



## The Image of Women in Tigrigna Oral Poetry: A Feminist Analysis of Raya Oral Poetry and Songs

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### Abstract

*The main objective of this study is to describe and analyze the image of the Raya women in Tigrigna oral poetry and songs. The study was conducted based on field research in rural areas of Raya Azebo and Raya Alamata Woredas in the Southern Zone. The data was collected through observation, interviews, and focus group discussions using a purposive sampling technique. For documentary evidence, twelve informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique.*

*The research method employed was ethnographic qualitative description. The data was collected in Tigrigna language and then texts were translated into English using free translation. After that, the data were analyzed using functional and feminist approaches. Then, the selected oral poems were grouped under seven (7) thematic classifications. The results revealed that there is an occurrence of both negative and positive portrayals, such as fulfilling, dependent on men, women's voice against forced marriage patriarchal ideology, women's image as housewives, and the beauty of women. The conclusion of the article indicates that Tigrigna oral poetry and songs are used to express women's voices against patriarchal ideology and traditions that lead to their subjugation against forced marriage. The study also concluded that women are portrayed as the cornerstone of the family. Women are also portrayed as dependent housewives/there is a division of tasks between men and women. All in all, the study showed that there is an occurrence both negative and positive portrayals of Raya women in Tigrigna oral poetry and songs.*

**Keywords:** feminism, Image, marginalize, patriarchal, poetry, Post- structuralism

## 1. Introduction

Oral literature, as a vehicle of cultural transmission, has been identified as one of the important vehicles used to marginalize women. According to Ngugi (1975), language has been used to perpetuate the myth of female inferiority, and he recommends examining social and economic structures of our society in order to place and define women more meaningfully. He succeeds in showing how language has served as a crucial tool in shaping the image of women in society.

Besides, Ngugi (1975) argues that language has been used to perpetuate the myth of female inferiority, and he recommends examining social and economic structures of our society in order to place and define women more meaningfully. Likewise, Mugo (1975, 210) added that the impact of language on women in society. According to her, the biggest enemy to be reckoned with in the battle for the liberation of the abused female image is first and foremost language.

In same token, Chesaina (1991) in her paper, *Images of women in African oral literature*, observes that the Kalenjin regarded women as children who need to be guided and protected. She reported that this view was held by both men and women and any woman who did not live up to that description was considered as westernized. Thus, Chesaina (1991) concluded that the portrayal of women in Kalenjin and Maasai oral narratives was very negative.

Similarly, Ethiopia like many African countries is a multi-ethnic state. Women in Ethiopia occupy a low status position in the society, although they represent half of the population and contribute significantly to food production and perform many other duties. On some occasions, the Ethiopian women in most families are in an inferior rank to their brothers and male counterparts.

Likewise, in Ethiopia, many studies have been conducted in oral poetry. Tsiyon Yohannes (2007) study has conducted on *the content of 653 Amharic songs produced in cassettes in 1997 E.C.* Tsiyo's study were analyzed based on a coding sheet that was developed using 16 physical traits, 19 personality traits and 3 variables on division of labour related to women. According to Tsion women are more portrayed as untrustworthy, dependent, irrational, incompetent, cruel, careless, haughty, jealous and as quitters than as trustworthy, independent, assertive, and fulfilling.

Tsegaye Abie (2022) also conducted on the *Physical Beauty of Women in Some Amharic Oral poetry: Positive looks in Focus*. According to Tsegaye (2022), the Amhara people use oral poetry to reflect their attitudes, feelings and thoughts regarding to the positive physical features of women; for instance, they appreciate the tidy teeth, colorful eyes, attractive lip, hip, waist, and the overall attractive physical features of women. In addition to the image of women, Tsegaye concluded that in the Amhara oral poetry uses different figurative languages such as simile,

metaphor, personification, hyperbole; oxymoron, etc. were used as a spice to empower the oral poems in strengthening the physical beauty of women.

