



Full Length Research Paper

Geerarsaa: A multifaceted Genre of the Oromoo Oral Art

Zealelem Aberra* (MA)

Helsinki, Finland

Email: zealelemaberra@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Geerarsaa, isan Oromoo folksong, a repository for different kinds of emotionally charged messages, sung on different occasions to address different issues. Based on the representative samples obtained from manuscripts, the author's recollection and other sources, this study attempts to reveal the lyrical nature of geerarsa, its major communicational purposes and features, and the messages it conveys pertaining to praise (faaruu), ridicule (ciigoo); resentment (roorroo), delight (gammachuu); humorous (qoosaa) or non-humorous (fardii). The study employs a descriptive and analytical approach to reveal the overriding purposes of geerarsaa and the social and historical factors that shapes its purposes and its features. The analytical approach employed in this study also reveals the therapeutic role Geerarsaa played in the life of the Oromoo; victims of historical trauma due to the subjugation they suffered in the hands of armed settlers from the north; as historical documents indicate. In addition the study reveals the types of the poetic sound devices involved in the lyrical composition of geerarsaa.

Key Terms: Geerarsa, genre, historical trauma, oral art, praise songs, rite of passage

Axareeraa

Geerarsi ogina afoolaa Oromoo keessatti weedduu miirrimaddee ergaa bifa adda-addaa dabarsuuf guyyaa adda-addaatti weeddifamu dha; ykn geejaba ergaa miirri madde kana isa weeddisurraa gara isa dhageeffatuutti dabarsuun tajajila. Qormaati kun raagaalee adda addaa kan kitaabota, yaadannoo barreesichaa akkasumas maddilee biraarraa argamanirratti hundaawwuun, geerarsi ergaalee faarsaa, ciigoo, roorroo, gammachuu, akkasumas qoosaa fi fardii calaqqisan akka uddeellatu muldhisuu kaayyeefata. Qormaati kun xurree xinxaalaa fi ifaatii fuulefachuun dhimmoota jaboo geerarsi tamsaasuu fi taateewwan seenaa fi haala hawaasaa keessaa kan dhalachuu dhimmoota kanaaf akkasumas uumama bifoosaa kanaaf sababoota ta'an muldhisuu yaala. Qormaati kun xurree xinxaala fuuleffate kanaan rifaatii seenaa (historical trauma) harka qubatootaa qawwee hidhatanii kaabaa itti duulanii Oromoo isa bar tokko bilisa ture irraan gahanirraa akka dandamatu shoora geerarsi xabate xinxaala. Dabalees qormaati kun, geerarsi meeshaa qunnamtii ta'uun beekumsaa seenaa fi aadaa, safuu fi seera akkasumas argaa dhageetti Oromoo; odeeffannoo dadammaqsoo ta'an saba Oromoo hireesaafi mirgasa mirkaneefachuuf qabsaawa tureen gahuu keessatti qooda qabaachaa turuusaa muldhisa.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Geerarsa, gooroo oginaa, rifaatii seenaa, ogina afoolaa, faaruu, ayyaana ceumsaa*

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the study

One of the Oromoo folksongs that constitutes a multifaceted genre of its own, and usually sang by Oromoo men is known as *Geerarsaa*. As a term it represents both the poem and the melody combined. It has many themes and features depending on the historical and social circumstances, as well as the mood and emotion the singer is in.

Addisu Tolesa in his pioneering research on the subject introduces *geerarsa* as “a type of folksong, a medium of artistic expression firmly embedded in Oromoo social life in Oromia and Ethiopia, as well as in diaspora.” Further, he states that *geerarsa* “consists of life experience stories about the social positions of individuals, the *geerarsa* singers, based on their achievements. It is sung or recited usually by men, often in a call and response manner (Tolesa, 1999).”

Its main function is to serve as a vehicle for delivering messages pertaining to different issues; such as grievance that arise from political, social as well as economic circumstances. In addition, *geerarsaa* serves as a medium for conveying praise to different bodies. Praises for one's family, and self-praise for heroic achievement and success in economic and social endeavour; praise for value of property (gun, cattle and beasts of burden for instance), are expressed in *geerarsaa*. Heroic deeds and gains during conflict or battle, and in the olden days from hunting big games (lions, elephant, buffalo etc.) are also praised, while cowards and unsuccessful hunters are ridiculed and berated. Misfortunes, hopes and wishes, aspirations, remorse, warnings and even humour are other themes manifested in *geerarsaa*.

The pivotal role it played as an archaic tool of instruction during the informal training and acculturation of children at the initial phase of the *Gadaa* stages has also been observed by researchers (Melaku in Hinew, 2012).

1.2 *Geerarsaa* as a Lyric Poetry

Approaching the classification of *geerarsaa* poems especially by resorting to the Goethean generic classification method might pose some fundamental questions. Could a classification method that arose from Western studies of literature, nurtured by Western field research, and above all, designed particularly for written literature employed for the purpose of classifying a folksong like *geerarsaa*? Is there a boundary between oral and written poetry that hinders the application of one classification method for both? According to two prominent scholars of the field, Ruth Finnegan and Carl Lindahl, there seems no significant difference between the two.

Ruth Finnegan notes that: "...there is no clear cut line between 'oral' and 'written' literature, and when one tries to differentiate between them – as has often been attempted – it becomes clear that there are constant overlaps (1977, 2)." Carl Lindahl remarks that the opposing views on the artistic merit of oral literature has been one of the major causes of scholarly "warfare" between specialists of both fields of studies i.e., literature and folklore. As he further notes, however: "Since the late nineteenth century, growing numbers of folklorists have recognized that oral performances are artistic events which draw on the talents of gifted individuals." Finally, for those who established and follow the formula "Literature-minus-Art is-equal-to-Folklore", and for other sceptics he affirms that "Folklore is anything but art"(1978, 94, 96).

According to these assertions, regardless of their medium of presentation, they both are the literary product of creative individuals; above all, their artistic traits could equally be meritorious or immeritorious; depending on the style, technic and talent of the producer. It is based on these assertions that I yielded to the tempting task of taking glance at *geerarsaa* through a classifying lens designed for written literature. I hope it is as inciting for the scholars of the field to come up with a convincing study, as it is tempting for me. My effort is, to identify an appropriate class out of the three Goethean classification methods - (*the narrative (or epic), the lyric, and the dramatic*), - that better accommodates *geerarsaa*; the rationale being that these classes known as the three "natural forms of poetry", have been accepted as the standard for literature classification tool. They were suggested in 1819 by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and became an 'undisputed basis for most generic classifications of literature' with 'an almost world-wide relevance (William Desmond, 2020).

Of all the three natural forms of poetry, the lyric; its definition, its function, the subjectivity of its expression and the universality of its appeal seems to better accommodate *geerarsaa*. The lyric of today in the Western literary tradition was once a poem spoken or sang by an individual accompanied by the musical instrument known as "lyre:" hence, the name lyric. According to Stephen Burt's citations of different researchers: "lyric is the genre of personal expression," "a genre of song," "by definition musical" (Robert von Hallberg); poems that can be sung; poems that resemble song; "the voicing of one moment's state of feeling" (Mark Booth); "any fairly short, non-narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling" (M. H. Abrams); work that is

“personal, subjective, short, meditative, emotive, private, musical” (Dean Rader), (2016, 423-425). I think it is safe to say, in the Western literary culture, lyric today is perceived as a poem read or spoken by an individual, while *geerarsaa* as a lyric poem is sang by an individual performer. It is also safe to say that, his performance expresses his own personal emotions to which members of the community relate to because of its universal appeal. Hence, the lyricist, as Jonathan Culler elaborates is “a repertoire of discursive possibilities: complaint, praise, hope, and suffering relating inner and outer worlds (2015, 21.” So does, the *geeraraa*; or the *geerarsaa* performer.

So far all the evidences seem to indicate that, in spite of occasional generic blurs and overlaps that might be caused “as poets weave lyrical language into narrative poems (Craven, 2019)”, it seems safe to categorise *geerarsaa* poems under the lyric class of poetry. Nevertheless, it does not mean that there is no relation between the lyrical and the narrative forms. As research data indicates, in recent years this issue has become a subject of scrutiny under the lens of theoreticians and has yielded the following proposal:

As for poetry, such a transgeneric recourse to narratology is apt to demonstrate that narrative texts and lyric poems, in spite of their apparent differences in form, technique and function, share essential constituents and that narratological categories can, therefore, profitably be applied to poetry in the expectation that the more comprehensive scope and highly developed status of narratology as well as the discriminatory capacity of narratological terminology will both offer a fresh impetus to the theory of poetry and suggest new practical methods for the analysis of poems. (Peter Hühn, 2005,19).

In fact, the proposal does not deny the existence of apparent differences in “form, technique and function.” These apparent differences between narrative and lyrical poetry are: while the former “has plot, characters, setting that presents a series of events, often including action and dialogue,” all by one speaker; the latter, as have been discussed above is a subjective observation and feeling expressed by a presenter (Craven, 2019). Craven further notes that “While lyric poems emphasize self-expression, narrative poems emphasize plot.”

The attempt made so far suffice as to shed light on the nature of lyric and narrative forms of poetry and to find to which class *geerarsaa* could belong. In the following pages we shall examine its content features. Among others, *geerarsaa* contains uncensored and unadulterated messages of grievances, contemplation as well as awareness-raising propaganda dissemination; directly and artistically transmitted by a creative individual to the members of his community and beyond. Its role as a vehicle for delivering awakening messages is tremendous; for, like other African oral traditions, it possesses, what Harold Scheub, one of the world's leading scholars of African folktales, observes as an “extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses (1985:1).” The composition of *geerarsaa* lyrics, like the other Oromoo oral art (proverbs, riddles, blessings, lullaby etc.) involves features of different poetic sound devices, at different levels; i.e., at phonological level, (alliteration, consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia, rhythm, rhyme etc.) at semantic level (personification, imagery, simile and metaphor) at the syntactic level; (parallelism, anaphora etc.) and other figure of speeches.

Consequently, in order to display the thematic diversities, features and poetic sound devices the study provides a variety of samples of *geerarsaa* lyrics and their English translation.

Each sample shall be preceded by a brief introductory remark on its historical or social background, and the emotional mood that precipitates the songs.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the overriding range of functions of *geerarsaa* performance, and to identify the historical and socio-economic factors that influence them. In addition the study aims at achieving a well translated documentation of *geerarsaa* in which not only the meaning and context of the original Oromoo is conveyed to the target language (English), but the cultural nuances and feelings and emotions, the humorous and the non-humorous elements are incorporated as naturally as possible.

Specific objectives:

- To demonstrate *geerarsaa* genre's multiplicity of function by providing as much lyric samples as possible. The samples or data are from published literature sources, and from the author's recollection; hence, the study employs secondary data collection method.
- In every *geerarsaa* a story is told. In telling the stories literary devices are utilised by the story teller. Consequently, the study attempts to conduct a general stylistic analysis of some the *geerarsaa* samples.

