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Sayyid Roba Garbi: His ‘sainthood’, Prophecy and Wisdom in Arsiland (1870s to 1974)

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Abstract

Ethiopia is a land of diversity both in terms of ethnicity and religious affiliations. Even though Islam studies and Islamic issues now getting some attentions than before by scholars, it is comparatively far below Christianity studies. Many aspects of Muslim lives and Islamic issues need more investigations. Particularly the works of Muslim ‘ulama and saints who contributed a lot to their fellow community and country need more research in order to bring to light their achievements. One of the famous ‘saints’ who lived in the twenty-century Arsiland was Sayyid Roba Garbi. Sayyid Roba was a saint, prophet, social leader, supporter of the poor, jaalaloo (friend) of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar. During his life time he involved in many sensitive socio-cultural dealings and even symbolically in the political sphere including the issue of identity. Like few foresighted individuals, he struggled for the betterment of human-beings particular for the Arsi Oromoo as well as even for animal rights throughout southeastern parts of Ethiopia. His life history is the product of the writer’s Ph. D research fieldwork carried between 2014 and 2015 in Arsiland involving interviews of his family as well as his friends and common people. The writer also observed some places related to his life and also analyzed many chants known as sarmadee and zeekaraa to reconstruct his life history and contributions. Based on these data and their analysis, the writer concludes that Sayyid Roba Garbi life history epitomized the suffering Arsi Oromoo faced during Naftanga-Gabbar period and also their socio-cultural and religious conditions. Moreover, Sayyid Roba activities such as opening up Sof Umar pilgrimage sites of Hammarra and Hulluqa in Bale, spreading Islam, helping the poor and the needy Arsi Oromoo through material and spiritual activities and giving hopes when no institutions did not care for them during that period had even earned him the title of ‘saint’ from the Arsi Oromoo. The writer also appreciates his ability to command traditional Oromoo knowledge such as storytelling, sayings, anecdotes, usage of diverse hymns and its usage in his daily activities which contributed greatly for the survival of Arsi Oromoo indigenous knowledge and development of Oromoo consciousness.

Keywords: *Arsi Oromoo; Sayyid Roba Garbi; Sarmadee; Zeekaraa; Sof Umar*

Axareeraa

Itoophiyaan biyya heddumminaati. Hedduminni kun karaa baay'inna sabaaf sablammootaa fi amantiin ibsamuu danda'a. Yennaa ammaa amanti Islaamaaf waa'ee Islaamummaarratti qorannoo haga wayii haa godhamu malee baay'innaaniif gadi-fageenyaa qorannoo hayyoota amanti Kiristaanaarratti godhameen walbira qabnee yoo ilaallu xiqqaadha. Kanaafuu qorannoon jiruuf jireenya Musliimotaaf dhimma Islaamaa irratti godhamu baayyee barbaachisummaa qaba jechuudha. Keessattuu dalagaawwan Ulamaa'otaa Musliimaaf Waliyyootaa (nama qulqulluu) kan gahe guddaa hojjatan qo'annoo isaaniratti gadi-fageenyaan godhamee dalagaawwan isaanii immoo ummataaf ifa ta'uu qaba. Waliyyinni biyya Arsii jaarraa digdamaffaa keessa jiraate tokko Sayyid Roobaa Garbii jedhama. Sayyid Roobaa Garbii 'waliyyii', raagaa, gargaaraa hiyyeessaa fi jaalalloo Sheek Huseen fi Soof Umarti. Bara jireenya isaa keessaatti inni dhimmoota jajjaboo hawaasummaa, aadaa akkasumas dalgaanis dhimma siyaasaa keessattuu dhimma eenyummaa irrattis 'waliyyii' xiyyeeffateedha. Jijjiirama jireenya ilma namaa qofa keessati osoo hin taane mirga beeyiladootaafis biyya Arsii kibba-bahaa Itoophiyaa kessatti nama qabsaa'aa turedha. Seenaan jireenya isaa kun kan qophaahe yennaa barreessan kun qu'annoof qorannoo PhDiitif biyya Arsii keessa socho'aa turee bara 2014 fi 2015 keessa namoota isaatti dhiyaatan, maatii isaaf ummata baldha kessaa namoota dubbisuudhaan kan qophaaheedha. Dabalataanis, barreessichi kun bakkoota seenaa isa wajjiin walqabatanii fi faaruwwan akka Sarmadeef Zeekaraa jedhaman gargaaramuun seenaa isaaf dalagaawwan inni biyyaa hojjate kan ibsan xiinxaluudhaan kan qophaaheedha. Ragoota asii olii eeraman kanaan gadi-fageenyaan qu'achuuf xiinxaluudhaan barreessichi kun dhumarraatti seenaa Sayyid Roobaa Garbii haala jiruuf jireenya akkasumas gidiraa Oromoota Arsii bara sirna nafxanyoota irra gahee ture kan calaqqisu ta'uu hubateera. Itti dabalataanis Sayyid Roobaa Garbii bakka muudaa akka Hammarraaf Hulluuqaa Baleen keessatti saaqun /banuun, babaldhinaa amanti Islaamaa keessatti gahee taphateef hiyyeessota Oromoota Arsii qabeenyaaf Waaqa kadhannaan jajjabeessuuf hamilee kennuun gargaruun isaa akka 'waliyyii' tokkootti inni akka ilaallamu kan isa godhe ta'uu qu'anno kun agarsiseera. Barreessan kun Sayyid Roobaa Garbii beekumsa Oromoo keessatti kuufame beeku qofa osoo hin taane karaa seenessuun, himoota gaggabaabaa, jechoota hiikkaa guddaa fi dachaan qaban fi faaruwwan garagaraa kan beekaniif ofuma isaanituu kan qindeessan ta'uu isaanii kun maalummaan Oromootaa Arsii akka hin baanneef of akka beekan godhuu keessatti nama gahe guddaa taphataa ture akka ta'e hubanneera.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Oromoo Arsi; Sayyid Roobaa Garbii; Sarmadee; Zeekaraa; Sof Umar*

1. Introduction

Sayyid Roba Garbi was born at a place called Mullu in the present Midhaga Tola district in eastern Hararghe in the last quarter of nineteenth-century. His mother Amatalgani was believed to be from Hawiyya Somali clan. The name of his father was not exactly known. Sayyid is not his name, it is a title given to a famous person in most parts of the Muslim world due to a belief that he is a gifted and favored by Allah. Moreover, Garbi is not his father's name. According to oral informants, it is a name of a tree that mostly found in the eastern parts of Hararghe under which Sayyid Roba Garbi likes to sit. Through his father he had a genealogical connection to Abbu clan of Afran-Qallo Oromoo of Eastern Hararghe. It is also said that he belonged to a family of Aw Hussein Mohammed. This family is also considered as a 'saintly' family. Thus, Sayyid Roba Garbi's ancestors were made to be from a noble family. Informants believe that like Prophet Muhammad he performed a *hijra* (emigration) from the east to the west (Bale) in the late nineteenth century where he initially resided in the site of Dirre Sheikh Hussein, Anajina. For about seven years he intensively carried out prayers and meditation to God and Sheikh Hussein there. Sayyid Roba Garbi temporarily also settled in Sabro settlement in a village of *Qanyazmach* Shamsi Asaba

in Bale zone when he was said to keep cattle for him. Later, he returned to Anajina and settled there for a decade as a *dargaa* (custodian of Dirre Sheikh Hussein/Anajina shrine).^a