Nigussie Meshesha (2005) similarly conducted his thesis on the culture and gender in *Sidama folk poetry: a post structuralism approach*. According to Nigussie, women, are treated as if they are weak, incapable of doing somethings by their own and they deserve everything of the lesser quality. They are respected only when they give birth to so many children, which are considered as their great life time achievement. Males on the contrary do almost nothing whereas the women hold all the major responsibilities, but they are socially more influential

On the same token, Haileab (2018) conducted on the image of woman's sexuality in Eritrean Tigrigna oral poetry. The result of his study demonstrates the deep-rooted cultural connotations regarding women as subordinates or downright inferior to men. Hagos (2015) also conducted on the Portrayal of Women in Tigrigna Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions: the Stereotypical Beliefs and Behavioral Tendencies. The findings of the study illustrated that both favorable and unfavorable image of women. Contrary to men, Women are portrayed positively only in a very few proverbs. Most proverbs and proverbial expressions of Tigrigna indicated that women are dependent, evil, lazy and inferior in both their self-esteem and intelligence.

The Raya community of southern Tigray like other ethnic groups of Ethiopia has its own oral traditions such as oral poetry, proverbs, riddles, tales, fables, songs, idioms, etc. Through these oral traditions, the society reflect-sits fears, pleasures, appreciations, outlooks, dissatisfactions, attainments, judgments, etc. The oral poetry reflects social attitudes in general and women's views which are their clear manifestation.

However, the researchers' recognition shows that no study on images of women in Raya Tigrigna oral poetry has been made so far. This work intends to fill this gap in the field of interpreting oral poetry. The main objective of this study is to analyze the samples of Tigrigna oral poetry from the point of view of creating an image of women. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the portrayal of women in glance of Raya oral poetry.
2. explore gender themes which are rooted in the image of woman in the Raya society
3. document the indigenous wisdom (folkloric treasure) of the Raya community.

#### **1.1. Theoretical Approach: Post Structuralism Approach**

Post structuralism denies the totality of the universe that is guided by a single ideology. In other words, the universality of truth that is logo centric (having a center) is challenged because there is no single reality/center/. Therefore, post structuralism objects the idea of final truth. In post structuralism thinking every text is 'logo centric' as Jacques Derrida is the proponent;

things should not be seen as independent. thus, in structuralism, a thing is taken as if it has a determinate meaning with a center, but things need to be seen from their signification where meaning is deferred ' or postponed, this means, there is no center to define things as they are absolute Subarao (2004, 1-2).

According to post structuralism theory there is no definite center to define things. That is, there is no absolute meaning and everything works in relation and so there are always binary oppositions (male over female, good over bad, etc). In line with this, Subaro (2004: 3) says that deconstruction is a philosophy and methodology for interpreting the meaning of texts including literary texts. As its scope is very wide, post structuralism does help to the analysis of folk poetry as it is a literary form. As meaning has no determinacy, texts, for example poems, the metaphysical presence of male-centered reality is deconstructed since fixing a meaning for a text will be most unreasonable where there is female centered reality.

Similarly, Belsey (1983) explains that deconstruction (post structuralism) as it is mainly about the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings, its incompleteness and above all its contradictions". Moreover, Belsey explains that reality is inconsistent, limited, and contradictory. Hence, this school of thought takes truth conditionally.

Robey (1972) believes that deconstruction can perhaps best be discussed as a theory of reading which aims to undermine the logic of opposition

within texts. That means, it deals with binary oppositions: male over female, white over black, privileged over unprivileged, good over bad, etc. So as a literary form, folk poetry can show the binary oppositions. On the same manner, (Peck, J. and M. Coyle (1993) asserts that a text is a complex thing and there is no determinate meaning to the text that allows a degree of reckless freedom in discussing it. Thus, post structuralism can help to view things out of their metaphysical presence.

