

Full Length Research Paper

The Amharic proverbs and their use in Gə'əz Qəne (Ethiopian poetry)

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Received 11 May, 2020; Accepted 4 June, 2020

This article aims to provide a concise impression of Amharic proverbs and their use in Gə'əz Qəne. Qəne is an extraordinary Ethiopian poetry with special feature, beauty, and limit. There is no language restriction to compose Qəne; since its introduction in the 15th Century Gə'əz is predominantly used to compose Qəne in different forms. Adding an Amharic proverb to Gə'əz Qəne is a great talent which requires an advanced knowledge and exercise of both the language and the proverbs. However, many Qəne masters use sporadically Amharic proverbs to compose Gə'əz Qəne. Hence, it is customary to find various Amharic proverbs implemented in Gə'əz Qəne. The methods of how to realize such a composition are the main issues discussed in this article. With this regard, various convincing examples and analytical explanations are provided appropriately. It also deals with the significance and role of Amharic proverbs in the study of Biblical exegesis and in day to day communications of the Ethiopian people. Their impact on personal discourses and social interactions is like one of the key issues of the article. The concluding part consists of a summary and recommendation.

Key words: Proverb, Amharic, biblical exegesis, Qəne.

INTRODUCTION

The Amharic term ስነ ቃል *səna-qāl* mainly refers to a proverb. አባባል *'abābāl* is also a word which relates to it and used alternately. Proverbs are popular sayings that help to express ideas, feelings, and secrets precisely and effectively. They are naturally attached to a language because they can be expressed when they are uttered in any spoken language. It is assumed that each language society has its own tradition and collection of proverbs. In Ethiopia, there is a common tradition of using proverbs in all areas of the country. Each language society in the country is concerned about the preservation and dissemination of proverbs since it regards them as oral heritages that can define it from the historical, socio-anthropological, and economical perspectives. It is also

believed that proverbs are expressions of mentalities and life philosophies of a society. Thus, individuals that can suitably state proverbs are genuinely proud of themselves (Amsalu and Dagnachew, 1987: 3-5; Getahun, 1986: 1).

Amharic is one of the local languages which are significantly rich in proverbs. A considerable number of Amharic proverbs has widely spread throughout the country and are well known by many people. Those people who have enough knowledge of proverbs would prefer to express their happiness or sadness, their agreement or disagreement, their demand or wish by using short proverbs rather than making a long dialogue. Even to convince or to warn someone, using proverbs by

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choosing the harmonizing ones is a strong tendency of many people.

It is quite difficult and perhaps unimaginable to find out the actual time when Amharic proverbs were produced or introduced originally. Likewise, there could be neither an individual person nor a single institute which can take the credit of creating or introducing them. They are genuine social heritages that are transmitted orally from generation to generation.

The tradition of using proverbs is supposed to be practiced since ancient time. In Ethiopia, many cultural elements and traditional exercises have died and are still dying since the introduction and spread of modernization. Fortunately, the importance of proverbs and their practicability is not affected by modernization. Besides that, the number of the proverbs is acutely increasing from time to time. There are thousands of Amharic proverbs which can be wonderfully express almost every aspect of life and are used everywhere by different groups of people beyond the boundaries of age, gender, and personal status in the society.

Some people particularly those who have not a strong attachment with proverbs and other cultural practices think that the old and rural people are exclusively dedicated to learning and using proverbs. Indeed, it is quite clear that these two groups of people have a prolific knowledge and better experience of using proverbs and parables. But as mentioned earlier, the knowledge and use of proverbs is by no means linked with age and lifestyle. Nowadays, like adults and old people, the young people whether in the city or in the countryside are highly motivated to frequently mention proverbs they believe to endorse their idea at all events and all situations. It is customary to hearing proverbs in songs, poems, dramas and in religious and political discourses. For example, if we go to market places and service centers, we hear a lot of proverbs in the conversation of suppliers and their customers while conducting negotiations about prices or qualities of goods and services.

