



## The Practices of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in East Gojjam Zone: Opportunities and Challenges

Liknaw Yirsaw Wubie<sup>1\*</sup>, Alebachew Biadgie Mekonnen<sup>2</sup>, Yeshiwas Ewunetu Tegegne<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language and Literature College of Social Sciences and Humanities Debre Markos University, Debre Markos, Ethiopia.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Ethiopian language and literature Amharic, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Debre Markos University, Debre Markos, Ethiopia.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Economics, college of Business and Economics, Debre Markos University, Debre Markos, Ethiopia.

\*Corresponding Author’s Email: [liknaw\\_yirsaw@dmu.edu.et](mailto:liknaw_yirsaw@dmu.edu.et)

### Abstract

*The main objective of this article was investigating opportunities and challenges associated with the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in East Gojjam. Phenomenological method was used. Dominantly, observation supported by in-depth interview and focus group discussion, were tools applied for study. Opportunities such as social bonds among the members in the association; the economic implications, psychological security, conflict resolution and societal peace keeping and religious purposes of the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, and challenges; like, shift from the main reason, from religious purpose of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” to the other associated purposes of the association, some food wastage during the festivity, the unintentional conflict resulted from drunkenness of alcohol were dealt. Furthermore, the analysis was extended to deal with trend analysis shown as changes experienced in the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”.*

**Keywords:** “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”; religious association; socio-economy; psychological bondage; Shifts

### 1. Introduction

Like other people across the nation Ethiopia, the people of Gojjam have led life with their own custom, music, dance, religion and culture cumulatively. They have different associations which may have political, cultural, social, economic, religious and etc. purposes. From these associations, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is the religious association. This is believed to be old and well-structured practice, for the people in the study area have been practising Christianity for a long period of experience. It originally traces us back to the religious associations and practices of the first twelve followers of Jesus Christ, and the thematic aspect of “Yetsiwwa

Mahiber” is connoted with the religious promises bestowed for Saints which could be stated with a general phrase as “Those who do something in the names of the saints and the holly ones, will get the promise which had been given to the Saints upon whose name the practice is delivered. It leads to “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” shares some features with “zikir” which is something given to the need ones in the names of the different Saints. It could be good to state some introductory concepts in relation to what the very nature of the association, and how it is formed. “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” as per the religious point of view of the Christian inhabited areas of East Gojjam, is a religious festivity experienced by members in the names of the different Saints whom the Christians

consider the spiritually nearest creatures to Jesus.

In East Gojjam, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is practised by Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church followers. The ‘mahiber’ may be named as Saint Michael’s, Saint Gabriel’s, Saint Mary’s, Saint George’s and e.t.c. In most of the time, it is heard that the members of the association may make nomenclature to the association with lottery in the name of the different Saints, or they may give the name of any Saint that most of the members in the association agreed upon; even in some cases, they may give a name to their association with the name of Saint upon which their nearest church is named after. The festivity is practised monthly; this is so; because, the association is named after the name of one of the Saints, and it is practised on the date of the monthly anniversary of the Saint’s day.

From the beginning, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has come to the scene from the religious point of view, and that is why the number of the members in the association was twelve. However, the number varies; mostly it is more than twelve even double. Therefore, it is something which has to be pondered. In addition, the primary purpose of members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is getting the promise given to the Saints upon whom the association is named. However, as lived experiences of the practitioners, “mahbertegnoch”, indicate, the primary purpose behind the association seems reversed. People, especially in the rural area form this practice for social and economic purposes prior to the religious purpose of the practice.

According to Wassihun et al. (2005) findings this association is categorized under the extravagant practices equivalent to the huge cost incentive ones like, “Tezkar”-a forty day memory of the dead person, wedding, and etc. Surprisingly, the members in the association have the habit of helping each other when they have events which seek them high costs. This makes members free of the intensified huge costs. It is good to substantiate this notion

well-articulated here with an Amharic proverb, “አንድ ሰው ቢከብር፣ ብቻውን አያወጣ ተዝካረ”. This is a proverb related to mean *what so ever one could be rich enough; he/she alone could not be able to discharge the festivity of a forty day memory*. Therefore, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is something which should be well studied.