In an oral society like the Rayan, any kind of social discourse, for example, is framed in any kind of text must not be taken as a single ideological form but it constitutes differences and separatism. In other words, it shouldn't be given loyalty to absolute truth and objectivity. Any discourse that is done in the oral poetry can be interpreted in showing this relative importance instead of confirming the existence of an absolute truth. If we take the oral poetries, they can show the relative importance, for example, male centered and female centered reality side by side without giving objectivity to the dominant group.

## 2.2 Materials and methods

In the study the researchers collected, classified and analyzed the poems. The instruments used in the collection of the data are interview, focus group discussion and observation. The interview was mainly unstructured and participant and non-participation observations were also used. The informants are 12, consisted of men and women and based on their ability in telling the poems as

they are acknowledged in the society. The researchers did observations for the marriage ceremonies, local drinking and workplaces. There are about 65 poems collected and from these 50 of them are classified based on their nature of occurrence.

Moreover, in the study post structuralism approach is used to show the gender differences. The poems are analyzed based on their themes in showing the gender relationship. Furthermore, various books in the subject area were reviewed. The researches visited Culture and Tourism agency, Women's Association Affairs office and other offices from the southern Zone to documents relevant issues under inquiry.

With regarding to data analysis, the data was transcribed from the tapes. After that, literal translation of the genres was carried out because the data were collected in the Tigrigna language. From the literal translation, an actual or free translation was undertaken. After this, the genres were divided into groups according to their thematic occurrence. An analysis was then carried out to find out the images of women depicted by the genres under study.

### **3. Results and Discussions: The Image of Women in Tigrigna Oral poetry**

Literature is a reflection of society. It helps create our views of reality and it also mirrors and interprets the experience from the points of view of those who write about it. The images of women in literature have always been ambivalent; for every biological role, there has been both a negative and a positive view. The

women may either be seen as the giver of life as well as the destroyer of it.

Therefore, this section explores the portrayal of women in the Raya Community's oral poetry, focusing on the themes of the poems and how women are portrayed within them. It presents translations of the poems, outlines the theme of each one, and analyses how Raya women are represented in Tigrigna oral poetry. Therefore, the common themes and functions of the poetry are categorized based on the current gender thematic descriptions and the individuality of the female characters.

#### **3.1. Girls' Resistance against Forced Marriage**

In Raya culture, girls are often cautioned against considering physical appearance when choosing a partner. The community believes that a woman's beauty lasts only until she gives birth. Instead, it is believed that men should be valued based on their ability to support and provide for their families, rather than their looks. Beautiful girls become targets for many men, as beauty is seen as a positive trait in women. This creates a double standard in societal beliefs, a common theme in many oral poems.

In Raya cultural marriages, decisions are typically made for the women, under the assumption that men/fathers, husbands, and brothers are better suited for decision-making. As a result, girls may find themselves forced to marry those who can offer the highest dowry, regardless of whether the suitors are old, unattractive, lazy, or otherwise undesirable. However, contrary to the stereotype of submissive women, many girls

actively resist forced marriages. The following oral poetry illustrates the theme of girls' resistance against such societal pressures.

- (1) ፍድ ወለደይ አኸብረ ብለ፡ I thought that I venerated my  
ምኹርም ኹሉ ትቻብለ፡ parent's consent,  
ወለደይ ዳብ ደይፈሊጦ And I received all of their  
ምሽጥር ልእኸምኔ፡ advice,  
ወገሐ ፀብሐ ብበትር My parents sent me to a  
አደንቁሪ፡ mystery I don't prepared of,  
መጨረሻሉ ወለደይ Day and night he (my husband)  
ምንቁሻሽ ጀምሩኒ፡ beats me,  
my par And lastly, he began to disdain

In Raya culture, marriage is viewed as a source of dignity for parents. Those who marry off their daughters at a young age are often rewarded and respected by the community. However, this patriarchal belief is challenged by the oral poetry that expresses a girl's resistance to forced marriage. The performer emphasizes that women frequently marry not by their own choice, but to satisfy their parents' consent. This perspective contests the deeply deep-rooted cultural belief within the community that women should be married early.

