CHAPTER FOUR
THE STUDY AREA

Description of the study area gives general information about Libo Kemkem Woreda. This information includes the physical characteristics and social organization that found in the area.

4.1 Physical Characteristics

4.1.1 Location

Libo Kemkem Woreda is located in the South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara Region in North Western Ethiopia. It has an area of 1,560 square kilometers. It is bordered by Belesa Woreda in the North, Debra Tabor Woreda in the South, Ibinat Woreda in the East, Lake Tana in the West, and Fogera Woreda in the South west. It is located in 11º 57' 46.6" -12º 25' 32.6"N latitude and 37º 34' 48.9"-38º 3' 30.9" E longitude. It comprises of 34 kebeles. Of these kebeles, 5 of them are urban and the remaining 29 Kebele Administrations are rural. Addis Zemen, which is the Woreda capital, is located between Bahir Dar and Gondar towns on the major road connecting Addis Ababa. It is 645 kilometers away from Addis Ababa.

4.1.2 Population, Language and Religion

The total population of the Woreda is 198,951 of which 100,951 are males and 97,423 are females. About 176,328 people live in the countryside and this is 86.6% of the total population of the Woreda. Females are comprised of half of the total rural population (CSA, 2008). The Woreda has a population density of 1,948 per square kilometer and it covers 11% of the total area of the South Gondar Administrative Zone.
The people of Libo Kemkem Woreda speak Amharic language, which is the national language of Ethiopia. About 99.86% of the people speak this language while 0.01 and 0.08% of the people speak Oromiffa and Tigre languages respectively. Regarding religion of the people, 95.58% of the population follows Orthodox Christianity while 4.39% are disciple of Islam. The dwellers of the study sites are all followers of Orthodox Christianity (WARDO 2010).

4.1.3 Topography

The topography of the Woreda consists of plain land (42%), uneven (30%), mountains (21%), watershed (6%) gorges (1%). From its total area, only 32.3% is believed to be suitable for agricultural purpose whereas 23% of the area did not still give agricultural (farming) service.

4.1.4 Climate

The climate of Libo Kemkem Woreda is divided into three agro-climatic zones: Woina Dega (72%), Dega (22%), and Kolla (5%). Based on the Ethiopian climatic division, it is characterized as Woina Dega because of it is mountainous and its high altitude (1,800-3,000 meters above sea level).

The temperature of the region is medium, ranging from 18°C to 25°C. This area receives a unimodal rainfall of approximately from 900 to 1400mm per year, the majority of which falls between June and August. In effect, people can grow various types of crops such as teff (Eragrotis teff), peas, wheat, barley, and the like (WARDO 1999).

4.1.5 Land Use

The total land area of Libo Kemkem Woreda is 108,157 hectares. Out of these, only 55,119 hectares can be utilized for agriculture, out of which 52,116 and 3,003
hectares of land are available for perennial and permanent crops respectively. About 8,686 and 11,889 hectares of land are respectively used for grazing of animals and settlement purposes. At least 6,484 and 19,453 hectares of land are covered with bushes and forests and of rivers and gorges respectively. From the whole portion of the land, about 6,526 hectares is not put to any use. Moreover, except few places like basins, marsh areas, church and government forests, most of the vegetation covered areas have been destroyed in the region. This is due to the increase in the number of agricultural people, the presence of big floods in the rainy season, the continuous war during various regimes and the less extent of forestation in the region. Although there are deforestations, we can see certain typical indigenous trees in the region such as Tid (Junipers procera), Zegba (Pedo carps Graciliar), Shoal (Fichus Sycamore), Wanza (cordin), Doqna (Syzgium), Grar (Acacia) and other similar trees within the Woreda.

Different types of soils are found in various places of the Woreda. Most of the soils are deep with little rooks. Rooks are mainly concentrated in the river valleys and the steep slopes. The soil in the Woreda can be generally classified as gray (3%), dark (15%), reddish (22%) and the last which dominates the largest portion of the land is brown (60%).

