

*SHIRE JAMA AHMED:*

**A PIONEER OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOMALI'S  
NATIONLA ORTHOGRAPHY AND COLLECTION AND IT'S  
ORAL LITERATURE.**



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During the past hundred years, the Land of Punt witnessed some historical and cultural events which attracted greatly the eyes and the interest of various writers. These events had impacts on the life and structure of the Somali society.

Foreigners, particularly the Europeans, took greater interest to learn about the land and the people in the Horn of Africa. The explorers who, since the beginning of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had written about Somalia did not only learn about the geography, the climate, the heritages and the coast of Somali land, but they also learn and wrote in greater details the culture, Education and arts, specially poetry- which appeals to the interest of the populace. These writers explained in no vague terms the role of poetry in Somali society and importance of the poet among his people.<sup>1</sup>



Long before the colonial occupation, some of the Somali poets felt the need to conserve their own poems, so that these treasures can be saved for and passed down to future generations. This was not an easy task for all poets, since the Somali language then lacked orthography. Under the circumstances, most of the poets relied on the traditional system of preserving the oral literature. For example, poets ask their friends to memorize their poems and help disseminate them among the people. However, poets who had good knowledge of Islam and the Arabic language found this system totally unsatisfactory.



Indeed, the poems of most of the religious man were concerned with the promotion of Islamic teachings among the Somali people. But many Arabic-speaking poets tried to adapt in one way or other Arabic letters for the Somali phonetics, but not without difficult. To do this, they also used diacritics and sings to supplement the existing Arabic alphabets.<sup>2</sup> The Arabic system were in use for a time, however, the poets soon faced the problem of finding Arabic consonants and vowels inadaptable to some of the Somali sounds.<sup>3</sup> This problem turned to the an insurmountable obstacle for the Somali Arabic-speaking poets.

At times, some poets had forgotten the key to their system, and this after a time rendered parts of their poems unreadable to them too. While he Arabic speaking Somalis were trying hard to adapt Arabic alphabets for writing their language, it is true that some west European scholars were endeavoring to have the Somali language written in Latin script. The communications between these foreigners and the Somalis were very poor indeed; hence the use of these Latin scripts remained unknown to the Somalis for long time. And when they came to know of it, they looked at it with suspicion and dismissed it as the orthography of infidels “far-gaalaad”, which, if taken at the expanse of Arabic, could be sinful.



At any rate, the efforts made by these foreign scholars did not bear fruits among the Somalis, because from the beginning these endeavors were not intended to help Somalis reduce their language to a written form. From the orthographic point of view, the works of these foreign scholars had no any ill intentions; theirs were achieved by individual efforts. However, the works of these foreign researchers- just like the works of the individual Arabic- speaking Somalis , lacked universality and thus were readable only their respective inventors.

Whether trying to adapt the Arabic alphabets or the Latin for writing Somali language, the obstacle remained to be as to how all Somali phonetics could be represented to appropriate foreign letters. Most of the aforesaid foreign scholars were not interested to take deep linguistic research in the language, rather , they had been interested only in the

grammar, the folktales, the poetry and the traditional life of the Somali people, with a view to pass them to their people . This explains why, despite efforts by many foreign scholars, the Somali people did not inherit any scientifically sound linguistic research works that could ultimately help them write their language.

In 1920 a new efforts was made in the direction of securing orthography for the Somali. This new effort was different from those undertaken by foreign scholars because; **(1)** it was from those undertaken by a Somali poet who had a very good knowledge of Islamic studies and Arabic, and **(2)** it was not based on the adaptation of the foreign script at all. This Somali scholar, ***Osman Yusuf Keenadiid***, came from the family which reigned the Sultanate of hobyo along the southern coast of Somalia from **1884-1925**. Known as Osmania, this script first spreaded to the Italian Somalia, despite being oppressed by the Italian colonial authorities. Who were (sensitive to the slightest manifestation of Somali nationalist) **4**.

