

## CHAINS OF POETIC DEBATES

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### Introduction:

In this paper, we intend to examine the contemporary chains of poetic debates -- "silsiladaha suugaanta: Siinley iyo Deelley". Particular attention will be given to the characteristics of these chains and their place in contemporary Somali oral literature.

Also attempts will be made to show how these two chains became instrumental in exalting the social status of the short-metre genre of poetry, known as "jiifto" into a rank as high as the long-metre genre: the classics.

### The functions of poetry:

For many centuries, the Somali people remained an oral society. Despite the fact that the language was written nearly two decades ago, inherently, they still remain an oral society. This explains why oratory and rhetoric play a very significant role in Somali pastoral life. This rhetoric takes as much in the form of verse as it does in prose. So much so that European explorers were quick to observe that "the country teems with poets... Every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines... Every chief in the country must have a panegyric to be sung by his clan, and the great patronize high literature by keeping a poet..."<sup>1</sup>

## Chain (2)

The Somali Man uses poetry to express his deep feelings and to state his case before his countrymen in a fashion not less tenacious than an experienced lawyer would do in an open court. The case may be to praise kinsmen or to plead with friends for mercy and favours; it may be one to complain of neighbours or to curse foes for wrongdoings; it may be one of preaching good or evil to his audience. It may be one of engaging in diatribe with enemies or dialogue with clansmen. In all cases, "with negligible exceptions, the Somali verse is an 'oral' art and is part of a significant body of unwritten literature...<sup>2</sup> The language of Somali verse shows a strong prejudice towards beauty..."<sup>3</sup>

### The characteristics:

A chain of a poetic debate is a dialogue conducted in verse. They are very common in Somali oral literature, though very few are remembered. In the traditions of poetry, a serious poem hardly passes unanswered. If it does, it often means an approval of its contents and form, or else the addressee is stolen for time to hit hard or is taking the addresser just lightly. For poetic discourses to be considered as a chain, it must have the following six properties -- three essential and three non-essential characteristics:

#### Essential properties:

1. The poets must be minimum two, since "it needs two to make a quarrel" as the English proverb goes.
2. The poems must be many: technically they have to be three or more, for two poems would fall far shorter than to qualify for a chain.
3. They must have a thematic relationship and refer to one another.

## Chain (3)

### Non-essential properties:

4. The poems are better be of the same alliteration (qaafiyad).
5. Also they are better be of the same scansion (miisaan).
6. They are better composed in relatively the same period (for stretching the time-space is likely to change the situation and the settings that prevailed and provoked the first poem; and this is bound to weaken the crucial link of the debates of the chain).

### The famous chains:

Because of the controversy surrounding it, a chain of poetic debate is often better remembered for decades to come than a single poem or a duel. This explains why the poetic diatribes and tirades of Halac-dheere<sup>4</sup> and Guba<sup>5</sup> seem still fresh in the memory of the Somalis and are quoted very frequently.

1. Halac-dheere chain: was first started by Ali Sherma'arke in Hobyo at the beginning of the century. The debate went on for a decade or so with eight other poets taking part in it. It consists of 14 poems of the same scansion -- the long-metre genre -- in five different alliterations: h,m,q,w and vowels. Thus it satisfies all the three basic characteristics plus number five of the three non-essential particulars and, to a lesser degree, number six. Its time-space is estimated at ten years.

The Halac-dheere Chain involved two brotherly clans: Harti and Ogadeen with the ethics of hospitality as the centre of the poetic debate; the diatribes left behind not deep cuts but a universal social tease of greediness for the clan of Halac-dheere: Hussein Ashur Ali.

## Chain (4)

2. Guba Chain: was started by poet Ali-dhuux whose poetry went into the annals of Somali history as number one example of deadly provocations and inflammations throughout his life. He began the Chain in Walwal (Dollo: Ogadenia) sometime 1920s. In the 25-30 years to follow, Guba Chain was denied of retirement, and no less than eleven other poets had their turns. Altogether, there are 20 poems of the same scansion but in more than five different alliterations: c, d, dh, h, g... This chain, too, satisfies all those points met by Halac-dheere Chain, except that Guba's time-space is much longer. However, this stretch of time-space did little to curb the quality of this Chain, mainly because it approaches its subject matter vertically not horizontally; true, the poets belong to two generations and consequently the developments of the issues were to be taken into full account.