However, the oral poetry shows that women do not remain silent when they are subjected to abuse or defamation, especially by their

- (3) ወለዳ አመሪሰኛም ዳጥፋኡ Her parents wedded her with  
አጥፊኦም፡ massive expenses,  
ለብሚ ብሎም ሰድዶም They advised and sent her with  
መሪቾም፡ blessing  
ምስ ማንዛኦ ቢኸብሪ They united with her couple  
አፃሚዶም፡ respectfully  
ማን እሳ ድለየታ አይፀንሐይ But, it was not her consent from  
ካብቻደም፡ the beginning.

husbands. Although the community has traditionally accepted the abuse of women by their spouses, the girl in the poem takes a stand against her parents' choice of marriage. Despite enduring mistreatment from her husband, she defies the societal expectations placed upon her.

Finally, the performer of the oral poetry reverberated that marriages arranged by parent's decision often lead to unhappiness and life.

- (2) ትሕቲ ዕድመ መርዓ አብዝባና Early marriage becomes her fate,  
ገኒኑ፡ Is there no a strong regulation for  
ደዚ ድኽነተሪ ሐገዶ ትሳእኑ፡ this?

Raya culture, marriage is seen as a source of dignity for parents. Those who marry off their daughters at a young age are often rewarded and respected by the community. However, this patriarchal belief is challenged by oral poetry that expresses a girl's resistance to forced marriage. The performer highlights that women often marry not by their own choice, but to satisfy their parents. This perspective contests the deeply ingrained cultural belief in the community that women should be married off early.

Moreover, the oral poetry demonstrates that women do not remain silent when they experience abuse or defamation, particularly from their husbands. Although the community has traditionally accepted the abuse of women by their spouses, the girl in the poem takes a stand against her parents' choice of marriage. Despite enduring mistreatment from her husband, she defies the societal expectations placed upon her. Ultimately, the performer suggests that marriages arranged by parents frequently lead to unhappiness and failure.

In Raya culture, the dowry is traditionally given by the girl's parents to the boy's parents.

Additionally, the boy's parents are expected to present gifts to their son during the wedding ceremony. As a result, the financial burden of the



aforementioned oral poetry stands in opposition to this patriarchal ideology, advocating for women's rights to education, resilience in facing challenges, and the intellectual capacity to achieve their goals. Overall, the oral poetry embodies women's resistance to the patriarchal norms of a community that insists they must remain at home.

- (6) ቅትሪ ምስ ለይቲ ዓጭደ *I slice and grind day and night*  
 ጥሕነ፥  
 ሃም ወዲ ተባዕታይ *Like man, I plow and plough*  
 ጎልጉለ ሓሪስ፥  
 መሬቱ ኹዕተ ገደሉ *I cultivate the land, excavate the*  
 አፍሪስ፥ *hill,*  
 ብኹሉ ይዋግእ ካብኡዶ *I accomplish by all means, am I*  
 ንእስ፥ *not like him?*

The poetry discussed highlights women's resistance to traditional roles as housewives. The poetry is sung and recited by a female singer/poet. It challenges society's traditional belief that women should stay at home because they are considered weak. The opening line illustrates the persona's resistance to this societal norm, which forces women into domestic roles. While society maintains that women should be confined to the home, the persona expresses a strong protest against this misguided belief. The oral poetry performer argues that women are capable of engaging in various activities outside the home, including participating in social and economic positions, just like their male counterparts. Overall, the content of the poetry highlights women's opposition to the societal conviction that confines them to domesticity.

- (7) ኩናት እንተመጣ አይፈርሕን? *When war comes, I am not*  
 አነ፥ *afraid,*

- መናንጣይ ሸጥ አብለ ኪቃለስ *I will fight my guts out,*  
 ይሓ አነ፥  
 ስልጣን ተመጽኡ ይወሃበኔ፥ *Let power given to me when it*  
 comes,  
 ሃገር ድመርሕ ጥበብ እኔሀኔ፥ *I have the wisdom to lead the*  
 country

The personal challenges are that traditional belief, which portrays men as fighters, brave individuals, critical thinkers, and leaders of the country. In contrast, society often depicts women as weak, less capable of critical thinking, and lacking the mental and intellectual power that men possess.