Sayyid Roba Garbi grew during the climax of *Naftagna-Gabbar* (lord-tenants), politico-economic exploitative system in Arsiland when the impact of the conquest on Arsi Oromoo harshly felt in every aspect of the living conditions. His formative years coincided with the time when the exploitative system was at its peak. The man who was responsible for instituting this system was Menelik II. Menelik conquered Arsiland after a prolonged campaign of about a decade resulted in the amputation of hands of male and breasts of female at Anole in September 1887 (Abbas, 1982; Ketebo, 1999). Menelik conquest led to the loss of fertile lands by the majority of Arsi Oromoo who were relegated to *gabbar* (tenants). They also lost their culture and way of life. The Oromoo language was despised and forbidden to be used in various institutions. In order to destabilize Arsi Oromoo culture and way of life, the newly established system looked up on Islam, the religion most Arsi Oromoo follow in contempt. This incident widened the gulf between the Oromoo and the Shewan conquerors and the Arsi turned en mass to Islam as a resistance ideology against alien culture. With this, Islam spread quickly and took a firm hold in Arsiland (Abbas, 2002; Temam, 2002). It was in such milieu that Sayyid Roba Garbi emerged at the beginning of twenty-century in Arsiland when Arsi Oromoo completely marginalized by imperial rulers and despised as a backward people.

The main reasons why this study initiated is due to the fact that Sayyid Roba Garbi's exemplary role in improving the lives of his people at that time of imperial marginalization of Arsi Oromoo was not studied. Moreover, his biography which had embodied many features experienced by a few Oromoo individuals did not get any attention it deserves. Sayyid Roba Garbi is remembered in Arsiland as a 'saint', supporter of the poor, fortune-teller, father of oral literature, Islamic propagator, *jaalaloo* (close friend) of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar. Some says he was a political analyst while other says he was a religious leader. This all round personality lived in both Bale and Dida'a, Eastern Arsi zone till his death in 1974. Thus, the main objectives of the study are to appreciate his wisdom and document his life history.

2. Methodology

The paper is a result of a qualitative exploratory research with subjective approach. It involves elements of ethnographic techniques including interviews, narrations and discussions. The subject of the study is based on an individual history. For the purpose of the study, resourceful individuals starting with his two sons, his close associates, devotees and common people were interviewed in depth, along with giving them the opportunity to narrate other details. The paper is focused on three main objectives:

1. To document the narrations on the life history of the Sayyid Roba Garbi.
2. To appreciate Sayid Roba Garbi's Oromoo Oral wisdom in particular and the Arsi Oromoo in general.
3. To discuss Sayyid Roba Garbi's activities through which he support his people when nobody cared for them.

A comprehensive field work was done in December 2014 and January 2015 as a part of PhD fieldwork followed by additional follow ups in following subsequent years. Since Arsi population is large the writer used purposive and snowball techniques to collect data from oral informants mentioned above. Furthermore, many hymns known locally as *sarmadee* (a type of ritual performance in which either

^a Informants: Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba, 64 years old interviewed at Shashamanne on 23 December 2014 and Haji Halfo Sayyid Roba, 72 years old interviewed at Adelle on 21 January 2015.

one big drum or two small drums used in a dance accompanied by its beats moving one's body here and there during the praise festivals of Sof Umar and Ayya Makko, his daughter), *zeekkaraa* (came from Arabic word *dhikr* meaning remembrance but in Arsiland it could mean singing religious hymns using *kabala*, wooden clappers and movement of the body gently here and there for a praise of any saint or a prophet) and *baaroo* (which came from the Arabic word *bahr* in this context it refers to the magnitude of the love they have towards Sheikh Hussein which is as vast and deep as a sea) were used as a source of information to study Sayyid Roba Garbi's biography and activities. Sayyid Roba Garbi's various sayings, anecdotes and stories were also used as source to analyze the then living condition of Arsi Oromoo and also his life history. In the same manner, the method of analysis and presentation follow a subjective pattern encompassing synthetic overview. For coming up with the synthetic presentation, the paper takes into consideration four factors of information: the narrations from the field, from discussion, various hymns analysis and subsequent deduction from analysis. Sources of information are largely primary on being a lesser researched and documented 'saint', along with few additional references as supplementary.

3. Conceptual framework

The Arsi Oromoo used the title *wali* which comes from Arabic when they addressed Sayyid Roba Garbi in daily conversions. They say *Sayyiid Rooba Garbi bar waliyyidha*. The equivalent English word for *wali* is saint. Its plural form is '*awliyā*'. So this matter necessitates us to discuss why the Arsi Oromoo used the concept of *wali/saint* for Sayyid Roba Garbi and how and for what reasons he did earn that title. The word *wali* is used mostly by Sufi Muslims. This also obliges us to discuss the concept of Sufi Islam. The name Sufi came from the earliest Muslim Sheikhs who wore clear and soften material of coarse un-dyed wool called *Suf* in Arabic or Persia over the whole of their body to veil themselves from the worldly pleasure in order to dedicate to spiritual affairs. The Sufi is a follower of Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) in which Muslims seek to search divine love and knowledge through direct personal experiences of Allah. It developed as a reaction to worldliness of some Muslims. The Sufi sheikhs tolerated traditional culture of the people and tried to adopt it to Islamic concepts. It is for this reason that it is also known as a Popular Islam in contrast to main stream Islam (Nimtz, 1980).

Sufi sheikh/saint played an instrumental role in spreading Islam throughout the world. In the Sufi Islamic view, a saint is depicted as someone apparent by special divine favor and holiness, and who is specifically believed to be chosen by God and gifted with exceptional favors, such as the capacity to work miracle. The main aim of Sufi teaching is to enlighten their heart and to have strong moral behavior in order to attain closer union with the Allah or seek the ultimate truth. Moreover, the Sufi sheikhs /saints seek more inner purity than external conduct and blind observance of religious rituals favored by main stream Muslims. When the Sufis Sheikh dies, they are revered as '*awliya*' (saints). Their tombs are changed into sanctuaries and visited by their adherents. *Qubba*, a cupola-shaped stone building was constructed on the burial place of the Sufi Sheikh. The adherents of the saints visited the shrine yearly which is known as *ziyara* (*muudaa* in Oromoo) where they accompanied by singing and dancing (Nimtz, 1980; Temam, 2002).

The concepts held by many Muslims about the attributes of '*awliya*' or *Al-walayah* are diverse and many. Many misconceptions and myths developed about it. The Islamic sacred book, Qur'an (Surah Yunus, 63) summarizes this concept as follows. Allah's '*awliya*' are those who believe and they are always in fear of Allah. Hence, every Muslims who believe in the six pillars of faith and fear Allah could be a *wali*. '*Awliya*' also refers to a people who are close to Allah and loves Him. They are the friends of Allah. The conditions to be fulfilled to achieve a sainthood ('*Awliya*') status according to Hazman bin Hassan and Muhammad Ihsan (2016) are to be pious and strong belief in six pillars of faith and those adhered strictly

to the Qur'an and tradition of Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, the Sufi Muslim believes that a friend of Allah is a person of truth who through various forms of self-struggle has transcended the carnal dimension of his or her existence and reached the level of the heart and spirit, thus obtaining Allah's special nearness (Fethullah, 2009). Sufis also believe in supernatural abilities which enabled them to make miracles.