Unfortunately, with a measure of success, Guba Chain provoked wars among the major clans: Burao-Hargeisa vis-a-vis Ogadenia first, and then Burao vis-a-vis Lasanod-Ood. The cost of these inter-clan wars remains incalculable.

## Chain (5)

So far, we have had a brief look at the role of poetry in Somali pastoral life; We have also discussed the properties of the chains of poetic debates. Now let us examine how the two short-metre genres of poetic chains, known as "Siinley" and "Deelley" successfully became instrumental in exalting the social status of the short-metre genre of poetry into a rank as high as the long-metre genre: the classics.

But before doing so, it is important to show the distinction between the long-metre and short-metre genres: the former requires two alliterative words in each line -- or one alliterative word in each hemstitch -- whereas the latter requires only one alliterative word per line.

1. SIINLEY: This short-metre poetic chain was started by M.I. Hadraawi in Mogadishu in 1972; in little less than a year, 20 other poets from the intelligensia of Somalis everywhere quickly sent their responses to Hadraawi -- all in the same alliteration and scansion. He himself had to take three more turns in the the 33-poem chain.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its subtle metaphor, the chain was understood to be dealing with the controversial question of unifying the entire Somali people into one single nation. Particularly, the heated debate centred at the sensitive question as to whether or not Jibouti -- then a French Colony -- would join the Unitary Republic of Somalia, after independence. Since public politics were banned by the nascent Military regime, the intelligensia expressed their political views in a beautiful but very difficult euphemism and metaphors.

Chain (6)

2. DEELLEY: This short-metre poetic chain was commenced by Mohamed Hashi "Gaarriye" in Mogadishu on 10.12.1979, with the tacit approval of the Party and Government. Less metaphoric than Siinley, Deelley dealt mainly with the chronic disease of tribalism, categorized as No.1 enemy of the Somali people. The objective of the Chain was to counter another more damaging poetic Chain known as Hurgumo. But the controversy of Deelley centred at the role which the Government Administration had played in the revival of tribalism and corruption both increasingly prevailing in all fields of public sector.

About 48 other poets<sup>7</sup> responded in the same scansion and alliteration. With Gaarriye taking a second turn, the intense heat of the poetic debate soon flooded all over Somalia, Jibouti and the Arabian Gulf; and the Chain exceeded 67 poems within six months. This sudden outburst was to stop only after the Government had withdrawn her approval and endorsement from the poetic campaign against tribalism. From a distant look, the Chain "Deelley" was classified -- albeit wrongly -- as an anti-government poetic diatribe. However, at a close look, we would see that this wasn't so, for all poets agreed that tribalism was an evil and the number one enemy of the Somali people's unity and prosperity. True, many disagreed about the cause of its revival and the course of its remedy.

## Chain (7)

### Exalting the status:

The short-metre genre, known as jiifto is no new in Somali oral literature. It used to be respected, but not as high as the long-metre genre: the classics. Perhaps, the Siinley Chain was the first to discuss issues as nation-wide as the politics of national development and Somali reunification in this short-metre genre. The young generation of poets pioneered to opt for the simple short-metre genre in place of the complex long-metre genre. They discussed their subject matters in the jiifto and successfully earned the high respect of their society. This class of poets include such well-known personalities as Hadraawi, Hudeydi, Yamyam, Qays, Gaarriye and Saïd Salah. So by the time Deelley began in 1979, this genre was exalted up in the ranks of Somali oral poetry. And as a result, both the genre and the poets secured a high social standing place in the echelon of Somali poetry.<sup>8</sup>

### Siinley & Deelley:

These two short-metre poetic chains have some common characteristics. Putting the fact that the Deelley has twice as many poems and poets as the Siinley aside, they share the following similarities:-

1. Both chains share one common scansion;
2. Each chain has one single alliteration: they are alliterative in "S" and "D" as is apparent from their names;
3. Each chain deals with one single theme;
4. Each chain had taken a short time from the start to the finish;
5. In both cases, the poets represent the Somali intelligensia: indeed, seven poets<sup>8</sup> participated in both chains

Chain (8)

6. Both chains were composed at moments historic to the makings of the Somali nation;
7. In each case, there is a unity of views on the substance of the issue under discussion;
8. Both chains comment on certain aspects of government policies and social norms; and
9. Both chains served as crucial tests to the Revolutionary practices: Sinley was a test to the political tolerance of the nascent military regime, while Deelley was a test to the democratic rule envisaged in the newly adopted socialist constitution.