### 4.1.6 Economic Activities

The majority of the population of the Woreda is living in the rural areas where people are engaged in subsistence agriculture. Thus, 92% of the rural population is practicing mixed agriculture while 3% of the total population is performing purely farming activities. Limited number of individuals are engaging as daily laborer (3.5%), handicrafts (1%) and in small trading activities (0.5%).
The average household land holding measures 1.4 hectare, of which 1.1 hectare is used for farming purpose and 0.3 hectare for grazing of animals. In relation to the draft-oxen holding size, about 19% of the household belong to the have-nots. Those who have only an ox account for 35% of the total rural population whereas two and three oxen-owners are estimated to be 38% and 5% respectively. Only 3% of the total rural population possess four and above oxen (Ibid).

Various types of crops and cereals, vegetables and fruits and of spices are produced in Libo Kemkem Woreda. For example, from crops and cereals teff, dagusa, wheat, barley, sorghum, pea, beans, chickpeas; from vegetables and fruits potato, tomato, banana, lemon, papaya; and from spices, garlic and red onions, coriander(dinbilal), bishops weed (nech azmud) and black cumin (tikur azmud), fenugreek(abish) are produced in this area.

4.1.7 Social Institutions

Social institutions play big role to preserve and maintain the continuity of generation. Schools, health centers, water, post service, transport, telecommunication can be mentioned examples of social institutions. Libo Kemkem Woreda has small number of social institutions compared to the total population size. Even though many of the population found in rural areas, they do not have much access to these institutions.

This Woreda consisted of 74 schools, of which 70 are primary schools (grade 1 to 8); 3 are high schools (grade 9 to 10) and 1 is preparatory school (grade 11 to 12). This Woreda also comprised of 57 health institutions, of which 8 are health stations; 8 are health clinics, and 41 are health extension centers.
Regarding roads accessibility, the major roads that extends from Addis Ababa-Bahir Dar to Gondar is passed through main city of Libo Kemkem Woreda, Addis Zemen. Almost ten kebeles of the Woreda are found adjacent to this main road, which is covered by asphalt. They can easily access market and other infrastructure facilities around their environs like Yifag town and Addis Zemen town. Other kebeles are connected through weather roads. Some of which are accessible to modern vehicles like car.

Major transport systems found in Libo Kemkem Woreda are vehicles, carts, mules, horses, donkeys. Donkeys are major means of transport for rural people. The construction of asphalt roads along the major road since ten years before helps the rural communities to familiarize themselves to modern vehicles. Remote rural kebele residents use non-vehicle transportation system. Since the topography of these areas is full of hills and mountainous, it takes three to five days to arrive main market centres on foot. The majority rural societies are living in difficult condition due to serious shortages of infrastructure facilities. Especially, the poor households like FHHs who do not have transport mechanisms like donkey suffer a lot. Thus, poor accessibility of social institutions enhances the vulnerability of the people to various kinds of social, health, economic problems.

4.2 Social Organizations

The household is integrated into the wider community through various networks of relationships. These networks of relationships may be divided into two categories, namely social and economic. Social relationships are grouped based on marriage, neighborhood, kinship, affinity and friendship, and religion. Economic relationships are those involving in the various indigenous institutions for exchanging
land, labor, and animal power (mainly oxen). Thus, marriage, family’s role in socialization of children, homesteads and settlement pattern and indigenous associations of Libo Kemkem Woreda discussed below.

4.2.1 Marriage

Marriage, the beginning of the household as a social and economic unit, occurs between two individuals. However, in Libo Kemkem Woreda, there is a proscription and prescription rules of marriages that are already determined by norms of the society. Rules of proscription implies to prohibited marriages whereas rules of prescription refers accepted marriages among individuals.