This oral poetry serves to resist such misguided societal beliefs about women. The persona asserts that women possess wisdom and knowledge comparable to men, enabling them to lead and make decisions for their country. Furthermore, it encourages women to be courageous and take a stand to defend their country if war arises. This perspective opposes the patriarchal view that characterizes men as the brave fighters and leaders while relegating women to domestic roles as wives or mothers.

### 3.3. The Image of Women as Fulfilling

In Raya culture, a wife is believed to be a constant companion to her husband. She is expected to care for him, stand by his side, share in his problems and desires, while also fulfilling various household roles. As a good wife, she is anticipated to obey her husband, share his likes and dislikes, and show respect to his relatives. As a homemaker, the Raya community holds the belief that there is no true home without a woman. According to Raya and beliefs and doctrines, women are portrayed as essential to

life's fulfillment, and a man without a wife is seen as lacking something significant in his life. Therefore, the following oral poetry illustrates this portrayal of women as vital to existence.

- (8) እንተፅግመኒ ትሕግዘኒ፡      *You help me when I am in trouble:*  
 ተስፋ ኣብዘይብለይ ተስፋ      *You give me hope when I feel desperate*  
 ትህበኒ፡      *desperate*  
 ኣብ ሕምቕ ግዜ ኣጋዚተይ      *You will be my helper in bad times.*

In the poetry discussed, the essential role of women in a man's life is powerfully highlighted. The poet illustrates how a man's success is often closely linked to having a supportive woman by his side, portraying her as a lasting source of pride and fulfillment. This art form celebrates women as dedicated partners who actively advocate for their husbands' achievements, reinforcing the idea that their contributions are crucial to attaining greatness.

- (9) ኣብ ችግረይን ተኾኒለይ      *How much I am in my trouble,*  
 ህንድኣይ፡      *You share my joys and sorrows*  
 ኣብ ደስታይ ኣዘነይ ትካፈሊ      *You gave me hope for my future life*  
 ምሳይ፡፡      *life*  
 ተስፈ ኣርፌኺኒ ድመግኢ      *You bear all my worries with me.*  
 ችግር ሹሉ ትግፈረኺ      *me.*  
 ብህንድይ፡፡

Raya's oral poetry powerfully underscores the invaluable role women play in the lives of men, a theme that resonates throughout numerous recitals and songs. These artistic expressions not only celebrate women as nurturing figures, shining warmth and compassion, but also call attention to their significant contributions to the household economy something that is often overlooked. By shining a light on this complex interplay of roles, we can recognize that women's influence extends far beyond caregiving, highlighting their essential impact on family and community life.

- (10) ኣየ ናይ ሰበይቲ ናታ የዋህ      *Let me tell you woman's sympathy,*  
 ነገር፡፡      *Even one tries express her kindness,*  
 የዋህንታ ክግለጽ እዩ ብኻ      *Her perseverance is extremely boundless*  
 እንትዝርዘር፡፡      *boundless*  
 ጠዋሪንታ ብዙሕ ያኡ      *She is the custodian of everything,*  
 ድይብሉ ደንበር፡፡      *She is the protector and shelter of the family*  
 ጠዋሪት፡፡

In the above-mentioned Raya's oral poems, women in their roles as wives are often expected to fulfill a variety of responsibilities that encompass both domestic and emotional labor. These responsibilities typically include giving birth and nurturing their children, providing care and support to their husbands, and managing essential household tasks such as fetching water and gathering firewood. Additionally, they are responsible for maintaining a clean and organized home by sweeping the compounds and preparing meals for the family.

Interestingly, despite the prevalent notion in many African patriarchal societies that men hold the title of head of the family, the oral poetry referenced reveals a different perspective. In this context, women are portrayed as the true leaders within the household, often stepping into the role of caregivers and decision-makers, particularly when it comes to looking after their parents and extended family members.