1.4 Delimitation of the study

This article is subject to some limitations. First of all, *geerarsaa* is not limited to one region of the Oromoo population. It is a national folksong performed in different parts of Oromiya with a slight variation in forms and melodic styles; to fulfil the same objective of conveying different messages. While, this variation should have been covered by conducting an all-inclusive field research, unfortunately, due to the lack of prior research data from other regions of Oromiya the scope of the study is narrowed as to focus only on some already published data from the Maccaa branch of the Oromoo society, as well as from the author's recollection. Secondly, the study was not financially or materially backed by any academic institution. Hence, due to financial constraints planning an extensive field research and data collecting was unthinkable. However, the author believes that, the current study, regardless of all its limitation would serve as an inciting prelude for students and researchers of Oromoo folksongs, as to conduct an all covering scholarly research.

2. Data Presentation And Analysis

2.1 *Geerarsaa* as a coping mechanism for historical trauma

It is natural that, to adapt to their new situation, the least a people who went through a traumatic incident could do is to vent suppressed feelings and frustration and share them with others through mediums of verbal expression such as gossip, songs, poetry and riddles. Concerning the role of songs and singing in decreasing stress, results from some studies

show that venting oneself through singing makes a significant decrease in stress levels, (Lopez, 2018, 1) while song writing has been recognised as an effective method of coping with depression (Levihh-Coon: 2015, 1).

Hence, in modern times, as studies indicate, music and songs have been employed as a therapeutic tool to help those who suffer exposure to trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Landis-Shack et.al, for instance noted that employing music to cultivate resilience and facilitate healing in the aftermath of violence and oppression is a long and rich tradition (2017). The rationale behind this idea of prescribing music as a therapeutic tool is based on the fact that it increases “the release of endorphins to the brain” there by “boosting positive feelings while reducing fear, self-awareness, and sadness, improving one’s overall emotional state (ibid).”

While those advanced societies might rely only on the clinically proven methods of therapy to deal with trauma, the fact that every culture has its own way of dealing with traumatic experiences have been granted recognition by international organisations such as UNICEF. In this regard, though the Oromoo singer might not be conscious of the therapeutic value and importance of songs, nonetheless, *geerarsaa*, has been a traditional therapeutic tool for decreasing stress. As *Geerarsaa* lyrics presented under this sub title indicate, the songs are sang for no other reason than to cop up with the aftermath of social conflicts; especially the distress and trauma that came in the wake of the war of subjugation waged on them between 1876 and 1909. To say the least, the songs have served as an outlet to release suppressed anger, disappointment, and frustration that otherwise would have turned into a built-up negative energy that could have inflicted serious damage.

2.1 Trauma and Incidents that precipitate it

From a psychophysical point of view trauma is defined as “an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates (Freud in Leys 2000, 23).” Contributing agents for the said *increase of stimulus* or trauma obviously are natural and man-made. Among incidents that are known to cause traumatic events among a group of people are those that are man-made or natural disasters and war and conflicts can be mentioned. Rape, domestic abuse, witnessing death, drug addiction etc. could be dubbed as traumatic events on individual level. (Winmalawansa, 2013, 3)

The psychophysical effect of the increase of the stimulus (trauma) on the individual, as well as on group of people is long lasting and debilitating. U.S Department of Health and Human Services for instance, notes that “Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.” On the other hand, on mass or group level, certain historical phenomenon are blamed as agents that trigger a trauma of a long lasting effect; that destructs the social, economic and cultural fabric of a people; and hence the name “historical trauma.” Michele Andrasik, a psychologist, defines historical trauma as follows:

Historical trauma is an event, or a set of events, that happen to a group of people who share a specific identity. That identity could be based in nationality, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, race and/or religious affiliation. The events are often done with genocidal or ethnocidal intent, and result in annihilation or disruption of traditional ways of life, culture and/or identity. Each individual event is profoundly traumatic and when you look at events as a whole, they represent a history of sustained cultural disruption and community destruction. (Andrasik, 2018)

If Andrasik's definition of historical trauma is valid, the question that comes to mind obviously is whether the Oromoo has experienced, "a history of sustained cultural disruption and community destruction." The answer, according to historical documents written by both foreign and domestic historians, is affirmative. For instance, as Alexander Bulatovich notes, what initially started as a cross border raid by Abyssinian soldiers with purpose of looting "as much livestock and as many prisoners" finally grew into a full-fledged war of territorial annexation that entailed serfdom to the Oromoo mass who were free prior to the subjugation. Those who waged the war or the Abyssinian soldiers were armed with modern European weapons against people who had no firearms but traditional weapons such as spears and shields. The war, in addition to the destruction of property and large scale looting, also brought about the dreadful annihilation of half of the Oromoo population (Bulatovich in Bulcha, 2011; 364, 279).

The magnitude of the destruction on human life, and devastation of property and natural resources, the very manner in which the conquest and occupation was orchestrated was another factor that might have made the trauma debilitating and long lasting. Oromoo freedom as Professor Mohammed Hassen remarks was shattered, "abruptly and rudely" there by depriving them not only "of their sovereignty but also of their history" (Hassen: 1990:1). As Bulcha, referring to a historian comments the aftermath of the conquest in addition to the trauma and the lack of modern firearms made the Oromoo a helpless victim incapable of revolting against the Abyssinian rule for a long time. (Hodson in Bulcha, 2011: 364).

One might pose a question concerning the type of independence the Oromoo enjoyed and their perception of freedom prior to the conquest and subjugation that provoked the historical trauma that in turn instigated the indignant *geerarsaa* discussed below. This could be made clear if one takes a look at the Oromoo disposition of and perspective on the notion of independence and freedom, and the way it is incorporated in their life. Alexander Bulatovich's keen observation and eyewitness account sheds light on Oromoo outlook vis-à-vis the concept of independence in the following manner:

The main character trait of the Oromoo is love of complete independence and freedom ... The Oromoo does not want to acknowledge authority of anyone except his personal will. The former governmental system (*gadaa*) was the embodiment of this basic trait of their character... side by side of such independence, the Oromoo has preserved a great respect for the head of the family, for the elders of the tribe,

and the customs, but only insofar as they do not restrain him too much. (Bulatovich in Bulcha, 2011, 268)

As can be observed from the lyrics of the *geerarsaa* presented below, the anonymous singer (*geeraraa*) who might have been a free man, once master of his destiny seems to be in an utter disbelief when he suddenly finds himself and his society in a humiliating and depressing condition. To say that the dispossession of his land and the servile status to which his family were reduced to as unpaid labourers of an armed settler and his wife, disgruntled him is an understatement of no proportion. In general the mayhem the armed settler's invasion created and the social and economic consequence that it entailed had put the Oromoo in a traumatic situation. Hence, out of his frustration and his utter bewilderment he makes a diagnostic query asking himself and the world around him what brought upon him and upon his people the disgrace and destitution which they are experiencing today. He wails about what made him a *dresser of tattered clothes*; a destitute who *rakes cabbage*; a simpleton that *anybody could* whip regardless of his heroic and noble past. He laments about being viewed as *an ignoramus moron* and how he is *disgraced* by everyone. He asks himself and the world: "*Akkam taanee akkas taane?*" or "How did we come to what we are?" and sings his inquisitive *geerarsaa* thusly:

1.

1. <i>Akkam taanee akkas taane?</i>	How did we come to what we are today?
2. <i>Akkamiin akkas taane?</i>	How did we come to this, pray?
3. <i>Goommanaaf raafuu taane</i>	Wilt and weak like a cabbage for some
4. <i>Dhala abbaan raatuu taane</i>	Ignoramus, children of a stupid, bum
5. <i>Hunduu nutti xaphatte</i>	A ball to kick in every game;
6. <i>Muka nuugii taane kaa;</i>	We became a nigger-plant's stem;
7. <i>Hunduu nu bobeeffatte</i>	Everybody's fire-shrub to burn
8. <i>Dhala luujii taane kaa</i>	Children of a crawling worm
9. <i>Hunduu nu odeeffattee;</i>	Gossiping mouth's victim;
10. <i>Handaqii moofaa taane</i>	We became an old marsh-grass cloak
11. <i>Hundumtu nu uffatte</i>	That anybody could dress
12. <i>Gad deebii doofaa taane</i>	We became a worthless ignorant folk
13. <i>Hundumtu nu tuffatte</i>	That everyone spurns and disgrace.

The singer relies on metaphor to better describe the impact of that historical event on the life of his people. He draws similarity between two things that are naturally dissimilar. He makes an explicit comparison between incomparable things, to show how a people who were once free were dehumanized and brought down. He describes the situation of the entire Oromoo society in terms of things known to be of lesser values in the eye of the society. *Cabbage, ignorance, shrubs, dim-wit, moron*; are employed as indicators of how low the new social system has made the Oromoo sink in social as well as economic status. Furthermore, the singer puts a strong emphasis on the usage of poetic sound devices namely: parallelism (*raafuu, raatuu*), repetition (*taanee, taanee*), rhyme (*bobeeffattee, odeeffattee*), alliteration (*akkam akkas*) consonance (*bobeeffattee, odeeffattee*), and

assonance (*moofaa, doofaa*) etc. that makes lyrics resonant and enjoyable and have a reverberating long lasting life in the memory of the audience.

The collection of stanzas presented above narrates more about a physically and spiritually worn out, disgraced man. It is evaluative in its approach. It tells about some of the adverse effect of the implementation of the new mode of social system (serfdom) brought about on the general wellbeing of the subjugated Oromoo. Not only the dispossession of their natural wealth, but dismantlement of their culture, language and their general social fabric. The result as the lyrics displays is a dehumanized, disgraced, and dishonoured population that struggles to survive with smeared reputation.

