CHAPTER -4
MORAL VALUES OF OROMO

The ultimate end of morality is to make the world a safe place for human beings to build a well-lived and flourished life. However broad or limited the options are moral act is essentially dependent upon its being willed by the moral agent. In order to follow the emergence of the field of concrete moral action, it is not sufficient to examine only the objective aspect, namely the nature of the persons, actions and things involved. In addition, one must consider the action in relation to the subject, namely, to the person, who, in the context of his/her society and culture, appreciates and values the good of his action, chooses it over alternatives and eventually wills its actualization. Pojman writes, "...morality is a discovery, a discovery of those principles and strategies that promote the best individual and communal life, our most fundamental moral principles are both a rational discovery and a rational invention." (2005: 8) It is called forth for the necessity of arbitrating the conflict between the self-regarding and the other-regarding attitudes as well as for the flourishing of virtuous life.

Due to different reasons, the culminating end-results of moral values in a given society may not always be up to the reasonable expectations of people. It may fail to take steps along with the pace of social, material, political and cultural needs and development of a given society. Accordingly, at this point it may become a fetter to development instead of becoming its motif. On top of that, in many traditional cultures such as African culture, moral values are suppressed, underdeveloped or even ignored. Consequently, external sanctions override moral characters and qualities and thereby immoral values overstep. Thus a critical examination and re-examination of moral values of societies are required and pertinent.

4.1. The Oromo Concept of Morality

To explain the concept of morality of the Oromo People, it is appropriate to begin with the terms they use for moral value. In the traditions of the Oromo communities of the research sites, there are four terms referring to morality and social norms. These are ceera or salfokko in Borana and fookko in Guji, maaljenu in Jimma and safuu in other Oromo communities. These different terminologies are used to denote the indigenous moral value of...
the Oromo society in various extent and depth. When analyzed, the first three terms denote
more of the social values or the etiquette of certain Oromo community than they do morality.

‘Safuu’ is more comprehensive and widely used term to denote and connote the
Oromo indigenous moral value in its many shades than the mentioned three terms. In this
research the word ‘safuu’ is used to mean the Oromo traditional morality. One of the key
notions of the Oromo culture next to Gada is safuu. As a moral concept, it is an object of
philosophical and theoretical reflection. This is necessary in order to comprehend and explain
the personality of Oromo, their mode of life, the mechanisms they use to earn their
livelihood, the attitude they have to live with others and their contribution to the moral
system of the world.

In the social and cultural life of the Oromo in general the term ‘safuu’ means a bunch
of things. The intensive study of this concept was done by Lambert Bartels. In his book,
Oromo Religion (1983), he explained how the word ‘safuu’ is used in different contexts
expressing different feelings and judgments about various social and natural phenomena.
Commonly the term is used to express admiration or surprise, mysterious events, fear and
anxiety, distance or respect, the rightness or wrongness of human actions or behaviours.
People say ‘safuu’ when they do not know the cause of certain event, or when they think that
something that should not happen happens, or when someone does what he/she ought not to
do.

When narrowly used, safuu refers to the etiquette of certain Oromo community.
Etiquette is not morality though there is a concomitance between the two. “Etiquette, like
morality, is a source of rules telling us how we ought to behave in certain circumstances…”
and it’s “aim is to promote social harmony and good relations between people.” (Johnson, et
al, 2007: 4) The ‘ought’ or rule of etiquette governs the proper form of eating, dressing,
singing, greeting, etc. in a particular community. It is the norm that a certain society
establishes, or the value that society conventionally institutes. In essence it is culture-specific
value. A person who does not have safuu, according to Oromo, is said to be a impolite,
offensive or manner-less because he/she does not behave in accordance with the norm or
etiquette of the society.

Although in certain sense, etiquette and morality are concomitant they are basically
different, for the former is more about the rules or manners of a certain society and the latter
is about the universal questions of rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness of human actions and behaviours. Although it is used in varieties of shades, *safuu* is popularly and widely known as a moral category that denotes and connotes the moral action and behaviours of persons. In this research we are concerned with the moral dimension of the word.

When ‘safuu’ is used in the sense of meaning as distance or esteem, it expresses morality, moral value, law or principle. In religious context, it means the moral duty of a person to respect or obey Waaqa and his laws. In the cosmic order it refers to the moral obligation of each person to obey the law of nature that Waaqa has given. In social context it denotes the moral responsibility that people ought to have for respecting and taking care of one another. In their prayers and blessings Oromo always say, ‘*Waaqaf safuu*, respect for God, ‘*Lafaaf safuu*, respect for the land, *namaaf safuu*, respect for humankind. Thus safuu is the Oromo moral category that denotes how people ought to act and behave in their relationships with Waaqa, nature and one another.

### 4.2. Subject and Object of Safuu

Safuu is attributable only to a conscious agent. According to the Oromo philosophy there are two conscious beings in the universe – those beings that act or behave out of conscious purpose. These are Waaqa and man. Waaqa, who is the creator of the universe and of everything in this universe, is the subject of safuu. But he is such not as an agent that should respect safuu but as an architect of it. Safuu is the law that rules the conscious imperfect being. It is given by Waaqa to safeguard humanity from the evils caused by imperfections. It is required for those who need corrections, guides, injunctions and enlightenments for doing or not doing, for becoming ‘this’ or ‘that’. As a perfect being Waaqa does not need safuu. For that matter it is he himself who has created safuu as a law. He does not need a law since he himself is a law unto himself. He created safuu for human beings to whom imperfections are inherent. Therefore the imperfect being for whom safuu as a moral law is required is man.

As moral agents, human beings are the subjects of safuu. On the basis of the cardinal principles of safuu given by Waaqa, they extend these principles of safuu to all human actions and behaviours that can affect human life. It is they who act or behave either in line with or contrary to the law of safuu. They either use safuu or their personal whims as their guiding principle. In this sense, men as users of safuu are the subject of safuu. On the other
hand, safuu is necessitated in order to mould the human character in a desirable way. It teaches them to respect the life, interest, right, dignity and freedom of human beings in the human world, and Waaqa and nature in the cosmic order. In this sense, human kinds are objects of safuu. In short, man as a subject makes or uses safuu and as an object he is made by it. By developing and obeying safuu man makes himself morally more perfect.

But there is a metaphysical issue that could be analyzed at this point. With regard to the problem of whether morality is given by God or not, Socrates raised a critical question – a question that has not yet been conclusively answered. That was: If something is right because God says so, then "the Good" is dependent upon the will of God. If God says something is right because it is right then "the Good" is independent of the will of God. Similar problem was raised in connection to the safuu of Oromo for the contention that it is the Waaqa-given law. If safuu as a moral law is given by Waaqa, then man is not free to choose but obey it. If as a moral agent man does not freely choose between at least two courses of action then he is not praised or blamed for whatever action he performs. In that case we cannot even claim the existence of such a thing as morality.

The Oromo informants in general, and Borbor and Dagaagaa in particular contend that Waaqa has given us the law. Along with this law he has also given us freedom. It is possible to respect or disrespect the law. We are free to choose between the course of action that accords with or violates safuu. Which course to choose is the option left to our judgment or decision. That means there is a possibility for the actions of man to be either praised or blamed. If he acts or behaves in line with the law of safuu then his action or behaviour is praiseworthy; but if it the otherwise then it is blameworthy. Thus the reality of morality can be established.

Safuu provides moral principles that are used as a point of reference or standard in terms of which we evaluate human actions or behaviours that have effects on the well being of humans. Bartels quotes one of his informants: "Safuu is a fundamental and all-pervasive concept...It implies that all things have a place of their own in the cosmic and social order and that they should keep this place... Safuu implies both rights and duties. In the people's eyes wisdom is, 'knowing safuu and abide by it'.” (1983: 171) Safuu as a moral category arbitrates conflicts; harmonizes relationships and makes the integrity of people safe. Abera contends that we as human beings cannot live together without having safuu. Safuu involves
respect, distance, care or concern for one another. One has to respect what is desirable and
distance himself from forbidden acts. We are not only sentient animals but also rational
beings, who are capable of discriminating between right and wrong, good and bad.

According to Oromo belief, human beings have three major relationships – one is that
which they have with the system of the natural world, the other is with their fellow humans
and the third one is with their creator, i.e., Waaqa. They are tied to Waaqa, nature and to one
another through infinite number of threads. These relationships are not accidental, chaotic or
juxtaposed; rather integrated and law-governed ones. To each of these relationships certain
value is ascribed. For the Gada of Oromo safuu is the fundamental law of these relationships,
and is expressed through the rights and duties that each person has towards Waaqa, nature
and one another. We limit our discussion of this concept to social relations, as it is used in
social framework.

In the Oromo world view, safuu provides the moral and ethical code according to
which events at personal, social or cosmic level take pace (Gemetchu, *Journal of Oromo
Studies, Vol. 12 : 75*). As a moral category, safuu expresses positive and negative moral
obligations or duty. Positive obligation consists of what a moral agent ought to be or ought to
do. He or she ought to be person of good character in order to do what is morally ought to be
done. One who acts or behaves in accordance with what ought to be done knows and respects
safuu. When safuu is respected all things in the system remains harmonious to one another.

Wherever there is safuu there is respect or fair treatment. This in turn keeps things in
harmony. Whereas, when safuu is violated evils and sins of various natures inevitably occur.
One who violates what ought to be done is one who either does not know what safuu is i.e.,
ignorant, or one who does not have respect for safuu i.e., criminal, sinner. According to the
observation of Dewo for Oromo safuu is just like a comfortable and beautiful clothes that one
does not even wish to take it off. If you respect it, it makes you strong and graceful; get
praised and blessed. But if you do not respect it you become a shameless person, that is to say
you are a person who deserves no respect. The observation of safuu makes any person to
gracefully live in peace and harmony.

The important thing that makes human beings different from other animals, for the
Oromo, is safuu. Making, knowing and having it puts a clear demarcation between the human
and the non-human worlds. It lifts up humans from the world of biological species to the
higher level of a social, moral and spiritual being. Man knows, has or respects *safuu*, but other animals do not have the capacity of having, knowing and respecting it. Amsalu says, “We Oromo believe that it is *safuu* that makes man human. The other creatures do not know *safuu*, and hence they do not respect it. We are humans because we know, use, respect and also make *safuu*.“ In positive ought the moral agent has two obligations – the obligation of being [or becoming] someone, and the obligation of doing something. What does *safuu* want us to be? Or what does the Oromo morality prescribe for persons to be? The moral agent, according to the Oromo *safuu*, ought to be a person of excellent character or a virtuous person, in Aristotelian terms.

Chaaalaa says, “In *safuu* we Oromo are committed in cultivating a desirable character in each and every member of our community starting right from childhood.” The Oromo *safuu* shares some features in common with the virtue ethics of the ancient Greeks. It believes that moral quality crucially lies in the character of the moral agent. A moral agent with good character, according to the moral concept of Oromo, is one who always chooses to morally do right. What are the characters of a person who is said to be *nama gaari*, a good person? Or what makes a person to be good? Dagaaga answers by saying, “A good person, according to Oromo, is one who has desirable characters. These characters are expressed in being polite, honest, decent, gentle, kind, generous, wise, truthful, compassionate, thoughtful, courageous, cooperative, hardworking, etc. A good person, in most of his life, has these good qualities.”

The second obligation lies in doing something or acting in certain way. According to Oromo context, morality embodies not only the character of a person but also her/his action. The moral agent is ought to do what is morally right. Jaatani holds, “We human beings are not animals. We do not act and behave instinctively, rather consciously. We know what we ought to do and we also know what ought not to do, and act accordingly.” The actions and behaviours of the moral agent largely depend on the character of the agent. It is possible to know whether the character of a moral agent is good or bad from how the person acts or behaves. in other words, it is a good man, according to the view of some informants, who always prefers to do right. But this does not mean that a person who has no *safuu* does not at all do anything right. Accidentally she/he may do something morally good. This, however, is not because she/he is a person of good character but because of contingency. For the Oromo good character is not a matter of accident but rather an issue of habitual dispositions, in
Aristotelian expression. In other words the Oromo believe that a person of good character does not tend to do wrong unless and otherwise by accident.

Indeed, there is no person who does not have any element of safuu. If we think that there is such a person, he/she must be non-human. The point, however, is not whether a person is without any kind of moral value or not, but whether the degree of his/her commitment to the moral principles is worth or not. In moral life some people keep their integrity and others do not. Commenting on this Amsalu says, “It is possible to do right and good one day at one place. And it is equally possible for that same person to do wrong or bad at another time and place. But a person of safuu is one who keeps integrity.” Put differently, a good person is one who always consistently and consciously chooses the right course of action as opposed to the wrong one.

But the subject of fixing what ought to be and what ought not to be is another problem of morality. As Duube comments, “Whatever is in the best interest of the society ought to be done, and whatever is against the best interest of the society ought not to be done. This is how safuu teaches.” Taken from this perspective safuu is the expression of the best interest of the Oromo society. But can we say that this is always the case? The best interest of the society itself must critically be observed. It is not always true that the pursuit of the best interest of the society is a standard to be referred to. In some cases and situations it turns to be the anathema of striving for good life.

Negative duty consists of all what we ought not to be and not to do. In safuu just as there are things that we are permitted to become or to do, there are also things that we are prevented from becoming or doing. The Oromo safuu does not allow us to be a person of bad character, and do wrong things. Wrong doings are harmful or destructive to others as well as to the self. In contrast to the good deeds that generate pleasure or satisfaction, wrong actions afflict pain or dissatisfaction to the recipient. In an attempt to identify what kind of persons do wrong, Jaatani states, “Persons who deliberately do wrong are those who have evil intentions. They know what is good and bad. But because of this or that reason they have developed the habit of doing wrong.”

According to the comment of another informant, “Oromo people believe that humans do have the moral obligation, safuu, to refrain themselves from being persons of bad
character. A person of evil character does not have the affinity of choosing the right course for action.” (Mormor) When asked why a person prefers doing wrong although he knows that it is undesirable; some informants expressed their conviction that there is a benefit that could be gained out of it. And some others contended that there are people who do evil just for nothing good. Doyyo argues that some evil deeds are committed because they are intertwined with some benefits for the agent. For example, stealing is profitable for the one who steals and harmful to the one whom is stolen. The commission of this act is cuubuu, sin from the perspective of safuu and yaka, crime from legal perspective. The same act immorally and unlawfully benefits the agent and hurts the other. Another informant (Abdulkerim) holds that there are people who are satisfied by doing evil. From experience of life it is possible to observe that some persons seem to derive pleasure from using bad language and doing evil things against others, or inflicting harm on others.

But a person who respects safuu, according to the Oromo convictions, always chooses and acts to do right. The right character enlightens, directs and guides towards the right course of action. The purpose of safuu is to produce the best kind of person who always does the right thing. A person who always does right, does not only have the capacity of knowing and doing what is morally right or good, but also he/she has the good will to always choose the right course of action. People expect one another to do right. But who is the first to do right in safuu? Dagaagaa gives the following account: If I am a man of safuu I do not wait the others to do right first, rather I ought to do it first regardless of the value of the acts of others. Problems arise because we always expect the others to do right first while whatever we do is dictated by our interest. If everyone is the first to restrain him/herself from doing wrong then there would be no evil. Thus the unparalleled means of keeping safuu is restraining oneself from doing wrong to others. Doing wrong is always unfair treatment that gives rise to conflict and indignation.