### 3.4. The Image of Women as Housewives

Women, in their roles as wives, face specific expectations. They are often seen as responsible for giving birth, caring for their children and husbands, fetching water and firewood, cleaning the home, and preparing meals. When women do

not meet these expectations, they may experience social and psychological consequences, and their efforts often go unrecognized. Raya oral poems and songs reflect the societal ideology that women should be tied to domestic activities. This stereotypical view of women's roles in the household is frequently used to justify their mistreatment and exploitation. In this context, men are viewed as dominant figures that control key positions in society, while women are confined to domestic roles, serving primarily as wives and mothers.

- |      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| (11) | ሰብካይ መስረው ያዋድድ፤<br>ሰበይቲ እንጀራ ትሰንከት<br>ሓወይ ትእጉድ።           | <i>A man arranges his farming<br/>tools,<br/>A woman bakes and cooks</i>                                 |
| (12) | አሱ ፅምዱ አንትሓረስ፤<br><br>እነ ይጉልጉል የለሳል።                      | <i>When he /my husband)<br/>ploughs,<br/>I burrow and soften it.</i>                                     |
| (13) | አቲ ሰብካይ እንትግጭድ<br>እንቲኹምብር፤<br><br>እነ ፅንፀይቲ ይጥርንፍ<br>ይጥምር። | <i>When the man sickled and<br/>piles our harvest,<br/><br/>I collect firewood and tied it<br/>ይጥምር።</i> |

The oral poems and songs described above vividly demonstrate the societal norms that confine women to particular roles. Women are mostly assigned to the duties of maintaining the household, which include preparing nourishing meals and collecting firewood, while their significant contributions are frequently overshadowed by a deeply rooted belief in patriarchal customs. On the other hand, the challenging tasks associated with farming like preparing the land, gathering plentiful harvests, and threshing grains are unfairly regarded as the sole responsibility of men. This deep-rooted belief not only restricts women's involvement outside the home but also propagates a culture

that oppresses them, seriously diminishing their potential for meaningful social engagement.

Moreover, the oral poetry mentioned earlier illustrates a distinct division of labor according to gender, with women mainly tasked with household duties. In the first illustration, men are portrayed as heroes engaged in agricultural activities, while women are recognized for their contributions in collecting wood and tying it up with ropes. From this poem, we can deduce that women's roles center around gathering wood, while men participate in farming tasks, which are regarded as the primary contributions to the family's daily existence. This implies that men are as the providers of crucial resources for the household.

In general, the text discusses a division of labor based on gender in oral poetry, highlighting that women are primarily responsible for household tasks, such as collecting wood and tying it with ropes. In contrast, men are portrayed as heroes involved in farming activities. This reflects the perception of men as producers of essential resources for the household.

### 3.5. The Image of Women as Dependent on Men

Oral poems that delve into this theme vividly illustrate the deeply entrenched belief within society that women are primarily seen as dependents of men, particularly their husbands. In these representations, women are often portrayed as lacking the autonomy to make independent choices, which perpetuates the notion that they are incapable of overcoming their challenges without male assistance. As

these societal attitudes become ingrained, they establish an environment where women face various forms of oppression, including emotional suppression, societal dominance, and in some cases, even violence.

- (16) ጎሃም ሃገራ አናግሳረተ *Even she works hard to*  
 ከትግቢ፥ *change her life,*  
 አንተወረደት አላ ላዕሊ. *Even she faces up and dawn,*  
 ታሐቲ፥  
 ዋላ ተኾፈለት ዲላዓለ *Even she paid immense*  
 መስወደቷ፥ *sacrifice,*  
 ካበ መልሐስ ሓሊፉስ ወይ *She never goes beyond speech*  
 ካብ ሰበይቲ፥ *and woman.*
- (14) ገና ካብትፍጠረት አትሒዛ፥ *When almighty God created*  
*her early,*  
 ዓድሊዋ ይኡ ድስራሕ ገዛ፥ *He endowed her for house*  
*work,*  
 ደካማ ይኣ ኣይትኹዕትይ *She is feeble and couldn't dig*  
 ማባሮ ሒዛ፥ *using hoe*