The conclusion: No matter what similarities or dissimilarities these two chains of short-metre poetic debates have, they went into the annals of Somali oral and written literature as pioneers to an urban revolution by the intelligensia to bring jiifto in the equal footings with gabay.

end



## Chains of poetic debates

### Notes:

1. Richard Burton, First Footsteps in East Africa, Vol.I. pp. 81-82, Tylston and Edward, London, 1894.
2. Said S. Samater, Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism -- the case of Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, Cambridge University Press 1982, p.56
3. Ibid., p.60.
4. Qaman, Ali-dhuux, Goonni, Sayid Mohamed, Elmi Arab, Mohamud Qaman, Farah Aitame and Yussuf-Dheere.
5. Qaman, Mohamed Fiin, Ali-dhuux, Bullale Ali, Ismail Egal, Ismail Mire, Salaan--Arabey, Khalif Aw Ahmed, Hussein Dhiqle, Mohamed Omer Dage, Aden Roor, etc.
6. Ibrahim Awed "Kholi", SIINLEY (unpublished Manuscript written in 1983) Participants: Hadraawi, Qays, Said Salah, Garriye, Hudeedi, Afqalloo, Ali S. Bidde, Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, Hassan Elmi Dirie, Muse Hassan Yassin, Mohamed O.Said Weydaar, Yussuf Jama Muse, Ibraahim Sh.Saleman "Gadhle", Ali Ibrahim Iile, Farah A. Askari, Jama A. Shurie, Mohamed A. Rirash, Abdirahman Hassan "Raas", Said Shire Ahmed, Abdiweli Sh. Bihi and Asha Jama Dirie "Af-bahalle".
7. I. A. "Kholi" and A.F. "Idaja", DEELLEY, (unpublished manuscript, finished in 1989): see Annex i and ii.
8. Admittedly, the success of the short-metre genre is partly attributable to the development of the Somali music in the broadcasting services and at the Theatres as well. The genre was first used in the Radios and at the theatres gradually. Then the Chains -- SIINLEY and DEELLEY -- greatly helped the genre to reach this climax of success.