THEIR QUALITIES AND FEATURES

Amharic proverbs have their own qualities and features; some of them have plain meanings and messages that can be understood by any hearer while the rest of them are metaphorical sayings which are somehow difficult to get their core point simply. In connection with size, the proverbs can be categorized into three: short, medium, and long. Long proverbs could involve from eight to twelve individual words while the proverbs with the medium size include from four to seven words. More than half of the formal Amharic proverbs belong to this category. The shorter Amharic proverbs are formed out of two or three words. Even though they are short, they keep complete idea and give precisely momentous messages. The following proverb can evidently show the

nature and quality of those short proverbs: ያልጠረጠረ ተመነጠረ *yālṭaraṭara tamanattara* “The one that was not in doubt was exterminated”.

This might be an answer for those who underestimate the quality and value of African proverbs. Notwithstanding, one of the surprising things regarding them is that the users of Amharic proverbs are not only the Amharic speaking people. But many members of the non-Amharic speaking societies also mention an Amharic proverb in their daily conversations in its original language or by roughly translating it into their languages. But either before or after mentioning the proverb, they claim that the proverb is initially an Amharic proverb, saying, “እንዲህ፡ ይላል፡ አምሐራ...” ‘*əndih yelal ‘amhara...*’ or “...አለ፡ አምሐራ” ‘*alä ‘amhara!*’ – ‘Amhara says...!’ This shows how far Amharic proverbs spread throughout the country and are frequently used by the people. On the other way round, various proverbs which are borrowed from different local languages are stated in Amharic like the original ones.

As it is well known to everyone, Amharic is serving as the official work language of the Ethiopian governments since 1270 AD. It also keeps the same status in more six regional states within the current government including the capital Addis Ababa. The people who live in the remaining regions would study it in the school. This situation has indisputably contributed a lot for the development and spread of Amharic proverbs throughout the country.

Most assuredly, scholars, authors, poets, preachers, orators, entertainers, politicians, and other public figures are the good examples of the people that consciously use Amharic proverbs.

PRESERVATION OF AMHARIC PROVERBS

As mentioned, Amharic proverb is a legacy which passes from generation to generation through oral tradition. Such an oral tradition is mainly preserved by practicing it persistently. The other way of preserving such a tradition is keeping it in a written form. With this regard, there are few scholarly contributions in collecting and disseminating Amharic proverbs in a book form. The work which should be primarily mentioned is the publication of *Belāṭten-getā* Māhtama Səllāse Walda Masqal published in 1950 AD with the title, የአባቶች ቅርስ *ya-‘abbāt-oč qərs* “Legacy of the Fathers”. In this work, Māhtama Səllāse has provided more than three thousand and five hundred Amharic proverbs in alphabetical order (Māhtama Səllāse, 1950).

By the year 1967 AD, *Liqa-mazammərān* Mogas ‘Equba Giyorgis published a book containing around two thousand proverbs with the title, ጥንታዊ ምሳሌ በአማርኛ *tənāwī mässāleba-‘amareññā* “Ancient proverbs in Amharic” (Mogas, 1967). There is also a publication by Daniel Abera in 2006 AD with the title, የአማርኛ ተረትና ምሳሌዎች

ya-`amarēññā tarat-ənnā mäsälle-woč “Amharic parables and proverbs”. Daniel has provided more than four thousand and five hundred proverbs in alphabetical order; no additional information or linguistic analysis is given in the book; it is simply a list of a huge collection of proverbs. Again, the quality of a couple of proverbs included in the book is somehow controversial (Daniel, 2006: 3-107).

Among European scholars who studied Ethiopian languages and cultures, the Polish scholar Jacques Faitlovitch collected one hundred and twenty Amharic proverbs and published them in 1907AD along with French translation. He also discussed the origins and concepts of the proverbs provided in the book (Faitlovitch, 1907).

The most recent publication concerning Amharic proverbs is ኢዲሱ የምሳሌያዊ አነጋገሮች መጽሐፍ *'addisuyamässāle-yāwi'annagāgar-očmaşḥaf* “The new book of Proverbs” published by Debebe Haylegiyorg in 2008AD. Beyond listing out thousands of proverbs in alphabetical order, Debebe has presented descriptive details of some metaphoric proverbs; and at the same time, he provided synonyms of each proverb (Debebe, 2008).

Undoubtedly, all these works can support to preserve and transmit the proverbs they contain to the generations to come, though they are scarcely disseminated.