Furthermore, people in the area are practising “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” for not only the religious purpose. The members are helping each other when they are in needs. They are a kind of “A friend in need is a friend indeed”. However, it does not mean that “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has being practiced with no challenges. Obviously, the, members in the association are facing different challenges. In this article, therefore, along with the religious practices, the social and economic opportunities and challenges of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” were investigated. The article by Flemmen and Mulumebet (2016) deals with the ritual elements, dynamics and challenges of Mahiber in Ethiopia is related with the current article. Along with its own similarity, the former one is different from this article. The society in East Gojjam, is practising “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” as one of its religious and social associations so that it is good to deal with both the opportunities and the challenges related to the association. Above all, the research by Flemmen and Mulumebet was carried out on urban society mainly people in Addis and Shashemene different from the practice by rural society-East Gojjam zone the case in point.

The other paper by Menberu (2017) deals with the role of religious institutions for the development of the rural community. This article may intersect with the present article for their commonshare on economic implication of the religious association. However, the emphasis of the current paper is on the opportunities and challenges of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” unlike Menberu’s paper for the paper by Menberu has dealt with the monasteries advantages for development. Therefore, this article, The

Practices of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in East Gojjam Zone: Opportunities and Challenges, has been designed to fill the formerly described gaps.

## 2. Method

The main tasks in this article were exploring and describing the way how the religious association has been practised, and some comparative descriptions among the different selected “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” were made. Hence, the opportunities and challenges were made through the data which have been gathered through interview, observation and focus group discussion. The main method of analysis in this article is all about an observation of lived experiences of the practitioners. Hence, the article was carried out through phenomenological method. Phenomenology is understood in either of two ways: as a field in philosophy, or as a movement in the history of philosophy. However, the concept in this article is understood as a research method stated by scholars; like, Groenewald (2004); phenomenological method as a research method enables researchers to put their feet in place of the practitioners. Thus, the structure, how the association is practised; the social and economic advantages of the association were addressed. In addition, this method enabled the researchers to notice the very essence and practice of the “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”.

### 2.2. Sampling Techniques

Sampling unit is the issue which has to be well-considered before the selection matters. Sampling unit includes many things such as place, company, or social institution including an individual (Kothari, 2004). Cognizing of this fact, the researchers decide to individual members, culture development experts and religious men as units of analysis for this article. Purposive sampling technique was employed. Therefore, from the not more than seventeen rural woredas of East Gojjam, eight (47%) rural woredas were

selected and three kebelles based on agro ecological location were taken into account from the selected woredas. This was made for the practices varies as per the geographic ecology of the dwellers, and rural woredas were deliberately selected, for it is in rural woredas “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is mostly practiced for purposes [psychosocial, economic, etc.] beyond the primary purpose- the religious one.

### 2.3. Data gathering Tools

#### 2.3.1. In-depth Interview

So as to get sufficient data on the area related to the objectives of the paper, in-depth interview was conducted with many members of the different “Yetsiwwa Mahibers”, and the interview was further designed to get data from religious men and other personnel. Thus, semi-structured and unstructured interview questions were used.

#### 2.3.2. Focus Group Discussions

The other more proper data gathering instrument is focus group discussion where the data collectors have had a chance of exposure in to the free and genuine reaction of the subjects. Eight focus group discussions with an average ten individual focus discussion members from each Yetsiwwa Mahibers were selected as the participants of the focus group discussion. The problem that the focus group discussion could not solve was addressed through observation.

#### 2.3.3. Observation

It is a research data gathering tool in which the lived experiences of the targeted groups is easily be accessed. Therefore, researchers have had opportunities in easily knowing how “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has been practiced, and how the psychosocial and economic issues related to the opportunities and threats were observed.