At any rate, in early 1940s, Osmania gained grounds in the capital city as well as in the central regions, after the country's first political party, namely the **Somali Youth league (founded, SYL, on 15. 5. 1943)** decided to find the best ways of introducing Osmania as official Somali Script. **5**. It has to be noted that subsequently, Osmania was to be used for most of the party's correspondence, specially the secret communication. Not only this policy was continued for sometime, but also Osmania schools were opened in the party headquarters. Soon this policy was also introduced to all party branches in all the parts of the country, and it went beyond the borders into the British Somaliland, Ethiopia, the Arabian Peninsula (particularly Aden) where the SYL had established influential branches.



Despite its initial score of this significant political success, Osmania failed to retain the support of the majority of the party leadership in the early **1950s** when the new clan

politics began to overshadow the original nationalist sentiments. Osmania was once again assessed at the Party Headquarters in the Capital and it was now classified- though covertly not as a national orthography but a family one, whose name bore. **6.**

Anyhow, from the point of view of the orthography and of nationalism both, Osmania deserved praise and esteem. And this fact is apparent from the report of the committee appointed by the Somali Government in the **1961** to advise her on the issue of finding a suitable national orthography. Though the committee did not recommend that Osmania be opted for, yet it had to express its admiration. It wrote; ...."Certainly a great step forward in the exploration for a satisfactory form of the script for Somali" **7.**

Elsewhere, the report recorded; ... This committee should here like to record a unanimous vote of the respect to **Osaman Yusuf** for his initiative and zeal in history of this problem of the written Somali. It is not surprising that in subsequent years many more Somalis should have followed his footsteps and evolved a cluster of the over 20 scripts for their own language, all based on the same principles....**8.**

Both this **1961** committee of the Somali scholars and the subsequent **1966 UNESSCO** committee praised Osmania highly and its inventor. However these committees did not recommend it as a national orthography, mainly due to technical reasons. As I will explain later in this paper, both committees had recommended taking the Latin script developed by *Shire Jama Ahmed*.

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Very few young Somalis know that, well before addressing the issue of the adopting a national orthography for the Somali language, the debate centered as to which language will be chosen as the official language once the country achieves its independence: The language of the public administration and of medium of interaction in schools. Will it be Somali or Italian? In the learned quarters, there were Somalis who had serious doubt as whether the Somali language could actually be capable of being a tool for a modern public administration and schooling.

Dr. Yassin Osman Kenediid, one of the sons of the Osmania inventors, who tried hard to put it in use and the members of the society for the Somali language and literature. (Know Goosanka Afka iyo suugaanta Soomaalida). Pioneered not only to have Osmania as the national orthography but also to have the Somali language as official language. These efforts were opposed by some Somalis who wanted the Arabic language to be the official language; their argument was based not on national and technical grounds but mainly on religious fanaticism. Similarly, others saw no reason that the key to embark upon the road to quicker development and civilization.



The Osmania and the Latin script.

Although it is true that some of those who proposed to take the Arabic or the Italian language as the official language had acted on good faith, it is equally true that foreign countries had taken active interest and influence behind the scenes. Both the Italian colonial administration and the Egyptian Government which had been popular among the Somali masses had enjoyed a substantial role with regard to that hot issue. The Egyptians had taken interest in the Somali politics in 1950s and 1960s. They were very eager to see the Arabic as the official language of Somalia. The debate of which language to choose as the official language continued for a long time at many forums: at public gatherings, at the conferences and in the Somalia d'Oggi. It was mainly who favored the Somali; the supporters of the Italian language were few and their arguments could draw no reasonable supporter because of the lack of religious or nationalistic grounds.