Based on these historical evidence, it could be argued that the abrupt end of independence and freedom enjoyed earlier, witnessing or/and hearing about the massacre of one's own kinfolk, dispossession of national resources and confiscation of property, imprisonment and enslavement, disorganization of their social and cultural fabric are more than enough to put a people in a state of debilitating and long lasting trauma. Moreover, the imposition of subservience on the subjugated people compelled them to survive contrary to their values, social norms and convictions, their ethos and aspirations. They were compelled to call a character or a phenomenon by a name that it does not deserve; for instance addressing a coward a hero, a whore a lady, a bum and a nobody as "sir", or your "lordship", in order to survive a day or two more. The reason is calling things by their correct name is risky. To give respect and adulation for those who do not deserve and kowtowing to them became the order of the day. Gone is the day when they were free to describe situations by their true colour. And the *geeraraa* seems to blame his fate for being born in *thesetopsy-turvy of ages* as the following lines tell us:

2

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|--|--|
| 1. <i>Ulee shimala mixoo</i> | A bamboo-shrub cane in the hand |
| 2. <i>gonfa keessa qabanne</i> | From the ferrule's end we grabbed. |
| 3. <i>Jabana gilaabixoo</i> | In these topsy-turvy of ages |
| 4. <i>Kana keessa dhalanne</i> | We were born, how sad. |
| 5. <i>Sataatteen distii jenne</i> | We said a small pot is a big cooker |
| 6. <i>Bashaaxeen giiftii jenne</i> | We called a hooker a lady, a lady a hooker |
| 7. <i>Okkoteen gomboo jenne</i> | We said a pot is a clay jar |
| 8. <i>Foldeen obbo jenne</i> | "Master!" we called an ass-hole boar |
| 9. <i>Lama ittiin bullaa jennee;</i> | So that we could live two days more. |
| 10. <i>Ameessaan booqaa jenne</i> | A dairy cow we misnamed blaze |
| 11. <i>Dhama ittiin dhugnaa jennee</i> | So that we could drink whey |
| 12. <i>Dabeessaan gooftaa jenne</i> | We called a coward a hero, what a daze |
| 13. <i>Lama ittiin bullaa jenne</i> | So that we could live two more day. |

Once again, the major poetic sound devices are employed to capture the mood of his audience and emphasize emotional influence. Rhyming sounds are noticeable, occurring at the end of lines 1 and 3, 2 and 4; or right before the last word of each line, like *distii, giiftii* (5, and 6), *obboo, gomboo* (7 and 8); *booqaa, gooftaa* (10 and 12). The word “*jennee*” (which literally means “we said”, but in this usage implies admittance under pressure, or accepting the unacceptable); is an emulative recurrence that seems to mimic the recurrence of his real life tribulation. The semantic inversion in the lyric suggests the employment of antiphrastic literary style, but not in a humorous way. It rather emphasizes the fact that his effort to adapt to the alien legal code and coercive institutions of governance put in place by the armed settlers is not to his liking. Above all, the system has compelled him to misname “a coward a hero”, “an ass-hole boar a master” “a hooker a lady, a lady a hooker” all at the risk of negating his own norms and social values in order to survive few days more.

The *geeraraa* or the singer of this piece sounds an existentialist; for the more he attempts to survive the more the unfriendly environment squeezes him body and soul. Even time seems to have plotted against him. As he expresses in the following six lines the *geeraraa* complains about stagnation of time; and the stagnation is personal. He seems to complain of living in a strange state of situational ossification. Though the calendar, and the mechanistic time, all the way down to its unit of measurement, is in perfect working order; and is ticking, nevertheless, for him, time is at a standstill. The problem is with the actual *time*, that unit of measurement for human progress; it became motionless. It does not bring anything new or change that could abate his predicament. It is a paradox that there is no difference between last year, the year before last, or this year. He sings about a vicious circle in which his life is wallowing. He says that every era, including the past, the present and the future has become so identical such that time became a motionless construct that has neither brought achievement and satisfaction in his life, nor promise and hope to live for. So, he sings:

3

1. <i>Bar'dheengaddaan baranaa</i>	The year before last is this year
2. <i>Barannoo bara egeree</i>	This year is the coming year
3. <i>Barroo barumaan dhufaa</i>	A year comes every year
4. <i>Barroo barumaan darbaa</i>	A year passes every year
5. <i>Anoo barumaan kanaa</i>	I am the same every year
6. <i>Maali hoodi akkanaa?</i>	What a conundrum to bear?

As you can see, one of the poetic sound devices – an anaphora or repetition of a word or a phrase at the beginning of succeeding lines is in operation. In this case the word *bara* (year or era) with its different forms and usages is employed at the beginnings of lines 1, 2, 3, and 4; with the intention to intensifying the message and increase its memorability. In addition assonance (*dhufaa, darbaa*, lines 3 and 4); and rhyme (*kanaa, akkanaa*, lines 5 and 6) can also be noticed.

What is expressed in the following lyrics is how the imposition of a strange culture not only disarmed him of his cumulative knowledge but painted him as a complete ignorant. He is mischaracterised and misrepresented. Above all, he vents his spleen on the system that kicks him around with no regard, neither to his ancestors' bravery and heroic past, nor to his present manliness. He is robbed of his heroic virtue at a gun point. He feels disgraced and brought down so low in the social status that *anybody could whip him*. The dispossession of his cattle, - his *cash in the kraal*, if you may, made his dining table devoid of the regular diet he and his family are accustomed to - meat, milk, butter and cottage cheese; and made him a destitute who *rakes cabbage with a spoon*. Above all the lack draft animals to farm with strongly affected his annual income from agriculture. He sings thusly:

4

1. <i>Akkam taanee akkas taanee?</i>	How did we end up such a goon?
2. <i>Faldhaanaan raafuu haane</i>	That rakes cabbage with a spoon.
3. <i>Utuu akka-akkashee beeknuu</i>	While knowing how it is done
4. <i>Wallaalaa raatuu taane</i>	We became dim-wit and moron
5. <i>Mukarbaa duufte taane</i>	We became a leaning elephant-tree
6. <i>Kan abbaan arge yaabu</i>	That anybody climbs with glee
7. <i>Dhala abbaan yuuyyee taane</i>	Offspring of a mongrel's courtship
8. <i>Kan abbaan arge dhaanu.</i>	That anybody could beat and whip.

In the above presented stanza, the word *taanee* which means "we became" is repeated several times to create emphasis and rhythmic sound. Especially its consecutive repetition in lines 4 and 5 demonstrates how *geerarsaa* lyric relies on a poetic sound device termed as epiphora or epistrophe; known as a rhythm enhancer.

The scenario the singer draws in the following lyric is a sort of a conundrum. He finds himself and his kin in a dream like situation wherein it is possible to be a wealthy poor, a wise ignorant, healthy sick all at the same time. After identifying the general condition he is in, he finally starts contemplating what the solution could be and asks himself and the rest of his kin how to get out of this rut. He calls for deliverance to show him the route to freedom's land and the means to get him there, so that he could get out of this quagmire.

5

1. <i>Akkam taanee akkas taanee?</i>	How did we turn so, how come?
2. <i>Moofa uffattuu taane</i>	Dressers in tattered cloth
3. <i>Doofa of gattuu taane</i>	Self-disgusting ignorant of no worth
4. <i>Fayyaa dhukubsatu taane</i>	Healthy-sick, we became, O Lord!
5. <i>Beekaa wallaalaa taane</i>	Full of wisdom but dim-wit and uninformed
6. <i>Otoo qabnuu deegaa taane;</i>	We are haves, yet impoverished:
7. <i>Attam taanee taanuree?</i>	How can we be what we ought to be?
8. <i>Eessaan itti baanuree?</i>	Which path to take to arrive there?

9. *Akkam goonee taanuree?* Deliverance, where is the magic wand?
 10. *Kam goorree jalaa baanuree?* Which route to take to freedom's land?

As most of the lyric composition presented earlier, the above shown lines are also relying on the poetic sound devices. The rhyming phrases *moofaa uffattuu*, *doofaa ofgattu* in lines 2 and 3, *taanuree*, *baanuree* in lines 7, 8, and 9, the consecutively entered word *taane* at the end every line from 1 to 6, as we have already discussed in *geerarsaa* 1.2.4, is of course the poetic sound called epiphora; employed to enhance rhythm and create an evocative mental image of the situation.

The audiences' response to such evocative *geerarsaa* that addresses a common problem of the community is usually a sympathetic chant. Here is one such chant that remorsefully addresses one of the contributing factors towards their suffering, i.e. the absence of unity among the kinfolds:

6

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Utuu saree qabaannee</i> | If only we have a dog |
| 2. <i>Saree rimaa qabaannee</i> | A dog that is pregnant |
| 3. <i>Hoolaa bineensi hin nyaatu;</i> | Beasts wouldn't have eaten sheep; |
| 4. <i>Utuu gamataa qabaannee</i> | If only we have unity |
| 5. <i>Gamtaa firaa qabaannee</i> | The unity of kinfolds |
| 6. <i>Diinni nutti hin hammaattu</i> | The enemy wouldn't be as harmful. |

The reader is advised to notice the anaphora (*qabaannee*) at the end of lines 1 and 2, 4 and 5 and the rhyming sound captured at the end of line 3 (*nyaatu*) and line 6 (*hammaattu*). Even though there seems a sense of incompatibility between the two unrelated stories of *having a dog*, and *having unity*, nonetheless there exists a harmonious poetic and contextual affinity between the two bodies of narration presented in lines 1-3 and 4-6.

In general, the inquisitive *geerarsaa* seems to have assessed and gave an insight into the bewildering situation the Oromoo society found itself in at the time. Even though *geerarsaa* is a personal venting, however, it does not mean that a problem common to majority of the members of the society are not addressed. The song indeed reflects the very problem the Oromoo people had suffered in common; but not everybody could articulate and display a tormenting feeling in a soothing, touching and thought-provoking artistic way. It is obvious that only few in the society are endowed with the natural talent and suitable voice to a deliver a message wrapped in a captivating and evocative melody and strike many emotional cords. In fact, the *geerarsaa* lyric, as such similar lyrics are known to be, end up becoming orally disseminated propaganda material that plays significant role in sharpening a people's awareness. Regarding this point Finnegan has the following contention:

It has been well said that oral poetry takes the place of newspapers among non-literate peoples. Songs can be used to report and comment on current affairs, for

political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mould public opinion. (1970, p. 265)

Based on such assertions, it could be argued that the role of *geerarsaa* as a medium of information disseminating tool, for the then pre-literary Oromoo man was of a substantial communicational value. It is natural that the first phase of a search for solution to any problem, be it physical or spiritual, individual or societal, starts with identification of the problem itself. In this regard, the *geeraraa* has played the role of presenting questions and providing explanations for the situation he and his fellow men found themselves in but does not pinpoint the route to be taken to the solution, i.e., breaking the yoke of servitude that he implicitly indicated. But he has raised enough awareness that prepares the society to take the next action, which probably could be giving a warning to the perpetrators of the crime.

2.2 *Geerarsaa* as a medium of conveying warning

As the struggle to break the yoke of servitude gathered momentum, and the consciousness level of the subjugated mass increased, the content and message of contemporary *geerarsaa* showed significant change in objectivity and determination. *Geerarsaa* which usually follows the lyric poetry style, as the following poem indicates, resorted to historically significant messages which are strongly laden with metaphoric construction and conveyed warning to the landlords. As can be observed in the following stanza, warning against extortion, and even prognosticating the inevitable demise of the system of serfdom imposed on the mass became a popular song that seemingly played a role in ushering in the *land to the tiller* slogan of the 1960s, echoed by Ethiopian students uprising; and the coup d'état attempt that shook the foundation of the monarchy. Here is one stanza that I heard as a young man and that still lingers in my memory.