In Ethiopia Islam expanded mainly through Sufi Sheikh at least from twelfth and thirteenth century onwards. The most outstanding Sufi Sheikh of twelfth and thirteenth-century was Sheikh Hussein of Anajina/Dirre Sheikh Hussein and Abadir of Harar and followed in sixteenth-century by Ahmed al-Aydarus. When these sheikhs died they were venerated by people. Some saints venerated locally others regionally or internationally (Trimingham, 1956). Among them Sheikh Hussein who had many shrines in Arsiland had also international fame while Haji Ali Wale and Sayyid Roba Garbi have a regional importance.

In Islam unlike in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity there is no a highly organized structure in religious institution. Hence, this opened the door to confer any title including Sheikh, *wali* or a *mufti* to a gifted person by a common people. The most important criterion for a sheikh to acquire the title of a *wali*/saint is the ability to perform some miracles. One of the miracles said to be performed by Sayyid Roba Gabi happened to be as follows- once upon a time he sent a certain local intermediary to a chief of Aymaro clan who lived in Dida'a, the present eastern parts of Arsi zone, Ammo Nyamma to marry his daughter. However, Ammo Nyamma refused to give his daughter to him for the reason that his address and relatives were not known. On the same day at the night hyena ate twelve cattle of Ammo Nyamma. Astonished by this event and supposing that Sayyid Roba had a special power, *karama*, Ammo Nyamma was compelled to give his daughter, Ayyo Sadiya to him. This anecdote coupled with some rumors earlier retold by pilgrims who knew him at Anajina finally sanctioned him 'sainthood' status. Later, when many of his prophecies which people believe came true, finally, confirmed his 'sainthood' status by majority Arsi Oromoo in the twenty-century.^b

Nowadays the issue of his achieving sainthood status came into question following the introduction of *Salafiyya* also called *Wahhābiyya* since 1970s and 1980s. *Salafiyya* /*Wahhābiyya* is a religious reform movement developed by Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab (d.1792) in the present-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The movement was opposed to Sufism and Western cultural influence and preached a return to the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (prophet Muhammad ways and in general his teachings) and *ijtihad* (common Muslim religious consensus). The *Wahhābīs* have been known for literal word for word interpretation of Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The followers of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab were called *Wahhābīs* but they preferred to call themselves as Ahl as-Sunna *wa'l-Jama'a* or *Salafiya*. Their center now a day is Saudi Arabia. And their main theological studies focused mainly on *Tawhīd*, oneness of God (Holt and Lambton, 1970).

The main disagreement between the followers of the *Wahhābīs* movement and the already established Islam among Arsi Oromoo Muslims in Arsiland is who really represent the Orthodox Muslims. Both of them claimed that they only represent the *tawhīdīst* and Orthodox Islam. Furthermore, the *Wahhābīs* attacked *Ziyara* locally known as *Muudaa* to shrine of saints as mentioned above and some Arsi socio-cultural practices the Sufi Muslims tolerated. The *Wahhābīs* taunted the pilgrims who came from far distance to shrine of saints and considered their practices as un-Islamic. The *Wahhābīs* criticized the

^b Informants: Haji Adam Haji Hussein, 89 years old and Obbo Adam Hussein, 37 years interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014.

gathering of pilgrims at shrine where males and females intermingled during invoking their patron saint as un-Islamic. Therefore, the *Wahhābīs* considered this practice as religious innovation, *bida'*. Due to above changes in religious make up among Arsi Oromoo particularly among youth, educated class and those returned from outside the country the sainthood of Sayyid Roba Garbi now put into a question (Temam, 2017).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Sayyid Roba Garbi's 'Sainthood'

A famous saint Haji Ali Wale of Bale in the second half of the nineteenth-century foretold the coming of Sayyid Roba Garbi to Arsiland. He appeared at Anajina at the beginning of twenty-century unknown by many people. The following couplet was said to have been composed by him concerning the advent of Sayyid Roba Garbi (Feqadu, 1999).

Irraana gad dhufa Roobaa biyyaa Garbii (Roba would come from the region of *garbi*, acacia tree)
Yoo inni dhufuu baate biyyeen taate garqii (If he does not come, the region will be in ruins)

According to Sayyid Roba Garbi sons, Sheikh Bayan and Haji Halfo in the 1910s Sayyid Roba Garbi moved to Dida'a, the area located to Northwest of Anajina beyond Wabe Shabelle River of the present southeastern Arsi zone. He arrived there through Seru and Balee towns and finally settled at Dinkit in the present Aminya district. As mentioned above it was in Aminya that he had secured the status of a 'saint'.^c Later, he moved to Bale and established his settlement in a village of Darago in Dallo Manna district and also in the villages of Dabaye and Manayal in Goro district (Mohammed Hussein, 2011; Waajjira Aadaa fi Turizimi Baalee, 2000).

People believed that since Sayyid Roba had a special power so what he asked would be responded quickly by Allah. One of the common features of Sayyid Roba Garbi personality for which he was known in Arsiland was the tradition of taking something from the private individual and distributing part of it to a needy person. When Sayyid Roba Garbi requested any person to give him some stuff that individual should have to oblige to scarify it in order to avoid Sayyid Roba's curse and achieve his internal peace and success. If he refused to give what was asked off the natural consequence is a curse. That was why the people tended to reply positively to his order in order to escape from his curse. Sayyid Roba Garbi might ask some donations from people such as cattle, money, pack animals, clothes and any attractive material he saw in people's hand. On his part Sayyid Roba used that resources by providing to a needy people or also could use it to perform *Mawlid al-Nabi* (the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad birth day which falls on 12th day of *Rabi al-awwal*, the third month in the Islamic calendar) festivities and for his personal usage (Temam, 2017).^d

Taking from a wealthier person and giving to the poorest person was one of the hallmarks of Sayyid Roba Garbi character. He also took even from the poor for some reasons as we will discuss now. The process of taking someone's property would be performed in dramatic manner. For instance, once upon a time while Sayyid Roba Garbi was travelling through Gura Dhamole area in Bale he passed by a home of a poor person and ordered the owner of the house to slaughter his solo cow to be eaten by his neighbors as *sadaqa* (religious feast). Initially that individual refused to comply with the order however, through persuasion by

^c Informants: Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba and Haji Halfo Sayyid Roba interviewed at Shashamanne and Adelle on 23 December 2014 and 21 January 2015 respectively. This view is also held by many elders in Arsiland.

^d Informants: Haji Adam Haji Hussein, 89 years old and Obbo Adam Hussein, 37 years interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014.

his neighbors due to fear of curse by Sayyid Roba Garbi he obeyed the order. After enjoying the feast with the surrounding people Sayyid Roba Garbi went to Sabro clan and yelled by saying that he had committed a serious crime so he needs their help. He also narrated what he did to a poor person to the Sabro people. The latter were so surprised and astonished by the act that they hurriedly began to collect money and cattle which Sayyid Roba Garbi gave to the poor person. The collected resources were so huge that the poor person became very rich in a single day. This type of benevolent acts performed by him was common throughout Dida'a and Bale regions during his life times (Mohammed, 2011).