**Dr. Yassin and Shire**, who later joined him, spared no efforts to have Somali as official language. Dr. Yassin argued that since there is homogeneity of language, which is absent, elsewhere in black African among the Somalis, there is no need to have an alien language imposed on them. Also he saw difficulties in having a national language on the one and in learning the Arabic language as the bearer of religious teachings. He used to cite other Muslim countries such Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia as examples. He insisted that if the children were taught foreign languages as early as at the beginnings of schooling, they are bound develop an unnecessarily strong affection to such an alien language, to its culture and to its people, to their heroes and their history. **10**

Although they supported different script yet Dr. Yassin and Shire shared one common objective, the struggle to have the Somali language written and make it official. They both opposed foreign languages. Like Dr. Yassin, Shire was of the opinion that the Somali people can not embark on the road to rapid development and civilization. While using a foreign language as a tool. Shire strongly apposed those who supported foreign language and wanted the Somali language to remain the spoken language alone.

The leader of one political party (PDS or Partita Democratic Somalia) who supported the Arabic language was confronted by Shire in an article published in Corriere Della Somalia. In his rebuttal, Shire demonstrated the dire need to have the Somali language as the national official language “ if we are to hope to achieve a broad-based education which provides equal opportunity to all the people”. He told both the politician and the readers that the Somali people had their own language and need not the Italian or Arabic languages to impose on them. He said that that whoever suggests that the Somali language remain unwritten and unofficial is insensitive to the crucial problem of the high illiteracy tare among his people. He wrote: “*The leader of the PDS seems not to be concerned with the rights of the Somali nomadic men and women to have their share of the country’s educational opportunities. He seems, too, to have failed to realize that these nomads will have access to educational appointees only if their own mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction*”.

Shire argued that if we want to have a united Somalia, we should have their language written and official, for without a written language no people can aspire to achieve progress, culturally, economically or socially. He concluded that the language is the bond that binds the people together.

As was said earlier both men struggled hard to see the Somali language written; nevertheless, they had serious differences. While Dr. Yassin had a natural and strong affection for Osmania, the brain-child of his father, Shire supported the Latin script mainly on technical grounds and for its practical application.

**Shire J. Ahmed** was born in wardher (a town in the western Somalia) in 1936. He moved to Mogadishu where he had learned the Arabic language. Then he attended the British military administration’s school of teachers in 1945-1951. In the early 1950s, when the Italian administration returned, Shire resumed his studies in Arabic; this helped him to receive a scholarship at the Al-azhar University (Cairo) in 1955.





It is believed that Shire had devoted much time to study linguistics, and was convinced that no script other than Latin will be viable for the Somali language in practical terms. However he dared not argue this in the public in Egypt then,

In 1957, when Shire returned home, he joined in the current debates regarding the written of the Somali language. Soon he was known for daring support for the Latin script; as a result, he had to face the anger of the religious leaders who believed that no script other than the Arabic was acceptable to the 100% Muslim Somalis.

The debates were sensitive and heated at times. It was nationalistic to support that the Somali language is written and made official, but it was a bit hard for one to find a plausible argument to support the Latin script in place of Osmanya a pure Somali invention or of the Arabic language which was regarded as a divine language.

On the other hand, Latin was interpreted a “laa diin” Laterally meaning in Arabic “without religion” and was categorized both as an importation and as an imposition of colonialism. It was considered as a colonial legacy; As much as this earned many enemies for Shire and others who supported it. Its merits or demerits were hardly discussed. It was hated as a piece of colonials reminisce period.

Although the Latin script was apposed so strongly, it had a considerable number of the sympathizes who dared not support it openly as the case was in the Arabic from Shire; a number of top politicians, it is true to say, supported the Latin openly too. Mr. Abdullahi Issa Mohamud, the highest political personality of the time, did support the Latin script. In his capacity as the Prime minister in the first self-government, he encouraged the daily news paper, “Corriere Della Somalia” in 1957 to introduce one page of Somali language in Latin script. This page was entitle “wargeyska soomaaliyeed” (the Somali newspaper) in a big and bold type. Abdullah’s administration was soon criticized for this and the page was discontinued abruptly. This anger, though, reinforced Shires determination to support the Latin script. From that day, he becomes the symbol of the Latin script.