These rules would be expected to be respected and followed by people as if they were orders of parents. The first marriage prohibition occurs when individuals want to marry within their own group (endogamy). Sexual mating between individuals who are related up to the seventh degree of consanguinity is disapproved and considered as incestuous. The second marriage prohibition appears in relation to outcastes groups. The study society classified groups of individuals based on their occupation. This is traced from the tradition of the previous ancestors. This classification is adopted through time by the coming generation. Artisans such as potters, tanners etc are not allowed to marry farmers, traders and government employees because they are considered as outcastes, but they can marry each other. Thus, occupational status holds its own impact on marriage relation among the study society.

Moreover, persons who are victims of leprosy, elephantiasis, smallpox and the like have less chance to get partners from those who are not. Traditionally called slaves and evil-eyed persons are condemned and considered as inferior by other groups. As a result, people do not want to make marriage relation with them.
The study society prohibits the practice both levirate and sorority marriages. This meant that individuals are not allowed to marry their deceased brothers’ wives or sisters’ husbands. Regarding this practice, there is a saying that clearly states by the following statements:

*Warsa yewerese; dinber yaferese*

One who inherits brother-or sister-in-law; he/she is considered as violating a territory.

According to the above proverb, inheriting *warsa* (brother-or sister-in-law) is completely forbidden. Even it is unthinkable to inherit *warsas* in the tradition of the society. On the contrary, every family has a responsibility to take care of *warsas* and their children. *Warsas* can marry a husband outside of their consanguine family. However, this also depends on the will of *warsas* since few of them do not want to marry until the end of their life. This is an indicator of their trustworthiness. If individuals practice it, they will be condemned by their own society. According to the proverb, the action is considered as violating ones territory. This is because; land, as a social and wealth marker of the society, has big value among the society.

Informants point out that individual marriages will be accepted and legalized when they look ahead to marry outside of their group, delimiting marriage to carry out beyond the seventh degree of consanguinity (exogamous). Thus, identification of the background and occupational status of individuals are also second criteria to establish marriage relation with persons. Hence, marriage relation among the couples is started after rules of proscription and prescription are clearly distinguished.

In the study area, there are three categories of marriage formation. These are *bebeteseb* or *bezemed* (arranged marriages), *bebetechristian* (religious marriage) and *bemezegaja bet* (municipal marriage). The most frequent and known marriage
formation is through arranged marriage. In most instances, arranged marriage is started by the boys’ parents. It is arranged by the boys’ fathers and village elders (*shimagles or ginbar gelach*). Couples have equal legal status with respect to land and other properties. This is called *ye semaniya gabicha*. The couples especially the girls do not have any power to choose their partner for two reasons. First, it is the influence of society’s culture. Second, couples are mostly engaged at early ages.

### 4.2.2 Families Role in Socialization

In the study area, families play decisive role in shaping children’s behavior. A family includes a husband, wife and unmarried children. Sometimes the notion of family extends up to uncles, aunts, grand mothers, fathers, nephews and nieces. However, other relation, which is formed by marriage, is considered as enclosure.

The headship of a family is associated with males. The husband is the symbolic and social head of the household. He considers himself as protector of his wife and children. He assumes that, with the exception of female dominated activities, the fate of every household matter falls on him. He also considers himself as the prime responsible for the right kind of rearing of children. In his outlook, the wife is always expected to feed and give care to children.

In the study area, gender differentiation starts when a mother gives a child. Individuals reflect various attitudes towards male and female sex that arises from birth occasion and develop at the time of socialization of children. Male children have more value than female children. If the child is male, his father begins to boast by saying *yene mekuria*. Unlike his female children, he entertains his son by displaying various signs of love like embracing in the armpits and walking around the area. His father always wishes to his son to be clever, courageous and strong farmer. Although a mother does not create differentiation among her children, she wants her female
children to be in the home and to do domestic chores. Boys are considered to be available at home during lunch, dinner and sleeping time. According to Daniel, there is marked difference in the upbringing of male and female children. This is because:

Females are trained primarily to become mothers and transmitters to their children of the community’s cultural heritage; their contribution in this regard for which in many communities they may be highly esteemed, overshadows their performance as individuals. Men, on the other hand, are generally valued to their individual contributions to productive goals in the society and only secondarily for their role as fathers (1983:6).