### 2.4. Analysis Technique

This article had applied a qualitative analysis, and all the data collected were

analyzed with thematically. First, the data collected in audio and video form were transcribed in to textual data. The analysis was fully being dependent on these transcribed data. The analysis was categorized with the respective thematic issues as stated in the analysis [Practice, religious foundation, advantages, challenges, comparatives issues and trend analysis matters of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”]. Since all the data were collected in Amharic, they were translated into their English version. The method of translation is Semantic Translation where the meaning of the source transcribed text, Amharic text, is translated into the target language, English version of the text.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. The Practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

Before some four and so decades, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” was practiced for two to three days which is called “Yaddar Mahiber” in which the members of the association came to the house where the festivity is ready since from the eve of the Saint’s day, and they spent till the evening of the Saint’s day. On the first day, the members and some family members participate starting from the night. On the second day, starting from breakfast to dinner time, the members of the Mahiber and families stay there. Members of the Mahiber, leave at the evening of the second day. On the third day, only family members are invited for dinner. However, as the data of the focus group discussion made on 29/06/2013 E.C with Yekorra Amanuel Balezabiher Mahiber Members illustrate, the Mahiber currently stays only for half a day. Thus, the extravagant practice habituated in the past, is now totally changed. As the data indicate the festivity follows certain structural stages.

First the members meet with a regular period nearer to the home ready for the festivity. When the time is 6:00 pm-7:00 pm local time in the afternoon, the members enter into the home, and very

light food (starter), a slice of bread in most of the cases, is provided, and the god-father of the owner of the house is expected to avail himself there so that he prays a praying on the food. After the praying gets over, the light food is given to the members there, and they begin to drink very soft “tella”, local bear. This is associated with the idea stated as “This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19). “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”(Corinthians 11:25).

And then some late comers are expected to ask apology. In some cases, they are penalized with a certain amount of money. After certain minutes probably after an hour, the members eat lunch. And then, the intensity of the drink, “tella”, is changed, for the first drink is a kind of starter. And the drink goes on for some two to three hours till 12:000 pm to 1:00 pm, and they eat their dinner. After the festivity is over, the owner of the house has to transfer the responsibility of the festivity for the next month for other member. To this purpose, the owner of the house has to stand in front of the members, and he calls an individual from the members who will make the festivity in the coming two months up, and the next immediate member who will be responsible for the festivity will invite the second person in the same pattern. Then, the owner of the house gets himself at the middle with two cups, “birlliewoch” full of “tella”, and he has to give the cup on his right hand to the one who is standing on his right side to mean the first responsible member in the immediate month, and the cup on his left hand should be provided to the member on the left side, and then, the one in the right side will warmly invite all other members. These are some of the basic issues observed in relation to the ways how the association is practised.

### 3.2. Religious Background of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

To identify the historical and religious profound of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, the researchers were practicing in depth interview with religious men. Coupled with their in-depth interview, the researchers were reviewing documents like the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. According to Likehiruyan, a tittle in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church to mean, the highest of their highness, Tegbaru Adane:

The word “Mahiber” is derived from a Geez term “Habere” meaning collaborated; the plural form of “Habere” is “Mahiber” which means collaboration to mean something or somebody has a common share with others. Therefore, the word “Mahiber” is always associated with concepts like unity, oneness, friendly and togetherness.

He further explained the issue in the way that “mahiber” involves in practices with mutual assistance in working towards common physical and spiritual goals. “Mahiber” is initially associated with a group of two or more people who share common interest and who are ruled under the same system with religious faith the case in point. “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has religious foundation in the way that the association is celebrated as a remembrance of Jesus Christ and the Saints. This is the idea supported by the religious allusion stated as “Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.”(Exodus 12:14). “When you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid(Luke 14:12). From this, we can understand that the festivity behind this religious association has to be made for people that are in need because of their poorness, weakness, and some other

sanctions so that the festivity practised in the names of Jesus Christ and the Saints will earn a religious purpose coupled with the psychosocial and economic importances gained from the members in the association. However, as our observation made on 21/08/203 E.C. at Denbel Mariam area of Yeboqilla district, the members in the association are deliberately practising for the purpose beyond the religious purpose.