THE NUMBER OF AMHARIC PROVERBS

It is difficult to know how many Amharic proverbs are existing countrywide. One of the reasons is that the distribution and use of proverbs is varied from place to place. There is also an attempt to create proverbs out of some influential statements and public phrases of other forms. Here, we can mention the following amazing poetic verses:

ጽድቅና ኩነኔ ቢኖርም ባይኖርም
şədq-ənnā k^wənane binorəm bāynorəm
 ከከፋት ደግነት ሳይሻል አይቀርም
ka-kəfāt daggənnat sāyəşāl 'ayqarəm

“Whether righteousness and torment do exist or not, generosity is better than iniquity”

This poetry was composed by Kebede Michael (1914-1998 AD) who was one of the outstanding poets and novelists of 20th century Ethiopia. But because of its power of affecting hearts of millions it has widely spread, and many people attest it in their written and verbal conversation, recognizing it as a formal proverb. Maybe this is one of the factors that motivated some writers to recognize such influential poetic verses as proverbs. The work done by Daniel Abera is one of the recent works that practice this as well. Along with the known Amharic proverbs, he provided a couple of poetic verses such as: *ዘመድና ሳንቲም ከመንገድ ወድቀው*

zamad-ənnā sāntim ka-mangad wadqaw
 ሳንቲምን አካሉ ዘመድን ትተው
sāntimun 'anaşşu zamadən tətaw
 “A relative and money having laid down on the street, (they) take the money leaving back the relative”

ቀድሞ ነበር እንጂ መጥኖ መደቆስ
qadəmo nabbar `ənii maḥḥəno madaqqos
 አሁን ምን ያደርጋል ድስት ጥዶ ማልቀስ
'ahun mən yādargāl dəst ḥədo mālqas
 “Grinding in fair amount would have been done first; what now helps crying, having put the pot on the fire?”

However, there is no way to reject such innovations and conversions in the tradition; once the society recognizes such an influential expression or a poetic verse or a lyric as a proverb then it remains a proverb. This kind of social dedication makes the number of Amharic proverbs progressive. To frankly say, it is not a big challenge to accept new proverbs either converted or composed but it would be better to know which is what initially. So, to make a persuasive estimation of the detectable and currently used proverbs we need to make an extended investigation.

FACTORS FOR A TENDENCY OF USING PROVERBS

Behind such a strong tendency of using proverbs, there are some social approaches that can be regarded as basic factors; some of them are explained as follows:

- (1) People who know well proverbs in their correct form are highly appreciated by many people. They are also supposed to deeply know the language as well as the history and tradition of the society.
- (2) Someone that can use proverbs appropriately is considered as an intelligent with great capability of expressing ideas shortly and clearly. He is appreciated by his audience to talk or to write more. Some people tend to introduce such a person as a wise man or as an eloquent and talented speaker. They also use some special words of appreciation, while introducing him such as ነገር ዐዋቂ *nəgəggər'awāqi* “intelligent”, “talented speaker” and አንደበተ ርቱዕ *'andabata rətu'ə* “gifted orator”.
- (3) Someone that can use proverbs appropriately is considered as an intelligent with great capability of expressing ideas shortly and clearly. He is appreciated by his audience to talk or to write more. Especially, to collect old or difficult public sayings, one must search old books or must spend enough time with old people who know parables and proverbs as well.

Moreover, there is a popular saying by which the people encourage others yet themselves too to lavishly use proverbs. It says: ነገር በምሳሌ መዘመር በሃሌ *nagar be-mässāle mazmur ba-hälle* “Talk with a parable/proverb (and) a hymn with Hallelujah”. This saying has at least two

incompatible messages. On one hand, it shows the strong wish of the people to hearing proverbs or parables reliably. On the other hand, it claims that a talk without an inspirational proverb or a parable is like a hymn without Hallelujah. In the context of Ethiopian Christian tradition, every hymn (particularly *yaredic* hymn) begins with Hallelujah, and a hymn without Hallelujah is considered as incomplete. Comparably, this proverb signifies that many people are passionate to follow the talks and dialogues with parables and proverbs.