7

1. *Lakkii, lakkii birillee^a dhikki-dhikkikee dhiisi^b*
2. *Mormikee sirraa citee foollee bishaanii taataa.*
3. *Lakkii, lakkii yaa qawwee, qacci-qaccii kee dhiisi*
4. *Qaataankee sirraa citee qonyee fi maarashaa taataa.*
5. *Lakkii, lakki abbaa lafaa, as fidi-as fidiikee dhiisi*
6. *Gabbaariin biyyaa badee atuu gabbaarii taataa.*

I warn you the narrow-necked flask, stop that cling-clung,
 For, you shall lose your neck, and become a water-ladle
 I warn you musket; stop your click and squeak,
 For, you shall lose your trigger and become a hook and ploughshare.
 I warn you Mr. Landlord; stop your “bring; bring more!” stern

^a *Birillee*: is a flask with round bottom and a narrow neck to serve honey-mead in.

^b Source: Anonymous

For, soon servitude shall vanish and you become a serf in your turn.

The two self-repeating words *dhikki-dhikki* and *qacci-qaccii* in lines 1 and 2, are two of the poetic sound devices known as onomatopoeia employed by the *geeraraa*. They are words that mimic the natural sound of things or events. In this case the self-repeating words *dhikki-dhikki* and *qacci-qaccii* are representation of the natural sound that is produced by the personified narrow-necked flask when honey-mead is poured out of it, and the natural sound that the personified gun gives when loaded or unloaded. The literary device onomatopoeia is thus often used by poets to help the reader, in this case the audience, to sense a visual/audio scene of an event.

The narrow-necked flask in which honey mead is served, the musket that helped impose serfdom on the Oromoo masses, were not taken as mere utensil and tools, but metaphorically taken as material symbols of the landlord's domination which deserve to be warned equally of their future demise; unless they stop making that unpleasant voice. A slightly different version of the same *geerarsaa* has been presented by Addisu Tolesa (1999:189).

2.4 *Geerarsaa* as an expression of resentment (*roorroo*)

As mentioned earlier, the thematic diversity of *geerarsaa* varies from addressing communal issues to individual problems. Individual loss of social and economic status and the prestige that goes with it; or in other terms, suffering *downward social mobility* might lead to mood fluctuation or even mental depression that could make the individual susceptible to trauma. Comparing one's social/economic position with that of a successful member of the society and feeling sorry for oneself could be the first step towards self-destruction. Blaming the situation on the times or on one's fate could be one form of rationalizing and coping up with reality. Here is a *geerarsaa* from an anonymous singer who believes that he deserves better but whiles the time away wallowing in self-pity instead of taking adversity head-on.

8

1. *Inni abbaankoo guddise^c*

2. *Kaballaan na kuffise*

3. *Inni abbaakoo tii gadii.*

4. *Hardha gaangeensaa sadii.*

5. *Gaangeen biyyaaf barcuma*

6. *Ani hin yaabne takkumaa.*

7. *Kaabbortaan raroo taatee*

8. *Na geessee rakkoo taatee.*

The one my father brought up

Brought me down with a slap.

The one lower than my father, in every way

Owens three mules today.^d

Mule, a cushioned-stool for all

I haven't mounted one at all.

The over-coat, a skin-mat for every man

But for me so troublesome to have one.

^cSource:

^dIn the time when this *geerarsaa* was sang, mule was a means of transportation that the haves only could afford. The over-coat also was a luxurious cloth that few could put on.

The *geerarsaa* performer who sings such pitiful songs usually receives a sympathetic and a comforting response of chants from the audience. Here are few:

9

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Gindiin yoo dhiitan malee</i> | Ploughshare, unless kick-pressed |
| 2. | <i>Didee daarii kabala</i> | Would slap the plot's edge; |
| 3. | <i>Dubbii yoo dhiisaan malee</i> | Squabble, unless ignored |
| 4. | <i>Didee aarii dabala.</i> | Would bring more rage. |

Or

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. | <i>Moqorqoraan alaada</i> | The metal-pot is a quarter |
| 2. | <i>Jira gabaa kaleessaa</i> | It was in yesterday's market |
| 3. | <i>Hinbitanneef maleessaa</i> | Though I did not buy it; |
| 4. | <i>Inni Garaa kee keessaa</i> | What is in your <i>belly</i> /thought |
| 5. | <i>Jira garaakoos keessa</i> | Is in my <i>belly</i> /thought as well |
| 6. | <i>Hinhimanneef maleessaa</i> | Though I didn't tell. |

Interrelated ideas of the ploughshare slapping the plot's age unless kick-pressed and the squabble bringing more rage unless ignored are the parallelism deployed in the lyric above, sang as an advice by the responders. The parallelism is more in the balancing of the two unrelated messages contained in the four lines, emphasised by the perfectly rhyming last words *kabala*, *dabala* (2,4) and the incurrence of *malee* (1,3). The second stanza follows similar deployment pattern of rhetorical device as the first one.

The content of the next *geerarsaa* is quite the opposite of the above presented expression of a self-pitying, despondent fellow. Unlike the previous *geeraraa* who seems to slowly sink in a state of negative mood and depression, he approaches the matter from a positive angle.

He attempts to identify and state the general impact of destitution on a fellow man and subscribes a solution. He maintains the view that one can only become victorious over destitution by setting rules and restrictions, exercise abstinence from indulging in leisurely affairs; such as avoiding flirtation with girls regardless of their enticing beauty; until one has triumphed over poverty. The singer, seemingly a merchant who frequently travels from one distant market to the other; his merchandise loaded on donkeys' back; rises clouds of dust during the dry season and tramples the mud during the rainy season to break out of the grip of destitution. So, he sings:

10

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. | <i>Si'a bonaa...</i> | In the summer... |
| 2. | <i>yoo kuttoo kaasan malee</i> | Unless one rises the dust, |
| 3. | <i>Si'a gannaa...</i> | In the winter... |
| 4. | <i>yoo dhoqqee dhiitan malee</i> | Unless one tramples the mud |
| 5. | <i>Magaalaan oodan malee</i> | Stops flirting with the dark maiden |
| 6. | <i>Dimtuun boqqoran malee</i> | And shun the brown maiden with a smile |

7. <i>Deegni nama hin lakkisu</i>	Poverty will never leave one for a while.
8. <i>Deegi maggaanyaa korma</i>	Poverty is a bull of a disease;
9. <i>Luqqeettuu nama lixa</i>	The sides, it penetrates
10. <i>Lummee nama jallisaa</i>	The vertebrae, it bends,
11. <i>Moofaa namatti huwwisa</i>	In rags it dresses,
12. <i>Doofaa nama taasisa</i>	With stupidity it blesses;
13. <i>Geeccaa garaatti hambisa</i>	All desires it suffocates,
14. <i>Nama dheeraa gabaabsa</i>	It shortens the tall man
15. <i>Gabaabaa badduu baasa</i>	It dwarfs the short one
16. <i>Haati deesse hin jaallattu</i>	The mother who delivered loves no more
17. <i>Abbaan uume hin leellisu.</i>	And the father who sired abhor.

Like the hard working merchant, an industrious farmer also attempts to identify and state the general impact of destitution on a fellow man and puts forward what he thinks the solution could be. He maintains the view that one can only become victorious over destitution by all means available; first and foremost however; by doubling the farm oxen and plough the virgin land, (*go talk to the soil*, as he puts it); by hanging it on some of the characters the society deems unworthy; by kick-breaking its knee; even by running away from it if need be; and all these not with self-pity but with spirit of exhilaration and strong will power. It reads thusly:

11

1. <i>Deeggayii lafti awaaraa^e</i>	In <i>Deeggaa</i> the land is dusty
2. <i>Mee baala bunaa ilaalaa</i>	May you see the coffee leaves
3. <i>Deegaa allaattitu awaala</i>	It is the vultures that bury a destitute
4. <i>Mee gaafa du'aa ilaalaa</i>	May you see on the day he departs.
5. <i>Surree jilbarraan dhumtee</i>	A trousers torn on the knees
6. <i>Abbaatu waraannataa</i>	The owner himself darns as he should
7. <i>Deega ijoollummaan dhuftee</i>	Poverty that came in youthhood
8. <i>Abbaatu tattaafataa</i>	The victim himself must strive as he could;
9. <i>Deega koo бага dhuftee</i>	O, my poverty; its good that you came
10. <i>Erga dhufuun kee hin oollee</i>	Since, from coming you do not refrain
11. <i>Baga ijoollummaan dhuftee</i>	Good that in young hood you showed up
12. <i>Akkan kufee ka`uttii</i>	When I can fall down and get up
13. <i>Akkan bu`ee bahuttii.</i>	When I can move down and move up.

According to that farmer, poverty is better fought against when one is young and vibrant. The *geeraraa* is transmitting this message to the members of the new and up-coming generation of the farming community. For him the only way to get wealth or to get out of the grip of poverty is *to talk to the virgin land* to work and toil, and even to hang it to the symbols of poverty such as *a father-cursed son*, *a lazy girl that cannot spin cotton yarn*, and *a branch-less tree* that could be a good symbolical representation of poverty.

^e Source: Beekan Gulummaa Irranaa's, collection

12

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Akkamiin horii horuu?</i> | How can one earn wealth? |
| 2. <i>Bajjii buqqisan malee</i> | Unless one digs the virgin earth |
| 3. <i>Hojii hojjetan malee</i> | Unless one works and toil |
| 4. <i>Deega balleessan malee</i> | Destroy destitution and foil |
| 5. <i>Beela balleessan malee</i> | Destroys starvation and its spoil |
| 1. <i>Deegakoo yaa farrisaa</i> | O my poverty, the evil-wisher |
| 2. <i>Turi ammaan si fannisa</i> | Just wait and see when I hang you there |
| 3. <i>Mukarbaa daraaretti</i> | On a blossoming elephant-tree |
| 4. <i>Ilma abbaan abaaretti</i> | On a father-cursed son |
| 5. <i>Durba jirbii hinfooetti.</i> | On a girl who can't spin cotton yarn |
| 6. <i>Niitii dhirsi hindhaannetti</i> | On a woman whose husband can't control. |
| 7. <i>Deegakoo yaa laashoftuu</i> | O my poverty, my crippling poverty |
| 8. <i>Lamuu natti hin haasoftu</i> | Never again shall you torment me |
| 9. <i>Fiigeen si baqqa malee</i> | From you I would rather flee |
| 10. <i>Dhiiteen si cabsa malee</i> | Or I shall kick-break your knee. |
| 11. <i>Deega koo yaa farrisaa</i> | My poverty, the evil-wisher |
| 12. <i>Tur amman si fannisaa</i> | Wait and see when I hang you |
| 13. <i>Muka damee hin qabnettoo</i> | On a branchless tree |
| 14. <i>Akka baddee hin gallettoo</i> | So that you can't escape away free |
| 15. <i>Deegni nama salphisaa</i> | Poverty humiliates one |
| 16. <i>Isa guddaa xiqqeessaa</i> | It makes a big man a small man |
| 17. <i>Gadi nama deebisaa</i> | It lowers down one |
| 18. <i>Sanyii namaa rakkisaa</i> | It makes the human race indigent |
| 19. <i>Kana maalan callisaa</i> | About this matter I can't remain silent |
| 20. <i>Dhaqeen lafatti odeessaa</i> | I shall go and talk to the soil |
| 21. <i>Qotiyyoo cimdii godhee</i> | I shall make the draft animal double |
| 22. <i>Ofirraa si balleessaa.</i> | And lay waste to my trouble. |