According to oral informants Sayyid Roba collected property from the people through a threat of curse: Why he did this he claimed that it is the order of Allah. He narrated that in a dream he saw that Nurana Hussein preferred him from among twenty-five saints from Ethiopia and appointed him to administer Habasha. Then Sayyid Roba asked Sayyidana Kadar (a very wise man mentioned in the Qur'an who knew hidden knowledge during Musa/Muse prophet hood) who was with Nurana Hussein in a dream how to perform this mandate. Sayyidana Kadar ordered him not to indulge in accumulating property. Sayyidana Kadar again advised him to take belongings from some people and distribute it among the needy ones until they come out of their problem. Based on this claim that he takes property from some rich family and distribute it to the poor in the Arsiland. In the course of time, this benevolent act made Sayyid Roba a popular person and also got wide recognition among the majority of Arsi Oromoo as even a 'saint'.^e

The other act which endeared Sayyid Roba Garbi to Arsi Oromoo was his habit of arranging marriage agreements among the poor people. Any interested individual who wishes to marry but did not have enough stuff for consummation of a marriage contract could apply. After listening to his request he tells him on the spot to prepare for the marital ceremony. To the family of a girl he also tells them that he proposed their girl so they should prepare for the ceremony. Without any hesitation both of the families do what was ordered. In this way he arranged many marital agreements among many Arsi families. By doing this he managed to avoid high demand of bridal wealth. He defended this act basing his argument on the Islamic law (Sharia). It was for this reason that Sayyid Roba Garbi is remembered in both Arsi and Bale as the 'father of girls' as he persuaded families to engage in marriage contract on time without demanding high bride wealth. Because of this and above mentioned benevolent activities he was loved by the people and was called by different names such as Jano Garbi and Lenca Garbi. This act affirmed his 'sainthood' by Arsi Oromoo and made him a great social leader. Terje Østebo (2012) who did his PhD thesis on the history of Salafism in Bale concluded that he was the most renowned saint in that region.

4.2. Sayyid Roba Garbi's Socio-political Prophecies

Sayyid Roba Garbi was also believed to be a good interpreter of events. He foretold about the future happening of many socio-political events during Haile Selassie regime. Many Arsi Oromoo in both Dida'a and Bale believed that most of his prophecies became true during *Derg* period and later during the Tigre dominated regime.

4.3. Sayyid Roba Garbi's prophecy about the coming of Italians

One of the prophecy through which Sayyid Roba Garbi got widespread recognition among the Arsi Oromoo as retold again and again by some elder people in Arsiland was about the coming of the Italians long before they had occupied Ethiopia on the occasion of Sof Umar festivity through his *sarmadee* chants as follows-

Ziyaaraan kee ji'aa baatii Rajaabaa

Karaan samaa'ii baasu waan ajaabaa

^e Informants: *Obbo* Usman Ahmed, 69 years old and *Obbo* Hussein Kabir Hassen, 76 years old interviewed at Dabaye on 30 January 2015

Si jaalata Raayitu Daadhii Tarree

Shibbirii akkanaa takka hin arginee^f

English translation- Your pilgrimage (of Sof Umar) is in the month of Rajab (of Arsi calendar)

The pathway we see in the sky is so marvelous

He, Dadhi Tarre of Rayitu loves you

We did not see such types of horrendous terror (unleashed before and after the Italian occupation).

The above mentioned couplet interpreted by majority of Arsi Oromoo as that the pathway which mentioned in the second stanza referred to the airplanes ways through the Italians planes move through the sky. At that time the Arsi Oromoo did not know and see the Ethiopian airplanes moving throughout the sky. The terror which was unleashed mentioned in the fourth stanza referred to the bloody massacre happened before and after the Italian occupation when the Italian warplanes bombed many targets in Arsiland which led to deaths and sufferings of many people.^g

According to informants^h and Mohammed Hussein (2011) another incident related to the coming of Italians as well as the future return of emperor Haile Selassie happened in 1938. *Fitawwari* Hussein Mamme Adi and *Qanyazmach* Abdulqadir Aliyi Tura some of the renowned Arsi chiefs in Bale region met Sayyid Roba Garbi at Anajina on the occasion of pilgrimage in 1938. Sayyid Roba Garbi ordered *Qanyazmach* Abdulqadir Aliyi to climb up on the stone and deliver a speech by pleading him to say starting with the phrase *hadaraa* Haile Selassie (in the name or presence of Emperor Haile Selassie) three times loudly. After the order was carried out again Sayyid Roba asked *Fitawwari* Hussein Mamme Adi to do the same. Unlike Abdulqadir, Sayyid Roba Garbi ordered him to say in a low voice. He also performed that action and consequently asked Sayyid Roba Garbi, “If we are killed in the hands of the enemy, it was you who made this judgment.” But Sayyid Roba Garbi smiled at him and informed both of them that nobody heard the sayings except him. Furthermore, he told them that the reason he did that during Italian rule was because Haile Selassie will come back later and the Italians after accomplishment of their work will leave Ethiopia. He also told both of them that they will obtain political appointment when the emperor returned to the country (Sheikh Bayan, 1987).

Later on, these two Arsi chiefs from Bale region informed the emperor about the existence of a saint who ordered people to say *hadaraa* Haile Selassie even at the presence of the Italians. The king told them to bring him to his palace. After the appearance of Sayyid Roba Garbi, the following conversations took place between the Emperor and Sayyid Roba Garbi:-

King – Why did you say *hadaraa* Haile Selassie by standing in front of the enemy?

Roba – Allah had shown me your return.

^f Informants: *Obbo* Usman Ahmed, 69 years old and *Obbo* Hussein Kabir Hassen 76 years old interviewed at Dabaye on 30 January 2015

^g Ibid

^h Informants: *Obbo* Hussein Kabir Hassen, 76 years old interviewed at Dabaye on 30 January 2015 and *Haji* Adam Haji Hussein, 89 years old interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014.

King – If you had such ability, why did you allow Italians to come and destroy our country?

Roba – We were the ones who had called Italy to come.

King – Why did you call them?

Roba – To solve many socio-economic problems like:-

The slaves accused us on the Allah's *chilot* (court). Similarly, pack animals such as horses, donkeys and mules accused us. He further elaborated that the tenants were forced to give free labor services and sometimes were flogged and were forced to work for long hours from sunrise to sunset. Pack animals presented their accusation to the court of Allah by saying that they were overloaded when they travel long distances. Because of these, their backs were wounded and bulged. Then, Sayyid Roba Garbi said that we promised to correct these sufferings. He again said that we who are Ethiopian saints like Nurana Hussein, Abadir (saint of Harar) and me met and decided to call Italy in order to eliminate these problems. Sayyid Roba said because of road constructions and the introduction of cars and trucks by the Italians the conditions of pack animals had changed and improved. Astonished by sayings of Sayyid Roba Garbi the king awarded him a cloak and also gradually became his close friend (Mohammed, 2011).¹

¹ Ibid



Sayyid Roba Garbi was adorned by a cloak given by Emperor Haile Selassie in 1944.

