

THE SOMALI CRISIS AND THE ROLE OF ORGANIC POETRY:

A BRIEF REFLECTION

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" O God, for a mistake through  
misunderstanding made, punish  
us not; but for injustice  
deliberately committed, leave us  
not unpunished."  
( A Somali proverb )

And certainly "to err is human" could be added to it. Never-the-  
less, to call a spade, a spade is always advisable.

Hence, any poetry that seeks to provide set answers to social  
problems inevitably lapses into sloganeering.

Not universal by approach, artistic immaturity; poverty of  
imagery; absence of crystalized consciousness and narrow-  
mindedness characterize it. While in direct opposition to it and  
in full accord with the universal principles of art, organic  
poetry is marked by objectivity , truthful but imaginative  
reflection of reality and profound creativity.

But apparently more than declarative statements is called for.  
Thus, and for the sake of further elaboration, from Ousmane  
Sembene's illustrative literary expressions the following has  
been relevantly drawn. An accomplished writer and a cinema-  
director, highly talented, that great son of Senegal had  
elucidated on this topic of our discussion conclusively when he

justaposed the relation between man and mirror with that of art and reality.

From there, driving his point of view home, he carried on and defined the art creator's role to the maximum. In a nutshell, "The artist," he maintained, "can neither invent anything (worthwhile; out of the blue), nor receive anything (substantial, ready-made).... He must know and critically observe his society. He have to be within and without at the sametime. Within so as to feel the heart-beat and without so as to create the image that the society gives him. And its from there that he takes his position. But since the artist alone can not change the society, his role stops there. However, he can help and effectively contribute to the crystallization of new consciousness as the reviewer (reader or listener) reflects upon the piece of art seen (read or listened)..."

And how aptly this quotation is applicable to Somali intellectuals in general and literary creators in particular needs no emphasis of mine. The readiness to draw the right conclusions from it is only called for.

Hence, and from a vantage point, closer at home, the following poetic proverb comes:

"KA DARTAYE MA DIBI BAA

WAXAY DIHATAY EEGGANA?!"

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"Oh! Has the damned cow

Once again an ox calved?!"

Classical by mantle and 'D' alliterated by letter, the proverb is pregnant with implicit connotations.

The story on which it is based has it, long time ago, a traditional Somali herder had a cow of highly priced breed. Proud of its ownership, from on set, he had no doubt at all that, within the shortest time possible, his stock was, through its admirable calfs, bound to multiply. Actually his confidence in her knew no limits. Many a time it fanned his imagination into flames. His gleamy eyes trained on his beloved cow, he will start licking the clouds with his tongue and mentally picture himself - already a blessed owner of a prestigious 'KADIN' - one hundred heads strong.

But since for the men of his age daydreaming was unbecoming, and rather down-to-earth realism was theirs' by custom, his wishful thinking usually ended with the following prayer-like note:

"God willing it will be so

And to hell the devil will go! Amen"

But to his disappointment fate willed otherwise. The cow though not barren, had tauntingly failed to add a single calf to the herd.

Hence the owner, lamenting over his great expectations that never materialized, had to baptize the last male off-spring that arrived fresh from her womb, with the proverb quoted above.

From that moment and since then, whenever the outcome contradicts the one called for,

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KADIN: One hundred, in Somali

Somalis - minus those unfortunate children-of-the-two-worlds whose cultural growth has been stunted by alienation - are apt to utter it in their disillusionment.

And even the sageous guru of contemporary Somali poetry M.I. Warsame (Hdrawi) had adopted this very proverb, for the concluding section of the poem "DALLAALIMO" - The Shady Sky.

By A.D. Guled's scansion rules of Somali poetry a JIIFTO, the poem is alliterated in 'D', the sixth letter of the Somali alphabet. Broad humanistic outlook, living imagery and artistic harmony are of its basic characteristics.

Remarkably rooted in the social setting out of which it arose, never-the-less, it transcends it and so amazingly anticipates the imminent future.