13

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Maal nan goone deegni koo?</i> ^f | What is there that my poverty hasn't done to me |
| 2. <i>Raafuu na kadhachiise</i> | A cabbage scrounger it made me |
| 3. <i>Raatu na kabalchiise</i> | It made a retard slap me |
| 4. <i>Deegni koo deega korma</i> | Mine is a bull of poverty that deject |
| 5. <i>Ijaajjee naati morma</i> | It opposes me standing erect. |
| 6. <i>Deegakoo yaa farrisa</i> | O my poverty, my ill wisher |
| 7. <i>Tur ammaan si fannisa</i> | Just wait until I hang you |
| 8. <i>Laga Sakko sanatti</i> | At the yonder side of <i>Sakko</i> river |
| 9. <i>Lafa rakkoo sanatti</i> | Where tribulation spew |
| 10. <i>Muka baala hinqanetti</i> | On a leaf-less tree |
| 11. <i>Ilma yaada hinqabnetti</i> | On a son with no worry |

^f Source: Kumsa Boroo (2009, 411-412)

12. *Muka damee hinqanetti* On a branch-less tree
 13. *Akka baddee hingalletti* So that you can't escape free

The impact of destitution on a social standing of a member, as the *geeraraa* wails becomes insignificant. The moment he touches the lower step of the economic ladder the wife is no more invited to festivities with respect, but summoned to work on the preparation of the home-made beverage; and her husband to carry chairs and help with the sitting arrangements. And no one cares to serve him with what the other are served, he is rudely given a turbid drink, or left-over, for *his does not bother them*; provided others are satisfied.

14

1. *Deeggayi lafti awwaara* In *Deggaa*, the land is dusty
 2. *Utuman deemuun dhufe* I arrived here walking
 3. *Deegaa allaattiitu awwaala* A destitute is buried by vultures
 4. *Utuman beekuun dhufe* I arrived here knowing
 5. *Niitii nama deegaa dhaa* The wife of a destitute
 6. *Farso dhimbiibbaa waamu* Is summoned to filter cottage beer
 7. *Namicha deegaa sana* That destitute fellow
 8. *Barcuma fuudhaaf waamu* Is summoned to carry chair
 9. *“Kan kee nun dhibu” jedhu* “Yours does not bother us,” he is told
 10. *“Boruu dhufittaa” jedhu* “May you come tomorrow,” he is told
 11. *“Booruu dhugittaa” jedhu* “May you drink turbid,” he is asked
 12. *Kanaafan boobee tumee* That is why sorghum I threshed
 13. *Kanaafan booyee du’ee* That is why to death I cried.

A clean dress, with a large white shawl on top of the shoulders is an indicator of the economic status of a farmer. On the other hand a tattered, brownish in colour reveals how desperately poor the individual is. Such an individual attains neither the customary respect of being called “Obbo” by young boys, nor sister- in-law’s avoidance of his birth name.

15

1. *Deegaa marga diimessaa* In *Deegaa* the grass is brownish
 2. *Deegni wayyaa diimessaa* So is a poor man’s cloth
 3. *Nama wayyaan diimate* A man with a brown cloth
 4. *Ijoolleen obbo hinjettu* Children do not call him brother
 5. *Waarsaan maqaa hinlagattu* Sister-in-law doesn’t avoid his birth name
 6. *Kanaafan boobee tumee* That is why sorghum I thrashed
 7. *Kanaafan booyee du’ee* That is why to death I cried.

2.5 Geerarsaa for Expression of Wish

To Hope and to wish are two different things that many people usually take one for the other. Margaret Wehreberg, (2017), characterises hope as a “positive emotion” that could be realised provided the circumstances are favourable. And there is a possibility of influencing

the circumstances and make the hope realised. “The positive emotions build the strength, and give us the desire, to continue working toward a future, even when we may feel it is hard to do.” Wishing on the other hand is unrealistic and unattainable desire that might cause harm to the wisher by diverting his focus. In the following few lines the *geeraraa* or the performer express some unattainable wishes

16

Hawweekaa, hawwe, hawwee
Anoo waan baay'een hawwee
Wannumtin hawwee dhabee
Sa'a waatiirraa hin guunee
Hadha ilmooraa hin duune
Saani waatiirraa hin guune
Bara hongeeff qorichaa
Haati ilmooraa hin duunee
Gaafa qoonqoof qorichaa
Kanaafan hawwee dhabe

O I wished, I wished! O, I wished!
 A lot of things I desire
 What I wished for but could not find however,
 Is a not drying cow that feeds her calf forever
 An undying mother, one who lives for her child.
 A not drying cow that feeds her calf forever
 Is essential for the time of drought
 An undying mother One who lives for her child,
 Is crucial when hunger breaks out
 I wished for but couldn't find.

The *geeraraa* wishes for an undying mother, and for a never drying dairy cow; something that is naturally unattainable. Mothers are not only known for pampering their children but are a source of kindness, love, physical affection and above all security. No wonder the *geeraraa* wishes for an undying mother, even though it is against the natural order of things. On the other hand the following is an attainable wish that could be achieved provided the wisher works for it.

17

Hawwe kaa hawwe hawee,
Wannumtin hawwee dhabee
Kombolcha caffee keessaa
Odolcha fardeen keessaa
Kombolchi caffee keessaa
Bara aduuf qorichaa
Odolchi fardeen keessaa
Gaafa gugsiiif qarichaa
Kanaafan hawwee dhabee

O I wished, I wished! I just desire! Alas!
 What I couldn't get, but wished indeed
Kombolchaa tree in a morass
 A black horse with white stripes in a grazing field.
Kombolchaa tree in a morass
 Is essential for a day of parching heat
 A black horse with white stripes among horses
 Is crucial during a horse racing feat
 I wished for, but couldn't find.

He also sings about partially attainable and partially unattainable wishes:

18

Hawwe kaa hawwe hawwee
Wannumtin hawwee dhabee
Koodee wal bira jirtuu
Qawwee saaxinii keessaa

O I wish, and I wish, I just desire
 What I desired but couldn't get
 Is a friend that is always there
 A gun that is in a box kept

<i>Abbaa nama irraa hin duunee</i>	An undying father who is so adept.
<i>Koodeen wal bira jirtuu</i>	Friends that are together
<i>Gaafa giixiif qorichaa</i>	Are crucial during mutual labour
<i>Qawween saaxinii keessaa,</i>	A gun that is kept in a box
<i>Gaafa xiiqiif qorichaa,</i>	Is essential for a day of spite
<i>Abbaan namarraa hin duunee</i>	An undying father who is adept
<i>Gaafa roorroof qorichaa</i>	Is vital for a day of harassment
<i>Kanaafan hawwee dhabee.</i>	I wished for but couldn't find.

Finally, it would be interesting to conclude this topic with a fantasy a performer who proposes in his desire to bring about ethnic equality by making Amharas Oromooo and Oromooos Amhara interchangeably, and govern one another turn by turn peacefully, and solve the existing ethnic conflict for once and for all. The wish is not unattainable *per se*, if all the stake holders of the country come together and sit around a table and find a lasting solution for the problem that has been and still ravaging the country. He sings his proposal thusly:

19

<i>Utuu akka garaa kootii</i>	As to my heart's desire
<i>Dhidheessa nooraa goonaa</i>	On <i>Dhidheessaa</i> we build a bridge
<i>Bonaa fi ganna irra ceenaa</i>	And commute on it winter and summer
<i>Hiyyeessa gooftaa goona</i>	We make a poor man a rich man
<i>Amaara Oromooo goonee</i>	We turn Amaaraa to Oromoo
<i>Oromoo Amaara goonaa</i>	Oromooo to Amaaraa
<i>Tara taraa wal moonaa.</i>	Turn-by-turn govern one another.

Bigotry, arrogance, blind patriotism and chauvinistic attitudes etc. could be dubbed as few of the stumbling blocks to harmonious and peaceful unity and coexistence of peoples. Aaggressiveness, egotism and notoriety are serious impediment to dialogue and compromise that could ultimately open the door for war and conflicts. The *geeraraa's* desire or kind of proposal, if you may, seems to have been based on peace, one of Oromoo's vital belief system, he wishes if only we could look at things from on one another's shoe, or if we play *you be me and I be you* turn by turn by exchanging ethnicity, and hand over the mace peacefully to one another, and willingly *conquer one another*, our country would have been a better place to live in.

2.6 Geerarsaa for Praise, and for Rite of Passage

Preliterate Oromoo society used to recognize or attest the achievement of members who successfully fulfilled their social and cultural duties in accordance with the values and norms set by the society, by adulation through songs sung on festivities and other public gatherings. The songs are performed by girls, *asmaaries* (amateur singers) and *Geerarsaa* singers. The melodies and some of the lyrics of these praise songs, especially that of *geerarsaa* has been

inherited by the present generation of singers and is sometimes made to blend with modern songs, or at times on their own. As the following *geerarsaa* shows bravery, wisdom, and generosity are regarded as the highest virtues in the Oromoo society. To make an analogy, the performer crosses boundary to the field of botany and mentions three types of trees he deems as high ranking among the plant world that he graduates as *kingly trees*, on the merit of the service they render to his society and their symbolic value. Thus he makes a comparison between the three Oromoo virtues and the three high ranking trees. As the following *geerarsaa* lyric shows, the analogy thus is between what he calls *three kingly trees* among the plant world and the *three kingly behaviours* among the Oromoo society. He presents both in the following manner:

20

<i>Mootiin mukaa waa sadii</i>	Kingly trees are of three types ^g
<i>Gofaa firri bulfatu</i>	One that a family pampers and protects
<i>Odaa jilli dhaabbatu</i>	One is a sycamore that a pilgrim plants
<i>Tokko muka yaa 'iiti</i>	And the other is the public assembly tree
<i>Kaan qancareetti mukaa ti</i>	The rest are stunted, midgets, and scum
<i>Qottoon maa xaph hingoone</i>	Who cares; if the axe ravages them.
<i>Mootiin ilmaa waa sadii</i>	Kingly sons are of three types
<i>Tokko jagnatu dhalata</i>	One is born a hero
<i>Tokko gmanatu dhalata</i>	One is born a wise
<i>Tokko arjaatu dhalata</i>	One is born a generous
<i>Kaan qancareettii lugnaa</i>	The rest are stunted, cowards of no shame
<i>Golfaan maa xaph hingoone</i>	Who cares; if the plague ravages them!
<i>Yoo dhalchan akkas dhalchu</i>	If one sires, one sires thusly ^h
<i>Ilma galata galchu</i>	A grateful boy and a burly
<i>Maal godhu wasallattuu?</i>	Of what use is a human scum?
<i>Duutee lafatti haa galtu</i>	May the earth swallow the bum.