Few days after the publications of the Somali page, Shire wrote a long letter to the *Corriere Della Somalia*. In his letter Shire argues that the Somalis must careful not to direct their strong hatred for colonialism to western education and civilization, **12**.

For they are not evil things at all. He compared the Latin script with the electricity, arguing that everyone likes and uses the light though it is known that is an invention invented by the western colonialists. As was argued by Dr. Yassin earlier, Shire also argued in his article that other Muslim countries adopted the Latin script to write their own languages and he cited Turkey and Indonesia as good examples. He repeatedly argued that orthography was not divine present from the heaven but, rather, was a man-made invention. “For that reason, he said “to use the Latin script as a tool to have our language written will not be inconsistent with the teachings of Islam.

5.

From 1957 to 1960 when Somali become independent, Shire devoted much of his time to evolve a system of the Latin alphabets adaptable for the Somali phonetic sounds, always tries not use diacritical marks and sings. At about the same time, he began collecting oral literature in the Italian Somalia a venture in which Dr. Yassin and a very few Somali scholars were interested in at the time. In the British Somaliland were protectorate, this type of venture was undertaken by Musa Hajji I. Galaal, B.W. Andrezewski during 1940s and 1950s So Shire and Sheikh Jama Omar Issa had joined in the ranks of these men who were to devote successfully the rest of their lives to promote the Somali art and oral literature. These men believed, mightily, that without a written language, it will be impossible to salvage the Somali rich treasure. They began meeting aged men to record the thousands of Somali poems, songs, stories, riddles, proverbs and saying in there minds before they die with these heritage and treasures. This venture which continues to this date is worth of the efforts invested by them and the subsequent generations. Admittedly, not all was saved but a lot has been collected and conserved since then.

Between the late fifties and the early sixties, Shire made a large collection of oral literature in the central regions and western Somalia “Ogadenia”.

He collected and published in his periodical publication many poems and stories related to famous Somali personalities. During 1965-68, he continued these publications in Mogadishu, using of course, the Latin script.

One must always bear in mind the intense political climate under which Shire had to work; if it were not for his strong character, he would have easily abandoned this hard and hectic struggle to support the Latin script. He is known to be a man with determination, endurance and persistence. He was opposed by the majority of the leading politicians and businessmen, who had a considerable influence in the Pre-independence self-government. Perhaps, it would not be wrong to say that shire’s biggest opponent was Haji Mohamed Hussein, one of the founders of the Somali Youth league, an orator who was well conversant with the language of the masses. Haji Mohamed, who elected as the

SYL General Secretary, while studying in Cairo, supported not the Arabic script but strongly adored the Arabic as the only official language of independent Somalia. In his capacity as the SYL General Secretary, Haji Mohamed wrote to the Italian administration Mr. Sing. Fornari, suggesting that the Arabic language should be “the international language of Somalia”.

The memorandum claimed, (1) that the SYL Secretary had traveled through the country, and could get no agreement concerning a standard Somali dialect, and found no objection to a “Uniform” Arabic which would be understood throughout the Islamic world; (2) that the Arabic language is rich in vocabulary, whereas “it is extremely difficult to express oneself sufficiently well in the Somali language”, (3) that the Arabic language is vital and growing, whereas “it is difficult, if not impossible for the Somalis to make their language better at this time”, (4) that Arabic would enable the Somalis to speak a world language, and thus enable them to “embark on an ocean of culture which has no limits”, (5) that the Arabic language is already a lingua franca in Somalia; and (6) that the Arabic language will facilitate the cultural and political alliance of Somalia with our brother Muslim who all believe “IN ALLAH, IN HIS SACRED PROPHET MOHAMMED, and in the SACRED QUR’AN” **13**.

Obviously, Haji Mohamed’s opinion represented the wishes of the religious elders and top businessmen from whom the SYL drew its vital spiritual and material support. At that time, the debate centered not as to which script to choose for the Somali language but as to what language will be chosen to be the official language.

In addition to these serious challenges, Shire and other Latin script supporters, had to face another front- though less serious. A sizeable number of Somali scholars suggested that the Arabic alphabet be adopted instead of Osmanian or the Latin.