According to the above poetry, a woman's identity is often defined by her relationship with her husband. She is portrayed as dependent and tends to rely on her husband's profession, as suggested by the poem's title. The stereotype of a lazy housewife is evident when the woman stays at home, expecting support from her husband. This laziness is emphasized in the first verse of the first stanza, illustrating her carelessness, as she knows that even if she does not contribute financially, her husband will provide for her. This highlights how some women have been disempowered, viewing themselves as dependent on their families before marriage and on their husbands afterward.

- (15) ሰበይቲ አንተወረደት ብላ ላዕሊ. *Even woman faces up and*  
 ታሐቲ፥ *dawn,*  
 ዋላ ተኾፈለት ዲላዓለ *Even she paid immense*  
 መስወደቷ፥ *sacrifice,*

- ካብ መልሐስ ሓሊፉስ ወይ *She never goes beyond*  
 ካብ ሰበይቲ፥ *speech and woman.*

In this oral poetry, women are portrayed as weak and reliant on their husbands. The performer of the oral poetry depicts women as meaningless and they need support from their husband in order to live suitable life. Although women work hard to improve their problem, the persona describes that it a man who solve their problems. This indicates the society view women as dependent and feeble that could not perform their work by themselves.

- (18) ሰበይቲ እንተሃለዋ ዕቡቕ *Although a woman has a good*  
 ግረማ፥ *majesty,*  
 ስብኣይ ይኡ ድፈትሐ ኹሉ *All her problem is resolved via*  
 ፀገማ፥ *man,*  
 አላማን የብላይ ትሐት ይኡ *But, she is weak and her power*  
 ዓቕማ፥ *is low*
- (17) ምሕራስ እንኳ ድይትኸአል *She could not plough*  
 አላላሊሳ፥ *properly,*  
 ብኩሉ ንገር ደካማ ይኣ ኢሳ፥ *Woman is feeble by*  
*everything.*

These oral poems and songs stated above illustration that women are inferior to men and should occupy an inferior position in society. They also came to believe that men are biologically stronger which implies that they are superior. They came to believe that since they are not endowed with the same strengths that would enable them to perform similar activities as men, men's roles are more important than theirs. The society authorized these beliefs by all means possible and inculcated the inferiority of women through the oral poetry. The indistinguishable images of women became part of the attitudes and beliefs of the society. Generally, it clearly reveals the fact that the target society views

women, as opposed to men, as unsuited public activities. A woman is portrayed as being affiliated with the kitchen within her home as she

- (21) አቲ ልሰሉስ ወለላ ካንፈራ፡ *Her glossy and charming lip,*  
አንሐር ሰዕምኸያ ይገደክ *If you kiss her, her love is*  
ፍቅራ፡፡ *fascinating.*

is thought of being especially suited for cooking and other domestic tasks. If a woman tends to participate in public spheres, she is considered abnormal.

### 3.6. The portrayal of Woman's emotions: Expressing Love and Affection

In this thematic classification the analysis of the oral poems shows that the physical appearance of women is associated with beauty. It is common for Raya oral poetry to be full of love praises and gratifying expressions about beauty. But the recurrent expressions of love praises in terms of beauty are the different parts of a girl's body such as waist, teeth, hair, eyes, and breast. In addition to these, lovers use skin color as a mark of praise to their loved ones.

According to our field observation, the informants stated that their oral poems are the product of their share experience and knowledge. They recite and sing different oral poems based on ideas brought by their observation from people around them and their environments. In this regard, informants said that they recite and sung this poems and songs to applause the beauty the girls and women at some point in different social occasions, and did not find it difficult to portray women's feelings in their oral poems.