SHAXDA TAXANAHA SILSILADDA DEELLEY

CURIYAHA	TIRO	M A A N S A D A	SADAR	BOGGA
1.M. Gaarriye	1	Dugsi ma leh qabyaaladi	122	_____
2.M. Hadraawi	1	Daalacan	206	_____
3.Axmed"Idaa'jaa"	1	Daahyada acoon-xumo	182	_____
4.Gaarriye	2	Colka wadhaf ma lagu deyey?	114	_____
5.C.X.S. Yamyam	*	Duqdii reerka lama dilin	172	_____
6.Cabdullaah"Taano"	1	Weynoo bil dabadeed	126	_____
7.Yuusuf Aadan	1	Dood qaran	190	_____
8.Axmed"Idaa'jaa"	2	Miyaa lays dhex degi laa?	220	_____
9.Cabdi-dhuux	*	Waan ognahay dembiilaha	123	_____
10.Yaasiin A.X.Nuur	1	Muruq baa dagaal gala	165	_____
11.Jaamac Daad	*	Dabayl caafimaad	131	_____
12.M.N.Shareeco	1	Wax la duugey waa hore	196	_____
13.M.C.Singub	*	Ha gabbado dembiiluhu	164	_____
14.Siyaad Daauud	1	Ha ku dagan sabaalaha	271	_____
15.Faarax A"Gammute"	*	Ninba garashadiis dood	135	_____
16.Xasan C.Ganey	*	Ka daryaye ma dibi baa?	184	_____
17.Cumar C.C. "Fakad"	1	Dura	168	_____
18.Cabdi Cali Weyd	*	Dacawaa cir ku onkoday	146	_____
19.I.X. "Farxaan"	1	Dadweynuhu is-weydii	240	_____
20.M.C. Falaxfalax	1	Deelleey ma galanjaa?	181	_____
21.M.N. Shareeco	2	Dacwadaada miisaan	277	_____
22.Maxamed Aadan Dacar	*	Dadna barasho uma hadhin	158	_____
23.X.Sh. Kaddare	1	Dareen guud	238	_____
24. Aadan Tarabbi	1	Dirira	113	_____
25. I.X. Farxaan	1	Dildila gurur	316	_____
26. Cismaan Askari	*	Ninka diidey waa kuma?	227	_____
27. Cabdi Iidaan	1	Awrka"dool" ma lagu yidhi?	261	_____
28. Yuusuf Aadan	2	Dul-jalaali wal-ikraam	396	_____
29. Cali Sugulle	*	Maxaa daran? Maxaa dan ah?	510	_____
30. Aadan Tarabbi	2	Ii daa dix-dhagaxeed	142	_____
31. Maxamuud Sh.Siciid	*	Taariikhdu dung ma leh	182	_____
32. Cali Sh. Jaamac	1	Dur iyo deleb	137	_____
33. M.C.Falaxfalax	2	Dawaar raadis baan ahay	317	_____
34. Sugaal Abdulle	*	Dariiq waliba aragtidi	230	_____

SHAXDA TAXANAHA SIIICILADDA DEELLEY

CURIYAHA	TIRO	M A A N S A D A	SADAR BOGGA
35. Axmed Daahir	*	Sama-diide dabin dhawr	365
36. Maxamed Cartan	*	Dubbahaygu kugu maqan	260
37.M.M.Y.Dheeg	*	Dunida sow rag baa nool	312
38.Xuseen Sh.Kaddare	2	Deelleyna ii xiran	341
39.Maxamed C. Filsan	*	Nin dabbaasha qusoow	207
40.Yaasiin A.X.Nuur	2	Dayaxle	230
41.Xirsi Cabdi C.Kolon	*	Daaliban	355
42.Axmed Garow	*	Deyran iyo abaabilan	677
43.Ciise Muuse Shirwac	*	Deexashada xaqiiqada	285
44.Cali Cilmi Afayare	1	Doogta haw dhiman	231
45.Saado Cali Warsame	1	Kaa qaad dadweynuhu	202
46.Muuse Cali Faruur	*	Deelleey markhaati leh	338
47.Maxamuud M. Fidhin	*	Danni iyo ogaal	244
48.Cabdi Iidaan Faarax	2	Daad wararac	176
49.Cali Muumin	*	Dan baa tiri	285
50.Maxamuud I. Xudeedi	*	Dara-dhig	673
51.M.N.Shareeco	3	Reer Jabbuuti	277
52.Aadan Iimaan Dacar	*	Daabbad	143
53.M.I. Hadraawi	2	Daahyaley	400
54.Cabdillaahi "Taano"	2	Ha la duubo delebyada	160
55.Cali Cilmi Afyare	2	Geeddiga ku soo daran	283
56.Saado Cali Warsame	2	Diiwaanku hay dhigo	453
57.Yuusuf Maradoon Cali	*	Dan-ka-hadal	334
58.Cumar C.C: "Fakad"	2	Dardaaran	226
59.Ibraahim Sh.S.Gadhle	*	Ha dacwiyin dembiiloo	236
60.Xasan Cilmi Diiriye	*	Duhur weeye barashadu	135
61.Cabdulle Raage	*	Dareen	102
62.Aadan Tarabbi	3	Digadaa markhaati ah	159
63.Siyaad Daaud	2	Difaac	419
64.Cabdi Aadan "Qays"	*	Derder	366
65.Siciid Shire Axmed	*	Dawo	242
66.Cali Sh. Jaamac	2	Deddo	215
67.Axmed I.D. "Qaasin"	*	Duco	173