This idea is also backed by the findings of Hirut (2000: 23) who states that “Boys are thought to be courageous, dominating, to show qualities of leadership, while girls are thought to be submissive, conservative, introspective, and shy, etc.”

According to the norm of the society, every child is expected to attain good conduct. Parents want their children to be polite (chewa). For this accomplishment, next to real families the roles of relatives, neighbors and village elders are considered to be crucial. To avoid conflicts that arise from deviations, every community has devised mechanisms such as moral precepts, customs, laws, religion, believes and rationalization, whose purpose are to integrate individuals into their social involvement. Individuals may be condemned by the society when they act beyond the norm of the society such as stealing, lying, cursing, harassing elders and children, stereotyping and other harmful traditional practices. For example, if an individual steals, then not only he but also his families and relatives may have bad names among the communities. This is considered as shameful. Thus, every family exerts much effort to make their children well-mannered.

Moreover, parents impose their own impacts on their children so as to imitate their responsibilities of the households. Children should learn and know the traditional division of labor. Although boys and girls share a lot of tasks in the households, boys do not perform girls’ tasks and vice versa. The reason is that, according to FAO as
cited by Daniel (1983:2), “All human groups and cultures create roles and expectations in order to facilitate relationships and understandings and to get standards of work participation. With the help of these role expectations it becomes easier for the individual to know not only how others in his environment behave in a given situation but also what others expect of him.”

Thus, both females and males in the study area are required to confirm to society’s role expectations and if they act contrary to these expectations, they risk disapproval.

In domestic arenas, female perform various tasks such as baking *injera*, grinding, fetching water, cooking *wat*, washing clothes, feeding and caring children, cleaning the houses and other domestic chores. Males, on the other hand, carry out works like milking cows and fencing the gardens. Both males and females participate in marketing, gathering firewood, and maintaining animals in the field. With regard to outside farm works, females participate in all types of agricultural field work except in ploughing. They take part in sowing, weeding, threshing, winnowing, collecting and transporting harvests and hoeing. Similarly, males carry out the above-mentioned farming activities including ploughing. However, females’ daily routine begin in the peasants’ home well before daybreak. They are always busy since they involve in domestic and farming works at least for about 18 hours. According to one of the key informants, “females may have rest during their lunch and dinner time.” Their children are also participating in domestic and agricultural works. They help their parents by fetching water, keeping animals, gathering firewood, weeding and collecting harvests.

In general, parental and family expectations of the female child are lower than the male child. The societal environment continues to encourage males to higher
aspirations. Custom makes greater demands on female than male child. Child upbringing practices negate against the personal development of the female child so that by the time the female child attains womanhood, her orientation towards her position in the society is more negative than positive.

4.2.3 Homesteads and Settlement Pattern

The pattern of settlement, that is, the spatial distribution of homesteads varies from nucleated villages to scattered homesteads. In some areas, there are quite small clusters of homesteads (2 to 4), in other areas there are scattered homesteads and still in others there are about 15 to 20 homesteads clustered together. Fences sometimes separate the homesteads and they form a single pattern of settlements called blocks. In general, nucleated settlements prevail in the study Woreda. Settlement patterns are mainly affected by the topography of the area. In homesteads where hills and mountains dominate, they are far apart from each other. This is due to its suitability of keeping farmlands.

In the study area, homesteads have symbolic significance, which are mostly associated with economic status of individuals. Even though homesteads serve the same basic functions such as for storing property, preparing food, living and sleeping for household members etc, they are not equal in size. The wealth status of individuals determines the sizes of homesteads.