But as another Somali proverb says: "A party present, needs no spokesman". Thus its up to the reader to judge for himself the telepathetic foresight and the prescient warning with which DALLAALLIMO's last stanza paints the face of the dawn, unborn:

"KA DARYOO SACEENII  
DIBI BAABU DHALI JIRAY  
DOORARKII HOREETEE  
DAALAA DHACIISIYO  
DACAYDA IYO CAASHIYO  
DAAMANKAAN U JEEDAA  
DACAR IYO DHUNKAAL BAY  
LA DUNUUNUCAYSAA!  
DA'DAN WAXAAN KA BAQAYAA  
INUU DABA-KA-RUUBIYO

DABAR-GOOYE FOOSHEE  
DOOBIR II DHEH YAASIIN!"

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" That odd cow of ours, you know  
If in the past and the days gone by  
An ox was the worst it could bring forth;  
The tread unsteady like drunkards'  
The bleack features, swollen with chaos  
And all these ill-omens do tell me  
That none but bitterness this time  
And deadly poison, it is simmering with!  
Of course dismayed and afraid I am  
A calamity of scale, untold before  
And a tragedy nameless, by her to be calved!  
So call out Yasin, "God save you" to her  
Again and again on my behalf!"

(Excerpt - Hadrawi).

And certainly between now and the late 1982, when DALLAALLIMO saw the light of the day, a lot of blood has gone under the bridge of time. Yet the living, organic unity between this life-size, poetic reflection that was blazed on the literary canvas eleven years ago, and the crisis ridden social reality of today is getting stronger as the wheel of history turns onward. But whence, one might ask, comes this prophetic vision? Luckily, for the answer, 'We don't have to go far', as a Somali idiom says.

In "WAXYI" - Revelation, a poem of an exceptional artistic merit, Hadrawi provides us an answer so enlightening.

Dr. Moh'd Saleh Hassan, a Somali historian, has once, in the poet's presence, wondered over the unique therapeutic quality of Hadrawi's poetry. In response to that comment, thus the following lyrical stanza of "WAXYI", had this to say: .

"WAAYAHAY DOKTOORKOW  
HADDAY WEEDHU MUUNIYO  
WALANQIYO DUX LEEDAHAY  
AMBA SOW WALAALOW  
WADAR KALE MA KAASHADO!  
SOW WONGA JIIFTADA  
DADKA WAAYAHQODIYO  
WAJIGOODA KAMA QORO?!"

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"Yes Dr. but if at all, as you say  
A delicious food, enriching the spirit  
literary works happen to be, (you better then)  
brother of mine, be informed that  
Others do constantly extend  
unto me a moral support acknowledged,  
And I too, sparing no effort  
do create my verses from  
The spider webs on the peoples' faces  
painfully scratched by the worrisome times"

(Excerpt - Hadrawi).

However, the ability to feel the heart beat of the society and discern with marked sensitivity the seed of the future germinating in the lower depths of the present is by no means an easy task. Besides talent, moral integrity, sense of fairness deeply ingrained and wholesome personality are of its major requisites.

And finally to highlight the difference and demarcate the boundary separating the essential from mediocre poetry, I would like to conclude with the following definitive stanza from Hadrawi's philosophical epic "SIRTA NOLOSHA" - The secret of life:

HEEDHE SAHRAAY HEEDHE  
SUUGAANTU IIB MAAHA  
HUGUN IYO SITAAD MAAHA  
SIDDI IYO I DAYA MAAHA  
SALLID UGU DUCEE MAAHA  
KU CALEEMA SAAR MAAHA  
SULLAN REER KU CAY MAAHA  
SADHO IYO XAJIIN MAAHA  
LABA SAAQ KU GADO MAAHA

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Mark my words Sahra  
Divine art is never for sale  
Fluffy plumes adorned by  
Phony peacocks it is not  
With it neither the devil is praised  
nor the pariah is crowned  
a degenerate means to dishonor

and taunt clans, it is not  
And never like a merchandise  
for any price it is to be sold.

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