Cuubuu is another important term in the traditional moral value of the Oromo society. Doing wrong either explicitly or implicitly to a person or thing, according to Oromo, is cuubuu, evil or sin. Cuubuu is the anti-dot of safuu. While reporting his informant’s response to the issue in point Bartels (Ibid: 340) writes, “To us, Oromo sin (tchubbu) is always against safuu, it is always that breaks peace among people. What does not harm other people is not sin.” Oromo believe that, inflicting injury let alone to humans even to animals

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without good purpose is cuubbuu. Any person who does not permit anyone to commit cuubbuu onto him must not do the same to other fellow humans. If you commit cuubbuu that no person notices, still you do it under the perception of Waaqa. According to Oromo committing cuubbuu is not only hurting others but also that which eventually counts against the doer. Therefore, safuu contains both affirmative and negative obligation that each and every Oromo should observe in his interaction with other fellow human beings. According to Dagaagaa some of the major actions and behaviours that safuu prescribes are as follows:

- Truthfulness, honesty, generosity, compassion, courage, etc. should be the guiding principles of the Oromo people
- Unconditional respect for Waaqa (god) and the land
- Children ought to have safuu towards their parents
- Parents ought to love and take care of their children
- Parents should hide their genitals from their children, and children should not see their parents’ genitals
- Juniors must respect their elders, and elders must take care of their juniors
- There should not be marriage between close relatives. At least seven ancestors must be counted on the father’s side and five on the mother’s side
- A pregnant woman and nursing mother have safuu- are respected and taken care of
- Committing incest is intolerable offence
- Adultery should not be committed
- Failure of keeping one’s own words, betraying one’s parent or offspring, country and people is a serious moral offence
- Elders of both sexes should be respected. The aging, sick and troubled must be assisted. First service should be rendered to them
- Unmarried girls should strictly be taken care of. Rape and any kind of sexual harassment against girls is the anti-dot of safuu
- No one should be allowed to commit bestiality
- Having sexual affair with the same sex is strictly forbidden
- Every one ought to live on the genuine fruits of her/his work
- No Oromo person should do evil to any human being
- Human beings all over the world are brothers and sisters since the first ancestors of human kind came to the human world from the same father, creator or source
- People should work for the good of one another
- Fair judgment and just treatment should prevail in the human milieu
- There should be love and compassion, hospitality and generosity, peace and tolerance, sharing and caring among Oromo (among humankind too for that matter)
- Avoid abusing nature

In the view of this informant, these are the core points that safuu prescribes for observation. As he himself says, “These are, more or less, the rules of safuu. Going into all the details is time consuming and difficult.” Some of the items in the list are culture-specific social values and others are universally valid concepts.

### 4.3. The Origin of Safuu

Where does safuu come from? With respect to the Oromo world outlook, as reported by Borbor, Mormor and Dagaagaa, there are two laws operating in the world. One is *Seera-Waaqa* [god-established law] and the other is *Seera-Nama*, man-made law. The law that men make is the derivative of the Waaqa [god]-given law governing both the natural and human worlds. Thus safuu is fundamentally the law that Waaqa has created for the good of the world. At this point it is worth quoting the statement that Bartels (1983:172) got from his respondent regarding the issue in point: “According to the Matcha people the Saffu was given to them by Waqa [god] and earth from the very beginning, prior to gada-laws; which they took from men as they say themselves. These gada-laws, in their turn, were no more than a man made shrine for their safuu.” The Oromo believe that the whole world is the law-governed giant. Safuu is the law that Waaqa [god] has established for the world and everything in it; to exist, live, move, act and behave in harmony. Reporting the reaction of his respondent Bartels again writes, “It is Waaqa’s will that safuu exists. He does not want safuu to disappear from among us. ‘Saffu’ is something from Waaqa and the earth. When safuu disappears nothing is left.” (1983: 333)

Very often the Oromo people say we know that days are followed by nights, and nights by days because there is harmonious relation between the two. This harmony is the work of Waaqa. Safuu defines [prescribes] how we ought to behave or act in accordance with these harmonious relationships. It is not as such in anyone; rather it embeds the relationships that humans have with their creator, nature and with one another. As Bartels reports, “Safuu is not something in them, nor it is in one, it is between us. They pay respect to me and I pay respect to them; and we do this in many ways.” (Ibid: 333) This is the law of the cosmos. Just
as Dharma is to the Indians, Safuu is to the Oromo. Dharma which literally means “to uphold” is “interpreted in Hindu scriptures as the law that upholds the universe and keeps it from disintegrating into nothings. This is certainly true of human interaction. Without morality our civilization would dissipate into chaos” (Pojman, Ibid: 8). With the similar vein, “In the Oromo world-view, safuu provides the moral and ethical code according to which events, whether at personal, societal or cosmic level take place.” (Gemetchu, Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 12, 2005: 75)

The Oromo believe that everything has an appropriate place in the order of the universe; and it exists and functions according to the place and role it is naturally endowed with. If it acts differently to what it is naturally best fitted for, then it becomes unnatural or unlawful – it is unsafuu. Anything which is against its own nature is unhealthy, violent or destructive. Eating grass is appropriate and natural to a cow, but it is not so for a human being. Walking on two legs and/or speaking an articulate language are appropriate or natural to human, it is not so for an animal. Should a man eat grass or an animal speak like a human being then Oromo would say safuudha, ‘it is safuu’.” (Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 12, 2005: 76)

Just like many other parts of the cosmos man is also, according to Oromo belief, one of the creations of Waaqa; and hence is governed by the law of Waaqa. Unlike other animals “Man alone is endowed with the intelligence to comprehend… this gift places man at an advantageous position with respect to all other natural beings in the universe. But Waaqa does not give such an advantage without responsibilities.” (Gemetchu, Journal of Oromo Studies, vol. 12, 2005: 77) All other creatures are governed by the law of nature. Humans, however, are not only governed by the law of nature but also by the law that they make for themselves. Being endowed with the capacity of thinking humans are, to some extent, free to choose between two or more courses of actions.

Oromo believe that everything in the universe is purposeful and law-governed. It is the safuu of Waaqa that governs the whole world. At this point two questions may crop up. One, if the whole world is purposeful and law-governed then what is the cause of natural calamities such as drought, famine, earthquake, disease, storm, etc.? The responses of Dagaagaa, Mormor and Borbor are condensed as follows: Natural disasters themselves have purpose. There is nothing in the universe that serves no purpose, or nothing occurs without
the knowledge of Waaqa. Waaqa knows why and for what purpose he does whatever he does. If a natural catastrophe occurs, it is Waaqa that causes it in order to correct something. In other words, it occurs to ultimately keep all things together. When somebody dies we feel sad. But we also think that it is the will of Waaqa that he/she dies, and we believe that he wills this for good. In this sense, although “some of the particular natures may be more affected than others,” (Gemetchu, 2005: 76) “its overall effect is good. So the disasters are necessary events that occur for the good of the whole.” (Ibid)

The other pertinent question is: if man as a part and parcel of the cosmos is governed by the law of nature i.e., safuu, then he is not free to commit unlawful acts. In the absence of an opportunity of choosing between this or that course of action voluntarily, it is impossible to think of moral life. How could safuu itself be morality if man has no freedom of choice? Some informants are with the opinion that man is free and at the same time not free. He/she is free as long as he/she acts and behaves in accordance with safuu; and not free to act and behave in a way he/she violates safuu. But sometimes the intelligence and freedom of man may not make him/her “to act in accordance with the natural laws set down by Waaqa.” (Gemetchu, 2005: 77) Although Waaqa “expects man to act in harmony with the cosmic whole” (Ibid), his desire and freedom may force or tempt him to abuse his intelligence and freedom. To prevent man from abusing his freedom and intelligence and to help him discharge the responsibility entrusted to him man makes his own law. Thus “Oromo social law is derived from cosmic law.” (Ibid)

The social and political laws of the Gada system are believed to have been derived from the ‘safuu’ of Waaqa. In human domain safuu regulates human relations. Human beings stand in certain relation to one another; consequently they treat one another either fairly or unfairly. Indeed no one wants to be ill treated. But also not all humans want to treat others the way they want to be treated for themselves. A person, who never wants anyone to hurt him, may want to hurtfully treat others. Human history knows that there were people who preferred to treat others the way they would not like others to treat them. That is why the world has been experiencing ill treatment. Reconciling or harmonizing the interest of the self and the well being of others is the mission of morality in general. For the Oromo it is safuu that fulfils this mission.
According to the accounts of some informants safuu was strictly respected by almost all people in the past, because it was believed that the failure to respect safuu would give rise to evils that could threaten life. “When there is safuu there should be respect. When there is no longer safuu nothing remains.” (Bartels, Ibid: 333) Without safuu, almost all good things disappear. This clearly indicates how immense the importance of safuu is to human life in the Oromo indigenous value system. What happens to anyone who does not act and behave in accordance with safuu? A person who has no respect for safuu is blameworthy in human system, and sinful to the religious world. On the question how god treats those who act or behave against safuu, there are two responses from the informants. One group contends that if a person commits wrong against safuu she/he offends Waaqa, because she/he does what Waaqa does not will her/him to do. For this she/he ought to receive punishment here and only in this life, not in the life believed to be lived after death’, from Waaqa.

As reported by Bartels the other group contends that “Waaqa would only have turned away his face from” (Ibid: 340) those who do not obey safuu. He leaves them alone for ever. The Oromo believe, if for example, incest was committed by a man and a woman, “Both of them overstepped the boundary between them, both of them failed to respect safuu Waqa put between them. So Waqa withdraws from them, and the woman will give birth to a child without arms or legs.” (Bartels, Ibid: 341) The life that Waaqa does not support, according to the Oromo view, is the life without hope and confidence, guidance and enlightenment. “Such is the fate of everyone who does not keep to those safuu.” (Ibid: 340)

4.4. Value of Human Life

Why man establishes moral rules? Oromo informants say that the substance of safuu, morality is human life. Crudely speaking, it is the simple expression of the value that humanity ascribes to life. In his attempt to explain as to how he views human life, Dorsis says that what Oromo society values most next to Waaqa is human life. We the Oromo consider whatever is good for the individual as well as collective life is good, right and whatever is bad to this life is undesirable. The informant asks, “Do you know why we hate death most? It is because it takes away the life that we wish to live forever. We hate death because we love life.” Another informant contends that life is mysterious. We love it very much. I do not really know why we love and value it more than everything except Waaqa. Those who live well definitely love it, and hence they do not want to miss it. But even a person who is the
wretched of the earth prefers to live, despite the painful suffering he/she experiences. But the question why is not simple to answer. Thus, for me life is a mysterious thing. Safuu is concerned with the protection of this life and with the promotion of its good. (Dagaagaa) Contrary to the position of the above informant, (Chaalaa) argues that life is not mysterious. It is the wonderful gift from Waaqa, god. Waaqa has given life to us with good features. But because of our wickedness we abuse it. The purpose of safuu, for Oromo, is to correct this abuse. We do whatever we do for the comfort of this life. In seeking a comfort for our life we sometimes do wrong to the life of others. But such act commits double crime – since doing wrong to others is eventually doing the same to oneself. Safuu is against such wrong actions and behaviours.

According to our observation, many Oromo believe that human life is intrinsic. In the secular world anything is pursued for the good of this life, not as an end in itself. Human life, however, is respected not as a means for something else, rather as an end in itself. Safuu teaches that human life should be respected for its own sake, and all other good things are pursued for the sake of this life. The former could be good if the latter could appropriately be used for its sake. That means everyone can lead a comfortable life only if all respects safuu. Life flourishes if the interest, right, freedom and dignity of each and every one are protected.

If intrinsic value is assigned to human life, then how taking human life be considered in the light of safuu? “In the Oromo society taking human life is the most hateful crime on earth. It is the most immoral act, because it makes one to lose what he/she thinks is the most important thing for him/her on earth.” (Duubee) In view of the contention of this informant human life is the most valuable thing on earth. Perhaps that is why humanity worries to live a well-lived life not only here on earth but also for the one believed to exist after this life. Mormor insistently contends that persons like us should not take our lives. Sometimes life is lost for very simple things. Some people may think that they solve problems by eliminating the life of other people. But in actual fact no one solves a problem by taking life, rather he/she is adding more value to the problem. Such act multiplies the formidablebility of the problem instead of eliminating it. Mormor further argues, when you kill a person you are hurting not only that person but also those to whom that person is dear and near. Not only these but also humanity. This complicates the problem.
Everyone has the duty to serve the good purpose of life, not the right to hurt it. According to the informants, I love life; you and others also love it. We all wish we could live it from eternity. Because it is the most precious thing that Waaqa has given us, and hence no one has the authority to take it away from us except Waaqa himself. Even a person commits a suicide, in the belief of Oromo, does the most harmful and hateful crime to humanity and Waaqa.

4.5. Individuals and Society

What is an individual to a society and the visa-a-versa? In the context of Oromo society which one is the centre- the individual or the community? Whose interest has the leading role, or has an overriding value in safuu? Is it the individuals who make up the human society, or the society that makes the individuals human? The idea that people have about these issues has a tremendous effect on the moral actions and behaviours of individuals or groups. With regard to this, there are two opposite views in the world – individualism and collectivism. Individualism is the view that the individual should primarily take care of his or her own interest. It reasons out since individuals are self-centred they must be at liberty to mostly pursue their own individual goals. It advances the attitude of more care to oneself and less care to others. In contrast collectivism stands for a society in which the cohesion or integration of people is highly valued. The proponents of this view think more in terms of ‘we’ than ‘I’. More care should be given to the group. Since the group is more important than the individual the good of the latter should be sacrificed for that of the former.

Apparently in the Oromo tradition, the individuals largely submerge into the group. In this case Oromo seem to adopt collectivism in contrast to individualism. In the western culture the individual is at the centre, whereas in the context of Oromo tradition it is the community that takes the precedence. But the Gada and safuu of Oromo do not antagonize the individual and the society; rather they attempt to keep them in balance. In deed the communal values and interests are given priorities, but not at the cost of the individuals. It is a matter of fact that people live together. The value of togetherness is a common knowledge in Oromo society. Traditionally the Oromo ask what meaning life has without humans living together. Very often they say that we live together. We eat and drink, work and exchange, enjoy life and suffer pain with one another. Tooree holds, “Others want me because they have something to take from me, and I want others because I have many other things to receive from them. Even upon death people stay together till grave parts them.” It is, therefore this,
for the Oromo that creates society. Life is meaningless without togetherness. This is how Waaqa created us. It is only in social framework that people develop and actualize their human potential. It is from such notion that the African dictum, “We are therefore I am” is derived.

With regard to this Grayling (2005: 38) writes, “... society is the necessary field for the exercise of our human obligations: we cannot honour parents, love children, foster friendships and nurture what gifts we might possess for the benefit of mankind unless we stand, after all, in relation to parents, children, friends and mankind.” All the informants report that the Oromo people have the same conviction. The statement of Tamiru can represent the views of all. He contends that what is safuu for a person who lives outside society, if at all such a person exists? What are love and hatred, friendship and enmity, peace and violence, wealth and poverty, job and joblessness, humility and arrogance for him? In the light of this view, all these are meaningful only when people stand in certain relations with one another within a given social framework. In short there is no doubt that there is society because there are individuals who stand in certain relations to one another, there are human individuals because there is human society from which they get their human traits.

But the question is – how the society treats the individual and the individual behaves towards the society? In some historical settings society treated the individuals in harmful ways. According to Grayling (Ibid), “…too much society threatens to be equally debilitating. It makes us dilute our principles in the interests of consensus, it often seduces us into speaking and thinking in common places, it can lead us to compromise our honour and our ideals.” When the interest, value and institutional forces of a given society threaten the right, interest and freedom of the individuals then it becomes harmful not only to the individuals but also to itself. From this perspective, the society becomes an immoral or unethical institution to the individuals. And in the other social and historical contexts the individuals overpower the society. This is a situation where the shared values and systems of the society are given less care and concern. This is also another source of evils.

Oromo society is represented by organized bodies or institutions that impose certain laws and restrictions on individuals. Apparently the law which is made in the interest of the society restricts the freedom of the individuals. Can we justify this restriction? Responding to this question Duubee contents, “This is an unavoidable fact. As humans we cannot live without some restriction. The restriction does not exclude the individuals because we have
rights or interests to be safeguarded by it.” The point to be considered, however, is whether the laws, norms and restrictions really keep the interests of the two in balance. When fair laws are made and enforced in the best interest of the society there could be no grievance on the part of the individuals. But if laws are made and implemented in the interest of a certain clique then the interests of the majority could be suppressed. This forms the bedrock of violence. Human beings suffer when they fail to harmoniously manage their togetherness. “Oromo have a mechanism to keep their togetherness from becoming a threat to their peace and life, and also the means of changing the troubled togetherness into the harmonious ones. This mechanism is their Gada.” (Mormor)

The safuu of Oromo does not allow the society to be a debilitating agent on individuals. There has never been communal tyranny in the history of Oromo society. The individual is not the slave of the community that is absolutely commanded by the will of this community, and the community is not the master that absolutely rules the individual in its own will. It seems that the interests of the individual in the society and that of the society that is composed of the individuals hold their appropriate places. The individual is one who cannot stand in her/his own right alone, and the community cannot exist without the relationships of the individuals. Both exist when one takes care of the other. They are the two sides of the same reality, i.e., humanity.