Not apart from this, the superb qualities of proverbs motivate people to know and use them. As mentioned earlier, Amharic proverbs are mostly short, but they can explicitly demonstrate deep ideas and replace long talks; they are clear but can convey tough messages in a figurative way. They can easily attract and control attentions of the audiences but do not fade swiftly from the mind. All these factors make the proverbs important and evergreen.

LESSON BOOKS COMPRISING AMHARIC PROVERBS

There are different lesson books that comprise various local proverbs. However, the Biblical exegesis books take precedence over other secular and religious texts since they recognize the proverbs as important parts of both Biblical and cultural wisdom. In each exegesis, several Amharic proverbs are mentioned appropriately to clarify and ratify different interpretations. If we take the exegesis of the Anaphora of St. Mary as an example, twenty selected Amharic proverbs are attested in different places though the exegesis is not large. Similarly, the exegesis of *wəddāse Maryām* comprises ten competent proverbs that are not mentioned in the Anaphora mentioned earlier (Təṣā'ē, 2001: 47, 205). However, this does not cause the exegetical texts to be considered as origins or ultimate sources for Amharic proverbs but to search Biblical exegesis is truly to come across with a huge collection of proverbs. The following two Amharic proverbs are among the proverbs that are mentioned most frequently in various exegetical manuscripts (Təṣā'ē, 2005: 207):

(1) በቃል ያለ ይረሳል በመጽሐፍ ያለ ይወረሳል

ba-qāl yālla yərrassāl ba-maṣṣaf yālla yəwwarrasāl

“What is kept in mind will be forgotten, (but) what is kept in a book will be inherited”

(2) ውሎ ውሎ ከቤት ኖሮ ኖሮ ከመሬት

wəlo wəlo ka-bet noro noro ka-maret

“Everyone comes back home when the day is on (and) everybody is buried when life is over”

The reason behind the frequent attestation of the first proverb is most probably connected with the background

history of the scriptures. It tells that the writers have written the scriptures so that their followers shall not forget what they taught them. The second proverb is mentioned to strongly advise people to think about death which is the core message of almost all Biblical scriptures.

Proverbs of such a high quality and value are attested abundantly in every exegetical book. For this reason, those who know or use such wonderful proverbs are considered by many people as good readers.

Besides, the Amharic curriculum in the elementary and secondary schools in Ethiopia should be appreciated for its concern of the study of proverbs, their meanings, and functionalities (MOE, 2008: 2). It also requires the students to further develop their knowledge of proverbs by reading books and asking parents.

THE ROLE OF AMHARIC PROVERBS IN THE STUDY OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND QƏNE

When we come to ecclesiastical teachings, we see apparently that Amharic proverbs have great values and significances in creating and transmitting knowledge. In particular, the schools of Bible exegesis and the schools of *Qəne* (Gə'əz poetry) use Amharic proverbs more than the remaining church schools which are concerned with the study of Liturgy and chanting. In the study of Bible exegesis, proverbs are very important references next to Biblical and non-Biblical quotations in the construction of text interpretations. Almost in all possible cases, Amharic proverbs are mentioned in the explanations of texts to make them more understandable and unforgettable by connecting them with popular sayings. After all, the common phrase which always follows the proverbs, “እንዲሉ 'əndilu” “as many would say” approves their state of being proverbs.

The scholars present the following two Biblical verses as references while responding to the question, “Why traditional parables are needed to be incorporated with religious instructions in the process of elaborating allegorical meanings of scriptures”:

- “I will open my mouth in a parable” Psalm 78:2

- “Therefore, I speak to them in parable” Matthew 13:13

This meant speaking or writing Biblical messages in a parable is a usually practicable method of knowledge transmission since BC.

Similarly, the schools of *Qəne* give a comparable attention for Amharic proverbs. Firstly, the dialogue between students is somehow full of parabolical phrases. They frequently attempt to practice presenting quotations and parables beside attending formal sessions to develop their personal collections in mind. They believe that such an activity enhances their awareness and creativity.

There is also a course which is offered to senior

students called ጉት *gutt*. It deals with various styles of *Qəne* and provides various model compositions illustrating the features of each style. One of the model compositions keeps a title, እብብ ያየ በልጥ ደነገጠ 'əbāb yāyyaba-leṭ *danaggaṭa* “The one that saw a snake got scared with a bark”, and this is obviously a renowned Amharic proverb. Moreover, using Amharic proverbs in the composition of Gə'əz *Qəne* is a usual habit of many *Qəne* masters.