Homesteads have circular walls with conical roofs shape. Inside the homestead there is a 4 to 6 meters long pole stretching from the center of the floor to the tip of the roof. These poles enable the homesteads to become strong. The smallest homestead has a diameter of 2 to 3 meters long while the largest one measures 4 to 5 meters. The homestead’s walls may measure from 2 to 4 meters long. Unlike the
outside part of the homestead wall, the inside wall is always plastered (*mirgit*) with mud. Regarding plastering of the wall, my informants point out:

> We are not accustomed to plastering the outside wall of the homesteads. As you see, no outside part of the homestead is plastered with mud. The reason is that high suffocation is created. This, in turn, creates conducive situation for the breeding of termites. Termites are used to feeding woods. As a result, they may ruin the homesteads. Moreover, most homesteads do not have piles of stone around them. This facilitates the ruining of homesteads shortly.

For light and ventilation, each homestead has single wooden door, which is attached to a vertical wooden first beam. The doors are mostly made of woods in the form of lumber. Besides the door, some homesteads have 25 by 25 centimeters circular holes at their junction. The holes are important in order to let the smokes of the woven out of the homesteads. However, some homesteads do not have holes since they believe that smokes make the homesteads strong.

Homesteads, as the researcher have mentioned before, are not equal in size. Larger homesteads might have sections for eating, sleeping and entertaining guests; one for animals and one for kitchens. The smaller homesteads combines the above all services together. For sitting and sleeping purpose, unmovable earth bench built into the wall extends around the wall. Other household furniture and fixtures include bed; chairs made of wood are available in certain homesteads. A minimal assortment of cooking utensils such as a teaspoon, pot, and plastic jug for fetching water, plastic materials and storing materials are also found in the homesteads. Homesteads have also different sizes of crop and flour storing. Storing is made of mud with straw and is made by women. Few homesteads have shelves, which are important for putting household furniture. Others put household furniture either on the floor or attach to the wall through nail or nailed like wood with strings.
Members of kin groups construct huts. Individuals bring building materials from the nearby forest. They prepare the materials before they start to build the hut. Men and women participate during house construction but they involve in various division of labor. Men take part mainly on digging the holes, implanting the poles, knotting the woods, covering the layer part of the homestead with grasses and plastering the wall with mud. Women also involve in fetching water.

4.2.4 Traditional Associations and Role of Elders

In Libo Kemkem Woreda, people at the grass root level participate in various indigenous associations so as to tackle economic as well as social problems. Some of the indigenous associations, which are discussed in detail below, are iqqub, wonfel, debo, iddir/jemiya, senbetie and mahiber.

One of these indigenous associations aimed at fulfilling economic interests of the study society is iqqub. Iqqub is a traditional self-help economic association found both in rural and urban areas of the study area. The study communities are used iqqubs in order to fulfill their money needs. Of course, there are credit lender associations in the study area like Safety Nets, Amhara Credit and Saving Associations (ACSI), Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives (RSCC). However, the interest rate and procedures of the credit institutions are some of the constraints for individuals to obtain loan. Thus, individuals are compelled to use iqqubs as source of obtaining the sum total money. The sum total money gained from iqqubs is used by FHHs as starting up business. They involve in small-scale trading activities in their residential areas and nearby market centers. Some are used to buy agricultural inputs like fertilizer, seeds.
There is another indigenous association, which is important for reducing economic burden of the study society. This is called *wonfel*. *Wonfel* is an agreement whereby two or more individuals work together on each other’s plots for an equal amount of time. Besides economizing labor, *wonfel* increases social networks among the study communities by ways of sharing a morale consensus. *Wonfel* agreements in the study area are usually concluded among individuals with close relationships such as neighbors, age mates etc. In the study area, small size households give more value to *wonfel*. The size of households may usually reach up to four. Newly married couples team themselves in *wonfel* and enjoy each other’s company. Most FHHs in the study area have small household compositions but they are less beneficiaries of *wonfel* because of two reasons. The first reason is that most FHHs have household members who are too young to involve in farm works. The second reason is that they have no enough farmlands for utilizing such social networks. Thus, *wonfel* gives importance for those who have enough resources in terms of land and labor.