One is not sacrificed or ignored for the sake of the other. The communal interest does not breach the law that protects the rights of the individuals, and the individual interest does not violate the law that defends the common good. In other words, the interest of the individual is in line with the interest of the society, since the latter is constituted by the former. Individuals have enough space for both private and communal life, although the latter is more valued than the former. Thus in the Oromo society there is a balanced relation between the two. The laws, norms and restrictions that protect the interest of the society are also the ones that protect the rights, freedom, dignity and interests of the individuals. Thus each and every Oromo individual willingly accepts these laws and restrictions. Commenting on this Tamiru says that every one of us knows that this is the price to be paid to ensure all of the individual rights. In the Gada context, law is made for the sake of the common good. The common good is also the good of individuals; it is the good in which the individual has a vested interest. The law does not antagonize rather fairly integrates the two. Whenever this
law is correctly applied both the individuals and society enjoy good governance that harmonizes the interests of the individual and that of the society.

4.6. The Concept of Good Man and Society

The goal that morality aims at is the attainment of good life for both the individuals and society. “Human beings are not satisfied with merely keeping the body and soul together. They do not want merely to live, but to live well, to have a good quality of life.” (Tripathi, Ibid: 39) With the exception of masochists all humans desire to have comfortable, fulfilled or happy life. The search for such a life is as old as human history. Tripathi again writes, “... the search for a good society and good life are the perennial quests in the advancement of human civilization.” (Ibid: 68)

Who is the good man for the Oromo? How the safuu of Oromo aims at creating such a person? When is a person said to be good practically? Some informants do have and some others do not have clear ideas of this point. The question who is the best or good man is a persistent issue in morality. Religious personalities, moral thinkers, philosophers, artists, social scientists of different disciplines have been searching the ways and means of creating the best man. The search is still in progress, because the desired goal has not yet been attained. To those who are engaged in applied science the search does not even look meaningful, because they placed their faith and confidence on scientific knowledge to answer all questions and solves all problems. “But the really important questions of human existence today like, how to lead a good life, how to be a good person, how to create a good society, are not in the realm of science at all.” (Tripathi, Ibid: 31) It is rather the domain of morality and ethics.

What has been said and unsaid by safuu about the possibility of creating a good man and good society? The ultimate aim of safuu is to make Oromo live in harmony with the laws governing the natural and human worlds. A man of safuu, according to the Oromo morality, should be one who always complies with the law of Waaqa. “He always does what Waaqa wills him to do, and avoids doing what Waaqa forbids.” (Dorsis) But is it really possible to get such a person? Informants have responded differently to this question. In connection to this Amsalu gives this contention: We Oromo consider that a person of safuu is a good person. He/she must be one who always does what he/she ought to do, and refrain himself/herself from doing what he/she ought not to do. But I have a reservation about the
existence of such a good person. No one perfectly follows safuu. We can say a person is good if he/she acts or behaves in accordance with safuu better than other persons. But we cannot with confidence say that there is a person who perfectly observes safuu at all times, and at any place under any condition.

Chaalaa also follows the same line of thought. He argues that from the perspective of safuu it is difficult to characterize a person as best. Yet it is possible to compare the actions and behaviour of one person with that of the others in terms of moral standing. In other words a good man is one who more often tells the truth, keeps his words; is honest, gentle, kind, selfless, compassionate, humble, polite and friendly than others. He is one who better refrains himself from doing anything wrong to others as well as to his own self than others. Other informants insisted that the best man is one who avoids committing evils against anyone. Tamiru contends that a man who is believed to be the best is one who avoids committing cuubbuu, evil or sin. He explains, “Telling a lie, failing to keep a promise; betraying one’s parents, a friend or country; offering misleading information, gossip, theft, violating rights, etc. is all cuubbuu. All these are evils because they are harmful to life.”

In connection to this we may raise a question: Can the avoidance of doing wrong necessarily make one morally good? Some informants answered this affirmatively. They contended that if a person does not do anything wrong to others or himself he is good. What makes one bad, according to this opinion, is wronging others or oneself. If a person does not do wrong to anyone then he does not have bad character. He is not bad in character means automatically he is a person of good character. This assertion does not seem to stand a critical observation. For one thing it commits circularity; and for the other the avoidance of doing wrong alone does not make one good. The character of good person must not be explained in terms of negative action alone – i.e., the abstention from doing wrong. It must primarily be understood in the light of affirmative action. If a person who never commits anything wrong fails to save the endangered human life when he could do it with the minimum risk, can we say his act is good? No, it is not. He is good at one thing and not at another one, which means he lacks moral integrity. Thus the character of a good man cannot be explained in terms of either ‘this’ or ‘that’ quality, but in terms of both ‘this’ and ‘that’ quality.

Some other informants attempted to describe, a good man is a man of all possible good qualities or characters. Basically a person is good to himself, or he is good to others; or
to both the self and others. In general however the goodness of a person is explained primarily in relation to his or her action or behaviour toward the right, freedom and interest of the others. Tamiru says, “A person is good if he knows safuu; lives, acts or behaves in accordance with the rules of safuu. If he is a man of safuu then he is decisively good to others.” In Oromo tradition it is commonly believed that the goodness of a moral agent is understood more in terms of what he/she does to others than to himself/herself. This is because there is the assumption that no human being with normal mental states intends to do harm to himself/herself.

One more question to be raised in connection to this is: How can one become happy? Can a good man be also a happy man? Borbor attempts to answer this by saying: In the Borana context the best life is peaceful and happy life. A happy man is one who has a good wife and a son. For a Borana this is very important. Also a person whose views are held in respect in the community is a happy person. This is again a decisive factor in a Borana life. A family with reasonable amount of wealth and in which there is mutual understanding, love and respect, care and concern is a happy family. But Dewo has a slightly different answer, “A happy person is one who is satisfied with what he has become and with all what he has.” But what man wants to have and to become is infinite in number. It may not be possible to think that a person can acquire all what satisfies his desire in one life time. Even if he is given one or two thousand years more he may not be satisfied, since there are always new needs that develop. Therefore, it seems to be reasonable when the informant says that man has to get satisfaction with what he has and what he is.

But according to this contention one should put a limit on his desires to remain content with what he is and what he has. This contains three problems. One, although there are some who impose this kind of restriction upon themselves generally it is impossible for man to curb his desires. Two, even if we assume the possibility of limiting desires this would be an impediment to development. Third, how can a poor man who is believed to be the wretched of the earth get satisfaction from what he is and has? Thus, although this contention seems to be consoling one it may not be realistic.

The question whether a good person is a contented person or not is also attempted by Mormor and Abdulkerim. “A good person” according to Mormor, “is good to all humans. He is good to others means he is good to himself too. As far as I understand a good person is
without internal and external pain.” A contrasting contention of Abdulkerim goes like this: A
good person does not necessarily mean a happy person. The person is good because he is
treating others and himself in a morally desirable way. In deed this makes him happy. But it
is not the way he treats others but also the way he is treated by others that makes him happy
or unhappy. If the best quality of this person does not deserve him the best possible treatment
from others then he may not be happy and contented. That means the goodness of human
actions and behaviours is mainly judged in relation to what the moral agent does to others.
But in actual fact the source of happiness for the moral agent arises not only from his /her
own action, but also from the actions of others that are either beneficial or detrimental to
him/her. Thus a good person may or may not be a happy person.

Informants maintain that safuu teaches us also how a good society can be created.
Dagaagaa says, “A society becomes good only if the individuals constituting it are good. No
one expects that a good house could be constructed out of bad bricks. Similarly a good
society cannot be built by bad individuals.” Tamiru on his part says the same thing with
different words: Safuu teaches that we all should be good in order to have a good society. If
some individuals are good and others are not, the possibility of such a society is unlikely. One
evil bull in a crowd of cattle is enough to disturb the whole. This is true to society too. The
creation of a good society in the true sense of the word is impossible as long as there are
selfish and vicious individuals.

To the question whether humanity today is in good society or not the response of the
informants is generally the following: We today are in a society in which those who prefer to
do good are countered by those who like to do bad. It is this that prevents good from
unfolding as much as it is desired. If all humans do right or good undoubtedly a good society
will flourish. A society cannot be good if the individuals constituting this society are not
good, and individuals cannot become good when the society does not inculcate good
character trait in them. Although the Oromo safuu strived towards that end it was cut short
before bearing fruits, by the Abyssinian intrusion. Therefore we are neither in good nor in
bad society. The failure to establish a good society as much as it is craved for is embarrassing
to humanity at both local and world level.

4.7. Actions and Characters in Safuu

Where does safuu consider the locus of moral quality is – in the action or in the
character of the moral agent? The safuu of Oromo, according to the informants, prescribes
what ought to be and to do, and evaluates whether an act or behaviour is morally right or wrong, good or bad. In the intention of making good human individuals and good society safuu attempts to instil moral virtues in the minds and internal life of people. To that effect it combines the character and action of the moral agent with the precedence of the first over the second. It is a person with excellence of character who does right. For Gada whatever the moral agents do is determined by the type of character they have. It is possible to speculate whether the character of a person is morally good or bad only in his/her action. As one informant responds, “We expect good and right act always from a person who respects safuu. A good man always does good things and behaves in a good way. If he does not, he cannot be considered as a good person.” (Dagaagaa)

Although safuu is given to humans by Waaqa, individuals are not born with it. Thus it is the moral duty of men to inculcate and develop the power of safuu in the minds of their fellow human beings. (Chaalaa) In this sense, safuu is taught to the individuals in order to help them develop good characters, or desirable moral behaviours. What are the good character traits that safuu infuses in the minds of the individuals and society? Safuu as a moral concept should be ‘for’ or ‘against’ certain characters. It should stand for the desirable characters, and against the undesirable ones. All informants agree that in safuu, kindness, politeness, generosity, compassion, hospitality, gentleness, faithfulness, truthfulness, integrity, loyalty, courage, honesty, self-confidence, wisdom, diligence, decency, trustworthiness, humility, tolerance, and patience are all good characters of humans. In moral terms all these are desirable. Safuu, therefore, attempts to promote all the above mentioned virtues and values. There is no Oromo parent who does not wish for and teach at least some of these good characters to his/her son or daughter.

A person who has acquired or developed safuu in the fullest meaning of the word has almost all of the mentioned good qualities. He or she is a person of excellent character or virtue, in the terms of the ancient Greece moral thinkers. Abera comments, “In the true sense of the word, a good person must be good in all aspects of life.” Having one good quality and lacking the other good one, in view of the Oromo safuu, cannot make the moral agent fully good. For example, if a person is courageous but not honest he/she cannot deserve to be a person of safuu. If a person is wise and kind but not diligent then that person is not also fully a person of safuu.
4.8. Safuu, its significance and Status

Is there safuu today? Is the safuu of this day as strong as that of the past? Teib has two opposite answers for the question whether there is safuu or not. He maintains, “I cannot say safuu exists, and I cannot also say it does not exist. It is there with the senior members of our community as an internalized principle of their life. It is not there as much as it is required in the young people, because we do not teach children our traditional values both at home and in schools.” In the course of life, as many informants observed, the safuu of Oromo was threatened by different evils. An old woman quoted by Bartels says, “Nowadays people do not care for safuu anymore. Without safuu all good things disappear; without safuu nothing is full [perfect, good].” (1983: 333) Dorsis also contends that today people do not have meaningful respect for safuu. Even many of them do not know what the word itself means, because they are not taught. In conclusion he states, “Owing to our failure to respect safuu we are now being challenged by different problems. We relegated it as if it were not important. This is our folly, inexcusable folly. We downgraded the quality that is essentially human than anything.”

The above expressions hold grains of truth. In the absence of moral values that people observe voluntarily it is only fear and force, instinct and necessity that keep people together. Nowadays practically what is observable in the life of people is this. It is not love and respect, compassion and kindness, generosity and honesty that decisively rule the behaviour of some of the modern Oromo but fear, force, instinct, indifference or the necessity of life. To mention some the vices and challenges that threaten the Oromo indigenous moral values [safuu], as pointed out by informants are: goomii [jealousy], haccuca [oppression], soba [telling a lie], nama ganuu or walganu [failure to keep promise, or pay back what has been borrowed], hanna [theft], arrabsu [insulting], tuffi [despise, or disrespect for], sagaagalu [committing adultery], believing in superstitious things such as budaa [evil-eye], moortuu [sorcerer], etc.

All these are against safuu. Indeed if safuu is strictly pursued none of these evils could not happen. Some of the evils arise out of ignorance and others are motivated mainly by greed and lust. Many informants reported that these different kinds of evils infested the Oromo traditions and have become endemic to them after the forceful introduction of the Amhara culture to the Oromo life and their culture.
4.9. Core Virtues of Safuu

Safuu as a moral category advances good number of concepts. Some of these concepts serve as leading themes. The concepts of truthfulness, honesty, peace, friendship, work ethic and beggary are briefly reviewed in this section as examples. Some of these express the good qualities of a person that Oromo traditional value appreciates and one, i.e., beggary refers to a social pathology that the Oromo morality criticizes.

4.9.1. Truthfulness

Let us take the prominence and the weight of truth-telling in Borana context, as reported by almost all the informants from Borana. The Borana Oromo say “Soba himun hamitu dika, telling a lie is bad or evil. A Borana man or woman does not prefer to tell a lie even if telling the truth counts against him or her.” (Chaalaa) This means, he/she does not hesitate to tell the truth even if telling the truth makes the moral agent heavily responsible. If one Borana kills a person, without being seen by anyone and is brought to the Abba Gada or Qallu as a suspect he automatically tells the truth. He/ she outrightly says, “It is me who killed Mr. so and so, because of this or that reason.” Instead of hiding the crime committed by telling a lie it is morally preferable to tell the truth and accept whatever consequence thereby follows.

Let us take one more example from Chaalaa. If two individuals are being seen physically beating up each other, and one of the two is my own brother as a Borana I should not help my brother against the ‘other person’. It is believed ancestrally that the ‘other person’ is also my brother. Even if I am called upon to give my witness, I should not give false witness in order to save my brother from getting punished. I am morally required to tell the truth that describes the actual fact that I experienced on the spot.

Witnessing this Chaalaa says, “If such a case is confronted a Borana does not compromise the truth. He/she tells the truth. If this proves his/her brother guilty of committing a crime and consequently the person is sentenced to punishment, then he/she helps him in some other ways he/she can afford, not by hiding the truth.” Quoted in Father Salviac (Ibid: 27) M. Mondon witnessed, “The lie, they (the Oromo) acknowledge, makes the word a pungency that has no truth. Thus in safuu moral rules override expediency. One can seriously justify hopes for betterment and improvement on the Oromo character, energetic, noble, level, more than of the Amhara.” Viewed from this angle the Oromo are deontologists.
They believe that truth is inherently good regardless of whatever the consequence thereof follows.

4.9.2. Honesty

Honesty is regarded to be the other virtue of safuu that needs to be emphasized. It is one of the most important values in the life and interaction of the Oromo people. They believe that honesty is the force that keeps people together. “Oromo men and women are honest in many aspects except in sexual life. There are Oromo men who do not remain honest to their wives, and also Oromo women who do not keep their honesty to their husbands. (Borbor) This is the perception that many of the informants share in common. But in other aspects of life the honesty of the Oromo of Gada cannot be doubted. Dagaagaa remarks “Not only have the Oromo but also the non-Oromo known the honesty of Oromo. They are honest to Waaqa, nama (human), the land, law and most importantly to their own conscience.” (Dagaagaa) Themselves being honest, Oromo do not mistrust others.

4.9. 3. Concept of Peace

In this section the thesis discussed on the Oromo concept of peace relatively in intensive and extensive dimension because of three major reasons. One, in Oromo culture peace is believed to be one of the highest good for man to pursue and relish. Second, apparently of all the important subjects, philosophy seems to have given less attention to peace, when it should make one that deserves more attention or at least as much attention as the other subjects. The reason why it has had less attention toward peace is not obvious. One thing, however, is certain - the silence of philosophy on such important question seems to be a green light for violence to keep on ravaging the world. Third, the tragic experience of the current world calls upon philosophy for analytical and practical endeavours. The world is upset or depressed by wars and violence, atrocious and vicious acts and behaviours. Billions are being haunted (besieged) by the spectre of war and terror, violence and force. What could be more important for philosophy to reflect upon than this situation in which humankind is panicking?