Qəne is a genre of an extraordinary Ethiopian poetry with special feature, beauty, and limit. It is an exciting intellectual composition which provides two or more messages by the same poetic verses. To compose a *Qəne* following the common rules and standards, it is needed to have enough knowledge of the language as well as the story about which the *Qəne* is to be composed. But to compose *Qəne* using Biblical quotations or popular proverbs, the composer must have enough collections of quotations and proverbs in mind in addition to the basic knowledge of the language. He also needs to know well their correct literal and metaphorical meanings. Particularly, to insert an Amharic proverb in Gə'əz *Qəne*, one should know how to translate it into the Gə'əz language as it keeps its tone and beauty that it has in its original language. So, such a performance is considered as a talent which is more appreciated than the common composition of *Qəne*.

Hence, many *Qəne* masters tend eventually to put various Amharic proverbs in their Gə'əz *Qəne*. It is not just a matter of tendency or interest. But they become more satisfied in their knowledge and talent of composing new treatises when they can deliver a concrete message through a popular proverb, Biblical quotation, and an idiomatic expression they use in the *Qəne*. Even the *Qəne* composed being interwoven with a quotation or a proverb has a great chance to spread out and be remembered more. To realize this, we can look at the following short *Qəne* with two lines.

ኩንኖ ጎጥአን ከሎሙ አይደልወከ ምንተ
k'onnəno ḥaṭə 'an k'əllom-u 'i-yəḍalləwa-kka mənta
 አፍቅሩ ጸላዕተኩሙ እስሙ ትብል አንተ
'afqəru ṣalā 'ətakə-mu 'əsmā-təbl 'anta
 “(Lord) you should not punish all sinners because you say ‘love your enemies”

The *Qəne* is assumed to be composed by the late 'Alaqā Gabrahanā (1822-1906 AD) (Marye, 2014: 9) who was one of the most popular church scholars with great acceptance and esteemed personal in the palaces of three Ethiopian Emperors Tewodros II (1855-1868 AD), Yohannes IV (1871-1889 AD) and Menilik II (1889-1913 AD). He died one hundred and fourteen years ago, but he is still known as a notable wise man and entertainer that the country has ever seen because of his comic jokes and funny actions which are narrated in the family and public stations (Arafeayne, unknown). With this *Qəne*, he attempted to shrewdly dispute against the Lord, not to

judge the sinners by presenting His own statement quoted from the Bible (“Love your enemies” Mathew 5:44) as an evidential reference. It is old composition but is still mentioned like the fresh one almost in all *Qəne* schools by students with joy and fun. Honestly, his other compositions did not get such popularity. He is rather known in his prolific knowledge of chanting alongside with his humors. Thus, it is genuinely possible to claim that the quotation he used made the *Qəne* more enjoyable and fascinating.

The following *Qəne* verses are also formed in the same way.

ባሕቱ ነፍሳት ገባአት ሲኣል ዘበዘጉ
bāḥəttu nafsāt gabbā 'əta si 'ol za-bazḥu
 ይወጹኑ በጽባሕ ወሠርክ ይትፈሥሉ
yəwaqqə 'u ba-ṣəbāḥ wa-šarka yətfəśśəḥu
 “But numerous souls, the peasants of Hell come out in the morning and become happy in the evening”

These lines were taken from a certain *Mawaddəs Qəne* composed by *Merigetā* Yətbārak Qirqos who was one of the popular *Qəne* masters of the 20th Century (Admasu, 1970: 210). The last line is fully quoted from David's psalm (Psalm 64/5:8). He has not made any change or rearrangement on that Biblical verse while putting it in the composition since it is fitting to the line structurally and theoretically. Like the previous one, this line made the entire *Qəne* gracious. Likewise, the attestation of proverbs in any form makes *Qəne* adorable and remarkable.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF INSERTING AMHARIC PROVERBS IN GƏ'ƏZ QƏNE

Like Biblical and non-Biblical quotations, Amharic proverbs are treated in different ways when they are needed to be part of Gə'əz *Qəne*. The following are the most practicable ways.

