cittaa”

Jedhee kana natti himee

Wayyoo yaa bada abbaakootii

Kun dhuma dubbii kooti

Jedheen bayee baqadhe

Waayee namas kakadhe.

Maali falli koo jedheen

Shaanfoo koo manaa butee

What could the solution be, I pondered
From a wise blacksmith I enquired
And thusly he answered:

“In the morning I hammer iron
During the day, charcoal I burn
Those who plough demand of me
To make them ploughshare
And a hook curved and bent
Your arrival to stand here
Is making me an indolent
I know no solution; you solve it.”

His eyebrows he knit, saying that

He also made me give up in fact

What could the solution be, I pondered

And from a wise tanner I enquired

When I enquired from the wise tanner

He too answered thusly:

“I make saddle for the horse
for the bride I make a pillow
It is me who beautifies the in-law
In the morning I am busy tanning
And watch out the dogs during the day
Why is this standing and sniggering anyway?
You, *Leeqaas*^o please chase him away!”

He too eyebrows knit, said that

And made me crestfallen in fact

“Comeback and have my advice”

So he called me back, how nice

Gave me a chair and made me sit

And gave me all his wit

“A leather sack is five *qarshii*^p

You can buy from the market

A he donkey, a jack ass

You buy with fifty *qarshii*

Off to *Kurmuk*^q you go

And bring gold that is raw

Ennaa

If gold is not found

A pullet malaria is abound

You come home and suffer a broken back”

He told me so; the man has got the knack.

Woe is me, I am in a total mess

This is the abrupt end of my case

So, I run away from there

And swore about others’ affair.

What could the solution be I pondered

Then I snatched my lance from the house;

^o*Leeqaa*: An Oromoo Tribe

^pQarshii: A monetary name

^q*Kurmuk*: A small border town between Ethiopia and The Sudan

Kuruphee kolbaa filaa
Gaara keessa kaachisee
Shaanfoo koo itti nyaachise
Kuruphee yaa waatikoo
Orma lubuuf baqattaa
Ana lapheerraa xabatta.

Dik-dik with an upright horns
 I chased in the mountain terrace
 And made her eat my lance
 O dik-dik my bovine baby
 From others you escape at a glance
 As for I, on my chest you dance.

8. Asmaarii and reward

Asmaarii in his praise songs mentions the heroic deeds of men living as well as deceased. He sings about the generosity of husbands and the wives. He praises the tall, the short, the bald-headed and all kinds of men and women. For their performance, they are rewarded with, usually cash. As much as they praise the generous ones they also ridicule and hurl humorous insults at the stingy ones. When rewarded, the *asmaarii* produces a sound of ululation on his *maseenqoo* and blesses the provider.

One of his means of softening the hearts of his audience and make it generous is to use a self-deprecating humour as a tactic. Appearing as humble and helpless a person and lowering themselves down a little the *asmaariis* try to attain the sympathy of their audience. They seem to be aware of the fact that self-deprecating humour attains more attention than pomposity and braggart of a cocky person. There are few lyrics in my collections that can pass as good examples of self-deprecating humour. The first lyric shows how an adult *asmaarii* belittles himself to a level of a child, by asking for a prize usually meant not for adults. It reads as follows:

8.1

Waan naagootu yoo dhabde
Naa kenni indaanqoo dhaltuu
Kan lafa adeemtee galtu
Kan mana geesse dhaltu

If there is nothing you can do for me at all
 Just give me a female fowl
 That can walk home on her own
 And delivers the moment she gets home.

For a man of his age, asking not only for a fowl, but for one that can walk home like a four-legged animal is quite absurd. This is no gift that fits an adult's status; for in the Oromoo farming community it is children who are given chicken or rooster as a gift.

Asmaarii usually performs on annual holidays or other festivals. On these occasions just like the other invited guests he helps himself to whatever the festivity could afford. But during his performance, to earn the sympathy of the audience, he brings his wife into the picture, even if his not married, portraying her as a pitiful woman left at home and dying of hunger while he is enjoying himself dining and wining. In order to wheedle his way to the pocket of his target he blames himself for lacking a leather sack, in which he would have taken some food home for her, a strange and unheard of practice.