This photo was provided by Sheikh Bayan, the son of Sayyid Roba Garbi

Sayyid Roba Garbi's ability to prophesy things mainly increased when he was attracted to certain actions or during the performances of *zeekkaraa* and *sarmadee* chants at religious festivities. During the climax of these ceremonies particularly at the occasion of *waziizaa* ritual (when ritual fire burned and people dance around it in emotion) his ability to say something about future events would increase. For instance, once upon a time in the 1972 he came across some tenants from Gasagar area in East Dida'a who set out to Addis Ababa to pay their *gibir* to their overlords who lived in that city. He enquired them where and why they set out from their home. They told him to Addis Ababa to pay their rents. He told them not to go there since their lords are not there when you arrived in Addis Ababa. Those tenants astonished by his taking and continued their walk, but when they arrived at Hawas as Awash River known to Arsi the tenants heard that there is a *shibir* in Addis Ababa referring to student demonstration and police actions against them. It was at this juncture that the saying of Sayyid Roba became true and then the tenants returned back to their home.^j

^j Informants: Haji Adam Haji Hussein, 89 years old and Obbo Adam Hussein, 37 years interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014.

As conclusion remarks to this part we would like to say something about this sub-topic. First, we can conclude that Sayyid Roba Garbi was a very strong person who can order even the renowned Arsi chiefs to do what he like at large gathering at Anajina when the Italian occupied the country without any fear. Second, he discussed allegorically about the suffering of Arsi Oromoo and also the suffering of pack animals under the harsh rule of *naftagna* system, hence, he aware his people about the bad situation they lived in and tried through what he could to liberate them. Third, even though the Italians were the conquerors he concluded that the Italians were better than the Amhara rules as they liberate not only the tenants but also pack animals. Thus, what the readers could deduce from his prophecy is not only about the mystical aspect but also the underlying context in which his prophesies framed in relation to suffering his people and giving hopes.

4.4. Sayyid Roba Garbi Prophecy about the Political Development from 1950s to 1974

According to Mohammed Hussein (2011) in the 1950s again Sayyid Roba arrived at the Emperor's palace while Haile Selassie was standing on the corridor. The Emperor greeted and asked him why he came. Sayyid Roba replied that I have seen nothing to come from the right and left but a flood will come up from under your bed. The flood that would arise from under the bed of the Emperor according to Arsi elder's interpretation mean opposition to his rule comes from the palace compound not from outside. The king then requested him the solution. Sayyid Roba Garbi informed him that a solution would be making a visit to Sheikh Hussein's shrine. The King went to Sheikh Hussein's shrine accordingly in 1960 and 1962. As soon the Emperor reached Anajina, he put off his shoes stood on his bare-foot, and wept. At Dire Sheikh Hussein, Anajina Sayyid Roba Garbi blessed the Emperor to stay on power for a long. As said above in December 1960 the coup d'état staged by imperial bodyguard under the leadership of Mengistu Neway and the police force who were the protector of the Emperor and his palace (metaphorically referred as Haile Selassie's bed) affirmed the truthfulness of Sayyid Roba Garbi's prophecy and also made him a close friend of the Emperor who depend for more blessings from the Sayyid Roba Garbi.

In the early 1970s Sayyid Roba Garbi also predicted about the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie regime and the coming of the *Derg* as the following *sarmadeee* implies:

Uduudatti eegan warrii (The regime expected the worst to come from border areas)

Irranaa gadi duuddi jarri^k (However, the strong opposition will come from the center)

The above idiomatic expression foretold that a threat to regime will not come from far places like the border conflict with neighboring Somalia which expected by the regime and the majority people at that time but actually Haile Selassie's dangerous enemy will come from the center like the student movement in the university that bears his name. Sayyid Roba also foretold the disorder that followed after the taking of power by the *Derg* junta in 1974 in the following metaphoric chants:

Gudii Malkaa Awwa 'oo (To the surprise of Awwa country)

Gabaabaa jilba hin gahuu 'oo (Even to the short ones it (the dress) will not reach the knee)

Dhaadatani fuula Rabbii duratti (They boasted before God)

*Duula gadhiise biyyoo marattii*¹ (They unleashed war all over the country)

^k Well known sayings in Arsiland

The above couplet interpreted in Arsiland as that the military regime boasted itself regularly through the rallies it organized, slogans uttered and military drills it made while giving lip-service to the importance of religion and indigenous knowledge. Due to the many wars waged by a new regime poverty became a common phenomenon that even the short peoples could not get enough dress which covers the whole of their body. Again also we can conclude this part by saying that Sayyid Roba Garbi knew about the political development of the country at that time (1960-1974) and also employing the instrument of bless and curse he made even the emperor to visit his holy place, Dirre Sheikh Hussein/Anajina which made him a great man among the Arsi Oromoo.

4.5. Sayyid Roba Garbi's Prophecy about the Eventual Liberation of Oromia after Its long Sufferings

Sayyid Roba Garbi also talked about the suffering and the protracted struggle of Oromoo people during his life time. He discussed sometimes metaphorically through *sarmadee* and *zeekkaraa* hymns, various sayings, anecdotes and storytelling about the suffering of the Oromoo people, the patience they have to endure and hope for their eventual liberation. According to oral informants, once upon a time in Dallo Manna in 1965 two groups of bees which had red and black colors fought each other. Then, Sayyid Roba ordered the nearby people to bring these bees. The people brought it but he again ordered them to return them to their original site and again asked them to come up with seven new red bees. They presented it to Sayyid Roba and then he allegorically said that "Oh Waqo you neither prayed *subh* (early morning time) prayer nor waited for *Asr* prayer (afternoon time), what type of prayer did you offer at this time. Later on, Sayyid Roba interpreted the wisdom of red bees as follows: He enquired the people around him about the Tagraway people. Nevertheless, at that period the common people had no knowledge about the Tagraway people. Then, he told them that these red bees were Tigraway and they would come from Mekale and ousted the *Derg* and would seize power. Furthermore, he commented that when they come, "each of you will be a state." On the other hand people around him also interpreted the above story of two groups of bee and their fight as the untimely beginning of Waqo Gutu warfare against Emperor Haile Selassie and its eventual failure. The seven red bees also are interpreted as the seven bloody years of wars between General Waqo group and the regime (1963-1970).^m

According to Mohammed Hussein (2011) in the early 1960s while Sayyid Roba was coming on the mule back from Goba town with his companions including his major servant Haji Aliyi Rida raised a critical question. He invited them to bring their mules close to each other and presented himself between them. Then, he asked them to tell him the one who is rich but poor in certain conditions. A man whose name was Abu Bakr replied that I do not know the one which is rich but poor except you. Then, Sayyid Roba was stunned and took his *alaange* (whip) and said I am asking what you know. Some of his followers responded that it would be the sky and the earth. All of them tried but failed to get the answer. Finally, he asked them to listen to him and told them that the one which is rich but poor is the land of Oromia. He said Oromia have enormous natural resources like various water bodies, mineral, oil, natural gas, gold, historical places, streams, rivers, lakes, fertile soils, forest, good climate etc. Therefore, Oromia is rich in these natural resources but poor because its rulers had ignored and abused it. Again in the early 1970s Sayyid Roba gathered the residents of Manayal in Bale and asked them about their identity to which they belong. The people replied that they belong to Islam. Then, he said that who prevented you from your Islam; I am not asking your religion. Then, he asked them why they refrained to say that their identity

^l Ibid

^m Informants: Obbo Yube Darga , 75 years old and Obbo Umar Muhammad, 75 years old interviewed at Waltae Kajelo on 2 December 2014.

belongs to Oromoo. They asked him why he had said this. He responded that my Oromoo people who endowed with natural resources actually fragmented into various factions (Sheikh Bayan, 1987).