The study informants point out that *debo* is also a system of mutual assistance found in the study area. Individuals who have short of labor, oxen or both use such mutual association. Especially, *debo* is important during agricultural season. Individuals mostly call on friends and relatives for help. It is a common practice that a household which calls others for a *debo* party has to invite them for food and drinks in return for the assistance it received. The amount of food and drinks is differed from one *debo* to another. It is relied on the size of the *debo* participants. People mostly prepare *injera* with *wat*, *nifro*, *tella* and *araki*. Women prepare such foods and drinks. But, all individuals are not users of *debo* since it incurs a lot of money for preparation of food. Especially, this is true in case of most FHHs who lack human labor, capital.
and oxen. Some FHHs, who are at old ages and have got shortage of labor, obtain debo services from volunteer residents.

_Iddir or Jemiya_ in the study area is an indigenous association based on religion. _Iddir_ is for Christians (followers of Ethiopian Orthodox faith) while _jemiya_ is for Muslims. _Iddirs_ are formed by household heads that represent household members during meetings and some other functions. The main function of _iddir_ or _jemiya_ is to help members during bereavement. In addition to the financial assistance and help in service and facilities, the members give morale support. The second function is to establish and maintain good neighborhood relations among the members. Members are encouraged to pay visits to each other, not only during times of happiness but also when a member is sick. This indigenous institution like _iqqub_ is run by elected officers who included at least a chairperson, secretary and a treasurer. Meetings are held monthly or by-weekly and all members are supposed to attend. Non-attendees are fired if the absence is not for emergency reasons. Each member pays a fixed amount of entrance fee which varies from one _iddir_ or _jemiya_ to another. After joining the association, each member contributes a fixed amount of money every month or week to the common fund. Moreover, members have to contribute injera with _wat_ at the moment of death of members or their relatives. FHHs, according to female informants, are particularly most beneficiaries of _iddir_ or _jemiyas_ since it is one of the sources of increasing their social relationships. But, they mentioned its cost as high

_Senbetie_ and _Mahiber_ are also traditional associations found in the study area at which every follower of Orthodox Christian is expected to join in order to get spiritual satisfaction. _Senbetie_ is celebrated around the church in every Sunday whereas _mahiber_ is celebrated in a year, which is differed from one to another based
on the existence and name of Ark of the Tabernacle. Members of *mahiber* and attendants of *senbetie* do not work during the celebration day. If they work, they will be condemned by priests or deacons. Members have to prepare feasts, which includes *injera* with *wat*, bread, *araki* and *tella*. Few FHHs involve in this traditional association since the expense for preparation of feasts is beyond their financial capacity.

Village elders (*shimagles*) and priests or sheikhs play the main role for the continuity of the above practices of the society in the study area. Village elders are usually, although perhaps not always, elderly people. They do not hold permanent office and there is no such thing as a council of elders and they are groups formed for a short time to consider a particular matter. Their role derives from the way they are valued by the society for three reasons. First, elderly people are respected because of their old age. By virtue of their age, people react towards elders with respect or reverse. Second, elders are believed to be wise from their rich experience in life and, thus, their opinions are highly valued and respected. Third, elders are thought to be relatively impartial, fair and honest. Because they are near death, they regret for their past sins and try not to commit sins by being partial, unfair and dishonest.

Traditionally and at the present, village elders in the study area play central role in maintaining good relationships between people by reconciling families and individuals who have quarrels or who hold grudges against each other over various facets of life. They reconcile problems involving damage to property, marriage disputes, insults, repayment of debts and physical injury. They may reconcile matters before or after they are brought to a court of law or to the social courts. Village elders also play important roles as witnesses at the making of marriage contracts and wills.
4.2.5 Religious Institutions and Functionaries

Religious institutions play a big role in promoting peaceful co-existence of people. There are two major religions in Libo Kemkem Woreda: Christianity and Islam. There are also pagans.