Inserting an incomplete proverb

Characteristically, proverbs vary from one to another in form and length. Only some of them fit the form and length of *Qəne* lines and can be easily treated. When the proverb which is needed to be used cannot be fully involved in *Qəne* verses in terms of its length or in terms of the type of the *Qəne* and measurements of its lines the composers use only the significant part of the proverb. We can prove this by seeing how *Malāka Bərḥān* Admāsu Ġambbare who was one of the prominent church scholars in the 20th Century used the following Amharic proverb in a short *Qəne* which is called *Guba'e-qānā* which is the simplest type of *Qəne*.

The proverb says:

ወንድ ወልደህ ለፈረስ ሴት ወልደህ ለበርኖስ

wand waldah la-faras set waldah la-barnos

“You may beget a son (and he may reach the age of riding) a horse, you may beget a daughter (and she may reach the age of wearing) a fine linen”.

Contextually, *barnos* “fine linen” is a special cloth which a bride wears at her wedding ceremony and reaching the day on which a daughter becomes a bride and wears that bride’s cloth is the dream of every parent. Similarly, the maturity of a son and his potential to ride a horse makes his parent happy and proud.

The size of the *Qəne* did not allow the master to use the complete translation of the proverb. Therefore, he took only the first fragment which he found so important for the composition of his *Qəne* as follows (AEL, 1988: 59):

መርቆሬዎስ አብ ይደልወ ከፍ፣ሥሐ

marqorewos ‘ab yədalləwa-kka fəśśəḥā

ሃይማኖት ወልድክ እስመ ለፈረስ በጽሐ

Hāymānot waldə-ka ‘əsmā la-faras basha

“Father Marqorewos, you deserve to be happy, because your son Faith reached the age of riding a horse”.

According to the accounts of synaxarion, the parents of Marqorewos were initially pagans; they became Christians after his birth. He became a martyr in his early age though Christianity was a new faith in the family. In his martyrdom, his black horse which he was riding during his lifetime has its own part. Soon after his death, Basil the Great (329-379 AD) confessed that the saint was revealed to him in the vision riding on his horse (Tənśā’e, 2002: 345-346). Thus, the *Qəne* master effectively used the proverb to draw our attention to this story.

Inserting a complete proverb

The other way of treating Amharic proverbs in *Gə‘əz Qəne* is to completely mention the proverb without adding words or phrases that make it abstract. Sometimes, syntactical changes can occur for technical reasons regarding to word length and rhyme procedures. However, the entire proverb is treated in its equivalent *Gə‘əz* translation.

Let us see how *Memhir Mengstu Zelealem* who is one of the most popular *Qəne* masters since 1960s used the well-known Amharic proverb, “የሚያጠግብ እንጀራ ከመሰብ-ያስታውቃል *yamiyāṭagəb ‘əngārā ka-masob-u yāstāwwəqāl* “A loaf which makes full is known from the basket” in his *Gə‘əz Qəne*.

He says:

ያስታውቅ እምነ መሰብ ዘያጸግብ መና

yāsta ‘awwəq ‘əmnna-masob-u za-yāsagəb mannā

In the *Qəne*, the proverb keeps different syntactical

arrangement of words. In its original form, it begins with the noun preceded by an adjective and ends with a verb. But in the *Qəne*, it occurs in the vice versa. This is however to keep the standardized length of words and to form a rhyme. Otherwise, no difference is rendered regarding the concept.

Inserting a proverb by splitting into different lines

The other way of using a complete proverb in a *Qəne* is splitting the proverb into two or more and put each segment in a separate line. In this case, the master may add some other words or phrases to keep the standard measurement of the lines and provides it in a figurative way. Nevertheless, the immediate message of the *Qəne* reflects the full concept of the proverb. Let us see the following Amharic proverb in the *Qəne* composed by the same master.