“Mahiber”, has three time periods. The first period is “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” During the Law of Minds’ which refers the time before Moses where people were aware of religion where there were no religious teachers. It covers a time from Adam to Moses. The second one is “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” During Moses’ period a time before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Jews believed that being together, which indirectly associated with our point of discussion, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, was their main objective to be free from the slavery life posited by Egyptians. The people had a trust upon Moses and made him their leader who in turn could be associated with the leader of the association of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is currently called Moses of the association.

The lord spake unto Moses in the willingness of the congregation, on the first day of the first month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, sayings take ye the same of all the congregation, of the children of Israel, after their families ,by the house of the fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; from twenty years old and upward all they are able to go forth to war in Israel :thou and Aaron shall numbered by their families and with you there shall be a man every tribe ;every one heads of the house of his fathers. These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribe of their fathers, head of thousands in Israel. And Moses and Aaron took

these men which are expressed by their names: And they assembled the entire congregation together on the first day of the second month and they declared their pedigrees after their father according to the number of their names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls (Old Testament the book of Numbers, chapter 1: 1-18).

Connoting the quote above, “Mahiber” could be associated with congregation which is the idea which refers an assembly of persons, especially a body assembled for religious devotion or consistently attending a particular church. The last period is “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” Since Birth of Jesus Christ. It is a period which refers from Birth of Jesus Christ to the present time. In this period, religious association is mostly associated with the practices of The Twelve Apostles (Peter, Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, Philip, Bartholomew and Judas the traitor) of Jesus Christ, and it is heard that “Yetsiwwa Mahiber in the long distant members was formed with twelve members, and this indirectly associated with the Apostles. However, the real situation with regard to the number of members in each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” varies from one to the other. Though the association currently has multi faced purposes in the economic, social and psychological functions, primarily, the association has been founded with religious motive.

### **3.3 .Socioeconomic Importances of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”**

As per our observation made at Yegodena kebele of Awabel Woreda Saint Michael’s “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, when various natural and man-made disasters occur on the society; like, firestorms, dust storms, floods, hurricanes, diseases are some of the disasters; the members are there in help. The members contribute money to rebuild and renew the lives of the members. Mahiber has played a role

of being foundations for different traditional micro finance institutions. It is a base for informal financial institutions like “Ekub” where individuals regularly save and share the saved money from with lottery method. Mahiber is also a base for the practice of “Edir” in which the members of this traditional association will share responsibilities of expense during individual from the member or an individual closer to the member dies.

In addition, they have a habit of working practices in common in which they can save wealth which in turn would be taken as a base for modern financial institutions like insurance company, Share Company and cooperatives. The members are there both in their hard and soft times. The individuals are practising “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” for not only the religious purpose. They help each other in sharing both the graves and triumphs of their lives. These members are there together in weddings, funerals, sicknesses, workings and etc. These are people who are real friends. They are a kind of “A friend in need is a friend indeed”. Nowadays, members in the association, “Mahbertegnoch”, are the most nearest individuals on earth; they are closer than biological brothers and sisters so that they are practising “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” primarily for these psychosocial and economic advantages. The one with friends in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” feels a psychological, social, and economic security.

This religious association has importances even to the people out of its members. The members invite people out of their association. Most of the time, the one who makes the festivity invites people who are in need for their survival; like people who are poor, weak, disabled and etc. even the religious individuals always advise them to invite these kinds of people while the members in the association are making festivity. The religious fathers underline the issue that the central point, the religious purpose, of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is

remembering and praying the Saints whose names are used for the nomenclature of the respective associations through the provision of the festivity for the people who are in need. Otherwise, inviting friends, relatives and members of the association in the names of the Saints is considered a kind of lending festivity which the relatives, friends and members of the association will turn back. Therefore, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, is helping all kinds of individuals.