- (19) )ኢታ ንእሽተይ ቃዖሐ ጎርዞ፡ *The little girl who is crimson*  
*lady,*  
ድኸሉ መንእሰይ ብመልክዓ *She draws youths with her*  
ተፍዞ፡ *beauty,*  
ፈጣሪ ፈጥረዋ ብፍሉይ *God created her with unique*  
ምህዞ፡፡ *creation*
- (20) ) አቲ ፀባ ደርግስና፡ *Her astonishing teeth,*  
ተፈጥሩ ድስሐቸ ድዝና፡፡ *It is created for laughter and*  
*fun*
- (22) )ሽምጣ ለይላይ ፀባ ድርግ *The girl, whose waist is slim, her*  
ስና፡ *teeth is milk,*  
ምንፍራይ ድይትፈልጦ *She never feels anger except*  
ብደደዝና፡ *laughter,*  
ፀባያ ጥዕምቲ ኹሉ *Her personality is lovely*  
ዳመስግና፡፡ *appreciated by all.*

As shown in the above oral poetry, the poet suggests that beauty is beauty beyond description. Boldness soft skin, lip and slenderness in a woman are associated with beauty in Raya community. The poet therefore uses the women's body to praise the physical beauty of the woman. The poet not only praises physical beauty but also praises the personality of the girl by refereeing her fine verbalization and yearning amusement. Besides, the persona praises a woman's physical beauty, highlighting her slender waist, white teeth, and appealing personality, which is akin to that of a charming comic character. The use of metaphor vividly depicts the woman's beauty. In the Raya community, a woman with white teeth and a slim figure is considered beautiful. Therefore, the speaker compares the woman's teeth to milk to emphasize its attractiveness.

- (23) ምስክላ አሕርኸይድኸ ጫወታ፡ *If you go with her, she*  
*laughs,*  
ምስቲ ሓደ ተኸይዳ ፈሸከታ፡ *If she goes with others, she*  
*smiles,*  
መርዓ እነትኸይዳ ማዕረኸጋ *If she goes to wedding, her*  
ብዙሪያ ኩታ፡ *majesty is vast,*



women are inherently untrustworthy. It suggests that if a woman knows your secret, you might live in fear for the rest of your life, as she could reveal it at any moment. This portrayal depicts women as unreliable and crafty, while implying that men are more dependable. Consequently, women are often seen as individuals who cannot be trusted to keep secrets. The examples presented suggest that society perceives women as needing to be controlled by men to achieve a genuinely healthy and normal shared life.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main objective of this article is to describe and analyze the current thematic image of Raya women in Tigrigna oral poetry. Some songs express women's voices that express a desire for liberation from customs and traditions that lead to their subjugation to forced marriage. The Raya women are also portrayed as the cornerstone of the family. They are believed to form the foundation of the household, and without them, the community believes that life becomes incomplete. In this context, a man without a wife is often viewed as lacking something crucial in his life, emphasizing the importance of women in men's success.

On the contrary, the analysis of the oral poetry and songs shows that there is a negative portrayal of women while encouraging traits such as dependence and reliance on men, both physically and economically. Such presentation of women as non-self-reliant reinforces men's power over women, enabling control and domination, as it suggests that women are incapable of addressing

their own concerns. Besides, women are also portrayed negatively as unreliable beings; they are often portrayed as untrustworthy, deceitful, and crafty. This characterization suggests that society does not trust them to share secrets and perceives them as unpredictable, indicating a belief that women require male control to experience a genuine, healthy, and fulfilling community life.

In addition, the Raya's oral poems and songs reflect society's view that women are primarily associated with domestic activities, depicting them as unsuitable for public engagement. In this gender analysis, there is a male-controlled belief in which society regards women as only fit for domestic roles.

The Analysis of oral poems and songs also shows Women's emotions and affections. The portrayal of women through the oral poetry focuses on their physical attributes, such as eyes, teeth, skin, hair, height, hips, lips, breasts, legs, neck, waist, and thinness. The study found that certain physical traits carry sexual connotations, referencing body parts like hips, waist, eyes, hair, teeth, and breasts.

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