History shows that peace has been more of religious and political agenda than it has been the topic of philosophical and ethical discourse. It is widely used in politics and by politicians, in the hands whom it also perpetually suffers. We are of the opinion that the issues of peace must not be left to religion and politics alone. Especially the intervention of philosophy is crucial. Particularly, at this point in time when peace is the urgent need of the
billions and when the modern mechanism of peace keeping does not seem to meet the needs of people, it is imperative to explore the root it has in the values of the modern and traditional societies.

Peace had been the leading concept in religions, morality, politics, social life and traditional beliefs. It had been one of the top topics of our planet starting from time immemorial, and still it is one of the top priorities of our time. In human history it has been one of the most celebrated social phenomena and yet it has also been one of the most abused ones. Widely used in politics and by politicians, in the hands whom it also perpetually suffers. Wars and violence of different kinds were and are unleashed on humankind by humans very often in the name and under the pretext of peace. This section attempts to explore the concept of peace, its maintenance and endorsement mechanism in the morality of the Oromo society. Particularly, at this time when peace is the hunger and thirst of the millions and when the modern mechanism of keeping peace does not seem to meet the needs of people, it is imperative to explore the root it has in the indigenous values of traditional societies. For the inspiration of philosophical reflection on the concept of peace we believe that it important to consider Kant’s philosophy of peace, Gandhi’s concept of non-violence (Ahmisa) in connection to the Oromo traditional concept of peace.

4.9.3.1. Peace: Definition and Meaning

Peace is defined by different people in a various ways. For some it is usually the absence of war, violence or strife. For others it is more of internal or spiritual tranquillity or serenity. Yet there are others who define it as a harmonious relation between different parts or entities of systems. A prominent philosopher who first attempted to shed philosophical light on peace is Immanuel Kant. He is believed to be the great philosopher who for the first in the history of philosophy has elevated the issue of peace to the status of fundamental concept of philosophy. In his work 'perpetual peace' Kant attempts to provide a systematic political philosophy that map out the road that takes humanity to permanent peace. How does he define peace?

Kant does not seem to give a straight forward (explicit) definition of peace. Instead of peace he attempted to define war as “the sad recourse in the state of nature by which each state asserts its right by violence and in which neither party can adjudged unjust—” When considered from the perspective of this definition, Kant seems to say that peace is the absence of war. Probably being influenced by the works of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean
Jacques Rousseau and others Kant considers the existence and relations of humans in two states – natural state and civil state. The natural state is the state of war in which individuals and nation-states are engaged in constant wars for the purpose of imposing their rights upon others. And the civil state is the state of peace in which individuals and nation-states recognize the sovereignty and equality of the others. The whole issue of Kant’s “Perpetual Peace” is about the possibility of the transformation of the natural state into civil state and through the federation of these civil states into the “league of peace”. Thus the substantial peace that Kant advocates is primarily the expression of the relations of nation-states.

At this early stage it is difficult to know whether Oromo do have as such a well coined definition of the word naga (literally means peace). On the basis of their ritual and ceremonial activities it seems that peace, for them, is the harmony of things or parties involved in certain relations. Legesse writes, “Peace is a pervasive and sustained concern in moral life. The long blessings that are given daily by Oromo elders are prayers for peace. The theme of peace is everywhere.” (Legesse, 2000: 77) It is common, in many cultures [particularly in politics], to think of peace in terms of human well-being. But for the Oromo the concept of peace goes even beyond the human domain. They think that peace flourishes only if everything is at peace. This can be understood from the following prayers that they very often make.

O, Waaqa (god) give us peace
Peace to the land and sky
Peace to humans
Peace to ummama (nature)
Peace to animals
Peace to the wild beasts
O, god listen to us, we pray to you
Make us live in peace, we know that you can do it
O, lord you are the only Father we have
Protect us from evils, protect everything from evils
We do not want to do evil to anyone, protect us from those who intend to do it to us
Save us from the spears, swords and fires of war
We do not want to set fire to any one, help us in keeping away those
who want to set it to us
Help us in our effort to do away with evils
O, god, peace matters most to us, keep away from us all those anti-
peace forces
O, Father, give us your light that leads us to sustainable peace.

Why do Oromo pray for the peace of everything? What does peace mean for things such as stone, water, air, etc.? Everything is interconnected through myriad webs. “We are related not only to our fellow humans but also to nature and the spiritual power that we believe in as supernatural.” (Jaatani) Bartels writes the remark of his assistant, Gemetchu; who says when Oromo pray for peace “You must not forget that there are not two but three parties. The third party is Waqa with whom peace is made, too, and through whom people make peace with each other.” (Bartels, 1983: 252) But in the light of the above prayer the parties are not only three but more.

If any one of these parties is not in peace, according to Oromo, it is unlikely that the other parties can have it. The peace that humans have while nature, land or animals are in turmoil cannot be enjoyed. Thus Oromo strongly believe that making peace with nature is as essential as doing it with other human beings and oneself. But being at a peace with Waqa is the incomparable one, and one can be at peace with Waqa only if he/she is in peace with every other things. In this sense, for Oromo peace is holistic, it is the harmonious relation of all the parties involved. Oromo strive always for the peace of one and all.

Being quoted by Gufu Oba Baxter writes, “The maintenance of the proper and correct ritual vocabulary, particularly in prayers and blessings was a prominent feature of peace.” (in Baxter, ecs. et al. 1996: 119) Oromo love, respect and make peace because they believe that it positively values human life. It is a condition of existence, for them, in which human life [individually or collectively] is not haunted by tension, fear, terror or in general violence. Very often Oromo seniors are heard saying, “We respect peace because all humans need it, and Waqa loves it. All humans need it because it is the contrary of violence that threatens the good of life.” Put very comprehensively by Bartels, peace for the Oromo “is a moral state that is a necessary condition for fertility and life, and for the well-being of people and society. Where there is no peace there is misery and death.” (in Brokensha, ed. 1994: 78) Thus for the Oromo peace must be understood as one of the basic necessities of life. In the absence of
peace even the fulfilment of all other basic necessities cannot be adequate for the preservation and development of human life.

There is debate among different cultures whether peace is simply the absence of war, violence or strife; or whether it is internal [inward] serenity (tranquillity), or whether it is undisturbed state of existence in both internal and external life and relations. For Oromo peace is both the absence of war [or violence] and the prevalence of internal tranquillity. Baxter remarks that in the Oromo culture peace is much more than a mere absence of strife. (in Brokensha, ed.1994: 78) Very frequently, peace is raised, appreciated and advocated in relation to war, violence or conflict that occurs between or among individuals, group of individuals, communities or nations. In the conditions when and where evils are absent or mitigated it is believed that peace reigns; but in the prevalence of evils peace is absent or undermined.

But for the Oromo, peace must not be understood and explained, in terms of the presence or absence of explicit physical confrontation alone. The implicit, internal and psychological experiences [states] of life are also important in terms of which peace could be explained. The sheer non-existence of open war or the absence of explicit violence does not guarantee or prove the existence of peace. In Oromo belief any human action or behaviour that is harmful to human life and its flourishing is the opposite of peace. Not only open wars but also internal, implicit and systematic strife, violent acts and behaviours, arrogant and aggressive attitudes, unfair and abusive treatments are all threats of peace. How a person or a community who suffers perpetually from injustice because of lack of good governance is believed to have peace?

Oromo seem to ascribe both intrinsic and extrinsic values to peace. Since it is extrinsic people pursue it as a means for the survival and flourishing of their life. It becomes intrinsic when people view it, not as a means but as an end in itself. Yet there seems no rigid demarcation between the two, since it can simultaneously be extrinsic and intrinsic depending on the views of people. When for example, elders resolve conflicts they say that they do it not for the sake of this or that person, but for the sake of peace. Viewed as such peace is intrinsic. But when they say that they create peace to relieve the disputants of tensions and hostilities, it is the good of these individuals that is valued most. This makes peace extrinsic. Moreover the peace that humans may pursue for its own sake probably generates a desirable value for the agent or pursuer. In general, however, the value of peace, for the Oromo, is superior.
4.9.3. 2. Peace: External and Internal

In the Oromo tradition peace has two dimensions – internal and external. The peace of oneself and that of the members of a given community is internal. The peace to be considered between cr among different communities, nations or countries is external. Although both the external and internal peace is the necessity of life, according to Oromo, the internal peace seems to have precedence over the external one. Since the Oromo talk of individual and societal peace, the internal peace itself is further divided into personal and communal peace.

4.9.3.2.1 Personal Peace

In the observation of Oromo elders, when the person does not have any physical, mental, social, spiritual or legal trouble within himself he/she experiences internal peace. A person is at peace when he/she obeys his inner feeling and experience that is governed by his/her moral principle. If every member of a given community has peaceful life with himself/herself, then it is very likely that the community as a whole remains in peace. Why does a person lose peace? The responses of different informants can be condensed as: “One may lose peace because of her/his own deeds, the actions of others, or conditions beyond his/her capacity to control.” (Doyyo, Dewo, Jemal) That means when someone does either explicitly or implicitly something what she/he ought not to do to individuals, society, god or self, then her/his peace gets threatened. This is self- caused evil. When an individual is unfairly treated by individuals, community, systematic institutions, etc., then he/ she may loss peace. This is other- inflicted evil.

Poor living conditions, as Oromo believe, themselves sap the basis of the individual as well as societal peace. They very often say, “What does peace really mean, for a person who is forced to go to bed with empty belly because of poverty?” A person who is at peace with him/herself, in the belief of Oromo, is likely the most suitable candidate to be and to live in peace with others. If he/she is not at peace with himself/herself then it is very likely that he/she is et odd with others too - even he/she may do evils to them.

4.9.3.2.2 Peace as Harmonious Relations

Oromo do not want to be violent towards one another. Gada never taught them to be so, rather to have a sense of caring for, sharing with and loving one another. Peace, in the true sense of the word, means this. “The Gada system and the institution of Qallu” writes Bartels,
“essentially form a ritual system stressing the basic principles of internal peace and cooperation” (Bassi in Brokensha, ed. 1994: 25) among Oromo. Internal peace is the expression of the harmonious relations of the different units of the community. It is believed to be one of the prime values to be pursued not only because it secures the life and development of individuals and the harmony of the community, but also it makes them strong vis-à-vis external threats. That is why Oromo elders, Gada officials and Qallu institutions teach that Oromo people should not “break the peace among them. Aggression should be directed against outsiders”, (Hultin in Brokensha, ed. 1994: 78) not against one’s community. In prayers and blessings elders are very often heard saying: O, Waaqa, make our peace the everlasting. Bless our harmony which is our source of strength and beauty. Do not divide us. Make us stand and remain together. When we stand together being shoulder to shoulder anti-peace forces get frustrated and those who love peace get encouraged. Give us an everlasting unity and peace. (Dagaagaa)

Most of the Oromo people behave and act towards one another, according to the internal commitment they have for the value of peace. “Naga Oromo literally means ‘Oromo peace’ which is the universal principle among the Oromo sanctioned them. The naga concept characterized the inner rhythm of Oromo communal life everywhere.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 51) There is a common understanding that most Oromo are not hot-tempered rather patient. They take time to deem before taking action; they are friendly and peace loving, imbued with the sense of humility, equality and assimilation, caring and sharing. These desirable behaviours are the necessary conditions of peace.

The Borana Oromo in particular give special emphasis to the maintenance and promotion of internal harmony or peace among the members of their own community. They believe that peace is the supreme value for which every person should persistently strive. Witnessing this Johan Helland says, “The maintenance of internal peace is strongly expressed ideal in Borana public life.” (in Brokensha, ed. 1994: 140) The same is stated by Baxter in a slightly different wordings, “Between Boran there should be peace and gentleness,... violence even angry violence between Boran is a sin…” (in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 51) That means, “In everyday personal interaction Boraan men are expected to treat each other in an egalitarian way, respecting each other’s physical and psychological integrity by not using violence, threats of violence, orders nor insults to each other.” (Ibid: 174) One hardly observes conflicts of serious nature between or among Borana Oromo.
External Peace

External peace is understood in contrast to the internal one. It refers to the peaceful or healthy relation that Oromo should have, make or establish with others [non- Oromo human communities]. In the relationship that they establish with any non- Oromo ethnic groups Oromo had preferred and still prefer friendship, mutual cooperation and tolerance to enmity, mutual exclusion and intolerance. Many scholars and researchers of sociology, anthropology, history, religion, politics, etc., [with the exception of some Abyssinian writers] witnessed that there is no time and incidence in their relations with other ethnic groups in which Oromo acted or behaved with bias and prejudice, arrogance and violence, aggression and confrontation. The principle of peaceful coexistence is inherent to their culture and values. Oromo concept of peace and tolerance emanates from their recognition of human differences and oneness. Difference for them is a matter of fact, and hence it should be recognized, valued or respected. Within their differences humans have immense features that they share in common, i.e., at least they have the same source. They say we are all the sons and daughters of Waaqa, god. People of the same father are nothing but sisters and brothers; although spatial-temporal differences apparently made them strangers to one another.

Oromo give equal importance to both human difference and unity. They never attempted to sacrifice one in favour of the other. For them, human differences must not be exaggerated, and they must not also be underestimated. The same thing is true to the unity of humans. One should not be unfairly sacrificed for the sake of the other. Borbor says, “We are different in many ways, even the identical twins are different. We are one in many other ways; that is what makes us human.” In this sense for the Oromo, people are different, but their difference is human difference; the difference within the same entity, the difference of sisters and brothers, or of the same family members. It is not the difference of a predator and its prey. Human difference basically necessitates unity, and hence on its own it is not a source of a problem. Both unity and diversity become problems when they are abused by men.

Humans are one, Oromo insist, not only because they are from the same source but also because they have many features and interests that they share in common. If this is a matter of fact, there has to be a reasonable balance between human differences and their unity [identity]. There is a possibility of exaggerating one and underestimating the other when human mind is infested with bias and prejudice, ignorance and arrogance, greed and lust. The informants repeatedly say that for the Oromo of Gada system human differences [whether
social or natural, mental or physical, shape or colour, wealth or knowledge, etc.] are not the differences of superiors and inferiors, rather that of the equals. Oromo treat other persons (Non-Oromo) not only as equals but also as brothers and sisters. If people treat one another as brothers and sisters there will be nothing but peace. The problem of peace arises from the way people treat one another. According to Chaalaa’s observation, the Oromo very often say ‘We do not want to ill treat others, because we do not want to be unfairly treated by others. It is our duty to fairly treat others if we need others to make us fair treatment.’ For further explanation Chaalaa asks, “Why ill treatments if we recognize what others want us to recognize for them, and if they recognize what we want them to recognize for us? Ill treatment does not exist in the language of the Oromo Gada and safuu. We want everything to remain in peace.”

The basic reason why Oromo do not want to unfairly treat others lies in their moral and religious perception. Morally, since they themselves desire to be taken care of, they believe, that it is their moral obligation to be considerate of others. The superior reason, however, is religion. In view of their indigenous religion, unfairly treating a brother or sister (since all are the children of Waaqa) is an offence to god. They say god does not like this. Thus for Oromo traditional belief, being human alone is enough for a person to be treated morally. No need of other qualification. If everyone is treated the way he/she would like to be treated, then peace will get preponderance over violence. The good will of one party alone does not, however, guarantee peace. Despite their unswerving love for peace Oromo had been at war with different ethnic groups in the country, and with external aggressors and colonizers. In almost all the wars they were forced to plunge into, however, they had no aggressive position but defensive one. As one Borana informant commented, “We Oromo never made or make war or violence our choice. We do not also rule out fighting a war; we resort to it when all possible peaceful options are exhausted.” (Doyyo)

The recent history of the country is largely the story of inter-states and civil wars. In all these wars Oromo have been the frontline fighters and victims. As one Oromo elder contends, “You cannot enjoy peace simply because you love and want it. How can you enjoy it as long as there are others who ill-fully set fire to your house? We Oromo go out for fighting only if we do not have any other means to protect our peace. Just as we know making peace, fortunately we also know how to do war.” (Dagaagaa) Today heroic deeds are
associate with wars and violence. If viewed from this angle the value attributed to wars and violence is greater than the value assigned to peace. What accounts do the Oromo informants have for this? Borbor contends, “The most heroic deed of humankind for us is that which brings about peace to humanity, earth and nature through peaceful means. Heroes are those who fight for the victory of peace over war.”