### 3.4. Opportunities and Challenges of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

#### 3.4.1. Opportunities of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

The focus group discussion that the researchers made with members of Saint Gabriel’s “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” at Jitt kebele of Awabel Woreda showed the extravagant activities in Yetsiwwa Mahiber is showing a decreasing trend and it is celebrated with very limited and optimal festivity so that it cannot be considered as extravagant practice. In some associations under discussion, the members in this religious association are practicing is a single dish feeding style, to mean the provided meal is one item not colour food. In addition, the members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” have an opportunity of supportive practices for living. As it has slightly been indicated in the previous section of this article, members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” are always there together both in their soft and hard times. They are the very closet individuals on earth. If an individual in the association lacks time, finance and other, all the members are for help that individual. Therefore, they are ready to help each other during illness; weakness and death. Their help is not limited in only the members; they engage themselves in other humanitarian practices. They help the needy ones, the national and regional army members and any other individual regardless of sex, clan, age, religion, social status and etc.

Moreover, as it has been stated above, the members are there together even when an individual is in triumph or happiness. The members are there together in weddings, in religious holidays and other celebrations. They are ready to share both the sorrows and triumphs of the members. They are actually the real friends. They are closer each other than the biological sisters and brothers; and this is articulated with the members’ saying: **ማህበርተኛ እናት ያለዎለድችዉ ወንድም ነዉ።** This is the sentence which used for referring the idea members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” are brothers though they are not biologically born from mother. The issue referred in masculine here works for females too, for there are “Yetsiwwa Mahibers practiced by females alone, and females and males together. This is because the males and females are together in their celebration of Ascension when the remembrance day of the departure of God from the twelve Apostles. Both the females and males colourfully celebrate this holiday together in one of the member’s house with the regularly rotated turn.

In brief, opportunities that “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” bears to individuals both in the association and out of the association are many. As our informants we made interview on 21/9/2013 E.C. with some members of Saint Mary’s “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” of “Yelmet” area of Enemay woreda, the association has various political, economic, social and psychological opportunities for each household in the association area probably to the nation in general. The members play a vital role in societal peacekeeping and conflict resolution among the members and out of the members. Even in their activities of saving practice resulted from their common wealth accumulation, the members work together. They harvest crops together, work some extra-activity which earns them business so that they are foundations for different micro financial institution. Like the precise opportunities explained so far, the following section will deal with some of the common challenges

that members in the different “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” face.

### 3.3.2. Challenges of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

“Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has religious base and its main purpose is to commemorate the Saints, not to have a big party. Though they, the members in the association, actually know the main reason of the association under discussion and though some significance changes, the decrement of the festivity have practically been seen in the intensity of the festivity they provide; still the intensity of the festivity should practically be depend on the economic status of members. This is so, for the festivity should be practiced as per the biblical discourse stated in Ecclesiastes 2:24, as: “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil”. Jesus commanded that the disciples pick up the leftover food after he miraculously fed 5,000 people. It did not matter that the food was provided supernaturally because, in truth, all food is a miraculous gift from God. As long as there are people who do not have sufficient for eating, wasting food is a form of moral bankruptcy. However, it was observed some unnecessary food wastage in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, and it is contradictory for the very notion behind the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”. The main purpose behind the practice of the association under discussion is religious where commemorating practice for the Saints is delivered to people who are in need to eat; however, the researchers practical observation has shown that the members give priority in serving their members in the association, friends and relatives, and it is practically opposite to the very mission behind the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in which the individuals are need to a very limited festivity for the purpose of commemorating the Saints through providing food for the needy ones.

Sometimes, the intoxication among members is observed particularly in Dega agro ecological zone area Like Denbel Mariam of Yeboqilla District, too much “Nabira Areqe”, the very strong and famous local whisky in the area, till 12 bottles are drunken by not more than forty-fifty individuals there in the religious association . Drinking “areqe” is also common both in Woina Dega and Kolla agro ecological zones of the area, but the amount of drink practiced in these areas is relatively less than the experience in Dega. Except very few areas, both in terms of food and alcohol, the feeding styles experienced in the sampled woredas could be considered as wastage. As a result of drinking much, some interrupted or rarely clashes or conflicts among the members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” are experienced. However, the members have a special type of conflict resolution in which they ask or bring the one who acts illegal into their common law after the effect of alcohol is off.