- **Christianity**

The religious belief of most people is Monophysite—that is, Tewahedo (Orthodox) Christianity. Christian people wear a blue neck cord (*meteb*), to distinguish themselves from Muslims. In rural regions, the rules of the church have the *de facto* force of law, and many people are consecrated to church functions: priests, boy deacons and church students, chorister-scribes, monks, and nuns.

Ceremonies often mark the annual cycle for the public, despite the sacerdotal emphasis of the religion. The calendar of Abyssinia is Julian, but the year begins on 11 September, following ancient Egyptian usage, and is called *amete mehrāt* (year of grace). Thus, the Abyssinian year 1948 A.M. corresponds roughly with the Gregorian (Western) A.D. 1956. The new year begins with the month of *Meskerem* (September), which follows the rainy season. On the seventeenth day, huge poles are stacked up for the bonfire in the evening, with much public parading, dancing, and feasting. By contrast, Christmas (*Ledet*) has little social significance except for the *genna* game of the young men. Far more important is Epiphany (*Temqet*), on the eleventh day of *Ter* (January). Ceremonial parades escort the priests who carry the *tabot*, symbolic of the Holy Ark, on their heads, to a water pool. There are all-night services, public feasting, and prayers for plentiful rains.

This is the end of the Christmas (*genna*) season and the beginning of the tournaments fought on horseback by the young men. The long Lenten season is approaching, and clergy as well as the public look forward to the feasting at Easter...
(Fassika), on the seventeenth day of Miyazya (April). Children receive new clothes and collect gifts, chanting house to house. Even the voluntary fraternal association mahaber is said to have originated from the practice of private communion. Members take turns as hosts at monthly meetings, drinking barley beer together with the confessor-priest, who intones prayers. Members are expected to act as a mutual aid society, raising regular contributions, extending loans, even paying for the tazkar (formal memorial service) forty days after a member's death, if his family cannot afford it.

➢ Islam

Islam was introduced to Ethiopia in 615 A.D. when the followers of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), including his wife sought refuge in Aksum. The king of Aksum welcomed them, respected their religion and offered them protection. They later settled in Negash, east of Tigray, which has become one of the most important places for the Islamic faith in Ethiopia. Islam became widespread in Ethiopia without violation, due to its first expansion in this area.

Regarding Libo Kemkem Muslim communities, almost all Muslims reside in urban areas. Muslims were denied ownership of land during the Imperial regime (1936-74). They were not treated equally as of Christians. Most of them have been engaged in trade activities, which were located mainly in the urban centers. That is why almost few Muslims found in the rural places.

Muslims communities have three major religious holidays that they celebrate such as Ed-ul-fatir (remadan), Ed-al adha (arefa) and Maulid (Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) birth day). Celebrations of these holidays are almost similar to other Muslims of the world. However, there are some exceptions in celebrating of Maulid. It depends on place to place. In the local area, it is celebrated in mass. People play religious
music called *menzuma*. All religious songs tell about the history of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

- **Other Religions**

  Other smaller denominations include some traditional animist religions that exist mostly in the southern foothills. In Libo Kemkem Woreda, we can say that there is no pagan but there are people who believe in traditional cults besides their main religion.

  To sum up, religion in the local people has big spaces. People are good in following their respective religion. Religion is not source of conflict in the area. Religious persons are much respected and are considered as symbol of problem solvers.

**4.2.6 Recent Changes**

Changes occur due to different factors. Political, economic, climatic, and environment factors affect the day-to-day activities of human beings and this, in turn, brings culture changes. Especially, rural people who live nearby towns are easily exposed to various changes since there is much interaction, exchange, and sharing of ideas among each other. Nowadays, household furniture, style of dressing and hairing, way of speaking and the like, for example, are changing through time. Therefore, changes are reflections of human life and may govern the interests and preferences of the society, though not usually.