The proverb says:

ለአህያ ማር አይጥማትም

la-‘ahəyyā mār ‘ayəṭəmātəm

‘Honey is not sweet for a donkey’

It was treated in the *Qəne* as follows:

እስመ ቀዳሙ ተብህለ ኢይጥዕኖ በምዕር

‘əsmā qadimu tabhəla ‘iyyəṭəm-o ba-mə‘r

መዐር ለይሁዳ አድጎ ሲኦል መቃብር

ma‘ar la-yəhudā ‘adga si‘ol maqābər

“...because it was said earlier that honey is not sweet for Judas- the donkey of the hell- grave”.

According to Biblical accounts, Judas was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. But later, he betrayed his teacher (Christ) for the Jews. Here in the *Qəne*, the master compared him to a donkey and attempted to remind how he left his discipleship and preferred to go down to the Hell (to enjoy punishment). This deed of Judas is compared to donkey’s vulnerability. Donkey carries a honey on the back but she neither taste it nor understand its sweetness. She rather prefers ashes or a dust to fell in it. Hence, the master could forward multiple messages in his *Qəne* by using one short proverb.

Inserting a proverb by changing word forms

A complete Amharic proverb can be inserted into *Gə‘əz Qəne* by changing the form of one or more words in the proverb from verb to substantive or in the vice versa. As mentioned earlier, the need to change the forms of words relates to the norms of word lengths, word forms and rhyme. But as usual the concept remains the same. The following proverb and *Qəne* can be a good instance for this.

The proverb says:

ልጅ ቢሮጥ አባቱን አይቀድምም

ləj biroṭ 'abbātun' ayqadməm

“Even if a son runs, he cannot lead his father”

Then, it was added to a Gə‘əz *Qəne* as follows:

አኃው ግብኡ ጳውሎስሃ መክብበ

'ahāw gəb' u pāwlosə-hā mekbəba

እስመ ወልድ ለእመ ረዋጺ ኢይቀድም አበ

'əsmā wald la- 'əmma-rawāši 'i-yyəqaddəm 'aba

“Dear brothers, come back to Pawlos the head because even if a son is a runner, he cannot lead his father”

The *Qəne* was composed by me and presented to the late *Abuna* Pawlos (1992-2012 AD) the fifth Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church a couple of years before his death. The reason for its composition was the internal conflicts between church authorities and the agitation led by some scholars against him. It was just a call for reconciliation.

When we come to its linguistic analysis, the proverb is completely rendered in the *Qəne* with slight changes occurring in word formation and syntactical arrangement. The main verb *'i-yyəqaddəm* “not lead” precedes the object noun *'abba* “father” in the *Qəne* because of its length and form. In addition to this, to keep the *Qəne* rhymed, the expected ending consonant is *b*; and the word which contains that consonant is clearly *'aba*. Thus, the positions of these two words were rearranged in the *Qəne*.

The other difference is related to the verb in the subordinate clause *roṭa* “run”. In the *Qəne*, it is replaced by a substantive *rawāši* “runner” which shares the same origin with it. However, the change does not affect the concept of the proverb, and finally the *Qəne* gives the message that the proverb does.

CONCLUSION

Some people consider African proverbs as outdated items. People in Ethiopia do not agree with this since they use most frequently local proverbs to bravely express their feelings and emotions. Amharic is indeed one of the indigenous African languages which are rich in proverbs. There are thousands of original and customized Amharic proverbs that the people state at every situation. Phrasing a short constructive and illustrative proverb instead of making a long dialogue is a common choice of many people in Ethiopia. This tendency is richly seen in public speeches and literature too. The proverbs have the same value and significance in the composition of Gə‘əz *Qəne* (Ethiopian poetry). A *Qəne* composed with a proverb is highly appreciated by *Qəne* masters because this sort of composition needs high knowledge of both languages and a good experience.

Proverbs whether Amharic or of any other language are legacies that can express the history, culture, the socio-anthropological situation, and mentality of the society that speak them. They are also significant parts of languages and literatures that give beauty and power for utterances and statements either the poetic or the prosaic ones. Such a priceless legacy should not perish because the loss of a legacy is compared to the loss of the society itself. Therefore, all society members should take the responsibility to preserve these legacies by keeping the tradition undergoing. In particular, the influential persons such as political and religious leaders as well as writers and entertainers are expected to play the ground role in the preservation of proverbs by appreciating the tradition. The appreciation must include using the proverbs in appropriate way.

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