Apart their own “Yetsiwwa Mahibers”, females are invited to attend Yetsiwwa Mahiber only from one to three day at the day of Ascension which the local people call it “Ergget”. As per our consecutive observations, focus group discussions and interview we made with members of different “Yetsiwwa Mahibers”, the elder ones and religious men in Awabel, Gozamin Enemay, and Enarji Enawga woredas so far, females are not that much practicing “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” equivalently their male counterparts. But it does not mean that females do not have a right to practice “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, there are “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” practiced by females too. The basic differences can be mentioned is Males’ Mahiber needs more preparation which involves more participants than females’.

### 3.5. Comparative Analysis of “Yetsiwwa Mahibers”

As it has been stated in the methodology part of this article, our sample “Yetsiwwa



Mahibers” were taken as per the agro ecological zones (Kolla, Dega and Woina Dega) woredas. Therefore, the comparative analysis especially the difference is mainly experienced with these different agro ecological zones.

Each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has some basic similarities; like, the very foundation of each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in the area is religion. Members practice it for the commemoration of the Saints upon whom the associations are named so that they were expecting to get the glory of the Saint. Though the intensity of the festivity is different among each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, the structural procedures that the members follow in the celebration are almost similar. In all “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” in East Gojjam zone of the selected woredas, the source of finance is members’ monthly contribution and penalty from absent and delay, but its amount vary across Yetsiwwa Mahibers, their monthly payment varies from 10 birr to 15 birr per month; it varies 3 to 10 birr for penalty payment for absent and it varies from 1 birr to 5 birr for delay from entry time and also the entry and exit time varies across Yetsiwwa Mahibers. If the day is not a fasting day, entry time for elders is 5:00 am and exit time 10:30 pm; however, for youngsters it is from 6:00 pm -7:00 pm local time, and their exit time extends from 12:00pm -1:00pm.

In addition, there are very active members in certain “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” who are engaging themselves in different extra activities which lead them to earn money. They collectively work on activities which make their association reach in terms of money, and that is why some “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” are taken as exemplary associations for small and medium scale financial sectors. Though the modality and intensity of support made for the members and out of the members, each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, engage in support in all the hard times and soft times of the members. There are also the provision of help for the members themselves in funeral, weddings, holidays and other events that concern

them. They are all together whenever one of the members wants the rests’ support. In all “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” females are allowed to celebrate Ascension. During this day, all the members are expected to avail themselves with their own respective wives, and the intensity of the festivity is relatively heavier than the festivity they make during the usual “Mahiber”. This is the celebration usually celebrated for two to three days with sharing all the responsibilities together. All the members should contribute their own share needed for the festivity.

Like the basic similarities explained among the different associations above, the following are basic discrepancies. The first difference is related to the number of the members. Though previously, the number of members in “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is twelve, currently the number of members in the association is different, and it is different among the different “Yetsiwwa Mahibers. It reaches to twenty four and so. The other difference researchers have noticed is related to the materials especially, the cups used for the festivity during the ceremonial practice of the association. In some associations, especially associations in the Dega agro-ecological zones; for example, in “Bale Egziabher Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in “Yekorra Amanuel” of “Yeboqilla Kebelle” in Gozamin Woreda, the members have cups equivalent to the number of the members in the association, and it is taken from home to home as per the turn of the members who are assigned for the festivity so that it may help the members no to be overburden in search of cups for the event. As per the in-depth interview we made, this was the common practice of each “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in the area. However, currently, it is not the common practice for the rest of the associations in entire area of East Gojjam. In addition, a difference experienced among associations is related to the intensity of the festivity provided. This difference has been observed as a result of the difference in agro-ecological zones of the selected provinces or woredas. The intensity of the festivity gets heavier

and heavier as the agro-ecological zones closer to Dega. Not only the intensity of the festivity is heavier and heavier in the Dega ecological zone, even the legal matters of the association are very strong and too restrictive. For example, the members in the association formed in the Dega agro-ecological zone are not allowed to laugh and to be chatty while they are eating. If one is showing any temptation of laugh and chat whatever cause leads him to do so, will be penalized with certain amount of money, and this in turn may imply that “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in this case could be seen as one of the social and religious contracts taken as basis for legal binding matters too.