Songs of praise are not limited to heroes only, but it is also customary to praise one's parents. Mother's beauty and home management skills; father's manliness and his wisdom, and wealth are subjects of praise. Like most *geerarsaa* performances, the praise song is usually delivered during social gatherings, such as festivities or rite of passage, to underline the significance of one's heroic achievement. Here also, *geerarsaa* plays an important role, especially during the celebration of the rite of passage of a successful hunter.

At this point, giving a short introduction to the term *rite of passage* and the concept it embodies seems necessary. The term *rite of passage* is known to have been coined as an analytical concept in 1909 by the French folklorist and social anthropologist; Arnold Van

^g Source: The lyrics are from Addisu Tolesa's research of 1999, page 55. (Translation mine.)

^hSource: The four line lyrics are from Tirfee Raagaa. (Translation mine.)

Gennep (1873-1957). Van Gennep, in his famous work entitled *The Rite of Passage* (1960), likens the human society to a house divided into rooms and corridors, of which the texture of their partitions depends on the level of the society's stage of civilization. He asserts that the higher the level of a society's development the thinner the partition, the wider and more open the doors are, and the easier the communication is. On the other hand, he remarks that in a semi-developed society because of the tightness of the sections and the isolation of each social group, transition from one group to another must be made through formalities and ceremonies. (van Gennep 1960: 26).

The formalities and ceremonies or *rites of passages* are the social events carried out to mark or celebrate the transition of individuals or groups from one social status or situation to another; thereby starting a new membership in a social category and ending the previous one. Van Gennep includes social events such as birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to higher class, occupational specialization, and death as examples of rite of passage. From the social events listed we shall only deal with traditional Oromoo marriage and advancement to higher class. It is also interesting to mention that the other important aspect of rite of passage is the three phases it constitutes, namely: the rites of separation, the rites of transition, and the rites of incorporation. (ibid.3)

Let us now take a look at the three phases mentioned by Van Gennep from Oromoo cultural perspective; mainly how hunting game animals for trophy was used as advancement to higher social class; until of course trophy hunting became illegal. In earlier times, an Oromoo young man who did not kill a game animal was classified in a social group called *gurgudduu*. In order to pass to the higher social group called *qondaala* or hero group; he had to kill a game animal. He had to participate in a battle or in a hunt and bring home a trophy or *faachaa*. The period he is away to a distant low land with his fellow group members according to Van Gennep's theory is the period of *separation* from his family and his community. The period after his arrival with his trophy and the time he isolates himself from public eye to pay homage to and reconcile with the sprite of the killed animal is *segregation*; while emerging as a new man with a new identity and finding his place in the new group is *incorporation*. Hence, for a hunter a trophy acquired from the hunting ground becomes a special attribute that significantly transforms him from what in Oromoo was known as *Gurgudduu*ⁱ to a new social status called *Qondaalad*^j.

As Finnegan (1970:111) notes, "praise poetry often plays an essential part in rites of passage." In the past, celebration of the successful Oromoo trophy hunter's *rite of passage* starts with self-praise songs that he sings. The hunter, upon arrival from the hunting grounds, displays his trophy singing boisterous *geerarsaa* reciting his adventure. He is greeted and received by his female relatives singing some goading and humorous songs that challenge him to sing more and recite more about his feats and prove the authenticity of the trophy he is boasting about; i.e. whether it is really from a living animal that he had killed as

ⁱ Gurgudduu: One who has not gone to hunt game animals or to a battlefield.

^j Qondaala: One who has hunted and brought home a trophy; or one who has been to a battlefield.

he claims, or if he had picked it up from a carcass. The women act sceptical and humorously downplay his gains and his adventure as can be seen in the following lyric. The first and the third line of the lyric are not substantially related to other lines, except to create tonal and rhyming parallelism with the second and the fourth lines. It goes as follows:

21

<i>Elemookee ya Dilaalaa</i>	Your milking gourd, O <i>Dilaalaa</i>
<i>Fidi eebookee nan ilaalaa</i>	Bring your lance, let me check it
<i>Gabaa Guutee, ya Morodaa</i>	<i>Guutee</i> market, O <i>Morodaa</i>
<i>Lafaa fuutee na sossobda</i>	You picked from the ground and deceiving me

This humorous song touches his ego; for doubting the authenticity of his trophy is similar to doubting his manliness, and that spurs him to prove himself. He becomes emotionally charged and sings his hearts out to narrate the authenticity of his trophy. He dramatizes the physical appearance of the big game when it was hit by that bullet. Here is a kind of song of triumph or epinicion:

22

<i>Alaamee kitit godhe^k</i>	I aimed and sent it
<i>Rukuteen bittim godhe</i>	I hit and scattered it
<i>Rukuteen gadlsaasise</i>	I hit and sent it sprawling
<i>Faachoosheen facaasise</i>	Its tail scattering
<i>Irraagadee kuffiseen</i>	I brought it downwards
<i>Irraan ooleen quncise</i>	And skinned it upwards
<i>Irraagadee kuffiseen</i>	I brought it downwards
<i>Huuba qoonqo muldhise.</i>	I exposed its uvula.

The lyricist or the *geeraraa* employs in the following some of the known literary tools – metaphor, imagery, simile, and onomatopoeia - and tries to paint the hunting scene so vividly that the sceptics could almost feel as though they were participants in the action or the hunt. By using the preposition “*akka*” or “like” he draws similarities of his action with the behaviours and actions locally known to his audience. That he squatted like dog, fed it like a husband pampering wife, finally, that he leapt and mounted it like one who thatches a tukul, are all metaphorical explanations of his action, and intensification of his heroic deeds. The usage of another onomatopoeic term “*quruph*”^l - (the sound and action of prancing) - explains how much he was over taken by bliss such that when the buffalo was brought down he bounced like a prancing gazelle or bovine and hopped on top of it. Here is a good example of visual imagery that describes how the successful hunter brought down the game animal and the excitement that possessed him:

^kSource: Pastor Fiixee Birri (2012:250)

^l.*Quruphisuu* (verb) means to prance. *Quruph* is the sound made when gazelles and bovines jump and touch the ground.

23

<i>Quphaneen dura taa'e^m</i>	I squatted in front of it
<i>Akka kajeeltu sarea</i>	Like a dog with crave and rouse
<i>Tokko tokkoon itti erge</i>	I sent it one by one
<i>Akka galchii kanniisaa</i>	Like the bees home coming
<i>Laaffiseen afaan kaa'ee</i>	I softened and mouth fed it
<i>Akka soortuu abbaa warraa.</i>	Like a husband pampering spouse.
<i>Dib godheen lafaan dhaye</i>	I brought it down to the ground
<i>Akka ba'aa qalqalaa</i>	Like a leather-sack load of mash
<i>Naannayeen itti sirbe</i>	I circle-danced around
<i>Akka daaraa masqalaa.</i>	Like the <i>Masqala</i> ⁿ bonfire ash.
<i>Quruph jedheen yaabbadhe</i>	I pranced and mounted it with a strut
<i>Akka ijeertuu manaa</i>	Like one who thatches a hut.
<i>Duph jedheen irraa bu'e</i>	I hopped off and dismounted
<i>Akka siree ganamaa</i>	Like an early morning bed
<i>Hankaasee itti dhaabbanne</i>	I used no supporting lance
<i>Yoo irreekooti malee</i>	Except, my arm's muscle
<i>Addaanyii ittiitt waammanne</i>	Nor did I call for a hunter's assistance
<i>Yoo ijakooti malee</i>	Just my own eye vision, no hustle.

According to Harold Scheub (ibid: 7) both lyric poetry and panegyric are built from diversity of images that are intricately tied to one another. This makes the poem's central subject and the lyricism share common character with proverbs and riddles which is "a regularly repeated pattern with alterations." In the following few lines, the value of the trophy is explained, paralleled with images of wealth transfer or lose through sharing, inheritance and confiscation. The *geeraraa* sings that these are all unlikely to happen until death parts him from his trophy and the sycamore tree^o *inherits* it. Until that time, he and his trophy will frolic together. Starting each line with "kan" or "that" he creates a parallel structure to emphasise the untouchable nature of that wealth he gained – his trophy.

24

<i>Horii dhuunfaan horadhe</i>	I gained me a private wealth
<i>Kan niitiin fuutee hin baane</i>	That a wife can't share in divorce

^mSource: Lyrics from 1.6.3 – 1.6.8, and 1.6.12. and 1.6.13 are all from *Gumaa*, unpublished material by the late Aseffaa Tuucho, in the possession of the author,

ⁿ.For the Oromoo *Masqala* is an annual festival for seeing off the old year and ushering in the new one right after the end of the rainy season, by burning a bonfire in public area as well as in individual homes. Singing and dancing around the ashes of the bonfire is customary; and that is what the *geeraraa* is referring to. It is interesting to note that a similar kind of festival known as *Juhannus* is celebrated here in Finland and other Nordic countries to see off the winter and to usher in the long-awaited summer.

^o. When the hunter finally dies, a sycamore tree is planted on a busy road-side and his trophy (*faachaa*) is hanged on it for passer-by to see; and that particular sycamore tree would be known as a kind of a memorial or statue for him and commuters remember him by that tree that carries his *faachaa*.

25

<i>Kan obboleessi hin dhaalle</i>	That a brother can't inherit
<i>Kan daanyaan hin warasne</i>	That a judge can't confiscate
<i>Kan baraan hin rakasne</i>	That age can't devalue
<i>Maaltu dhaala mirgakoo?</i>	Who dare inherits my gain?
<i>Dambii gurraacha malee</i>	Except the black sycamore tree
<i>Wajjin burraaqna malee.</i>	We frolic together with glee.

Lakoff and Mark (2003:8) in their book *Metaphors we live by* remark that “*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (Italics theirs). The *geeraraa* portrays to his audience the aspect of his father's and mother's dominating character and social standing, the character of their integrity, wisdom, and respect they enjoy in the society, which he equates to dominating natural phenomena that exist and known in his surrounding, such as, big river (*Birbir*; that he calls *Birboo*), or tallest tree (*milletia*). His effort is an implicit way of making known to the sceptics that in his veins runs the same blood too, or “An apple does not fall far from the tree”; as Finnish proverb goes. However, the lyric does not carry any exaggeration or pomposity; it rather paints an image of a wise, modest, responsible family man of a father.