Their arguments were based on religious grounds, believing that adopting any script other than the Arabic will be a step that departs from the Islam. They always appealed to the sensitive nerve of the 100% Muslim Somali masses. Shire and his followers dismissed as “infidels”. Playing on words, they said that Latin was “Laa diin” alias: “Latin is without religion”.

So in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Shire was the target of public rage long and popular opposition. Eye-witnesses still remember the long procession of anti-Latin demonstrations and mass rallies which approached his house after Friday Prayers. This campaign went on for sometime, and his life was threatened several instances.

Despite these intimidations, Shire had no intention to abandon his ideas easily. He decided to fight back, engaging both in public addresses and in writings. He tried to demonstrate that not only was he a Muslim man but that also he studied Islam very well. Indeed, Shire manifested great endurance that can be many as obstinacy if not a stubbornness. He earned many enemies that could have succeeded to risk his life and wreck his boat.

**Shire** had completed his Latin script before 1960. He used all consonants (except P and V and Z) and Vowels, adapting them to the Somali phonetic sounds. He successfully avoided introducing signs or new diacritical marks. He used letter “c” for the Arabic” ayn “(voiced pharyngeal fricative), letter “x” for “h” for the unvoiced, and letter “q” (for the uvular plosive). He also used the hamza. All five Latin vowels were used, doubling each of them to use for the sounds. For example:

- Ab (ancestors) pronounced as A like in an.
- Aabbe (father) pronounced as AA like in father.
- Edeg (baby goats’ coral) pron. As e like in enemy
- Eeg (look!) pronounced as ee like in leg.
- Il (eye) pronounced as i like in will
- Iil (grave) pronounced as ii like in ill.
- Or (noise) pronounced as o like in on
- Oori (wife) pronounced as oo like in No.
- Ur (smell) pronounced as u like in put.
- Uur (pregnancy) pronounced as uu like in pull.

7.

When the former British Somaliland and the Italian Somaliland become independent on **26 June and 1<sup>st</sup> July 1960** and joined to form the Somali republic on **1<sup>st</sup> July 1960**, neither the issue of which official language to choose nor that of which script to choose to write the Somali language was resolved. Thus, the new post independence administration had no option other than to use not only both colonial language –Italian and English but also the Arabic language which was not unknown in the two former colonies, the north and south.

Soon people began to learn how difficult it was to use several alien languages in one single administration. Soon the need to have the Somali language written was felt and the educational officials began to realize that the country’s high illiteracy was hard, if not impossible, to combat unless the Somali language was written. 14. Then the Minister of the education **H.E. Ali Garad Jama** nominated a 90 man Commission of Somali scholars headed by **Musa Hagi Ismail Galal**. The scholars who were selected for their knowledge of linguistics and orthography, represented the various Somali dialects as well as the several proposed orthographies.

Their terms of reference was to study the various proposed orthographies and, by March **1961** make their recommendations as to the most suitable orthography, given a serious consideration to the technical aspect, of the issue.

The commission examined 18 orthographies against 17 point criteria set as soon as the committee was formed. Most of these points dealt with technical aspects, example for example “is it phonetic? Is it simple in its lettering? Have its letters any diacritical marks? Is it economical? Has it good cursive value? **15.**

The commission made the following recommendation|: according to the answers shown against the queries set in the seventeen guiding principles, the most advantageous script has made itself crystal clear. It is the form of Latin script... submitted by *Shire J. Ahmed* and the later improved by Commission.. in short, it is the script that offers the best Commission of men who not us, as a growing nation, and as a commission of men who not only know about their language but who understands the differences between their emotion and personal pride and their real needs, we recommend it for adoption a matter of first choice and the Somali script devised by *Hussein Sheikh Ahmed. "Kaddare"* as N.2 on the list. This commission could not recommend any other script. **16.**

This final recommendation was signed by six members only following the withdrawal from the commission of two important members – *Dr. Yassin Osman Kenadid*, the supporter of the Osmania and *Mr. Ibrahim Hashi Mohamud* who supported the Arabic script. They quickly sensed from the 17-points guiding principles that their orthographies had very slim chance if any. They withdrew from the works of the Commission very quickly. Their decisions to withdraw were no doubt, a victory for *Shire Jama*. Nevertheless, the Minister and the Ministry for whom the recommendations were prepared put them on the shelves to collect the dust for long time to come.