8.2

Wayyaa Dangalloo Shabbaa
Wayyaa Dangalloo Shabbaa

The cloth of *Dangalloo Shabbaa*
 The cloth of *Dangalloo Shabbaa*

<i>Ofiikoof nyaadhee quufee</i>	As for me, I am well satiated
<i>Niitiinkoo agabuu jirtii</i>	But my wife is dying for a snack
<i>Wayyaa qalqalloo dhabaa!</i>	O, my lack of a leather sack!
<i>Asmaariin fira miti</i>	An <i>asmaarii</i> is not a relative
<i>Dhabu siin hilaa mitii</i>	If I don't get, I will not be lenient
<i>Yoon sitti siqee ijaajjee</i>	If I move and stand near you
<i>Maal gammadde naan jettaa</i>	You may say what made him happy
<i>Yoon sirraa siqee ijaajje</i>	If I move and stand away from you
<i>Maal dallante naan jettaa</i>	You may say what made him unhappy
<i>Gullallettan nagada</i>	I will go for trade to <i>Gullallee</i>
<i>Damma foolleetti naqee</i>	With a gourd full of honey
<i>Hindheeratee yoo jette</i>	If you say you are too tall
<i>Quphaneen sii sagada</i>	I will squat and bow to your wit
<i>Hamma abootteetti galee.</i>	Sizing-down myself to a fist.

When his cajoling yields positive result he blesses the generous provider with one of his humorous blessings. To make his provider more delightful, he unmans and curses the generous fellow's imagined or real adversary in a laughter eliciting way:

8.3

<i>Hori! Hori! Ammayyuu hori!</i>	May you prosper, prosper more
<i>Waan nyaattuu fi waan dhugdu</i>	May what you eat and drink
<i>Hamma afaanii fi fuunyaani sitti haadhiyeessu!</i>	Be as near to you as your nose is to your mouth
<i>Namni sitti hinaafu</i>	May he who is jealous of you
<i>Irraanolee abida haabaqatu!</i>	Flee from fire up-a-hill-track
<i>Abidi fagaara isaatti haaqabatu</i>	May fire catch his buttock
<i>Irraangadee dhagaa haabaqatu!</i>	May he flee from rocks a-down-hill-track
<i>Namni amajaajii keetii;</i>	A person who is your adversary
<i>Shan haa albaatu guyyatti</i>	May she be attacked by dysentery
<i>Dalga haa cabdu, akka udaan ishee!</i>	May she collapse side-ways, like her crap
<i>Lafa haalixxu, akka fincaan ishee!</i>	Like her urine may the ground suck her up
<i>Tasa haabaddu, akka dhuufuu ishee!</i>	Like her fart may she completely evaporate up. [†]

Conclusion

Asmaarii is a traditional entertainer that has impacted the Oromoo people's social life. His performance embodies both the humorous and the non-humorous oral literature that reflects Oromoo ethos. However, one might ask does the *asmaarii* himself have a sense of humour? The answer, simply is, not only that he has a sense of humour, but he is a mini humour factory that provides a multifaceted entertainment to his community. The *asmaarii* is a singer whose songs and a performer of praise and a humourist too. His is a social critic, a peace advocate and the guardian of the cultural norms and social values such as honesty, bravery, generosity, and hard work. He promotes the Oromoo language and literature through his poetic talent. He is an entertainer as well as an advice giver on the avoidance of conflict and advancement of social harmony. In general, his performance facilitates smooth interaction among community members by creating a conducive and friendly atmosphere during festivities and holidays. However,

[†] Source: Aseffaa Tuuchoo

according to a reliable individual informant who so far has collected and produced two books on Oromoo folktales and oral art, currently the number of these semi-professional singers is dwindling; due to different contributing factors; among which the pressure from religious expansion is said to be one. If such information could be verified through further research, strong voice against the deliberate eradication of a people's literary wealth and culture seems a call of the time. For most of the lyric contents of the *asmaarii*'s performance do not in any way counter the dogma of any religion, hence, an attack on a to-be-cherished tradition should not be tolerated.^s

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^sAccording to my telephone conversation with Guta Abdi, an Oromoo author's opinion, *asmariis* are no more singing in beverage houses in towns as they used to; nor on holidays and festivities. He further says that maybe few old ones could be found in the remote country sides where the influence of the Pentecostal religion has not dominated as yet.(05.01.2020)

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