

Somali Gabooye: A Poem

Bashir Goth

The following excerpt which I use as an introduction to the poem, is from an article I wrote in 2007 about the status of the Gabooye community among the Somali people.

“The real tragedy, however, is that these people, the Sab or Midgaan, do not only look like us but are most of the time more handsome than the rest of us, while their struggle for survival over the centuries has made them more intelligent and more resilient. They are our traditional hunters, doctors, blacksmiths, craftsmen, singers, tailors and fashion designers, barbers and hairstylists, hygiene attendants and butchers. We defend ourselves with the weapons they make, cultivate our farms with the plows they fashion, wear the clothes they tailor, eat with the pots and bowls they make, drink from the earthen jars they mould, submit our heads to them to cut our hair, call them to circumcise our sons and daughters, trust them with our necks to cut our tonsillitis, enjoy their music but still we despise them. They speak the same language we speak and pray towards Makkah five times a day like the rest of us. But dare you tell any Somali to pray behind the most learned Imam of the Migdaan and he would rather go to hell. Without them we will be defenseless and perish in the harsh environment of our land but instead of glorifying them we look down on them.

They have no voice among us and no political representation. And if anyone of them dares to protest, we easily silence them by invoking the

M-word. This makes every Somali around them flee and avoid them like a plague. Even in the national charter of the current Somali Transitional Federal Government they are nameless although they have taken a little better status by being referred to as the "others" among small but respected Somali clans. This is the closest they have ever come to share a status albeit an insignificant one with other clans."¹

The Artisan Grace

Take a look, brother, a full look at me
An eyeful of the whole of me
Poke my skin hard, and pinch it if you will
Cut my flesh, deep into the blood and bone
Until I cry, for I am not made of stone.

Can you see now?
That I shudder in pain?
Can you see my blood,
As red, as fresh as yours ?
Can you see my bones,
And the marrow in plain?

Take a look , brother, a full look at me
An eyeful of the whole of me
Don't you see me as handsome
As you expect me to be?
Don't I speak as I should?

With every syllable in place
As loud as I can shout my plea!

Aren't we together born in the soil?
And bred on the same sorghum and milk;
Didn't your siblings die,
just like my siblings died?
Of measles and malaria;
of malnutrition and diarrhea
Why then, O brother,
you see me not your brother
Why on hearing my name, Gabooye
You need to curse my mother?

Why do you turn your face to the South,
When to you I come from the North?
And when to you I come from the East
Why for sunrise you wish in the West?

Does being a nomad, a marauding herder
Make you of a higher order?
And being a maker of things, a gifted master
Condemn me to a divine disorder!

But despite your might as herder
Without my marvels and merit
With all your arrogance and ardor
Would you even an ax have or a weeder?
O brother, how many geniuses
How many builders you buried
In me, how much talent you wasted
In keeping me as a degraded barber?

After this long and a lonely journey
I found how I should redraw the race
It is surely in the secret of learning
To revive my artisan grace
In science and the art of schooling
To teach the camel herder's race

It is only ignorance, damn it;
That keeps our roads apart
That holds your blinds in place
And through learning, just maybe
You would finally look up at my face
And my humanness, may finally embrace.

Bashir Goth, 13th Nov. 2013.

Notes

1. <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/article/20070424/ARTICLE/304249959/1098>