8.

Strangely enough, the Ministry announced a government decision to have English as the medium of instruction in the schools- both in the North and in the south. If shire was happy to see his main opponents Dr. Yassin and Mr. Ibrahim Hashi –defeated at the Commission, he (and the other members of the commission) felt frustrated at the new policy decision adopted by the ministry of education. Their struggle- though had but to continue on. Shire resumed his public debates in favor of writing the Somali language in Latin and continued collecting oral literature, with particular emphasis on poetry and folktales.

The need to have the Somali language written grew day after day, but the post-independence government led by Premier abdirashid Ali Sharmark was too scared to make the quick decision demanded by the prevailing situation. His successor, Premier abdirazak Hagi Hussein, wrote to UNESCO in 1966 requesting a team of linguistics to look into the problem and the advice his government.

UNESCO then sent a 3-men commission headed by B.W. Anderzejewski to visit Somalia in March 1966 only to be greeted with massive demonstrations which led to arrests of several people.

“The political situation at the time was tense; supporters of the Arabic and the Osmania script were well aware what the results of the commissions would be, assuming that they would make recommendations solely on technical criteria” **17.**

The commission invited supporters of the different orthographies and received only seven applications. The commission had to examine the seven proposed scripts, namely: Two varieties of Somali inventions, three Latin and two Arabic varieties. In its report, the committee carefully listed the pros and cons of the seven scripts.

The commission, though, successfully avoided to recommend any one of them to be taken. Which script to take is a matter for the Somali Government and people to decide? Announced on 14 May 1966, the UNESCO commission wrote in the introduction of its report: We could not presume to give advice on the political and the social aspect of such a choice. In this report we shall Endeavour to show the technical advantages and disadvantages of the systems of writing which can be seriously considered as possible national orthographies..” 18.

The commission, carefully avoiding recommending the Latin, and referring to adopt Latin script for Somali, we recommend that it should follow the system used by *Shire Jama Ahmed*.

The Government of Premier Abdirazak (1947-1967) and of the Mohamed Ibrahim Egal (1967-69) just as that of Dr. Abdirashid (1960-64) allowed this report too to take its toll of the dust for fear of the public anger and uprising. The politician's were vulnerable to public opinion. However, this decision was never easy for the politicians to defend in parliament as well as in public, in the face of a growing demand for a national orthography to write the language.

In the 1960s, Shire increased his efforts to collect oral literature. He succeeded to publish a monthly magazine entitled “Iftiinka aqoonta” (Light of education) in which he published a large collection of Somali poetry and rich folktales.

This step made many Somalis- especially the growing intelligentsia realize that Somalia had rich oral literature which needed urgently to be conserved in writing. This publication serve as a ground to experiment successfully the viability of Shire's proposed Latin script. Shire thus gained more and more supporters as time went by. The post-independence there successive government were characterized for their non-decision and the chances to write the Somali language seemed remote.

The hope to write the Somali language become less gloomy in October 1969 when the Military took over the power and the Supreme Military Council announced its commitment to have the Somali language written as quick as possible. Only two years after on October 21, 1972, the Supreme revolutionary Council headed by Major General Mohammed said Barre adopted Shire's Latin script for the Somali language.