The Oromo believe that the heroic quality of an action is determined by the concern it entails for humanity. Quoted in Grayling (2005: 150) the medieval Muslim sage Sa’di said, “Even if you could tear the heads of an elephant, if you are without humanity you are no hero.” Indeed war or violence could be ignited by any wicked person. It needs no good quality for one to set fire to a house. Similarly it is a person or group of persons with bad character who could be a cause for a war. Grayling (2005: 150) comprehensively puts, “It is very much easier to be intolerant, angry, jealous and resentful than it is to be generous, patient, kind, and considerate. Without question it takes far more thought and far more work, to treat others from the standpoint of these virtues than from that of vices, which is why the latter are so prevalent.” Peace and fair treatment, according to Oromo are inseparable. How could be peace without fair treatment? In the absence of fair treatment and good governance it is intimidation and imprisonment, torture and killing, fear and tension that rule the life and relations of people. No one thinks of peace in a scenario of this type.

4.9.3.4. Peace keeping Mechanisms of Oromo

The crucial issue of peace is how to keep it. The Oromo believe that peace is not given rather to be achieved. Peace which is achieved through peaceful means is more sustainable and founded than the one surfaced by forceful acts. According to the Oromo philosophy, not force or violence but talks and dialogues must be the prime tools for its maintenance. Force or violence may spawn temporary silence not perpetual peace. In other words, the peace which is obtained by force is perpetually haunted by the same, i. e., force. Thus Oromo largely used and use peaceful means to maintain and promote peace. Their oral and written history reveals that they pursue preventive and remedial strategies to maintain it. Through the first they attempt to avoid or reduce all actions, behaviours, relations, situations and factors that undermine the value of peace and through the second they attempt to bring the peace disturbed by some kind of violence. The first aims at attacking the causes of
conflict, whereas the second attempts to heal the injurious effect of it. Yet Oromo do not rule out fighting a war although they do not make it their first choice.

4.9.3.4.1. Preventive Strategy

Oromo use two different preventive mechanisms for the prevalence of peace. These mechanisms are socio-political, and ideologico-spiritual. Both are embedded in the Gada system. The first one refers to the political and legal aspects of the strategy that Gada pursues, and the second is its guiding principle for the internalization of the strategy. Both aim at cultivating and inculcating a desirable attitude in people. For Oromo peace and justice [haqa or dhuga] are connected. There is peace where there is justice, and there is justice where there is peace. If a nation, community or a country is in peace, it is because there is justice in their respective domain. As a concept of value justice expresses the value of the relationships existing between individuals or group and institutions. How fair one is treated in these relationships is the core issue of justice. As Amsalu states “Peace requires not only the absence of violence but also the presence of justice.” Thus Oromo considers the prevalence of justice as a necessary condition for the promotion of peace.

A brief account of Gada System is required to understand what mechanisms Oromo people employ to serve justice. Legesse defines Gada as “a system of generation classes that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities.” (Legesse, 2000:104) Its essential content and prime objective is the maintenance of peace and order. It views peace as one of the highest good for man to pursue. To show how Gada attempts to maintain peace and order, it is important to explain some of its basic features - features that would be considered as conditions for the maintenance and promotion of peace.

4.4.3.4.2. Gada: A system of peace

Peace is inherent to the organizational structure, the administrative mechanisms and the purpose of Gada. The organization of people on the basis of age-set is one of the basic features of Gada. Generations are first formed by the sons, on the basis of the Gada class of their fathers. If a son is born to a father when the latter is in the Gada office, then this son must pass through different grades or stages up until he becomes one of Gada officials within 40-48 years, after his father. In every eight years members of this generation-set assume different positions, roles and responsibilities. The same individual has different social
positions and particular duties at the age from 0 – 8, 8- 16, 16 – 24, 24 – 32, 32 – 40 and from 40 – 48, etc. These are the grades to be attended by a person who has the legitimate claim for becoming a Gada official. It is believed that one learns the value of peace, the means and the ways used to maintain this peace from this process.

There are five Gada groups that take power from each other within forty years time in rotation. When the term of one Gada class ends, the Gada class of the next Gada group takes it over. This process keeps on going up until a cycle of forty years ends. In Gada it is already defined and scheduled which generation-set comes to power and when. The outgoing Gada system and class clearly knows which Gada group is the legitimate one to take the next term of office. Not only the incoming one but also the other remaining three know this well. This does not invite any rivalry and confusion. Thus in Gada system, power goes from the hands of one group to the other very peacefully.

Peace, in Oromo belief, is guaranteed by the rule of law. All political, social and cultural activities are ruled by laws. But the sheer presence of law does not guarantee the prevalence of peace. The most important thing is to make and enforce the law in the interest of people. Gada makes laws that clearly define what ought to be done, and what ought not to be done in terms of the interest of people. Thus for Oromo the rule of law is the strongest tool for the maintenance and promotion of peaceful life.

In the tradition of Gada society, laws are made in the general interest and with the consent of the society. These laws “provided the requisite social and political order which enabled them to move in and live with each other in peace.” (Oba in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 118) For the Oromo the rule of law is the decisive parameter of peace. They have more affinity for the rule of law than the rule of men. If laws have reasonable power to rule all people without exception, then peace could be maintained. Law, in the Oromo tradition, is binding on all. Even those to whom the supreme power is entrusted are law- abiding. If everyone is strictly governed by the rule of law there could be no ground for conflict to arise. What promotes peace, according to the Oromo view, is not the consolidation of power in the hands of the officials but the strengthening of the rule of law. The Gada officials have the power to rule according to the law that is already there. In Gada it is peaceful means that rules, not force. Any coercive measure or agent is not used to implement the laws.

**4.93.4.3. Spiritual and Ideological Teaching**
Peace can be maintained not only by administrative activities and legal procedures but also by raising the awareness of people about its importance. The media for Oromo to teach and preach about peace is blessing, prayer, ritual gathering, ceremonial undertaking and meeting, assemblies, work places and occasional performances. At these and other places peace is the leading theme to be addressed. “Prayers and blessings are important part of the daily life of every Oromo. In those prayers the most important word is peace. In every moment of prayer peace is asked for the community.”

Whatever is said and done, according to the political and ritual leaders of the Gada society, is just said and done for the sake of peace. Not only teaching the good, but also denouncing evil is the part of peace maintenance. Behaviours such as jealousy, stealing, telling a lie, speaking evils of others, failure to keep promises and using bad or obscene languages are cursed because they are believed to be threats of peace. Oromo believe that this exercise instils in the mind of people strong faith and unswerving commitment for peace. “The values expressed in Gada rituals condition the behaviour and attitudes of individuals; and therefore, they also have an indirect, not marginal, political effect.” (Bassi in Brokensha, ed. 1994: 24)

Childhood is only the time that needs peace but also the time when the value of peace, the mechanism of peace keeping and the goal of peace is thoroughly taught. “We teach our children why we love peace, how to make peace and avoid committing violence. If we do not sow this good thing in them when they are very young, it is difficult to make them work for peaceful life when they come of age.” (Dewo) Oromo use short stories, folktales, proverbs and riddles to teach their children. Each family is responsible for teaching this. All these present culturally, socially, politically and economically valid perceptions.

4.9.3.4.4. Peace and Poverty

Poverty is the other anathema of peace. It is, for the Oromo, a loathsome state of life that harbours conflict or violence. “A person with empty belly” according to Oromo elders, “does not only know what peace really mean, but also does not have the power to discharge his/her social responsibility.” Particularly in Borana Oromo, it is believed that “A man without cattle... cannot perform his social obligation; marry or participate in rituals. In effect he loses his identity as Boorana.” (Oba in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 120) Therefore, the problem of poverty should be tackled, since it seriously threatens peace. For example, in
Borana when a son is born to a family he is given cattle, camel, sheep or goat. The child grows with wealth of his own. When he gets of age he is already a self-sufficient person according to the standard of the community to perform his social duties. This is one way of keeping away poverty which in its turn keeps away violence. On the other hand if somebody is unable to support himself/herself, then it is the moral duty of the clan to rehabilitate him/her. No one is allowed to go out for begging, to become a dependent or to live on a condition that is contrary to a healthy and peaceful life.

The greedy interest of some individuals who wish to amass a large amount of wealth is also the other challenge that disturbs peace. According to Chaalaa, “Some individuals are blinded by their own selfish interest. They use any means to get what they need. It is difficult for them to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad. Safuu cannot stop them from doing badly to others.” Borbor strongly supporting the idea of the above quoted informant says, “There is nothing in the world that spoils peace than selfishness. I think very often people are driven to wars and violence because of the in-satiated lust of individuals. They do not understand that they remain in danger if there is no peace. Even the richest person on earth cannot be safe in the absence of peace.”

4.9.3.4.5 Remedial Strategy

Conflict is a fact of life. Although it cannot be avoided it can be resolved. Conflict resolution, for Oromo, is one of the outstanding traditional methods of keeping and restoring peace. This is a long-standing indigenous mechanism, for them, to resolve conflicts and restore peace. Even today many people in Oromo society prefer to present their case to the traditional conflict settlement mechanism called jaarssumma. Conflict or violence is the state of being at odds or unfriendly either with each other or with oneself. Leaving self-conflict aside we consider the conflict that occurs between different parties. Conflict is a situation in which two or more individuals or group of individuals are engaged in hostile relations. It may be caused because of absence of justice, lack of knowledge, evil will, or unhealthy living conditions. Whenever a conflict occurs, according to Oromo tradition, it must immediately be brought under control peacefully. Otherwise, it keeps on growing by involving animosity not only between the immediate parties but also between those who could directly or indirectly be associated to the parties in conflict. Moreover it may develop into revenge, which is another serious threat of peace. Gada does not permit any revenge to take place.
Duubee argues that Oromo do not prefer taking revenge. In principle no Oromo should attempt to kill a person. But, if a person accidentally or intentionally takes the life of another person, there should not be any good reason for taking the life of the culprit in the intention of avenging his wrong act. Gada has a mechanism by which it effectively settles such serious matters. It is a common knowledge for Oromo that peace cannot be secured by non-peaceful means. Of course, coercive measure may create temporary silence but not lasting solution. Thus, in the Oromo context, revenge is never the option to correct conflicts.

In the Oromo morality it is a common knowledge that peace cannot be secured by violence. This is the reason why Oromo do not make war or violence their first choice in keeping or restoring peace. At this point it is enlightening if Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of non-violence is called forth for appraisal. Ahmisa or non-violence is one of the concepts for which Ghandi is popularly known. This is his political and ethical concept. The concept is primarily the means for a good end. A good deal of people thinks of violence or non-violence in terms of physical confrontation. But for Gandhi non-violence means more than this. A non-violent person should be truthful, non-stealing and non-covetousness. In general it seems that for Gandhi a person who practices non-violence is a person of all possible good qualities.

He seems to have developed this concept on the basis of the Indian traditional values. He was not the originator of the principle, but may be the first thinker to apply the principle to political realities and actions on a large scale, and also in developing and popularizing the concept. As he says, “Non-violence is the first article of my faith; it is also the last article of my creed.” The very root of this faith seems anchored in his interpretation of human nature. The word non-violence is the converse of violence which means peace as an end or peaceful as a means. It is in the interest of any rational human being to always prefer non-violence or peaceful means to violence. That means non-violence is what all or almost all human beings prefer as good value. Gandhi says, “The science of war leads one to dictatorship, pure and simple. The science of non-violence alone can lead one to pure democracy—. Power based on love is thousand times more effective and permanent than power derived from fear of punishment—.” (Gandhi)

Gandhi uses the concept of non-violence in combination with truth. The good end for which non-violence is used as a means is this truth. As he says, “There should be truth in thought, truth in speech and truth in action.” I think this is the crux of human problem. If every one of us has been truthful in our thought, speech and action, the world would have not
suffered as much as it has been doing. At the basis of violence there is either falsity that is 
backed up by force or sentimental feeling as a reaction to other violent actions. If the actions, 
thoughts and behaviours of all human beings are enlightened by truth, then life would be 
shining rather than glooming.

The Oromo safuu and Gada are, to some extent, consistent with Gandhi’s concept of 
non-violence. They are of the opinion that no rational human being should prefer violence to 
non-violence, or warfare to peaceful method of peace keeping. While violence devours 
human life and resources, humanity loses either nothing or little in keeping or restoring peace 
through peaceful options. Even if it incurs some risk it is by far less than what violence does. 
Thus there seems no sound reason for why people choose violence to solve the problems of 
life when and where there is ample non-violent option. Ghandi remarked, “Non-violence is 
the law of our species as violence is the law of brutes.” With the similar tone the Oromo 
elders say, “Humanity should have left the rule of might long before to the beasts in the 
jungle.” Although Oromo never make force or violence their first choice for peace keeping, 
they do not, however, rule out the possibility of fighting a war. They resort to it only if all the 
possible peaceful alternatives are exhausted.

The concept of non-violence demands the abstention from revenge. Taking revenge is 
committing violence. In connection to this it is again worth quoting Gandhi, “An eye for an 
eye makes the whole world blind.” Revenge never offers a solution to the world, it rather 
rapaves it. The Oromo through their moral values share the same spirit. They say that revenge 
breeds revenge, which unceasingly haunts human life and security with threats. The only way 
to desist revenge can is adopting non-violent principle.

What makes peace unbeatable is love and compassion not force or violence. Mormor 
strongly confirmed the Oromo position of non-violence. He contends, “Violence devours 
human life and resources. This is an immense loss to humanity, and hence it is not preferable. 
In keeping or restoring peace through peaceful options, however, humanity loses either 
nothing or little.” And also peace, in the Oromo view, is in line with the desirable rules of 
morality. Even if it incurs some risk it is by far less than what violence does. Why people 
choose force to solve the problems of conflict when and where there is non-violent option? 
Oromo never make force their choice. They resort to it only if they know there is no room for 
peaceful option. Duubee again argues, “If an enemy invades our territory and kills our people
it is morally legitimate to aggressively defend ourselves. We use this means when we cannot have any peaceful option to protect ourselves.

Taking the life of a person, in the Oromo belief, is the most serious crime man ever commits. If the killing of a person is committed, according to the ethics of Gada, the relatives or clan or of the victim is not allowed to take independent action. Instead they ought to bring the case to the attention of Gada officials or to the elders of the community – who are believed to have the power and experience to fairly and peacefully handle such a serious case. There are two major ways of settling this kind of serious matters. One way is, sentencing the perpetrator to death, and the other is making the wrong doer pay compensation for the loss of life encountered. The first way of settling conflict is known only in the history of the society. Oba reports, “Serious and persistent disturbers of the peace could be put to death by beating on the open palm of the hand and in the groin”, haama mudamuuddi, with a club, Bokku.” (in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 119) It might have been used in the remote past. But still it is not clear how frequent it was employed. What is rather certain is that such penalty was given to a person who committed not only a criminal act of beyond imagination, but also who was still believed to be potentially dangerous to the peace of the society.

Indeed, according to Oromo traditional morality, this by itself is not welcome. Taking human life is basically evil; it is against the life to which humans ascribe intrinsic value. Yet it should be the price that must be paid for the sustenance of peace and security. If the wrong doer is allowed to stay alive he keeps on disturbing the peace of the many. Which one is reasonably preferable – putting him to death and save the peace of the society, or permitting him to stay alive and perpetually threaten the peace of the many? In the Oromo belief between two unavoidable evils the lesser one is preferable. To avert the greater evil committing the lesser one is morally justifiable. When the informants comment on such dilemma they say, “Waaqa, God knows why this is done, and hence it does not offend him.”

