IMAGE OF MAJOR JATANI ALI

Admirers of Major Jatani Ali among whom several were beneficiary of his service, in recognition of his massive contributions to Borana Community, have established a Foundation in his name. Being aware of my relationship and close acquaintance with him, they asked me to say few things that any interested party read and might share their admirations. Though they put a difficult task on my shoulder, I shall say something below in a generalized set up.
Once, an individual observer classified people in all over the world into three.

- Few make things happen,
- Score who watch them happening,
- Multitudes who have no idea what is happening.

From the perspective of my knowledge he was a few who make things happen. He was a person with unique character in relationship with people. He usually tend to reflect an attitude of love to an individual he met with in work or social relationship; his contact won't hesitate to respond in reciprocal manner. Where ever he happened to be for whatever reason among a group he used to come out as a leader. If one considers what might qualify him for such role, I can say his eloquence in the languages he spoke: Oromifa, Amharic and English. When he used to tell a story he heard or an event he witnessed usually they enjoy listening to him. As a matter of fact some of his associates nick-named him a story tell.

Let me turn to my assertion in putting him in the category of the few who make things happen. He provided services in two institutions in Ethiopian administrative structure, the Ethiopian Police Force and Ministry of Interior. Those who worked with him in the Police units in close contact used to tell me positive things about him in accomplishing any assignment he undertook. Nevertheless, the concrete examples I shall sight below are fully when he was in the Ministry of Interior as an executive provincial and regional administrator.

Before the Derg overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie from the throne, the Police Unit permitted him to pursue education for a degree in Addis Ababa University. Soon after completing second year and was ready for promoted to the third, the Derg closed the University and the secondary school grades 11 and 12. For promotion of their revolutionary idea they, dispersed students with their teachers to all provinces with the exception of Eritrea. Jatani Ali who was captain in rank at the time, instead of returning to Police service was assigned to Arero Province in Sidamo administrative region, not as a student but a leader of the squad. After he successfully completed this mission in two years, he was appointed executive administrator of Arero Province. This was where he worked for four and half years and demonstrated who he was as a leader of community.

Just to sight some features of his innate characteristics, he was a person against any sort of corruption; he was for the down trodden in the administrative services regardless of race or ethnicity. Those who were immersed in the practice of corruption at the time did their best to tarnish his character as though he was a bigot who stood only for the benefit of his race. In fact,

he had very close friends from all ethnic groups he happened to come in contact; in schools as a student, in cadet training for police service, in practical work in police units, in provincial and regional administrative services.

Let us glance at what he had accomplished in Arero Province. At the time the Derg regime happened to be short of fund for development projects. As the result they authorized administrators of provinces and regions to raise fund for development. Major Jatani Ali took advantage of this permit and organized a bazar at Yabelo and managed to get over a million Birr. He distributed the fund on priority basis on activities listed below.

In the stamina of Jatani Ali, provision of education for youth in a community which was deprived of such opportunity had been his priority. According to his perception education is a medium that brings out an individual from darkness to light that would eventually enable him to recognize his rights and obligations in communal life. The residents in towns in the Province had been educating their children in the schools around them. But the Borana rural residents had no such opportunity as their children had no place to stay overnight. Having said so much about the issue related to education of children of Borana pastoral community, I can mention below a few actions he took in an attempt to alleviate this critical matter.

- He mobilized the rural community to build schools for beginners around their respective settlements.
- For those who come to towns for further schooling he arranged conditions whereby residential hostels for overnight stay be built.
    - He mobilized the community to build with own fund and labor a hostel complex with capacity to host over 300,
    - From the bazar fund he picked up Birr 100,000 and requested a German Lutheran Mission that was stationed in the town to replenish from their budget what he had for construction of a hostel that could host about 200 boys.
        - The school in Yabelo had no facility to teach children beyond grade 8. To resolve this issue he approached the Ministry of Education which provided most of the facilities and Jatani covered the short fall, such as equipping science lab with the fund from bazar.
        - The school in Bule Hora also teach only up to grade 8. Jatani mobilized the community that its level would be raised up to grade 12.
        - The Minister of Education at the time mobilized a program of adult education for illiterate elders to learn basic education at night. In this scheme Jatni's Province was rated as one of the best in promoting the program. As a result the Ministry awarded the Province a Toyota Land cruiser.

Let us turn to how Jatani utilized the fund from the bazar to other service in the community.

- Jatani committed Birr 91,000 from the fund and Ethiopian Light and Power Authority assigned technicians who installed facilities that release electric light to the town residents.

- He distributed the remaining fund among constructions of different offices in the Province and football field.
  - Provincial administration
  - Provincial education service
  - Farmers association
  - Women association
  - Youth association
  - And football field with seating facilities for observers.

Borana is a pastoral community who depend for livelihoods on products of livestock they raise. Jatani constantly advised them to cultivate land for crop production, but they hardly paid attention to his advice. It so happened that during the Somalia invasion of eastern part of Ethiopia Borana was one of the victim communities whose thousands of animals looted, owners internally displaced and settled in Yabelo town. Here they survived on food aid from the government and international donor agencies for a year or so. Jatani decided to move them out of town and settle at two sites in Yabelo district. Here he arranged a condition in which they would learn a new trade for survival, which was land cultivation. To accomplish the purpose he obtained 200 oxen for each site and recruited volunteers from the town who would go to the sites and demonstrate mechanism of the new trade, that was harnessing oxen and break with earth with the implement in use.

The victims learned a new trade which happened to be highly beneficial. From then onward so many Borana pastoralists turned to agro-pastoralism.

In communal life he restored peace among different groups demonstrating to them advantages in participatory approach that each would gain in peaceful coexistence.

As executive administrator of Borana Region, Jatani served for about two years. Jatani was a person who won't hesitate to break a government policy that he observed against the interest of the people.

When he arrived at Nagale as an administrator of Borana Region he found the hospital in the city that the Ministry of Health administers was so neglected that the beds for overnight stay patients had no mattress. From his administration budget he purchased 60 mattresses from Kenya and requested the custom officer at Moyale to allow them duty free inland. The officer denied the request as it was against government policy. Jatani arranged their entry on camel back through bushes. The officer charged Jatani on breaking government policy. But nobody paid attention to the charge against him.

The Derg policy denied entry of vehicles inland. Jatani found the farmer's association badly need vehicle for providing services required of them for mobility during meetings. He purchased a second hand land cruiser from Kenya and allowed its usage in bushes where police traffic won't interfere in the use.

Moyale is an inland port through which licensed business men facilitate import and export transactions. Officials in Addis Ababa grant the license according to a set criterion to individuals

who reside out of the Region. He challenged the officials to give priority to any interested local persons who fulfill the criteria. The Derg officials in Addis Ababa supported his demand.

Jatani challenged the licensed business men who were from outside the Region to fulfill one of two options:

- Invest part of the gain from respective business on any kind of tangible property in the Region.
- Or contribute some amount from the profit to local development fund.

The business men protested against his demand and accused him on Derg high level officials, but lost the case as fair justice was on his favor.

Tadhi Liban

Author of his biography