FAR SOOMAALI	FAR SOOMAALI	FAR SOOMAALI
1) <u>SHIBBANE</u>	2) <u>FURAHA</u>	3) <u>CODADKA</u>
B T J X KH	x . Xiddig 	<u>SHAQAL GAABAN:</u>
D R S SH DH	c . Calan 	A - a : Arday
C G F Q K L	q . Qaanso 	E - e : Ey
M N W H Y	sh . Shimbir 	I - i : Ii
b t j x kh	dh . Dhalo 	O - o : Orgi
d r s sh dh	kh . Khad 	U - u : UI
c g f q k l		<u>SHAQAL DHEER:</u>
m n w h y		AA - aa : Baal
		EE - ee : Gees
		Ii - ii : Will
		OO - oo : Loox
		UU - uu : Suun

*Somali orthography leaflet 1972*

**Far qalaad ha moodina.  
Carrabku qaldi maayo ee.  
Sidii caanaha qudhqudhiya.  
Fartaadu waa furihi aqoonta.**

*Slogan in new orthography*

# Xarfaha Somalida

1

Iyo

Maahmaahyo

Iyo

Talo Wanaagsan

**BALLAN DARRO WAA DIIN DARRO.**

# XARFAHA SOMALIDA

## 1. Shibbane:

B T J X KH  
D R S SH DH  
C G F Q K L  
M N W H Y  
b t j x kh  
d r s sh dh  
c g f q k l  
m n w h y

## 2. Shaqal:

Shaqal gaaban –

A a, E e, I i, O o  
U u

Shaqal Dheer –

AA aa, EE ee, II ii,  
OO oo, UU uu

**MAAHMAAH**

**FAR KELIYUHU FOOL MA DHAQDO.**

**MAAHMAAH**

**BARUUR KELIYA AYAA BARUURO BADAN QUDHMISA.**

## ILAAH WUXUU YIDHII

### TOBANKII XUKUN

1. Aniga mooyaane ilaahyo kale  
waa inaanad lahaan.
2. Waa inaanad sameeysan sanam xardhan.
3. Waa inaanad Rabbiga Ilaahaaga ah  
magaciisa si been ah ugu hadal  
qaadin.
4. Maalinta Sabtida xusuuso inaad  
qoduus ka dhigtid.
5. Aabbahaa iyo hooyadaa maamuus.
6. Waa inaanad dhiig gelin oo aanad  
dhagaroobin.
7. Waa inaanad sinaysan.
8. Waa inaanad waxba xadin.
9. Waa inaanad marag been ah furin.
10. Waa inaanad damcin  
deriskaaga gurigiisa,

waa inaanad damcin deriskaaga naagtiisa,  
ama addoonkiisa,  
ama addoontiisa,  
ama dibigiisa,  
ama dameerkiisa,  
ama waxa deriskaagu leeyahay  
oo dhan.

(Hadalkii Ilaah faray Nebi Muuse)

### TALO WANAAGSAN

Wilkii caqli lahu wuxuu maqlaa  
edbinta aabbihis,  
Laakiin kii wax quudhsadaa  
canaanta ma maqlo.

(Maahmaahda Nebi Sulaymaan)

(Warqadda kowaad ee Talada Wanaagsan leh)



Looking back at two decades of Military rule in Somalia, the decisions to write the Somali and make it the official language are indisputably categorized as NO.1 and No.2 two successful and noble achievements. The SRC earned encomium and awards from UNESCO and the world bodies which are concerned with the appalling situation of global illiteracy.

All state employees were made compulsory to learn the script within three months and immediately put it in use in the public administration. Soon after that, a massive campaign launched to teach the masses how to read and write. It is widely believed that the masses have supported this decision though no plebiscites were never conducted

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Although Shire's Latin based script was adopted without any Changes, yes this fact has never been made public to this date for no good reason. Perhaps this explains why a few young people, if any know **Shire's long struggle and contribution to his people and country**. However, there is no doubt that Shire's role will be vivid in the pages that will have to feature the history of writing the Somali language. Others who struggled for the liberation of the minds of the Somali people will not be forgotten. These included **Osman Yusuf, Yassin Osman kenedid and Musse I. Galaal** to mention a few.