Sayyid Roba Garbi had also a solution for Oromoo national problem. One of his solutions was to have strong perseverance for liberation of Oromia which will be achieved gradually through the systematic exploitation of Oromoo wisdom. The art and the means of liberation could be sustained if anyone acquires a new and diversified knowledge. Thus, he encouraged the people to acquire more knowledge through both secular and religious means. For instance, one of the following sayings of him shows the importance of acquiring higher knowledge. “*Beekumsa beekumsaa liqimsituu jira, namni isi argate hinjarjaru hin aaru namni yaada dheerachu qaba malee yaada gabaabachu hinqabuu*”ⁿ (There is a knowledge that encompass other knowledge, the one who patiently strive to acquire a more encompassing knowledge through endurance would not in hurry and easily annoyed but he should have to develop an encompassing enduring ideas not short sighted ones).

The other saying of him which could strengthen the above notion is that “*Gowwan namaa Oromoon akka gabroomte hin bilisoomtu jedha. Rabbitti kakadhee Oromoon bilisoomtu malee hinhaftu*” (“the fools and uneducated people believe that the Oromoo nation will not be liberated but I swore by God the Oromoo people will be liberated soon”). He said that *Gabrummaa suutan keessa bahan yoo ariifatan akka nama sa’a dorrobe harkaa garaa keessa kahee ilmoo fudhee taha* (“we will come out from serfdom gradually if we hurried to do it in a short time it is like someone who put his hand into the belly of pregnant cow to bring out prematurely the calf) (Umer & Muktar, 2019). Therefore, he recommended patience accompanied by education as a necessary tool for the Oromoo to overcome the myriad problems they found in and full liberation is also not a far distance.

Sayyid Roba Garbi not only predicted during Haile Selassie regime about the coming to power of the *Derg* and later Tagraway through his much loved *zeekaraa* and *sarmadee* chants but also talked about the decadence of the social and moral behavior of the coming generations. The following *sarmadee* throw some lights on this issue-

Jaarsi dubbii hin fixuu itti qaba malee (The elders will not finish arbitration but postpone it)

Dhugaa hin dubbatamtu dhara malee (They will not speak the truth rather falsehood)

Kan liqeeffate ni aaraa kan liqeesse hin aaruu garaa malee^o (The debtor will feel angry while the creditor will not talk bad)

This *sarmadee* and also many others which comes next implies that in the future (particularly after 1970s) loose of morality, less concern for others, lack of honesty, the spread falsehood etc., will become a norm. He also predicted about the time when an ignorant person will become a leader as the following saying indicates “*bara fardi yarate harreen gabbattu, hayyuun ukkaamamee wallaalan biyya bulchu bara sangaan qotaa oolee lafa deemee dheedu dhabee hidhamee dhaabbataa oolutu dhufa*”^p (the time will come when the donkey becomes fat while horse becomes slim, the learned will be undermined and the uneducated become the ruler. Also a time will come when an ox which engaged in plow throughout a day lacks enough grazing land and tied to the rope around the home). Sayyid Roba tried to illustrate in the late 1960s how un-matured youths dominate the political as well as the social lives of the coming generations

ⁿ Informants: Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba interviewed at Shashamane on 23 December 2014 and Haji Halfo Sayyid Roba at Adelle on 21 January 2015.

^o Common saying among the majority of Arsi Oromo

^p Ibid

through the allegory of children. Unlike in Oromoo *Gadaa* system in which the tested and well-achieved people mostly around forty years, the mature age assume power in the next generation, however, it will be uneducated and un-matured persons who dominate the political condition of the country. The following allegory of children was intended to show this phenomenon.

Haga qoollee shaa jettee ijoolleen haga qoollee

Gabaan ta ijoollee haga qoollee gabaan ta ijoollee^q

English translation- The deeds of children is according to their age

Unlike the big ones, small trivial things become the major concern for children in their daily dealings (so is the generation ruled by un-matured people).

Some of these prophecies revolve around moral issues which includes the time will come when the father begs his son to be a good man but he does not succeed in that endeavor. A time will come when the man dislike his family and relatives. A man who likes to become a bandit could not get a place to hide in and escape. The time will come when people contest each other to be a successful pilgrim but do not know about their religious fundamentals. Based on the present situation most of the Arsi Oromoo confirmed that all of the above prophecies of Sayyid Roba Garbi became true and also acknowledged the depth and width of Sayyid Roba Garbi's Oromoo wisdom.^r

As conclusion to this part what the readers could learn from the above prophesies of Sayyid Roba Garbi is not only its mystical aspect but his usage of Oromoo wisdom in his daily conversion and guiding is smart and inspiring. The advice on moral issues, the role of educated and knowledgeable persons in the society, the political condition of Arsi Oromoo in the 1960s and 1970s, the issue of Oromoo identity instead of Islamic identity, population increase and decline of grazing lands and forest, and many more are inspiring and shows his great intelligence. Sayyid Roba Garbi uttered these advices in a period when Arsi Oromoo completely marginalized from the processes of Imperial development. Thus, we have to appreciate his insights and wisdoms and document many remaining ones for proper utilization.

4.6. Sayyid Roba Garbi and his Relations to Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar Shrines

Over all the 'sainthood' of Sayyid Roba Garbi in Arsiland developed mainly for being a Sufi Muslim and ardent loyal to the will of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar and his service to the poor. Like most Arsi Oromoo, he regularly visited twice a year the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. In the occasion of *Hajj* (Arafat) and *Zara* (the sixth month after the month of *Hajj* according to Arsi calendar) festivals he along his family and companions visited Sheikh Hussein shrine found at Anajina. Some of his companions departed on foot and others were mounted. Some others who remain at home protected the property of the pilgrims while others sent gifts and rope along with their donkey to departed pilgrims. On the journey and at shrine of Sheikh Hussein Sayyid Roba Garbi produced many *baaroo* hymns and other praise-songs for Sheikh Hussein. One of the famous praise-songs he produced is as follows:^s

Ifuu kee nurraa hiijaabanillee (Even if Sheikh Hussein light curtained)

Waan hin dandeenye kilaafanillee (Even if they are envying the thing which they cannot succeed)

^q Common saying in Arsiland

^r Well known by many elderly people in Arsiland.

^s Informants: *Obbo* Adam Hussein, 37 years and *Haji* Asabal Tilmo, 93 years interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014; Sheikh Bayan, *Dhamsaa*, p. 7

Keessan hikmaan ganaa hedaa mul'achuu (Your wisdom is going to be seen more yet)

Jibriil qadaa hin goone siin dubbachuu (Gabriel has not even missed regularly to speak with you)

Sayyid Roba Garbi was also ardent follower of Sof Umar and the custodian of his shrine. Sof Umar himself was said to be a genius person who believed to have possessed extraordinary ability to perform miracles. He lived in Bale in the twelve century. Like Sheik Hussein, he had also played a great role in the propagation of Islam among the Arsi Oromoo. Sayyid Roba Garbi is said to be one of the major 'saints' who preserve the sanctity of Sof Umar cave shrine. He also claimed that he was the descendent of Sof Umar.

Sayyid Roba had left his land and other belongings he had in Darago (a village in Dallo Manna district) to his followers and moved to Web in the early 1950s. It was here that he established his new home at Manayal. The village is near the historic cave of Sof Umar. It was he who erected the first ritual stone at the Great Exit of Sof Umar cave which is known locally as Hulluqa. Sayyid Roba erected this stone through the participation of the local people including the two chiefs of Hawattu clan such as Korme Gada and *Grazmach* Wako Butta. In this manner Sayyid Roba made Hulluqa a place of worship and a center of Arsi Oromoo pilgrimage site (Mohammed, 2011).