Oromo are popularly known by their rich experience of undertaking the second way of conflict management – paying compensation for loss of life. This is called Guma especially in Macca and Tulamaa Oromo. Literally Guma means compensation. It is a form of penalty that involves the payment of compensation to the victim of the conflict. This penalty is given only when it is believed that the killer is not a bad man, and he killed unknowingly. (Bartels, 1983: 242) Very often Oromo people are heard of saying, “...human
blood is dangerous and that a man with blood in his hands has to cleanse himself from it as soon as possible.” (Ibid: 257) And this is done by Guma.

There is one interesting point worth knowing about this particular form of punishment. The culprit is excluded from the community until he makes himself free by paying the required compensation. The exclusion is done not by putting him in custody but by making him wander till he pays off the Guma. He has to wander around and ask people for help. He goes as far as possible carrying chains in hand. Whenever he approaches a person or any passer-by he drops the chain to the ground and says, “I am guilty of taking the life of a person. I did it unknowingly or accidentally. Let God save you from such accident. Please help me with what you have so that I can pay the Guma of the victim.” Thinking that this is a bad luck the second person definitely sympathizes with him, and gives him what he/she has at the moment. Even if the perpetrator is someone who can afford to pay the Guma, compensation he cannot do it without wandering and asking for help. It is a must that he should do it, because this is the essential part of the punishment.

Although it appears to be unrealistic or utopia I think there is huge potential in Gandhi’s concept of non-violence and the Gada’s concept of peace keeping. Some may think that these approaches lead to passivism. In the view of these observers, non-violent or peaceful way of struggle for peace appears to be fruitless efforts, particularly in the face of the violent and armed tyranny that seems invincible. Although it is implausible to rule out this doubt, it is not difficult to understand the huge potential that these approaches have to salvage/rescue the world from atrocities, as they are consistent with the needs and interests of humanity in general. Apparently the current world has only two options – resorting to non-violence sooner or later, or to face a tragic end. From this perspective it is absolutely important to philosophically reflect on the possibility of building a peaceful world by non-violent or peaceful means.

4.9.3.4.6. Place of Forgiveness in Peace

Forgiveness is an important moral concept. Religious and moral thinkers appreciate and encourage forgiveness. It is one of the virtues of humans. It is imbued with great value that restores peace and harmony among individuals and the society. Dhifama gafachu fi dhifama gochun, asking and granting forgiveness has a key place in the indigenous moral value of Oromo. It is sought in the intent to bring back the peace and harmony that was lost.
due to the occurrence of conflict or resentment. Thus it could be considered as one of the peacemaking mechanisms.

The inevitability of conflict makes the occurrence of offence indispensable. Offence, in social context, implies undesirable relation between the one who offends and the other who is offended. The offender may be an individual, group of individuals or a community; and the offended may also be an individual, family, group of people, community or a nation. An offence arises when the first inflict harm on the second. This damages the relationships of the two. It changes the healthy relationship into the hostile one. (Tamiru)

The basis of forgiveness in the Oromo society is rooted in the Gada system. Gada teaches that people benefit much more from forgiveness than they do from holding revenge or sentencing punishment. Dagaagaa comments, “We Oromo believe that forgiveness has immense value. Both the perpetrator and the victim could be cleansed from the feelings of hatred, revenge, fear and tension. Society restores its peace through it.” Doyyo on his part says, “Forgiveness reconciles the culprit with the victim, Waaqa and the community. It heals social sickness. As far as my understanding goes nothing is more effective to settle conflicts than forgiveness.” As explained elsewhere, according to Oromo, taking revenge on the culprit never solves the problem. If the victim considers revenge as the best way to respond then he/she is more vicious than the culprit. There is no good reason for the victim to commit the same mistake that the perpetrator did, when it is very well known that what was done is morally wrong. The response of the victim should be to conquer the evil, not to harm the perpetrator. Forgiveness in Oromo tradition is, therefore, the mechanism of waiving the demand for punishment, compensation or revenge against the person who is believed to have committed an offence.

Forgiveness involves at least two individuals – the forgiver and the forgiven. It is granted and accepted with or without the involvement of a third party. The possibility of forgiveness, as Oromo elders say, depends on two conditions. The offender on his/her part must acknowledge the offence he/she afflicted to the victim; and the victim must know the value of forgiveness. This is one condition. Both parties must understand what significance forgiveness has for the community in which they are embraced. This is the other condition. Thus forgiveness for the Oromo Gada society is an act of relieving of the victim, the offender and the society from the malicious thoughts and feelings that binds all the three parties to the
offence committed. Mormor opines as: People should not let the offence of the past to painfully haunt the life of the present and the future. If bitterness, resentment or revenge is held on, then both the offender and the offended keep on being haunted by suspicion, tension, insecurity and fear. Forgiveness relieves both parties from such scenario.

Who initiates forgiveness – the perpetrator, the forgiver or a third party? Primarily it is the side that committed an offence that initiates it. A third party can also take that responsibility. Although it is very often initiated by the offender or a third party, the option that the forgiver also does it is not excluded. If an offender commits an offence accidentally, he/she gravely regrets, which is immediately followed by his/her request for forgiveness. Although the culprit initiates the request of forgiveness, it is very often processed through the third party. Particularly the involvement of the third party is inevitable if the offence committed is of a serious nature. Taken as a whole however it is the community that is predominantly responsible for providing conducive situations for asking and giving forgiveness.

What kind of trait should a forgiver have? Can we say forgiveness is what anyone can grant? Forgiveness in the Oromo traditional morality is a virtue that a virtuous person can allow to happen. “We Oromo think that forgiveness is a lesson, it is like imparting certain knowledge to others. Not everyone who can teach a lesson. Similarly it is not any person who gives forgiveness. He or she is one who can teach not only the offender, but also all of us to do right at one’s own cost.” (Abdulkerim) In other words, a person who forgives is one who goes beyond his/her personal interest, rises above his/her emotional feeling and very well knows the social and moral value of forgiveness.

The forgiver gives up demanding revenge, punishment or restitution when he/she has the legitimate claim or reasonable excuse for one of these. Despite the severe pain inflicted on him/her by the offender he/she chooses to forgive the latter when he/she could take revenge, demand punishment or restitution. It is unlikely for a wicked person to grant clemency. Chaalaa adds, “A weak, uncaring and a selfish person cannot forgive. It is the person who respects the best interest of the society and habitually volunteers to do right and good who prefers to forgive.” Thus, it means a forgiver is a good person – a person of manifold virtues, a person who always chooses to do right or good.
Forgiveness entails a sacrifice on the part of the forgiver. Although the victim experienced severe pain because of the harm inflicted on her/him, she/he forgives the culprit so as to make him/her not to experience pain. The forgiver relieves the offender from pains at his/her own cost. Thus forgiveness is an act of absolving the offender at one’s own cost. Epictetus said before 2000 years, forgiveness is better than revenge, for forgiveness is the sign of a gentle nature, but revenge is the sign of a savage nature. (Thomas, 1962: 143) One who keeps revenge eventually cannot conquer hatred or animosity rather gets conquered by it.

Should any offender be given forgiveness? This is a debatable issue. Informants are grouped into two on this. One group argues that there are crimes that cannot be excused because of their brutality. According to the contention of this group if merciless crimes are forgiven or left unpunished it is impossible to avoid violence. But in the contention of some informants forgiveness cannot be measured in terms of the crime committed. If it is measured in terms of the severity of the offence committed then there could be no forgiveness at all. Probably, according to their conviction, it is more important to weigh the consequence of forgiveness than measuring the cost of the harm inflicted by the offence. It is morally right to forgive if the consequence of giving forgiveness is such that it promises more peace and harmony than the revenge to be taken, punishment to be given or restitution to be made. Tamiru qualifies this. “It is not any offender who could be forgiven. But one who acknowledges the offence committed or one who knows that forgiveness is granted when it is thought that it could offer a moral reward to all the concerned parties.”

Informants (Borbor, Chaalaa, Tamiru and Duubee) contended that the grant of forgiveness is influenced greatly by the trait of the offender. For example if you forgive a crooked or cynic person who considers your forgiveness as weakness, foolishness or thoughtlessness it is useless. You must calculate the consequence before you forgive. Forgiveness must be educative and correctional to the culprit. If he/she regrets that what he/she has done is morally wrong [that should not be committed again], then it is appropriate to forgive. But if the criminal is an arrogant person who does not recognize the evilness of his/her deed forgiveness could even be an incentive for him/her to commit further crimes.

What is the importance of giving forgiveness? “In some cultures forgiveness is appreciated for its religious ends. But Oromo do like giving, asking and accepting
forgiveness not for the life supposed to be lived beyond this world rather for the human world which is here and only here.” (Jaatani) When forgiveness is granted the suspicions, tensions and fear could be replaced by trust, peace and confidence. It is not only the means to take the relationships of the parties back to its previous normal state but also makes these relationships grow rich and fulfilling. Holding on the feeling of hurting and hating for the offence once committed either accidentally or intentionally is allowing that same crime to continue hurting the parties involved. This is giving a chance for the spectre of evils to continue haunting life. According to the informants, a person who has allowed anger, revenge and resentment to continue controlling his life is made to sacrifice not only his/her freedom but also his/her health. Not only the individuals of concern that suffer but also the social environment (milieu) in which these individuals are parts and parcels. In forgiving what is unforgivable, or punishable the forgiver stands for the sake of an end which has higher value. Thus forgiveness is an act of eliminating all desires for revenge and ill will. As Amsalu remarks, ‘Forgiveness, according to our society, is a therapy that heals social illness. It is an act of healing the relationships that have been damaged.” For the Oromo of the Gada society it is the necessity of life since there is nothing that resolves conflicts as radically as forgiveness.

But there are controversial issues in giving and taking forgiveness. Can a merciless or brutal act of a criminal be forgiven? Does forgiving such an act that do justice to the victim? Forgiveness is offered to make the thing that went wrong right again. It entails a sacrifice on the part of the forgiver since he/she may not get what he/she deserves. From this perspective one can raise a question, is not forgiveness committing wrong when it fails to do justice to the victim? Indeed it is a debatable issue. Because on one hand we see the problem of whether it is appropriate for the victim to suffer double injury, and on the other it is possible to observe that whether forgiving a crime (or criminal) of any degree is a fair act.

4.9.3.4.7. Critical Analysis

Is the concept of peace that Oromo advance worth having? This section attempt to make a critical evaluation of the moral quality and dimension of the Oromo concept of peace, the mechanism they use for its maintenance and restoration. As mentioned earlier, for Oromo, peace is the harmonious relation between the different orders of the human and cosmic systems – both at micro and macro levels. Is this perception of peace morally worth? Indeed
peace is basically and primarily other-centred. It is the attitude of defending, protecting or taking care of the good of others. Permitting others to have a safe life and development is the essence that makes peace what it is. In moral terms this is a desirable behaviour, and hence praiseworthy. Peace demands the promotion of fair treatment and hence it is basically moral; and violence is the anti-dot of fair treatment and hence is immoral. Morality, according to the observation of Grayling, is fundamentally the concern how people treat each other. (2005: 18) All or almost all people (in their relation) want to be treated kindly, honestly, friendly, humanely, frankly, compassionately, etc. We want others to treat us, and others want us to treat them with and in these desirable qualities. This is moral, and wherever there is moral quality and treatment there is peace and harmony.

Oromo love, respect and give top priority to peace because they believe that it is what humans decisively need for the survival and flourishing of their life. What is more moral than loving, respecting and making peace which is one of the prime necessities of life? They strongly oppose violence because they believe that it undermines all or some of the desirable qualities and behaviours that people ought to adopt towards each other, and hence it is the antithesis of peace. What is more moral than opposing and fighting the immoral acts and behaviours that undermine the existence and prevalence of peace?

Peace prevails when people behave virtuously, and performs virtuous acts. It is the life and the work of virtuous individuals and society; whereas violence reigns over peace when individuals separately or in group act and behave viciously, and hence it is the life and works of the wicked. Peace is virtuous because it is beneficial to life, and violence is vicious because it is harmful to this life. That is why Oromo believe that violence is not only contrary to peace but also the anathema of morality. Thus the Oromo concept of peace is relevant or applicable to the human life and relations of the 21st century humanity.

This world gives more attention not to peaceful development, but to the building of weaponry that goes against the will and interest of humanity. It teaches more about violence than peace and non-violence. Take a simple instance. A military strategy and tactics is being taught as science – science which is virtually for killing or destroying human life and treasures. But there is no much attention to teach peace and non-violence. This is not to argue that we do not need military science. We need it to protect ourselves, in case of aggression. But the contention is, why as much attention is not given to peaceful and non-violent
strategies as is done for violence? Given rational capacity and being a moral being, why man thinks of war in the first place?

The Oromo mechanism of peace making may arouse curiosity. Another important question to be raised in connection to the mechanism of peace keeping is, whether the subject (maker or builder) of peace is only the politicians, elites, elders or the people as a whole. It is traditional to leave the issue of peace and war very often to the discretion of politicians. But in the Oromo philosophy, the question of peace and war should not be left to particular individuals or groups. In their view peace is a very delicate social phenomenon. While one crazy individual is enough to disturb it, the effort of many/all is required to maintain or restore it. For this purpose Gada has mechanism by which it makes people work for peace and live in it. In both preventive and remedial mechanisms people directly or indirectly participate in peace keeping. Even the most disabled person can participate in it at least through prayers.

This seems to be reasonable. It is the ordinary people who seek peace more than any one; and it is they who always remain to be the un-missing target during the time of war or violence. They are also the ones who are made to fight the war for which they are not the cause, the war that is contrary to their own will. The billions need no war or violence but peace and development, peaceful and meaningful life. There was no time in human history when war or violence was the choice of the majority. This suggests that wars and violence are always the choices and decisions of the few. But it is not the few but the majority who suffers all the crises that war or violence inflicts.

In the time of war there are people who mastermind the war on one hand and those who fight the war on the other. We wonder if there could be war if those who fight the war could also be those who mastermind it. It means those who are brutally devoured by the fires of war are those who are innocent of its cause, not the actual architects of that war. One basic reason why humanity is unable to stop war despite its interest is because people are inactive in keeping peace. If people from all walks of life are made responsible for peace keeping the world would be much safer than when it is left to the discretion of the few. But the system of the world had made the majority powerless to promote and keep its interest. Therefore, the fact that the participation of people at all levels in peace keeping, is emphasised in Oromo culture could be a sound idea to consider.
In the Oromo tradition, both preventive and remedial mechanisms are employed to maintain, restore and build peace. One of the aims of their mechanism is to develop conditions and environments that are free of violence, strife and antagonisms. According to their belief, the presence of good governance or the prevalence of justice is a necessary condition for that. In a society where there is good governance and genuine justice there is no condition that makes hostility, violence or war indispensable. That means, in the philosophy of life, peace requires not only the absence of war but also good administration and management that keeps away the conditions of violence.

The Oromo Gada system which is basically egalitarian is the system that attempts to provide a remarkable environment for peace to hold sway and flourish. If power belongs to people, if it is granted peacefully to the legitimate class of the people by these people, and given back to the people again peacefully, if law is made on the basis of the interest of the society by this society and serves the interest of these people, if it is not men or force who rule but laws, if power is handed and taken over through peaceful means, if the society is in general the society of caring, sharing and loving, if all harmful and unblessed acts and behaviours are persistently fought back, then where could be the environment that harbours violence? All these desirable moral and democratic values are more or less the ingredients of Gada system. Viewed from this angle Gada is a peaceful, democratic and ethical system.

In their teaching the Gada officials always attempt to keep the minds of their people away from those different evils that could pollute them. Peace or violence can be considered as an extension of human attitude and behaviour. Peace or violence is first fermented in the minds of the individuals – it is from there that it is borne out to social life and relations. It is the way they think of peace or violence that people practically act and behave. Therefore, Gada is morally right when it exerts efforts to guard the mind of its people from being infested with vices. It is only the mind free of vices that guides the action and behaviour of the moral agent towards peace and serenity.

Conflict is unhealthy not only because it is committed against the desirable interest of people but also because it is harmful, destructive and expensive. Yet it is a solvable one. The indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, in the Oromo context, has incontestable role in restoring the peace disturbed by violence. The goals of this mechanism in Oromo society are two – immediate and long lasting, individual and societal. When narrowly understood its goal
is the reconciliation of the parties engaged in conflict. When they get reconciled with each other the tension and fear between them would be removed. Dispelling evil feelings, according to Oromo belief, is the restoration of long lasting love, friendship and cooperation. This has immense contribution to the wellbeing and peace of the individuals and society.