When the historic announcement to write the Somali language in the Latin script was made in 1972; shire was a member of the 20-man Somali language Commission appointed by SRC in 1971 to prepare text books to use once the script is decided upon.

Then he became the President of the newly founded Somali academy of Culture. During this time, he was able to publish some of his works. These included the Somali Grammar, though not adopted as an official or standard grammar book. Nevertheless, it was a work full of mental fatigue, given the amount of the news coined terminology and word classification involved.

In addition to the collection of the literature, Shire also published in 1973 some creative works on literature. These included two short stories relating to culture and social traditions. The first story was: Rooxaan (The spirits) and the second was entitled "Halgankii Nolasha"( Life struggle).<sup>20</sup>

**At the time of writing this paper, Shire Jama Ahmed is the Cultural Attaché of the Somali embassy in Sweden (Stockholm).**

**It's sad to see one of Somalia's heroes goes away. What a Great work for the great man of Somalia. It's even worst to hear that many of his work done by all this great man has gone to ashes. As the author says how many Somalis know who invented the orthography of Somali language? Not many who can answer that question. But we are thankful and glad to have all this men and I hope their reward will be that they would recognized as Somali heroes in all time to come and as well as the history of Great Somalia..**

**We are grateful to Mr. Faaxax Idaajaa for writing this biography about our beloved father.**

**Shire Jama Ahmed Died 1999 in (Stockholm) Sweden were he is berried today.**

## **Sources:**

*(The Revolutionary Development of the Somali Language)*

1) See Richard Burton, *Footsteps in East Africa* (New York, Praeger 1966 P.93).

2) Nearly all Somali poets who happened to be literate in Arabic tried to conserve their poetry by using Arabic letters. As an example, I should mention one of the first in this field, namely Hagi Ali Majerten, a sheikh, a poet, a mystic as well as a religious philosopher who, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century lived in the Nugal and Eastern part of Somalia and later moved to the Banadir Coast where he died in 1840s. Some Somali scholars still possess copies of his poetry written in his lifetime with Arabic letters.

3) See Musa X.I. Galaal: *Some notes on the history of written Somali*, a paper written right after the Somali language was written in 1972.

4) *Ibid*, page 10.

5) I.M. Lewis: *The modern History of Somaliland; from a nation to a state*, page 123.

The inventor of this orthography belonged to Osmania Mohamud; a subclan of Majeerteen (one of Darod's major clans) who had been influential in the Somali politics. Hence opponents viewed it as the orthography of Osman Mahamud, construing, not inadvertently, Osman kenadid with Osman Mohamud. In addition, the general Somali clan politics (Daroodism. V. Non Daarodism) had its negative impact on Osmania.

7) From a linguistic report, prepared by a governmental committee in 1961, page it's available at the Somali history museum Mogadishu, Somalia.

8) *Ibid*, page 18.

Dr. Yassin founded in 1949 the society for the Somali language and literature, in an attempt to promote research in the Somali language and literature. The main objective of this society, I believe, was two fold: to have the Somali language written and to have Osmania as the national orthography.

10) *La nostra lingua Madre*, *Corrier Della Somalia*, march 3, 1952.

11) *Corrier Della Somalia* January 11, 1957.

**12) The articles title was: Non dobbiamo odiare L'occidente e la scritte Latina, Corrier Della Somalia, March 16, 1957.**

**13) David D. Laitin: Politics, language and thought; the Somali experience, the University of Chicago Press page 99.**

**14) Ibid, page 125.**

**15) 1961 linguistic report, page 4.**

**16) I bid, page 72-73**

**17) See David D. Laitin, page 108.**

**18) The writing of Somali, a study by B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Stredyn and J. Tubiana, UNESCO, Paris, 1966.**

**19) Ibid, page 12.**

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**20) See B.W. Andrzejewski: Rise of the written Somali literature; a text of lecture given on 16 august, 1975, at the Somali institute of development Administration and management, Mogadishu, Somalia.**

**All thanks belong to Allah and then: Ahmed F. "Idaajaa" for the great achievement and work.**