Moreover, Sayyid Roba Garbi introduced a new *muudaa* (pilgrimage) festival calendar. Initially it was Haji Ali Wale of Ilani clan who fixed the date of festival for the first time in the month of *Heexoo* (the eight month of Arsi calendar) in the 1850s. Haji Ali Wale started *Muudaa* ceremony with large gathering at a village of Balee Alamkaram in Goro district of Bale in the middle of nineteenth-century. It was Sayyid Roba Garbi who added two additional festival calendars to that of the earlier one. The new *muudaa* festival dates were fixed to be held in the months of *Safara* (the second month) and *Rajab* (the seventh month). The following couplets support this development-

Ziyaaraan kee Ji'a baatii Rajabaa (Your pilgrimage is in the month of Rajab)

*Karaan Samaa'ii baasu waan ajabaa.*¹ (The path which goes through the sky is miraculous)

Sayyid Roba Garbi also made the following peoples to maintain and protect the shrine Of Sof Umar. Accordingly, Sheikh Mohammed Alga (believed to be the legitimate descendant of Sof Umar and also the chief of Aymaro clan), Yaba Mudana (believed to be the legitimate descendant of Sof Umar and chief of Ilani clan), Wayou Sole (the chief of Hawattu clan), Roba Konton (the chief of Karara clan) and Sheikh Said Haloye (the chief of Gerjeda clan) to become the protectors and guardians of Sof Umar shrine. He also appointed *Abba Karras* (leaders of the ceremony). The current *Abba Karra* (gate keeper) of the *muudaa* festival of Sof Umar is Abdul Jabar. The second place of pilgrimage site of Sof Umar is found at Hammarra in Gololcha district of Bale. It is found to the northwest 35 km of Jarra, the capital of Gololcha district in Bale. Hammarra is also believed to be the burial site of Sof Umar. Sayyid Roba Garbi also encouraged the peoples to visit this shrine at least once a year (Mohammed, 2011).^u

The devotees of Sheik Hussein referred the pilgrimage/*ziyara* to Sheik Hussein as "a pilgrimage of the poor in contrast to the pilgrimage to Makkah. In the same manner, Sayyid Roba perceived the pilgrimage of Sof Umar as a little Pilgrimage as it is expressed in following chant -

Makkaan guddoon Arabaa (The big Makkah is in the Arabia)

¹ Informants: Haji Adam Haji Hussein, 89 years old and Obbo Adam Hussein, 37 years interviewed at Adelle on 12 December 2014.

^u Informant: Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba interviewed at Shashamane on 23 December 2014

Tuun Yasribii tuun Weebilee (The other is Madinah; the third place of pilgrimage is that of Web)

Makkaaf Madiinaa kiyyaa deebi'ehoo (Now we returned to our Makkah and Madinah)

Maaltu beeka waan Rabbi siif ta'ehoo (Who will know what God did to you?)

Weebilee gaarri ragaa bahehoo.^v (To my Web even the surrounding hills acknowledged its holiness).

Sayyid Roba Garbi had served as a spiritual leader of the *muudaa* ceremony during the pilgrimage of Sof Umar. He was given the seniority to open the ceremony through blessing. He would also bless the pilgrims coming from different corners of the country. Sayyid Roba inspired individuals to bring vows when the pilgrimage of Sof Umar had approached. When *waziiza* ceremony started, Sayyid Roba was the first person to say various *sarmadee* hymns and chants to praise Sof Umar, Prophet Muhammad and God. The most important right-man of Sayyid Roba and chanter at Sof Umar pilgrimage was Umar Onkosha. During the ceremonies Sayyid Roba most of the time ordered him to deliver various chants. Nodaway, one of his sons Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba Garbi is the spiritual leader of the ceremony.^w

4.7. Sayyid Roba Garbi and His role in the Propagation of Islam

Sayyid Roba Garbi played a crucial role in the introduction of Islam and construction of Mosques in different places of Arsiland. When he settled with one of his wives in the early 1940s at Darago in Dallo Manna, some of the residents of Darago during that period were the followers of traditional religion (*Waaqeffanna*). He made many attempts to convert them to Islam and also constructed mosques in order to propagate Islam in that locality. Inhabitants of Darago despite their initial resistances gradually embraced Islam.^x

Also in Arsi Dida'a in Aminya district he played a major role in propagation and consolidation of Islam. He constructed the first big Jumaa'a mosque in that locality and also colorfully performed *Mawlid al-Nabi* ceremony in it annually. Probably this was the biggest *Mawlid al-Nabi* festival celebrated under his leadership in that area of Arsiland. The festivities attracted a lot of people including religious leaders, commoners and the needy people. The ceremonies besides celebrating the anniversary of prophet's birth also involved thanks giving festivities in which believers gave alms to the poor and the weak, visited each other, and eat and drank together. The introduction of *Mawlid* as major religious ceremony and festival contributed in strengthening Islam in the region (Temam, 2002).

Sayyid Roba Garbi also played a crucial role in the introduction of Islam into Bulbula town found in the present-day Eastern Shewa. Sayyid Roba left all his holdings and wives to his followers and came to this region around the early parts of 1960s. He came up with one child named Abbo and tent to shelter himself from the sun heat during preaching in the countryside. After he reached Bulbula, he settled under the shelter of one great Oak tree found near the bridge over the Bulbula River. He established his settlement there for a while for propagation of Islam. From that settlement he tried to introduce and expand Islam into the residents of the town. Gradually, he made contacted with the elders of the area like Bonso Mude and Shenda Kushe who were the chiefs of Arsi Oromoo. They later

^v Well known *sarmadee* chants by Sayyid Roba adherents in Arsiland.

^w Informant: Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba interviewed at Shashamane on 23 December 2014

^x Informants: *Obbo* Usman Ahmed, 69 years old and *Obbo* Hussein Kabir Hassen, 76 years old interviewed at Dabaye on 25 January 2015

became his servant in expansion of Islam. Sayyid Roba also moved out of Bulbula town to a nearby *kebele* as far as Hiraphe to teach Islam. The peoples of the area gave him cattle as a reward for his preaching. Sayyid Roba also built a Mosque in the town from wood and mud. The first Mosque that was constructed in 1966 was built around today's biggest mosque of the town. Later on, the second Mosque was constructed to the North of the town by the contribution of the people (Mustafa, 2010).