Marriage relation of the society is one of the changes happening in the community. The study informants during FGD explain:

Early marriage has been a common practice in Libo Kemkem Woreda particularly in rural areas for many years. Commonly, girls get married below 15 and boys between 10 to 25 years. But, this has disadvantages for two reasons. First, our female children are mostly exposed to physiological problems during delivery; as
a result, they die. Moreover, females at these ages are not able to carry out parental responsibilities. This enhances divorce. Second, we lose our assets due to the preparation of big feasts during marriage. Government bodies have tried to intervene many times to reduce marriage at early age and costly feasts. They have tried to create awareness about the demerits of marriage at early age. However, our society is being challenged to discontinue this tradition not only for government intervention but also the scarcity of resources. We obtain small amount of production yearly due to the failure of rain and infertility of the soil. Thus, we reduce to marry our children at early ages because of the unbearable expenses of marriage.

Informants also point out that one of the traditions of the society is exchange of gifts during marriage formation. The prospective has to give a dowry to the would-be-wife at the time of marriage negotiation. The amount of dowry paid to the would-be wife was 5 to 6 Birr. It has now increased from 150 to 300 Birr. However, couples are given small amount of bride wealth from their parents. This is because of shortages of resources. This, in turn, has an impact on social relations of the couple’s parents and the communities at large. The study society has a tradition of inviting each other after they have interrelated through marriage. But, impoverishment has become a constraint for their social relation. People have been stopping to prepare feasts and invitation.

Changes have also occurred in buildings. Most homesteads in rural part of the Woreda are made of woods and grass. The layer parts of homesteads are covered by grasses although it is gradually reduced due to two reasons. One is that vegetation cover of the Woreda has decreased through time. People cut trees and bushes for farming purposes. As a result, people get short of grass for coverage of homesteads. Moreover, people are tired of changing grass converge homesteads in every year since it is easily exposed by high temperature and rain. This also asked high expenses. The second reason is somewhat the outcome of the first factor. People are nowadays used to change grass coverage homesteads to corrugated iron sheets. This is for its long use.
and a sign of wealth status. Thus, many corrugated iron sheet homesteads are now found in rural areas of the Woreda.

The constitution allows freedom of religion; however, religious conflicts nowadays happen due to government intervention in religious matters in the name of terrorists. People believe that government is so sensitive to intervene in religious matters in order to maintain his rule over the people. Since most of the government bodies recruited from one minor ethnic group, government does not want to see unity of people and follows almost similar to direct rule. There are also some changes in religious practices in major religions. Especially, changes are visible in Ethiopian Muslims. This is due to Muslims were denied to know and practice their religion freely for several decades. Due to expansion of religious institutions and mass media in the country has brought much awareness and make the Muslims very conscious about their religion. Societal changes and global influences increase tension among the people. However, the government uses this propaganda to oppress the people and extend his rule.

One of the basic household furniture is oven. In traditional rural and urban areas, three movable stones or clay stones mostly form an oven. Due to the effort of the WARDO, particularly the Home Economics Extension Department and the non-governmental organization of Winrock Ethiopia\textsuperscript{14}, women are able to make and use of closed ovens. Closed ovens are important for reducing time and firewood consumption. In addition to the ovens, women build shelves from mud. They use it

\textsuperscript{14} Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources. Winrock Ethiopia worked at Libo Kemkem Woreda from 2000 to 2005. It was mainly engaged in food security of the communities. Women particularly FHHs were target groups of the organization.
for keeping dishes and other utensils. Relative to the total rural population, however, several women are ignorant of making it.

On the whole, in the study area, the household is integrated into the wider community through various networks of relationships, which have social and economic aspects. Social relationships are based on neighborhood, kinship, affinity etc whereas economic relationships are related to indigenous associations such as debo, wonfel, iqqub, mahiber, iddir etc. In these social ceremonies, men as well as women are keen participants. However, roles are identified as men and women. Women are mostly involved in domestic related works while men are more active in decision-makings. Men dominate women in patriarchal social organizations of the society.