When understood from social perspective the goal of the mechanism has a long lasting and remarkable effect. The issue of conflict and peace is basically social. Both begin with the individuals – first in their minds and attitudes. But their effect goes into the fabric of the society. Although it may be caused by individuals it could be the agony of a society and also be resolved by the effort of this society. Peace flourishes when violence is attacked or avoided by individual and collective efforts. Thus the mechanism serves not only the purpose of the individuals but more importantly that of the society.

The moral quality and strength of the Oromo mediation mechanism can further be shown in comparison with the modern mechanism of conflict resolution that is largely executed at court of law and other government offices through legal procedures. This comparison is necessary to understand how practical, relevant and beneficial the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is. Some of the major points are singled out as follows:

1. At court of law when a verdict is passed the tried conflict is resolved by making one of the disputants the winner and the other the loser. This may punish the culprit but does not uproot enmity - still sense of animosity and revenge hangs around. Consequently, the disputants may go home not by cleansing themselves from the hostile situation that they have been with (since the occurrence of the conflict) but rather with another fresh ill feeling in their hearts and minds. Thus the conflict is not resolved but suppressed, and the resolution is not long lasting but temporary and reversible. In the context of the Oromo traditional mechanism, however, conflict resolution is not an issue of winning or losing the case for one or the other. Upon the attainment of a resolution none of the disputants is made to feel either the winner or the loser of the case in point. Elders very often think that the settlement of the conflict is the victory of the community over evil, not that of one disputant over the other. It is mutual understanding that is more felt than one getting triumph over the other.

The community believes that the resolution is not a sentence of punishment, rather it is an agreement reached at by the two conflicting sides through the efforts of mediators.
Unless it changes the hostile environment between the disputants into the relation of friendship, the resolution cannot be believed to be complete and fair. Thus none of the parties goes home with ill feelings in mind. Viewed from this angle the Oromo traditional method of conflict resolution seems to be morally superior to that of the modern one.

2. Basically conflicts involve both facts and values – indispensably moral values. The modern method of settling conflicts, however, largely treats the factual aspect of conflicts. In that case, the value that is intertwined with the facts is ignored. Passing a resolution on the basis of factual statements alone makes the resolution incomplete. But the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of Oromo society takes into accounts not only facts but also values involved in the conflict. This is done with reference to the already existing value system. Conflicts could be generated when the value system that creates harmony is violated. Thus, when the resolution is made the individuals get reconciled not only with each other but also with the value system of the society. In this sense the Oromo traditional way of settling conflicts is apparently more profound and complete than the modern one.

3. Peacemaking does not have only moral and social implication but also political mission. In indigenous conflict avoidance method, peacemaking to some degree is an exercise of self- governance for the community. It is the mechanism of creating and having an indigenous solution to local problems. Being devised by the people, it serves the purpose of these people by themselves. By and through it people rule over their cases. This is politically significant to the government for it provides an immense contribution to the maintenance of peace and order. Furthermore, it remarkably contributes to the promotion of democratic practices and values - for the societies adopting democratic style of life and governance.

4. In the modern conflict settlement mechanism in general and at the court of law in particular, legal activities and procedures (that may not be clear and transparent to the parties of the conflict) are pursued. Many things become matters of professions in there. What decisively motivates the professional may be the interest to get something or to win someone at the expense of anything, and may not be the resolution of the problem. This makes the mechanism vulnerable, since it can easily provide an open door for abuse. It creates a possibility of doing what morally ought not to be done, and the possibility of not doing what morally ought to be done. Given this situation one who ought to get justice may be made to
lose it, and one who ought to lose it, may be made to gain. In the Oromo traditional method of conflict settling, mediation is not a profession. Or it is not a means of living; rather it is the extraordinary social responsibility. No pay whatsoever is received for it. The mediators are believed to render this social service simply because they are motivated by their own good will and by the norm of the society. They treat, it is assumed, the case presented to them in good faith to the best of their knowledge. What matters for them is the resolution of the conflict without any condition.

Moreover, the possibility that exposes the mediators to corruption is very limited. Even if that possibility is there, it may not be an easy matter for any mediator to unfairly administer the conflict because of the transparency of the mechanism and the norm of the society. The main reason why the Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism cannot be corrupted, however, is faith. During the time of the selection of mediators, the latter took oath in the name of Waaqa, God, to rule over the conflict in good faith. It is hardly possible for the Oromo to violate this. Elders with rich experience of mediation very often say, “We make mediation mainly not for this or that person, but for the truth. Doing good or bad in such matters is ultimately for or against oneself. To the best of our knowledge we do good and right mainly for our conscience.” In view this, the Oromo mechanism of conflict resolution is, therefore, has double benefits.

One, it saves the disputants from being abused by corrupt officials, and the other it makes the probability of abusing the mechanism very low. If local questions are answered and problems are solved by indigenous means, the door to corruption could not be as wide as it is in the mechanism of the modern conflict resolution. In this sense the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism seems to be more rational and profound for the maintenance and building of peace than the modern one. In addition to the moral values it contains, it also provides other physical, economic, and psychological benefits.

Despite its strong moral quality the Oromo traditional method of peacemaking entails some moral weakness that should be sorted out for further consideration. One serious problem is, there is no written law or document of significant value to refer to, or that govern the process of peacemaking. References are largely based on laws and experiences that are orally transmitted. Even the details of the process of the peacemaking efforts is not well documented, except that sometimes the terms of agreement reached at is written and signed at
the end of the process. This makes the process of peace making appear as subjective judgments. But in fact it is not as much subjective as it appears to be. The norms, unwritten laws and the experiences of the society are used as point of reference. More importantly the views of the opponents and the evidence of the case in point keep the process from falling into grave subjectivity. Yet it is worth stressing that the process of peace making should be well recorded.

**An Initial Conclusion**

The value Oromo give to peace and their commitment for its promotion and maintenance is remarkable. Important lesson can be learnt from it. In general there has been fierce struggle between peace and war. It is still ongoing. Yet no one knows whether peace or war wins the battle at the end of the day. The mystery is, however, it is man who makes both war and peace, and it is again man who suffers from the destructive effect of war or enjoys the fruits of peace. The present day man seems to devote more of his energies and resources to violence than to peace. This is the paradox of man. He loves life while hating it, and hates while loving it. The exaggerated love one has for his own life contradicts the life of others. Unless humanity reconcile the antagonism of the "self" and the "other", the attainment of good life is an impossible possibility.

Let us put these questions as enticement for further exploration. If both, peace and war are the making of men then why war which is the most hated? Why not peace, which is the most blessed, loved and respected by almost all people all over the world? Why peace which has the support of the billions cannot win victory over war, which is the most hated by billions? What is the invisible force or the evil demon, to use Descartes’ term that inspires war?

Important lesson can be gained from the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism, *jaarsumma*. The modern world suffers from violence of different shades because of its failure to use peaceful means to manage conflicts. We experience that very often coercive measures are used to keep peace. Indeed there could apparently be peace because of fear among people. This is the case not because the cause of the problem is addressed but because the effect of the cause is forcefully suppressed. The resolution of conflict by force does not yield a lasting peace. Although people indispensably live together no good
knowledge of this togetherness has so far been acquired. If their togetherness is indispensable then there is no good reason why they fail to make it harmonious and peaceful.

4.10. Concept of Friendship

What weight does friendship have in the context of the Oromo moral life? According to Gada system, all humans at the best are brothers and sisters, or at the least friends. No one is born an enemy to anyone. It is only the way people think of and treat one another that antagonize them. One informant maintains, “Mainly it is our greed and lust that puts us in hostility. If there were no greed and lust every one is a brother, sister or a friend to any other one. (Duulbee) The Oromo moral value gives a significant place to friendship as a way of implanting a sense of brotherhood among humanity. A friend, according to the Oromo tradition, is the closest person who shares one’s own joy and pain. Although everyone is basically considered to be a friend, one who shares one’s most life experience for good is the closest one. Commenting on this Dagaagaa says: A person who is a genuine friend is one who shares not only your pleasure, fortunes or fine opportunities but also one who does your burdens, misfortunes and grieves. The latter is a test whether a person is a genuine friend of oneself or not. It is the genuine friend who remains being on your side on the critical day of your misfortunes.

According to the observation of another informant, “Under normal environment you cannot know who is a friend in the true sense of the word. During the time of your trouble you may find either a few or none of your friends standing on your side. Thus a friend is one who primarily feels your pain and shares your burden.” (Mormor) Friendship is established between individuals who may have concurrent characters, similar interests, occupations and common purpose, life style and the like. It is established by voluntary will. “Sometimes it is possible to see a friendship in which one of the individuals could be a genuine friend while the other may not, or both are genuine friends of one another. This is what we always experience.” (Dewo)

Although friendship could also be established for bad ends, the one formed for the purpose of promoting good end is morally desirable. That is why Abdulkerim probably says, “A good friendship is that which is established between people of good characters for good purpose.” Borbor adds: If a person is a friend of me, then he must not be good to me and bad to himself or to others. He must always be a person of good will and character to everyone. I say this because there are some people who are friends to you in order to attack others.
Personally I do not want to be a friend of a person who inflicts harm on others for the sake of me or himself. A good friend should not use my mind or hand to attack others. One who seeks some kind of help from me in order to pursue his evil end is not a good friend.

Friendship is not as such a business transaction in which the rule of ‘give and take’ governs. In this engagement one needs to get from the other more than what she/he offers or at least as much as she/he gives out. But according to Chaalaa, “A genuine friendship involves sharing and caring without anticipating a return from the other partner. It makes people comfortable to one another. In genuine friendship it is not only the friends but all of us are the beneficiaries.” That means, in evils one or some may gain unfair advantage but many lose or get harmed. But in friendship the opposite is true. In simple words, friendship is a free association of individuals that requires no coercive measure but only moral commitment.

How long should friendship last? Experiences witness that some friendships are short-lived relations and some others are long lasting one. Some informants are of the opinion, in utilitarian terms, that the more durable friendship is preferable to the less durable one. According to their view it should last as long as life does. Amsalu remarks, “Genuine friendship does not last short. It rather persists in so far as life lasts. It stands any threat that challenges it. But quasi-friendship can easily vanish since it cannot withstand the vices that threaten it.” There are other informants who asserted that friendship lasts as long as the friends remain in good terms. Teib says: The durability of friendship does not determine its sincerity. It rather depends on the behaviours of the individuals engaged in that friendship. If friends are sincerely honest to each other and the care-takers of one other, then their friendship will remain genuine regardless of its length of time. Even a short-lived friendship is genuine as long as the friends are good towards each other.

In friendship a friend wishes or does all the best for his/her friend. He/she offers any good thing or ideas to a friend that he/she owes to himself/herself. Friends share secrets that cannot be disclosed to any other person. One is confidential to the other. ‘My friend should be honest to me, and I should also be honest to my friend. Honesty is the essential feature of friendship. It is that which ties the friends together.’(Duubee) Friends who are honest with each other exchange their life experiences, knowledge and even share resources – one who has more fortunes helps the other who has less fortunes. Honesty is therefore the policy of virtuous friends.
In the Oromo tradition, friendship stands for higher cause. Abdulkerim states, “Friendship is not a matter of only sharing pleasure or misfortunes but also a desirable relation that promotes life. It is the advanced form of relationship that aims at quality of life. At the moment we do not observe such friendships in good number.” In other words friendship aims at good goal, with good relation as means. Viewed from this angle, friendship is a moral institution established by friends who have good moral attitudes towards one another. ‘We Oromo give immense weight to friendship because it is against enmity or hatred. We gain a lot of benefit from friendship and lose a lot of things because of enmity, hatred and indifference.” (Mormor) That is why morality appreciates friendship and rejects animosity. If all or at least the majority of humanity is in genuine friendship then the possibility of mitigating evils would be high, and this opens a venue for the rapid flourishing of human life.

The talk about the importance of friendship goes back to the time when philosophy flourished in ancient Greece, and it has been there deep in the life of humanity since and even before the mentioned time. Probably Aristotle is historically the first philosopher to have discussed and written about the subject. Indeed friendship is one of the moral concepts that are prone to confusion. Aristotle ventured to explain what friendship really means from moral view point perhaps to dispel this confusion. He remarks, “When you see two friends you see two bodies with a single soul.” (Thomas, 1962: 117) Epicurus who lived from 342 to 270 B. C and had also a deep concern for friendship wrote,

Cultivate this greatest of all our blessings. Make a religion of it. Worship it. For friendship is a sweet and beautiful and holy thing. The sympathy of true friendship is the only certain gift we possess in this world of doubtful values. If the sufferings of life can reconcile us to death, the joys of friendship can reconcile us to life.” (Thomas, 1962: 139)

Pojman on his part writes, “A true friend is one who is not always preoccupied about himself altogether, at least sometimes, in order to serve or enhance the other person’s interest.” (Pojman, 2005: 29). When do you ask your friend – when he/she needs you most or when you need him/her most? It must not be when it is convenient for you to ask but when he/she needs your help most.

In friendship, people live mainly for one another, and hence morally it is one of the superior relationships of humanity. It is what we all want to enjoy and have - because it is
desirable and good. But it has not gained a remarkable development as much as it is required because of the prevalence of different vices in human society. “I do not really know why people today do not talk much about friendship, love, cooperation and compassion. Although religious personalities and institutions permanently advocate for its importance, friendship is increasingly declining rather than flourishing.” (Tamiru) One can get evidence for this from the present day Oromo behaviour. Generally the Oromo of today are not as humane and compassionate or as friendly as they had been in the past.

What could be a good reason for the decline of friendship in the Oromo society? Teib says, “I do not really know why people today do not have deep concern for friendship, love, cooperation and compassion. They are generally preoccupied with questions of material life.” These good values are permanently advocated by thinkers of different subjects, religious personalities and institutions. But it is shrinking instead of developing in all aspects of human life. “The cause of this problem,” according to Dagaagaa, “is not mysterious. Obviously it is nothing but our failure to observe safuu. We gave up our prominent indigenous values and adopted the tarnished exotic values.”

4.11. Oromo Work Ethic

It is a moral issue whether a certain community gives a desirable value to work. In some cultures work has less weight, and even it is considered as a curse. In such cultures, people think that it would be preferable if there is any other means to earn their livelihood without work. In some other cultures work is a blessing activity – it is the activity that makes man human and develops it. In this section an attempt is made to explore the value that Oromo ascribe to work. Do Oromo have a sound work culture? Today it is possible to observe that Oromo have different attitudes towards work. This mainly depends on the natural environment they live in, the necessity of life and the life style of the society and on the retention of indigenous and adoption of exotic cultures. Many of the informants contended that Oromo had a desirable work ethic before the incorporation of the Oromo land to the Abyssinian Empire. Gada taught that without work men could not live as humans.

According to the observation of Chaalaa and Dagaagaa although today some Oromo do not work to win their livelihood as much as required we heard that our ancestors were very hard working people. They used to work not only to get what was enough for the consumption of the household but also to get richer than they were. But now there are Oromo
who do not even work to earn what is enough for their personal consumption. Doyyo remarks, “In Borana the prime occupation we are engaged in is herd rearing. We are primarily pastoralist societies. To find a grazing land and water for our herds we always toil. Every household needs to have a large number of herds to ensure its wellbeing. We, therefore, work hard in order to raise a large number of cattle.”

In contrast to this view Chaalaa gives us the following narratives on the attitude that the Borana and Guji Oromo have towards work: I do not think that the Oromo of Borana and Guji have strong work ethic. This might be because of the nature of their occupation and of the natural environment they inhabit. Most of them are pastoralists, and the environment in which they inhabit is hot and arid. They always wander about in search of grazing land and water for their herds. Of course they may think that they are hard working people. But in the light of the challenges they encounter and the developmental need of the community I say they work little. In the old days there was very vast area of land in comparison to the number of population, and hence no challenge of serious nature posed. But now this is no more the reality of Borana and Guji Oromo. The size of the land is unceasingly shrinking, its fertility is depleting and the resources of the natural environment are declining because of the unchecked population growth. In view of this, I doubt that the Borana and Guji Oromo could continue the way they had ever been working and living. Their work ethic should be reinforced.