4.8. Sayyid Roba Garbi and the Approach of His Death

According to Mohammed Hussein (2011) and oral informants in September 1974 Sayyid Roba ordered the residents of three villages such as Dabaye (Waltae Sayyida), Waltae Kejelo and Badamanna to collect firewood and hoard them at the home of his wife, Asha Badhasa Ero who was from Tulama Oromoo of Shewa. The communities and the surrounding peoples responded positively to his order. They collected firewood and hoarded it on the ground near her home. Then he said to her that "I will go to Kenya, the land of black peoples, but I will come back and on my return I will be changed into lion so that do not burn any of these firewood." After this feat, in late September 1974 Sayyid Roba began a journey to Kenya to full fill Allah's order along with his servants and companions. On a journey he was accompanied by the following prominent adherents: Haji Aliyi Rida (his son in law), Sheikh Ahmednur Sayyid Roba (his son), Hassen Mussa (his son in law), Haji Ibrahim Haji Shade (from Koloba clan of Dida'a), Qasim (from Dida'a), Tiliqu Sayyid Roba (his son) and Ayyo Rufo (his wife).^y

On the journey Sayyid Roba Garbi chanted a lot of *sarmadee* hymns that quite different from other times through which he praised the daughter of Sof Umar, Ayya Makko throughout the night. The chants which he offered during that moment includes-^z

Makkoo dafii Arshii bahii haajaa fixiihoo (Makko please come up quickly to finish the case)

Makkoo dubbiiin taa durii mitihoo (Makko the issue is not as before)

Jaanoo Garbii nasrii jettaan geettanii (Jano Garbi, you had already reached your glory)

Amma goobanaa qaata taatanii (You had already become a full Moon)

People around him later interpreted this as the approach of his death. When he arrived in Nairobi, Kenya Sayyid Roba unexpectedly struck by a stroke and died there after a few treatments in Jomo Kenyatta hospital in late September 1974. His body brought back home by Kenyan airplane to Moyale. From there his body was taken to his seat, Dabaye where he was buried. Later on, this place was developed into a shrine. Nowadays the name of this village was changed and called by his name as Waltae Sayyida. When he was alive various ceremonies were held at the seat of Sayyid Roba. These include commemorating Sheikh Hussein through poems of praise called *baaroo* and Sof Umar life through *sarmadee*. Ceremonies to seek rain, peace, health and progress of their people was also hold there. Vows were brought and sacrificial animals were slaughtered and its meat distributed among the needy and the pilgrims (Mohammed, 2011).

Following his death the surrounding communities constructed a shrine on his burial site in 1975. It was followed by the beginning of making a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sayyid Roba Garbi. Unlike earlier ceremonies, this time the date of the ceremony was fixed and the number of pilgrims increased. Before his death Sayyid Roba set the time of the pilgrimage on 15th day of *Ashura* (the first Arsi month).

^y Informants: Haji Halfo Sayyid Roba and Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba interviewed at Adelle and Shashamane on 21 January 2015 and on 23 December 2014 respectively.

^z Ibid

Nowadays, the current leader of the ceremony is his son, Sheikh Bayan Sayyid Roba Garbi. During the pilgrimage a number of ceremonies were performed. Early in the morning of the ceremonial day the site of pilgrimages was cleared and guests were received and given seats. The first ceremony to be performed was related to *Gabataa salamataa* or bowl of peace.^{aa}

Gabataa salamataa is a big bowl consisted of porridge which was prepared for the guests. It is so big that it reaches the height of a man. In the afternoon around 3:00 PM pilgrims moved to a site locally called Ardaa salaamoo and settled there under the ebony tree (Mohammed Hussein, 2011). Next, various sermons were performed followed by a discussion whereby elders exchange various views about the condition of their region. Then charities will be collected partly to support the needy, orphans and disabled persons. Finally youths were called in blessed and ordered to bring firewood for *waziiza* evening ceremony. It is a bone-firing ceremony held in the evening. During that ceremony pilgrims performed various important acts. These include singing many *sarmadee* chants and also offered many blessings. Some of the *sarmadee* chants performed by the pilgrims in praise of Sayyid Roba Garbi includes^{bb}:

<u>Afan Oromoo Chants</u>	<u>English translation</u>
<i>Nuurri Rabbi afamee</i>	The light of Lord covered the land
<i>Mannaa Daaragollee</i>	At Mana and Darago
<i>Nuurri Rabbii afamee</i>	The light of Lord covered the land
<i>Baalee Diida 'allee</i>	In both Bale and Didaa
<i>Jaanoo laafaa</i>	You are the soft one
<i>Yabbachiiftu zinnaarii</i>	The mounted and adorned one
<i>Rabbumaaf taatanii namni maali</i>	You did for the sake of God not to seek thanks
<i>Tee galata Amaarrillee dubbatee</i>	Even the Amhara spoken about your favors
<i>Baankii hiyyeessa kalqiin hifatee.</i>	The poor and the needy one satisfied of you.
<i>Gibbiin roondii qabaa</i>	The compound has a guard
<i>Adabaan Keessa deeman malee</i>	Go through it having good manners
<i>Ni milkaaya namuu</i>	Everyone would be successful
<i>Yoo sirriin lama taate malee.</i>	Unless he doubted.

Nowadays both the *ziyara*/pilgrimage and shrine/saint veneration performances in Arsiland came under attack by *Salafiyya* /*Wahhābiyya* movement as we said at the beginning of this paper. Hence, the number of visitors/pilgrims to shrine of Sayyid Roba Garbi decreased and even some young educated people start to question his sainthood. Sometimes we also see a clash between the two groups in the Arsiland. This happened due to a problem of judging the works and the deeds of past generation based

^{aa} Informants: *Obbo* Usman Ahmed,69 years old and *Obbo* Hussein Kabir Hassen interviewed at Dabayee on 30 January 2015

^{bb} Ibid

on the present contexts. The generation of twenty-century like those of Sayyid Roba Garbi supported their people when they were oppressed like the people who lived in the medieval period. The generation of Sayyid Roba Garbi came forward and filled the gaps left by the regime. They provided people with material and spiritual support. They also gave them hope for better life. In spite of this religious dispute among Arsi Oromoo Sayyid Roba Garbi still remembered as one of the great Arsi Oromoo religious figure in line with Sufi tradition who left many legacies for posterity.

5. Conclusion

The above discussions succinctly showed us that Sayyid Roba Garbi had contributed a lot to his fellow community and country in terms of economic support to the poor, socio-cultural survival and giving hope to the needy. He lived in the twenty-century Arsiland when cultural oppression, religious segregation and economic exploitation reached climax following the establishment of *Naftanga-Gabbar* system by Menelik II. He also contributed symbolically to the political and cultural awareness of Arsi Oromoo through his usage of indigenous knowledge transmission means like *sarmadee* and *zeekkaraa* chants, short stories and various anecdotes. Like few foresighted individuals, he struggled for the betterment of human-beings as well as even for animal rights throughout southeastern parts of Ethiopia. It was these activities that made him to earn the title of ‘sainthood’ from the Arsi Oromoo. Based on the above discussion and analysis of data the writer concludes that Sayyid Roba life history represented the socio-cultural and religious history of Arsi Oromoo during the *Naftanga-Gabbar* period. His numerous sayings, stories, anecdotes and prophecies about the lives and conditions of Arsi Oromoo and even Ethiopia found in which many informants believed were fulfilled in conjunction with his several *sarmadee* and *zeekkaraa* chants he composed made him one of the great Oromoo folklorist and possessor of a great Oromoo wisdom. Finally, this paper call upon Oromoo scholars to carry out further studies on such type of a gifted person and others in order to appreciate the works of past Oromoo generation who tried help their people through what they could when their communities sidelined from any Imperial developmental programs. Their wisdom should also be appreciated and documented for further studies. Lastly, the writer argues that many Oromoo personalities including Sayyid Roba Garbi who contributed a lot to their oppressed community by giving material and spiritual assistance, survival of their culture and language and hope for better life compelled us to carry out more research on their life history and wisdom for the benefit of a wider community of the country.

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