

## OROMO'S CURSE: BLIND MEN LEADING BLIND MEN



Oromo youth in protest

I always preferred to refrain from politics but after experiencing the legalized enslavement against my people, I was compelled to change that view. My passion with this subject has become a personal venture and during my incarceration, I have acquired the energy for change and the desire to fix the broken history of my people. I am constantly reminded by my peers about the 'heat' that is expected to emerge from publicizing the indolence and the corroded guidelines that surrounds Oromo people. In my research, I have discovered Oromo's concealed suffering, the social incoherence, the dreadful disputes that is raging among themselves, and the feeble nationalism principle that made them sluggish.

The Ethiopian tribes are profoundly different in religion, values, and politics but they merely share the common outlook of life's outward appearance. These tribes judge everything through the lens of tribalism and nothing is too trivial to be outside of its perimeters. They literally crave to slit each other's throat for the slightest pretext but strangely, most of them regarded Oromo as a common enemy. These tribes' view about Oromo is centuries old impression that was born perhaps long before the colonial era. The irony is that the Ethiopian government outwardly promotes unity but underneath, it covertly and persistently invests in fragmenting Oromo people to keep them from ever discovering their potential strength, and as of now, they are stereotyped as intellectually inferior beings that are not fit to serve other than in the army. The subject of this article is not to arouse odious sentiments towards Amhara and Tigray people but to unveil the truth about Oromo people.

Oromo people are suffering from identity crisis and this predicament is the very element that led to their disharmony, and the contemporary nationalists are trying to build a unity based on a fictitious identity provided by Bahrey, a Christian missionary. Instead of making attempts to understand the root cause of their downfall, they are in denial mode and are emotionally immersed in tribalism, a concept that divides more than it unites. It is certain that they are institutionally oppressed but since the time "*...they appeared from the waters*", it is themselves who are barrier to freedom, unity, and they are oblivious that the real power dwells in them. As of now, they are running in circles chanting dead phrases like, "Jirra Jirtu" (We are alive, aren't we?) - to be alive is a blessing that is worth celebrating but to be treated in contempt by corruption riddled tribal government is not.

In the past, Oromo had too many fruitless revolution attempts, the humiliation of the OLF being the last, it is unlikely that they will ever achieve greatness with tribalism or nationalism as a guide. No one is willing to give much attention to them nor bestow much significance to their grievances because they are '*Orma*' (strangers) in their own ancestral land, not that they are intellectually impaired, on the contrary, they are people with creative endowment but they need to

uncover their identity to unshackle the strangeness that is still hovering over father Oromo's progenies. It is not West or Ethiopia's interest to see the formation of a united Oromo, so, they are entertained with an artificial seceding scheme that is exactly the replica of the old colonial method of 'divide and rule' except this one does not disrupt the beehive. Oromo's unity is a potent threat to the world so, the strategy is to keep them in disunity, and it seems that thousand years of being war-dogs for Ethiopia's successive regimes have taught them nothing. Self-determination is a superb idea and fending off the claws of the tyrants is a noble cause but under what banner?

For instance, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established in 1973 whose fundamental objectives were self-determination and to end centuries of oppression by Abyssinian colonial rule, Amhara, and equally, the suppressive Tigrayan-led government. The formation of OLF was like a volcano eruption that stimulated dormant thoughts, and at the time, it was quite impossible to question the validity of its guidelines, the blueprint of its methodology, and the youths naively departed in numbers for the dangerous rescue mission but how to go about this fanciful ambition was a wild goose chase. Though foot soldiers were there in numbers but the goal itself was ambiguous, for example, whether the proclaimed self-determination was within Ethiopia or an independent Oromia state was vastly unclear. It had zigzagged across the land and preached the nationalism theory even to the remotest locations but due to methodological discord among top echelon officials, it failed to establish a foundation for social and political resurgence. Though debauchery and poor administrative skills were the drawback but the youths' valor and resilience were never in question. Some of the memorable battles include the Battle of Charchar, Battle of Dembidollo, Battle of Galemso, Battle of Hinde, Battle of Horo Guduru, Battle of Mendi, and Battle of Tiro.

The support for the group was over the top but gradually, the liberating agents showed signs of administrative deficiency followed by killings, infighting, tribalism, abuses, etc., and it became clear that the awaited saviors were methodologically aligned with the oppressors and, monsters were created in our

midst inadvertently. We have seen the detrimental consequence of blind men leading blind men, and how the virtuous youth's sacrificial deeds were greedily used as stepping stones for personal gains by treacherous leaders. The OLF's half a century old journey ended in futile dissipating time, wealth, and people. So, where did it go wrong? OLF was on barren principle led by individuals who themselves had no principle, and its surrender has simply added to a history that is already saturated with dark pages. Though the pride of my people has gravely diminished but steadfastness and bravery utterly remains unchanged.

Democracy is a term that is often echoed to delude the unlettered masses, and in Ethiopia, it is to be a servant for a tribal government and not living up to this personalized definition, one is categorized as an enemy of the state. Under such characterization, I have spent nearly eight years in Ethiopia's grisly federal prison, Kality (zone 1 and zone 2), but the darkness of solitary confinement has polished my senses, it brought forth the need to render to an action, and the curtain that obscured my vision has been lastly removed bringing about a clear ambition. Outside of the prison walls, I have noticed that my people no longer crave for freedom instead they are intoxicated with petty interests, paradoxically, Oromo youth are heedlessly joining the army to be spearheads for an oppressive regime, a regime that surveys its citizens through the spectacles of tribalism.