26

<i>Birbirsaa mootii mukaa</i>	Milletia king of trees,
<i>Riqaa malee hin yaabani;</i>	Without ladder can't be climbed,
<i>Birboo mootii galaanaa</i>	<i>Birboo</i> ^p king of rivers
<i>Daakaa malee hin ce'ani;</i>	Without swimming can't be crossed.
<i>Abbaan ofii mootii dha</i>	One's father is a king
<i>Harmeen ofis giiftii dha</i>	One's mother is a queen
<i>Mirga malee hin waamani.</i>	Without a trophy can't be seen.
<i>Kanaafuun boobe tume</i>	That is why sorghum I threshed
<i>Kanaafan booye du'e.</i>	That's why to death I cried
<i>Qumxaa machallaa godhe</i>	Rolling up my trouser
<i>Balasiin abbaa godheen</i>	Making <i>Balas</i> my father
<i>Isheen yaade nan goddhe</i>	I fulfilled my desire.
<i>Hoddhemoon nan barreesse?</i>	Did I sew or did I write?
<i>Tolche moo nan balleese?</i>	Did I err or did I right?

27

<i>Abbaakoo yaa abbaakoo</i>	My father, O my father!
<i>Wayyaakee kuula maru</i>	They ornament your cloth's fringe
<i>Natu kuula marsiise</i>	It was I who got it hemmed with furbelow
<i>Maqaakee duulli haabaru</i>	May your name be known to every warrior
<i>Natu duula barsiise.</i>	I made it known to every hunting fellow
<i>Qoteen baase maqaakee</i>	I dug out your hidden name

^pAn endearment for a river called *Birbir* in Western Wallaggaa

<i>Akka guboo dinnichaa</i>	Like a long-buried spud
<i>Hordeen dhaabe maqaakee</i>	And I planted it strong and deep
<i>Akka muka birbirsaa.</i>	Like a millettia tree to stand.
<i>Abbaakoo ani jedhu kuni</i>	This man I call my father
<i>Sooressa guutuu miti</i>	Is not a wealthy, filthy rich
<i>Hiyyeessa duutuus miti</i>	Nor is he a poor snitch
<i>Gamna itti himatan miti</i>	He is not a weather-wise guru
<i>Raatuu ifatan miti</i>	Nor is he a stupid to berate, it's true;
<i>Hinqotata maasisaa</i>	He has a field to cultivate
<i>Hingorfata maatii 'saa</i>	Has a family to guide and protect
<i>Hingodhata maayiisaa;</i>	Has a business to attend to and operate,
<i>Jaarsa dallaan waleensuu</i>	Just an old man with <i>waleensuu</i> ⁹ fence
<i>Isa didaa qajeelchu</i>	One who tames disobedience,
<i>Yaa isa kan coome qalu</i>	One who slaughters fatty cattle
<i>Isa kan doofeef faluu.</i>	One who wises up a fool's prattle.

Praised is also the gun the successful hunter may have used for hunting. His gun or *Minishiri* as it is locally known is not simply a weapon for hunting, but a lifelong animated friend that he promises to take to every heroes' gathering.

28

<i>Minishiri ulullee,</i>	O, <i>Minishiri</i> , the flute
<i>Yaa buttuu akka culullee</i>	Like a hawk you snatch, you loot
<i>Miniskirt yaa abbaa xeensaa</i>	O, <i>Minishiri</i> ; diarrhoea you cause
<i>Manni abbaa keetii eessaa?</i>	Where is your maker's house?
<i>Haftuu birrii keen geessaa.</i>	So I would take him your remaining price.
<i>Aduu, barii Jimaataa</i>	In the sun of Friday morning
<i>Gadi jettee biluu dhugde</i>	You drank blood bowing
<i>Akka waan dheebuun duute;</i>	As if of thirst you were dying;
<i>Ol jettee natti irkatte</i>	Then you leaned on me rising up
<i>Akka waan dugdaa cittee.</i>	As if your back got a sudden snap.
<i>Namni minishirii tume</i>	The one who made <i>Minishiri</i>
<i>Dheeraamoo gabaabaa dhaa?</i>	Is he a short or a tall man?
<i>Namumti si gurgure</i>	The one who sold you away, in fact
<i>Beekaamoo wallaalaa dhaa?</i>	Is he wise or an ignoramus arrant?
<i>Ani du'ulle sin gurguru</i>	I shall never sell you away, for my part,
<i>Gurmuu gootaan si baadha</i>	I shall carry you to all heroes' domain and strife
<i>Lubbuu koorran si jaaldha</i>	Above all, I love you more than my life.

For the women who anointed him with purified and spiced butter, and for the cows that made the provision, he sings the following *geerarsaa* that Pastor Fiixee Birri of Qellem, West Oromiya documented:

⁹*Waleensuu* is a kind of thorny tree that shades its leaves during the rainy season.

29

<i>Hori, hori yaa saawwaa</i>	Reproduce, reproduce, O cattle!
<i>Abbaa si horeef hori</i>	Reproduce for the one who breeds you
<i>Hormaata hiddii ta'i</i>	May you be as abundant as thorn-apple fruit
<i>Budaadhaaf hirmii ta'i</i>	May you be unsavoury to the evil-eye
<i>Giiftiin mataakoo dibde</i>	You, lady who anointed my head
<i>Dhukkubsattee hin ciisini</i>	May you never fall ill and take to bed,
<i>Yoo ilma, ilma malee</i>	Except boy and boy, again
<i>Waan ulfaatu hin baatini</i>	May you not carry a heavy load.
<i>Qoraan hin falaxini</i>	May you not split firewood
<i>Yoo qoraasumaa malee</i>	Except calabash fumigating wood
<i>Adeemtee hin fagaatini</i>	May you not walk afar
<i>Gorba dachaasuu malee</i>	Except to herd calves together.

Being anointed with purified and scented butter symbolises his induction into the new social rank, i.e., from *gurgudduu* to *qondaalaa*. The transition involves a change in body appearance too. He now wears an earring on his right earlobe and grows his hair; in a style which was known as *goofaree*; and later Afro-style. However, the anointment does not bestow on him social power and authority except fame, praise, and respect the society gives to the rank he joined. Nevertheless, not every member of the community accepts this business of killing a wild animal and anointing oneself with butter as heroic performance. The rejection comes from two sources: from those hard-working and productive farmers who value their harvest highly than fame gained from hunting big game and from those who for one reason or the other could not make it to the hunting fields. It could be that they don't dare to travel long distance to a wilderness where the big games are found and stay away from home.

Both the hard working and the apologist contend that that ceremony is a worthless, unproductive commotion when compared to the importance of the cereals that they harvest to save life or *resurrects from death*; - if you don't mind the hyperbolic expression. As the following two short poems tell, the producer of coffee beans, maize and *xaafii* claims to be more heroic than the one who killed a game animal. He vents his objection and sends an explicit message of superiority and attempts to expose the new hero to public derision and laughter, thereby questioning and threatening his new status:

30

<i>Anoo xaafiin afarsaa^f</i>	I am busy winnowing <i>xaafii</i>
<i>Maalan godha gafarsa?</i>	What would I do with buffalo?
Or:	

31

^fSource: From the author's recollection

<i>Dhadhaa garaattii nyaatu</i>	Butter is what the stomach is fed
<i>Gowwaan mataatti habaatu</i>	May the fool carry it on his head
<i>Gurree du'aa fannisu</i>	A dead buffalo they hang
<i>Bunaaf boqqolloo qonna</i>	But we farm coffee and maize
<i>Isa du'aa fayyisu.</i>	That resurrects from death.

Since the majority of the Oromoo society lives in the rural areas, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, while hunting wild beast is an adventurous endeavour undertaken to earn oneself a name and social prestige. Holcomb observes the social status both enjoy in the following manner:

“Farming is considered to be the most honourable activity in everyone’s opinion. The fascinating tales the old men tell, however, are not about farmers and the virtues of grain, but rather of strong Oromoo men who rode horses, killed wild animals with spears, and lived by eating meat (1973,109).”

However, such laughter engendering humour is not to the liking of the hero, as humour based on superiority stances are often unpleasant and cause hurtful feelings and even aggressive and combatant reactions from those subjected to such exposure. The successful farmer, while aiming at reducing the new social status of the successful killer, at the same time attempts to raise his own. It is likely that this provocation instigates the hero to react and hit back with one of his own, probably with one similar to the contentious interrogative *geerarsaa* delivered by an offended hero presented below. The successful trophy hunter looks down disdainfully, maybe at an ordinary farmer who has not seen a hunting party; and not even seen, let alone killed a buffalo and grill its meat. For him his heroic achievement seems to be of paramount importance:

32

<i>Gojjolaa nyaateettaaree?^s</i>	Have you ever tasted buffalo grill
<i>Yoo foon taskaaraa malee</i>	Except, with <i>taskaara</i> ^t meat your belly to fill,
<i>Gujii agarteettaaree?</i>	Have you ever seen a company of hunters?
<i>Gabaa Jimaataa malee</i>	Except, Friday market customers,
<i>Boora agarteettaaree?</i>	Have you ever seen a live buffalo?
<i>Sangaa magaala malee</i>	Except, that brown ox to pull your plough,
<i>Dhiiga agarteettaaree?</i>	Have you ever seen blood?
<i>Dhiqaa fagaaraa malee!</i>	Except vaginal douching flood!

The crassness of the form of expression read in the last line of the lyric is probably a residue from the teenage vulgar verbal insult discussed earlier. Carss or not, two things are expected to happen to the proud farmer: If this abusive *geerarsaa* does not instigate or goad him to

^s Source: From the author’s recollection

^t Feast in memory of a deceased relative, customary to followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian faith.

make the necessary preparation for going to the distant low land and bring home a trophy, nothing would. Or if this vulgar insult does not silence him for the rest of his life, nothing would.

As far as the successful hunter is concerned, the following *geerarsaa* indicates that, since he has proved his manliness, something the society values high, there seems nothing much left for him to worry about except pursuing a peaceful and happy farmer's life.

33

<i>Ameessa maalan godhaa?</i>	What would I do with a dairy cow?
<i>Yeennaa borillee gu'e</i>	For tomorrow it will dry
<i>Si'achi maalfaan godhaa?</i>	What is there for me to do from now on
<i>Yeennaan borillee du'e.</i>	Even if tomorrow I die.
<i>Moosisnaan korma ta'e</i>	Groomed, it became a leading bull
<i>Tumnaan qotiyyoo ta'e</i>	Castrated, it became an ox to pull;
<i>Gurgurraan dhibba bite</i>	Sold, it brought in hundred cash
<i>Gunfureen dhimma fixe.</i>	'Am virile now with no worry or rush.
<i>Si'achi maalan yaadaree?</i>	What would worry me now?
<i>Bajjii qotachuu malee</i>	Except to cultivate and plough
<i>Qalpii horachuu malee</i>	To live wisely and slow
<i>Goodarree dhaabuu malee.</i>	except planting eddo.
<i>Dhoobamee taa'u malee</i>	Like a fat, cool pumpkin, I sit
<i>Dhoobee dibachuu malee</i>	With butter, my hair I anoint.
<i>Ulee qaldhoo qabachuu</i>	With a stick so slim in my hand
<i>Biyya abbaakoo taphachu.</i>	I rejoice, in my father's land.