### 3.6. Some Trend Analyses on “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”

Unless a certain practice is dogmatic (doctrinaire) which is not friendly to be interrogated for amendments, let alone the very old-established practice which has gone through very long distant periods from the very beginning of “The Law of Mind’s” to the prevailing time, “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, changes are expected even any practice which has gone through in a short period of time.

The first and fundamental change shown behind the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is related to the intensity of the meal provided for the festivity. Previously, as we have made in-depth interview with Kosso Zirra Kebele of Enarji Enawga woreda Bale Egziabher ”Yetsiwwa Mahiber” members on 29/05/2013 E.C, the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” was practiced for a long hours starting from the eve of the Saints day to the mid night after the saint’s day. One could imagine the amount of meal which could be eaten and drunken for this much amount of time with all relatively numerous members of the association together with the relatively numbers of friends, relatives and neighbours of the one who is responsible for the festivity. However, currently, the practice is practiced for at most for six hours and at least for four hours so that the intensity of the meal for the festivity is very far limited than what had been experienced. Very

closer to the case, there was “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” members eating with a single type of meal which makes the association not to be an extravagant practice. As the elders informed us in “Yegodena” kebele of Awabel woreda, their youngsters are practicing “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” with bread alone. Researchers have been informed that there are associations under discussion which are celebrated with “Qollo”, a candy like dish, which is made with roasted barely. Therefore, the festivity provided for the practice behind the celebration of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” reaches to this level which does not lead the members to incur a cost more than their daily consumptions.

In addition, as the researches have collected data through their observation made on 21/9/2013 E.C. at Yelmet kebele of Enemay Woreda, and from the in-depth interview made with senior religious men Likehiruyan Tegbaru Adane, previously, the transfer of responsibility of provision festivity from one home to the next with the Moses, or leader of the association. However, as it has been described in the section which deals with the practice of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber”, in most of the associations nowadays, the ritual practice under the big notion of practicing “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is practiced with the individuals (with the owner of the house where the festivity is being served to the next two individuals).

Moreover, practically changes observed in the tradition of “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” in the study area are related to the numbers of the members in different associations under discussion. Taking the data we have collected through in-depth interview from the religious man, “Mezemir”, the title given to an expert in Zema Bet/Music School of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Geez School, Messele of Debre Worq Mariam Monastery, the number of members in a certain “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is expected to be twelve. However, practical observations have seen in the number of the members in each different “Yetsiwwa Mahibers” is more than twelve which reaches to twenty four and so. This is

so, for the priority that the members in association under discussion give has been shifted to the other associated purposes (economic, social, psychological and other related purpose). The more the number of members in the association, the more beneficiary the members will be from the association. On the other hand, there are also arguments against this issue. Too small and much number of members is not comfortable. Small number create burdens resulting frequent turn while large number is difficult for management, and they prefer an average number of members which ranges from twelve to twenty four. However, it does not mean that the association will accept any new request to be as member for the sake of getting numerous members. They seriously select the newly member based on different criteria. The first criterion is related to the code of conduct of the individual. The individual has to be well-disciplined and innocent enough. They do not accept an individual who is labelled as deviant as per the cultural and societal conventions; free from continuous bankruptcy, and social sanctions. Therefore, the members take these and other similar factors into consideration while they are accepting an individual as their member in the association. The other basic issue that the members take into account in the approval of one's request for being a member in their association is that the member who is requesting should be the one who does not have any conflict case with members in association. If one has had confrontation with one or more of the members before, his request will be rejected, or he will be requested to solve his confrontation with the members before his request gets approval.

#### 4. Conclusions

Dealing with the historical and religious profound of Yetsiwwa Mahiber, the researchers concluded that the association has total linkage with religion. Typically, it has historical religious background with the Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahido Church.

Historically, it develops from the sense of associations and togetherness for unity and spiritual issues. Within different periods, shifting its practices "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" has very long historical background.