Doyyo again says: We teach our children to work hard, because poverty is the consequence of laziness. Why one is rich and the other is poor? It is because of work. We get as much as we work. Anyone who works hard gets better than the one who works less. One family differs in terms of wealth from the other family because of diligence. Graceful life is attained only by working hard. That is why we teach our children to be diligent. To instil the spirit of hard work we teach them by using proverbs, folktales, short stories and songs pertaining to work. Another Borana informant argues, “The Borana people believe that work is a moral obligation for every person who can work. Every household ought to stand on its feet. There is no place for thieves, looters and idlers in Borana culture. We have to work hard. Otherwise we either perish or at least suffer.” (Jaatani)

For the other informant the culture of hard work in Oromo society has not developed as much as it should have been. “Personally I do not feel pride about the work culture of the Oromo people. In comparison to the formidable problems we either individually or
collectively have I argue that we are not hard working people.” (Amsalu) Many informants assert that originally the Oromo work culture was desirable. But it drastically changed after these people and their land was incorporated to the Abyssinian Empire. Prior to this annexation Oromo did not have any parasitic tendency. Self-sufficiency and contentment was highly appreciated. But after the conquest the creative and economic activities of the Oromo society got depressed. The Amhara rulers, soldiers, clergies and henchmen brought their hierarchical structure that would give an opportunity for some people to be free from engaging in physical labour. Some Oromo started thinking and living in the same way the Abyssinian settlers did. They started not only to liberate themselves from work but also to disregard the value of work (Borbör, Dagaaga and Dorsis). The Amhara rulers ranked those who were engaged in the ruling, ordering or administrative [those who had not engaged in physical labour) activities as men of high profile. They call them ‘chewaa’, literally means gentle. Metaphorically it means persons who had the power to make others work for them by virtue of having that power over the common people.

Unlike the ‘chewaa’, gentle there were people who were engaged in the production of material wealth. These were ‘gebaar’, tenant; ‘faqi, tanner; tumtu, black smith; suphe dhoftuu, potter, daldala, merchant, etc. Fewer values were ascribed to these who produced wealth, and more values were assigned to those who lived on what was produced by these producers. Less respect was given to those who worked, whereas more respect was given to those who were sponging on the works of others. It had become a norm to praise those who were free from physical labour, and to despise those who were engaged in material production. The Oromo work culture ceased to be dynamic since the time of its infusion with exotic culture. In general the decline of the Oromo work culture indicates the degeneration of safuu.

4.12. Social Pathologies

There are different kinds of social anomalies (such as beggary, prostitution, indolence, corruption, etc.) that are being experienced in Ethiopian societies. In this section beggary as an example of these abnormalities, is considered. One may ask what relations this has with morality. Certainly, beggary is a social phenomenon. As it is a man-caused social evil it is liable to moral judgment. It is the effect of moral degeneration and also the causes of various social and moral ills.
Beggary and Human Values

Beggary is one of the chronic social problems in the present day of Ethiopia. But there seems no profound concern to understand the cause, the nature and the destination of this painful anomaly. At this point in time it is appropriate if one raises a question, what relation does beggary have to the traditional moral value of the Oromo society? How does the Oromo safuu consider it? Is it a problem that should be ethically explored or a phenomenon to be left to its own self as given? If it is believed to be a social pathology how should it be treated morally? Almost all the informants have the opinion that beggary is the outcome of social illness. Basically, as most of them contended, it is an immoral act or behaviour, because it is harmful and undesirable social phenomenon. It is a dehumanizing social pathology. As an effect it is the symptom for the existence of chronic social evils in the society.

No one goes out for begging unless he/she is forced by the life condition he/she is in and encouraged by the value system of the society in which they live. It is impossible that any society could voluntarily carry beggary, as it is very abhorrent. But whether we like it or not it is one of the tragedies of Ethiopian life. One could really wonder if he/she is able to know what opinion and attitude that Ethiopian people do have about this kind of life. But how has beggary become rampant in the country? “Beggary”, according to Dagaagaa, “is undesirable and a repulsive social phenomenon. I think originally it started by those who were practicing ascetic life.” But in the secular world it is the life that the most debased and abandoned person lives. A failure to support oneself is basically a social pathology.

To survive he/she must be supported by the works of others if he/she cannot support himself/herself. This is a burden to the society. In reality it happens that the disabled persons may be forced to live on begging. In the words of Tamiru, “Our people sympathize with such people, and hence they extend some help to these disabled compatriots. But the sympathy of people can be abused by some other people. Those who saw that people sympathized with the disabled started imitating the disabled so as to share the sympathy.” Added to this no governmental and non-governmental institutions have paid attention to it. Due to the poor philosophy of life that plagued the country it has been seen as normal when it is actually abhorrent. It is in this way that beggary got rampant in this country. Amsalu on his part reports that Oromo did not practice beggary in their culture. It is their exposure to the culture of other ethnic groups that brought beggary to them. Even today the number of Oromo who
lived on begging is by far less than those who are from non-Oromo ethnic groups. Still Oromo cannot live in comfort when other fellow humans around them are in trouble.

To the question, “What opinion do Oromo have about beggary?” different informants have responded. Borbor asserts that the Borana Oromo do not like beggary, because it is debasing human value. If a person lives on begging it means she/he has already lost human dignity. In the past Borana did not allow this to happen to anyone. This was not because there were no persons who had miserable life, but because people had the culture of mutual support. Another informant, Jaatani on his part remarks: The Borana Oromo had been very serious about this matter. No Borana wanted to see any Borana man or woman standing on the side of a street and stretch his hands for charity. This is terribly shameful not only to the beggar but also to the clan or society she/he belonged to. Even the most disabled person should not be allowed to do this while the other Borana people were living in comfort.

One may ask, what could be done if one Borana went out for begging? Or how did the Borana stop one from having this kind of undesirable life experience? According to Chaalaa in the first place there could be no Borana who could readily accept such a style of living. If a Borana unfortunately became destitute she/he could make a claim, not beg to get rehabilitated by fellow compatriots. She/he could say, “Unluckily I have become the wretched of the earth. I cannot keep on living like this. Therefore, do me a favour to keep me out of this.” If a Borana said this, it could be immediately understood that he/she had become a person left with no option, and hence it was the moral duty of any capable Borana to take this person out of such situation. “No Borana hesitated to help his own fellow Borana. Our society had never been hard hearted. Let alone to Borana our community had been helpful even to any human being who needed help.” (Dura) It was the moral right for the destitute to ask help, and it was the moral duty of any capable Borana to help the needy person.

A person with a critical mind may react to this- is this itself not begging? Chaalaa aptly responded, “No, it is not begging in the strict sense of the word. A person put this question not to any by- passer, but to a person whom he thought was the closest. He had to be a person who was proved to be the capable and sympathetic one.” Very often what was requested was not what immediately could go for consumption but rather that which could be considered as capital that generates. If a person unfortunately failed to support himself it was the moral duty of his clan to rehabilitate him. But now that culture of our ancestors is no
more in place. Beggary is getting root not because we are unable to stop it but because we do
not have the will to do it.

Adding to this Chaalaa maintains: Let me tell you what Borana used to do to prevent
this social anomaly. As soon as they are born children were given a cow, goat or camel. Until
the child becomes a full grown adult the gift reproduces itself. Thus a person begins his own
life with a sound amount of wealth. This is one method of preventing beggary. The second
method of tackling the problem lies in marriage. Once married to a man of certain clan a
woman is guaranteed for her livelihood. Even if she gets divorced still she has the right to
stay in her livelihood. If a family was unable not only to offer a gift to the newly born
children but also to properly raise these children Borbor narrates that there were cases in
which children were given away to those families that were capable of raising them. He
further goes to report another method used by Borana to keep people from falling into
destitution. This is called Dabare. A close relative or friend could give, for example, a cow to
a poor family on certain terms. The recipient family could be given the right to use whatever
product obtained from the cow, but not the right to kill or sell the cow. Or the recipient family
could be given the privilege of owning the newly born calves.

All these efforts had their own contribution in keeping people away from beggary. It
is really worth knowing the important thing underlying these different methods that Borana
used to stop people from going out for begging. All the ways and means had a firm
foundation to stand on. That was the value and conviction of the Borana people. In view of
their moral value the Borana thought that beggary could strip men off their human values. It
is an act that is contrary to the Borana ceera, morality. People, therefore, should not be
allowed to dehumanize themselves by living on begging.

Are we sure that there are no beggars in Borana today just as they were no in the past?
Doyyo says, “We cannot say this. Because if we go down town we will find few beggars –
three or four, not more. But I doubt that these even themselves are beggars in the real sense of
the term. They are either the cheats or mentally troubled ones.” Chaalaa responds to the same
question with a more precise expression. “In the past I can say there were no beggars in any
Oromo society. But this cannot be said true of this society at the present. There are many
beggars in almost all the urban areas of the Oromo region.” All the informants agree that not
all the beggars in the towns and cities of Oromia are Oromo. Those with pure Oromo origin
are very few in number. However, it is possible to mistakenly think that almost all beggars
are of Oromo origin simply because they fluently use Afaan Oromo so as to soften the hearts of the Oromo audience while begging. Whoever they are, however, as beggars they are our moral challenge.

In the observation of the researchers, the Oromo beggars in Borana and Guji are not as many in number as those who are in the other cities and towns of Oromia. What would count for this difference? In the venture to answer this question Dagaagaa argues, “The Oromo people beyond Borana and Guji largely lost their indigenous values to that of the Amhara. But in Borana and Guji the number of people living on begging is few because at least the main components of the indigenous moral values of the Oromo are retained.” By contrast, the informant further explains, “In all other parts of the Oromo land the number of the Oromo people who have joined the army of beggars of the country is larger, because the Oromo indigenous moral value is adulterated with the value of others.” In particular it fell under the domination of the Amhara culture that probably does not consider beggary as chronic social pathology. But if we compare the number of Oromo beggars with that of the non-Oromo beggars still the former is by far less than the latter.

Do we need something to do in order to stop beggary, or leave it as if it were given? It is a large number of beggars that today flocks in all the urban areas of the country. No one can feel comfort when these compatriots from all ages and sexes restlessly swarm in the cities and towns. Probably beggary started initially by the most disabled people and by religious personality who had abandoned secular life for the sake of the heavenly one. But now the healthy and strong ones from all ages and sexes have drowned into it. It may not be an exaggeration if one could say the majority of people who live on begging are healthy and strong. Surprisingly it is unceasingly increasing instead of being the otherwise. What could be done about this terrifying situation? Is it possible to think of a better future with such a large number of beggars – that is absolutely ‘free’ to grow non-stop? Who can have a well-lived life while all the urban areas are invaded with a large crowd of beggars?

We can measure as to what extent we commit immoral acts by the number of beggars we daily see on the street. Even if you are a person who can afford, you cannot have a well-lived life amidst of such a huge army of beggars. It is human nature to sympathise with those who suffer from miseries of different types under our naked eyes. Today it is a fashion to talk about the development of economy and the country when this large number of people is left undeveloped and de-humanized. How do you think of a better life in such agonized
community? There is a necessity of bringing people from this inhuman state back to the human one. A solution can be offered if what the exact cause(s) of the problem is identified.

Informants have given a list of causes that they believed to be responsible for the development and rampancy of beggary. The main causes, as pointed out by them are religious practices, economic poverty, ignorance, and selfishness, political and moral degradation. Ignorance and moral bankruptcy are that which undergird all these. According to the observation of Chaalaa in particular: One can say poverty is the cause, another contends that it is ignorance. Still the third points out yet another reason about this. To me the ultimate cause of beggary lies in the hands and minds of humans, because the foundation of evils such poverty, ignorance, moral degradation and selfishness is deeply anchored in human minds and hands. Thus we all the individuals, society, groups of individuals, institutions, governmental and non-governmental bodies are responsible for such abnormal behaviour and life. All of us experience directly or indirectly moral and ethical bankruptcy. I think this is the cause.

Chaalaa is saying that we all are responsible for the occurrence and growth of beggary. But how and why? His answer goes like this: A person who goes out for begging may not either knew that he/she is alienating himself/herself from the human world by taking wrong course of action; or he/she deliberately de-humanizes himself/herself in favour of the material benefit that he/she thinks is superior to human value. From this angle we can say that the beggar is morally held responsible. Instead of bringing this self-dehumanized person back to his/her human status we the society, institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations aggravated the already self-dehumanized moral agent by permitting him/her to it in many ways. We find no solution to the problem if we attribute the cause of the problem to something else when in reality we all are the ones who caused it. The opinion of Jemal reinforces what Chaalaa said above. “It is a difficult job to suggest a simple solution to this formidable and complex problem. Any way it can be solved if all those who were responsible for its rise and rampancy could be the active parts of its solution.”

Some other informants emphasized more on the difficulty of the problem rather than on its solution. For some people beggary has become a special kind of lucrative company, trade or profession that could generate profit. Two kinds of beggars should be identified. Some are ‘self-sponsored’ and others are ‘other-sponsored’. Behind the latter category there are invisible beggars who draw profit by hiring other beggars. To your surprise the sponsors
have their own normal occupation and regular income. Whatever comes to their pockets through begging is an additional income. One can imagine how one human being de-humanizes another human being for his/her in-satiable selfish end. Why one goes out for hard work when there is a possibility of getting more without going up and down? These complicate the effort of finding a solution to the problem. But whatever the challenge is people should not lose hope for the possibility of finding solution to the problem.

A man who has debased himself may not have any concern for human quality. Even he may not have any respect for any moral, religious, social and legal values. The critical observation of Chaalaa goes, “To your surprise many of the beggars use the names of Angels and Waaqaa. Religiously, this is committing sin. It is, somehow, pardoned if the most disabled such as visually and physically impaired person may do this. But when a healthy person does it for the simple acquisition of coins, it is categorically shameful. This is violating safuu.” The account of this informant is sound. It is true that people make profit out of evils. If there were nothing that could satisfy the selfish interest of the moral agent, then it would have not been difficult to put an end to evils of any kind. Moral and ethical concerns were not able to make people rise above their own egoistic inclinations as much as possible. Beggary is one of such evils that were created because people failed to control selfish ambition. They dehumanize and make themselves the burdens of the present and the future generations simply because they put their own selfish interest above than everything – they value their own personal interest more than the value of anything. They do this by devaluing their humanity.

Conclusion

So far, we have been examining the factors that have contributed to the idea of moral values in the traditional Oromo society. Our reflections are directed toward two special implications which is especially appropriate to our times. One is the progressively generalized recognition of the lack of adequate attention to the distinctive dignity of person in social life and its structures implying the need for social development and change. The second is that this need confronts us with some of the most profound dilemmas of life in ever more complex times.

The dignity of the person can be experienced not only positively, but also negatively or by contrast. Hence, many mentioned ways in which the person is treated not as subject and
hence as a free and responsible determinant of their actions, but as an object to be manipulated by others and utilized for goals that are less than human. This suggests work on a number of levels. First, a critical hermeneutics could make it possible to identify at various levels the patterns of interest and the social and psychological dynamisms which constrict free expression. Second, the resources of the cultural traditions in the Oromo may hold special promise. This may be an important resource for any effort to conceive a humanization of social life. Third, work toward the future requires models of society which can guide our efforts. We need to search for models of wholeness and open social cooperation in a pattern of subsidiarity in order, instead of mutual exclusion and extensive marginalization, to maximize participation and responsible self-determination at each level. This would suggest a pervasive programme of humanization and entitlement at all levels of social life and thus a noble understanding of human values. There is good potential in the Oromo indigenous moral value to develop the required good will to that effect.

These observations obviate the necessity of appreciating the dialogue between tradition and modernity that dictate the contemporary reality of the African societies. It reminds us that in truth all crises of civilizations can be resolved only in dialogue with the past or the tradition. Such a dialogue is important both in resolving present problems and in projecting the future. This bespeaks, the importance, even the necessity, of the past; the need to remember in order to understand, and situate oneself in space and time and to walk with assurance toward the future.

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1. Although we are certain that this is the contention of Socrates, at the moment we are unable to trace the particular source from which it is cited.

2. These are people who get pleasure from the pain inflicted on them.

3. The term is derived from the word ‘Jaarsa’ which means elderly. Jaarsumma is thus the mechanism of resolving conflicts through the peaceful efforts of elderly people.