To live in dire circumstances can only mean absence of faith, determination, sacrifice, and equally, the strive for common goal has faded away. Generally, changes can only be acquired either by ballot box mostly the Western nations or by the sword, and history pages confirm that those who lay the sword down will eventually become slaves for those who keep it aloft, and Ethiopia's tribal caste system, only the stronger survives. At some point, Oromo needs to end the '*lonesome walk*', as Jaarso Waqo Qootoo, famous poet, said in one of his poems, and adhere to their ancestral religion, Islam, that will certainly rescue them from the servitude.

*So, put an end to this evil.*

*Our people remember who you are*

*And put an end to this neglect  
Talk of that which you've heard  
Yourselves, stop talking out hearsay  
Hey, clean your hearts  
Of such soot from a cooking pot  
Join in the construction of the fences  
To fill up this narrow gap between us  
Say, "come let's march together"  
And put an end to this lonesome walk.  
The evil people have laughed at you  
Relieve us of such disgrace  
You are fathers and siblings  
You are brothers and affine*

Theology has been my field of study and it made me understand the essence of all religions; the adamant determination, the unyielding passion, the fulfilment that depreciates material pleasure, and the perpetual ritual deeds. I have studied Waaqeffana (traditional religion), the Bible, Buddhism, and Islam, while the conveyed messages are comparatively within the same domain but their respective approaches are diametrically divergent. Unlike Abrahamic religions, Waaqeffana has no divine authenticity like God ordained message or a messenger, in fact, it has been accused of plagiarizing Boran Guutu's old monotheistic beliefs, and partially, it comprises of borrowed philosophies from Christianity and Paganism. Though it purportedly claims to be a monotheistic concept, strangely, there is an anonymous revered deity named, Ateete Maryam, the goddess in charge of fertility with supernatural ability to bless. According to Dirribi Demise's book, 'Oromo wisdom in Black civilization', "*The mother puts both hands, fingers in the jars of beverage and porridge simultaneously and sprays the liquids on their necks uttering the following words: O Ateete, be beneficent, bless me with health and peaceful life. Help me live long.*" Waaqeffana followers are merely satisfied with its nationalism appeal, a 'religion of our own'.

In my research, I could not find the intellectual knowledge or a program of life that can administer life's social, political, and economic forms but I have discovered a narrow concept that is confined to Oromo's ancestral land and its dwellers. During the OLF's fruitless odyssey, Waaqeffana was put to the test as a 'faith-based bond' and it has proven to be intellectually and spiritually incomprehensible, however, my concern is the people who are passionately immersed in Waaqeffana for heavenly reward. Nevertheless, it is not fit to be the central pillar of Oromo's unity.

Similarly, Christians have abandoned Christianity; the spirit of Jesus's true religion has been transformed into adulterated hollow ghost with numerous versions that invalidate each other, the God-consciousness and the virtuous ethics no longer irradiate its spirit. Without overstepping ethics of religious tolerance, Buddhism is not a faith but random imaginary thoughts that are devoid of any intellectual wisdom; meditation that has no religious promise, unnecessary suppression of physical needs, and it seems that the architects were in search of some sort of theological identity to differentiate themselves from others.

I have comprehensively studied Islam's glorious history, its racial and tribal equality, and the fact that there is no mediator between the Creator and the created. Grievingly, I yearned to cure my people from spiritual dehydration that mummified their thoughts, not only the symptoms but also the root cause of this illness with the radiant message of Islam. The transition is not easy. It demands termination and severing of all non-Islamic concepts including Waaqeffana, democracy, etc. And Islam not merely as a 'yoga' but a program of life, only then, Oromo people will be destined for greatness. The idea is the union of politics and Islam.

It was the early Christians who separated politics from Christianity by giving God some of his due and Caesar wrongful due, thus restricting it to mere mundane rituals that are practiced outside the business hours. On the contrary, Islam and politics are inseparable - it is a political community guided by organized Koranic thoughts that cover every aspect of man's needs physical or spiritual: individual

morality, inheritance, business, marriage, etc., and the Islamic Law gives equal rights to all and no preference is given based on class, race, tribe, or reputation. Since over 60% of Oromo population are Muslims, my proposal is to create Sharia courts in Oromo inhabited land where plaintiffs and defendants appear before Sharia court to settle their quarrels and complaints based on Islamic Jurisprudence. Such courts operate in United Kingdom, Kenya, and it may not be possible to do so in Ethiopia. Those who are working for Islam, defy danger to please God as the publisher of Sayyed Qutb's book 'Milestones' said, ***"The ultimate price for working to please God Almighty and to propagate his ways in this world is often one's own life. The author, "Qutb", that is -- tried to do it; he paid for it with his life. If you and I try to do it, there is every likelihood we will be called upon to do the same. But for those who truly believe in God Almighty, what other choice is there?"***

Hassan Jarso Kotola  
Nagelle Borana, Ethiopia

---

Please note: This article was originally posted on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