It is also concluded that "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" has splendid economic and social importances in the society. Its economic and social significance encompasses members and non-members. Economically, it has tremendous functions during various problems and events that the members and non-members of the association concern. As a result, the association under discussion helps its members and non-members through money, during crop harvest and wedding ceremony. Besides to the economic support to members, it provides economical support for churches too. It is believed that "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" also offers social importance among the members. It enables to create team solidarity among its members. As a result, it helps to keep interpersonal connection among the members. "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" also enables to resolve various conflicts appeared among the members.

In addition, challenges such as some wastage made during the festivity, the unintentional conflict among the members resulted from intoxication of alcohol, and shift from the main reason, religious purpose of "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" to the other associated purposes (economic, social, psychological, etc.) of the association are pronounced in the discussion made so far. When made in-depth interview and focus group discussions made with different members of the association, they responded much more on the economic and psychosocial importances than the primary importance-the religious purpose.

Moreover, the analysis has shown some changes experienced in the practice of "Yetsiwwa Mahiber" as modifications; like, the increment of the number of the members in each association, some amendments in the actual practices, the

minimization on the intensity of the meal for the ceremony, the shift from the very intention, to extra purposes, shortening the time where the members spend for festivity and others could worthily be mentioned here.

## 5. Recommendations

As per the precise conclusions elaborated above, the researchers of this study would like to recommend the following tips.

- ❖ “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” enables the members and non-members to have positive social cohesions. Hence, this importance of the association under discussion shall be encouraged by the society and supported by the local leaders.
- ❖ Though “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” is primarily a religious based association, its implications are more extended and useful to the members and to the society generally. For instance, its economic significance is magnificent. Thus, the society must develop a positive attitude towards the practice.
- ❖ “Yetsiwwa Mahiber” has some challenges during its practice. The society must discuss and provide possible solutions for the reduction of the challenges.

## Acknowledgement

We, the researchers of this study, would like to express our earnest gratitude to Debre Markos University in general and Haddis Alemayehu Institute of Cultural Studies in particular for granting us a financial support for all the expenses for this undertaking. Next, our gratitude goes to the members (Mahbertegnoch) in the religious association for the main data of this research collected through observation, focus group discussion and in-depth interview. Our heartfelt gratitude lastly extends to religious men; like, Likehiruyan Tegbaru Adane and Mezemir Messele, and

the respective woreda and zonal officials who helped us in facilitating things to get our informants who have provided us with very valuable data in relation to the area of focus.

## 6. References

- Holy Bible – American Standard Version. (1901). Holy-Bible. Online. <https://holy-bible.online/asv.php> Holy Bible - American Standard Version - ASV (holy-bible. Online).
- Eagleton, Terry. (1983). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Flemmen and Mulumebet. (2016). Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia: Ritual Elements, Dynamics, and Challenges, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46 (2016) 3-31.
- Fuster, Doris. (2019). Qualitative Research: Hermeneutical Phenomenological Method. *Propositivos Representaciones*, 7(1), 201-229. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2019.v7n1.267>.
- Groenewald, Thomas. (2004). A Phenomenological Research Design; *International Journal of Qualitative Methods: University of South Africa, Florida, South Africa*: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>.
- Houston, D. Drusilla. (2004). *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushitic Empire*: <https://www.amazon.com/Wonderful-Ethiopians-Ancient-Cushite-Empire>.
- Kothari, C.R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. 2nd Edition, New Age International Publishers, New Delhi.
- Menberu Bekabil. (2017). *The Role of Religious Institutions in Rural Community Development: The Case*

of Sellassie Monastery, Debre Elias Woreda, Amhara National Regional State: Unpublished MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Willis. (1996). Foundations of Qualitative Research: Frameworks for Qualitative Research, Sage Publications, Ltd.

**ዋሲሁን አደራው. (2005). የተንዛዛ ድግስ: ለተስካር የሚደረግ መጠነ ሰፊ ድግስን መሰረት በማድረግ የተጠና የዳሰሳ ጥናት, ምስራቅ ጎጃም ዞን ባህል እና ቱሪዝም መምሪያ።**