Unlike a lance the slim stick symbolises peace. In the following few lines, the hunter sings about the fame, prestige, and respect that comes with the trophy; and what it means from the society's point of view.

34

<i>Yoo ajjeesan mucaa ta'u</i>	When one kills one becomes a child,
<i>Mucaa kurkuraa ta'u;</i>	A toddling child full of bliss;
<i>Hundatu nama dhungata.</i>	Everybody smothers one with a kiss.
<i>Yoo dhaban budaa ta'u</i>	But if one loses, one becomes an eye-biter,
<i>Budaa furgummaa ta'u;</i>	An accursed man-eater;
<i>Hundatu nama tuffata.</i>	One is despised and given the shoulder.

2.7 Geerarsaa as a Medium of Fantasy and Humour

A supposition could be made that what elevates the successful hunter to a folk hero status is not the fact that he killed a game animal *per se*; his bravery lies rather in his endurance of several weeks of journey; the physically and mentally demanding ordeal and tribulations he claims to have gone through in a faraway strange land to bring home the trophy. Even if

by some chance he kills a game animal that came to his locality the trophy is not equated to that which is gained from a distant hunting ground. In addition, on the hunting scale a lion's trophy is higher than that of a buffalo; so is the prestige the hunter who killed a lion enjoys. The following two stanzas are an exchange of *geerarsaa* between two hunters, one who killed a lion not far away from his domicile and brought a prestigious trophy and one who travelled to a distant hunting ground (*Baqqoo*) and brought home a less prestigious buffalo trophy. The one with that prestigious trophy is said to have found a lion somewhere in his locality (Donoo), while going home after enjoying home-made beer in the neighbourhood with his friends. Since it is customary to perform boisterous or self-praise *geerarsaa* on festivities the hunter with the lion's trophy begins by singing a provocative *geerarsaa* that degrades the trophy that others brought by killing buffalo thusly:

35

<i>Daaleekoon gad baafadhaa</i>	I shall bring out my tawny (the colour of the lion)
<i>Loon keessan dachaafadhaa</i>	You better look after your cattle.

In the hunter's view the above two lines are degrading. It is a devaluative statement that equates the buffalo, an unpredictable and temperamental wild animal that no one has attempted to domesticate to a domestic and docile animal (cow) that a woman could milk and children could look after. The degrading statement deserves an equally degrading hit back from the one that hunted that wild beast of the far away land. So he hits back by unmanning the man and equating that lion he killed in the neighbourhood to a feral of the bush, and tells him that the trophy is in no way could be equated to the one from the distant land:

36

<i>Namittiin farsoo quufte,</i>	The man was satiated with cottage-beer
<i>Kanaaf ilfinyii baate</i>	For, from the guest house she appear
<i>Leencattiin booyyee quuftee</i>	The lion was full of wart-hog flesh
<i>kanaaf hincinnii baate</i>	No wonder she came out of <i>hincinni</i> bush
<i>Mirgi Baqqoo dhaa gadii,</i>	A trophy way down from <i>Baqqoo</i>
<i>Isa Donootti sadii</i>	Is worth three of that of <i>Donoo</i>

The lion hunter responds by reasoning against the idea of going all the way to a distant low land (*Baqqoo*), and waste one's time, and risk the chance of getting infected with malaria, if one could acquire the desired trophy right in one's locality, in this case Donoo.

37

<i>Yennaa Biilaa bitanii</i>	If you buy from <i>Biilaa</i>
<i>Najjotti buufatani</i>	And with a profit sell at <i>Najjoo</i>
<i>Maalumaaf Mandii dhaqu?</i>	Why to <i>Mandii</i> should one travel?
<i>Maaf karaa dabalatu?</i>	Why should one make the journey double?
<i>Yoo manuma bahanii</i>	If you just get out of your house

<i>Doonotti ajjeesani</i>	And could kill in Doono
<i>Maaluimaaf Baqqoo dhaqu</i>	Why should one go way to <i>Baqqoo</i> area?
<i>Maaf busaa dabalatu?</i>	And double the risk of getting malaria?

Similarly, if one kills a wild pest (warthog, porcupine, baboon etc.) in his farm plot or in a local forest and brag much about it, one becomes a target of ridicule. They are made fun of and a subject of entertainment for members of a *daboo*.^u During my stay with other government employees among the farmers in Gobbuu Sayyoo in Eastern Wallaggaa, I enjoyed an evening of entertainment when one of our colleagues, who claimed to have killed a warthog was roasted for showing excessive excitement about his successful hunt. The roast is in a poetic form; and the roaster begins his roast by asking the audience: “Have you heard what *Namichaa* (let us call him so) said and sang for killing a warthog?” The response was: “No; what did he say?” After getting the audience’s attention he proceeded and sang the following poem in a *geerarsaa* melody:

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<i>Geeshoo jala gugadheen</i>	Dashing under the <i>geeshoo</i> tree, at once
<i>Eeboon lama tumadhe</i>	I gored it twice, with my lance
<i>Gafaan laddaaf taa’aa waraane</i>	when I speared it in the flank and the butt
<i>Akka arbaa caraane</i>	It trumpeted like an elephant
<i>Hamma gafarsaa ga’a</i>	It was as big as a buffalo; O man!
<i>Gogaan saa afarsaa ta’a</i>	It’s hide is made into a winnowing fan;
<i>Kalaadaa qacaqacee</i>	Armed with tusk that rasp
<i>Qaata na bajabbaje</i>	I thought it will slice and mess me up
<i>Afaan saa kalaadaa dha</i>	Its mouth is full of tusks to slit!
<i>Amaaraaf asaamaa dha.</i>	<i>Asaamaa</i> ; ^v the Amharas call it.

The lyrics are a creative work of a farmer who is trying to tease another member of the community who might have recently killed a wild boar. However, this teasing might also be a provocation for the one who is made fun of to consider the idea of going hunting for a trophy.

For children the celebration of the home coming of the successful hunter is an ample scenario out of which they create humorous incongruity by mimicking his song. Concerning children’s mimicry, Alice Bertha Gomme notes, “If [children] saw a custom periodically and often practised with some degree of ceremonial importance, they would in their own way act in play what their elders do seriously (quoted by R.L. Zumwalt in Sutton-Smith et.al. 1999:27).” During the celebration of the folk hero’s trophy, what he killed, and where and how he killed are sung and talked about by members of his community. The following is a questioner dialogue in poem format that a shepherd creates to tease his fellow friend whom we may call *Namii*:

^u *daboo*: A mutual help association, members of a farming community create during ploughing, weeding, harvesting seasons and building houses.

^v *Asaamaa* is an Amharic word for a pig or wild boar.

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- A: *Namiin maal ajjeese?*^w What did *Namii* kill?
 B: *Simbira raatuu;* A retarded bird;
- A: *Maal dibatee?* With what was he anointed?
 B: *Mimmixa daakuu!* With pepper flour!

The children seem to have perceived that, from the society's point of view, killing a bird and a retarded one at that, and be anointed with pepper flour is totally absurd.

Besides, it can generally be said that children are master mimickers. Polimeni et al., (2006, 354) with reference to anthropological findings, write about the universality of the ability of children to mimic adults and how ridicule is more common among children than adults. This fact can be observed in the manner Oromoo children mimic a successful hero in an absurd way and turn the song of an adult into humour infused *geerarsaa* of a child. The mimicry is performed usually around the fireplace by two boys as a mock drama in the form of idyll during the idel hours of the evening. One boy plays the role of a coward (*Abbaa Bookaa*) and the other of a hero. The performance starts with the two children discussing about a hunting expedition to far away in a low-land region and bring home a trophy. The coward disagrees and prefers to stay at home; the hero goes to the hunting expedition alone and comes back with his trophy and sings his *geerarsaa*:

40

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>“Abbaa Bookaa gadhitti^x</i> | You, <i>Abbaa Bookaa</i> ; the coward |
| <i>Manakee boroo taa'ii</i> | Sit in your backyard |
| <i>Gaayyaakee huffee kaa'ii</i> | Puff on your smoking pipe |
| <i>Anillee ajjeeseen galee</i> | I killed and came back home |
| <i>Kanin ajjeesettiyyuu</i> | As for what I killed, it is |
| <i>Qurquraa gumbii jalaa</i> | the one that toddles by the silo |
| <i>Dhagaa daakuu jalatti</i> | The grinding stone under |
| <i>Geemmii abidda gamatti</i> | The fire stone-trivet yonder |
| <i>Nama taa'u duratti;</i> | In front of people sitting |
| <i>Siree xeephaa biratti</i> | Near the leather-strapped bed |
| <i>Boojjitoo masas godheen</i> | I snatched the stirring rod |
| <i>Addasaa basaq godhe!”</i> | And cracked its forehead. |

At the background of the episode is the adult hunter's narrative expressed in the *geerarsaa* song he sung on arrival from the hunting ground that the children may have seen or heard about. As mentioned earlier, in the adult *geerarsaa* is contained many expressions about the terrible things he encountered in the lowland forest, his ups and downs, and all the suffering

^wSource: From the authors recollection

^xSource: From the author's recollection

he had to tolerate in order to bring home the trophy. What makes the child-hero's hunting expedition incongruous and absurd is the way they model and turn the fire-hearth and its surrounding area into a hunting ground and the mouse into a game animal. The fireplace *jungle*, the huge grinding-stone *mountain*, and the three cooking-pot-supporting stone-trivets *hills*, are all modelled after the adult hero's *geerarsaa*. The successful adult hunter had a group of hunters as a witness for his heroic deeds, while the child hero had family members warming themselves around the fire fireplace. Who could ever doubt or not bear witness to his heroic deed of killing an imaginary mouse? The mock *geerarsaa* employed exaggeration as the main technique to produce incongruity and absurdity which in turn provokes hilarious laughter. The child performing this dramatic act puts the lyrics in the melody, style and voice of the hunter's original *geerarsaa*, and pretends to be the real hunter. Even though he is mimicking an adult hero, it seems to tell us the existence of a hidden desire in the psych of the child; that is: the desire to follow the footsteps of the adult hero and be gratified like him.

Conclusion:

Drawing on the data collected from various sources, in this modest article I have demonstrated the multifaceted nature of *geerarsaa*, particularly from the expressive purpose assigned to it. In this regard it can be classified as a single unique genre that fulfils the expressive needs of various individual state of mind felt under different social situations. In *Geerarsaa* triumph can be expressed; so does grievance, praise and castigation. The message it conveys ranges from emotions of individual nature to that of national issues that might have helped ignite popular uprising of the masses against coercive, undemocratic and authoritarian regimes. Hence, its purpose encompasses political, social, and psychological spheres of the Oromoo. It also encompasses both the humorous and the non-humorous aspects of Oromoo oral art. Overall it is an authentic art form of multiple functions that our fathers created and left us. The question is can the present generation keep this inherited art form rich and pure while making his own lyrical contribution towards its contextual richness and artistic purity without any adulteration for the next generation to inherit.

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