

# Nabadgelyo Siciid:

## *A leading scholar and true enlightenment thinker passed away*

### *Said Jama Hussein (1942 - 2022)*

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There is no right way to grieve and each of us reacts in our own way to the loss of a friend. Today, we have lost a dear friend whose wisdom, wit and charm have deeply affected all who have had any association with his world. Said Jama Hussein died in London at the age of 80 and many people, belonging to different generations, are mourning his passing. I asked him in the last days of his life, his views on life, and he answered, "as a member of the humankind living on this earth, I have always - since my adulthood at least- maintained that the best legacy to leave behind was to take part in the process of human reproduction - giving birth to children, who hopefully might come up with brilliant ideas; but more importantly, to leave behind ideas that contribute to the progress of man on his journey on this planet." Said was one in a million.

Many people know Said Jama Hussein as a leading scholar and visionary Somali short story writer. He was beyond that. He was someone who was full of wisdom and eventful life. Even though I met him after I was a grown man, meeting him has shaped me in many ways. His independent thinking with his critical observation skills and playful but concrete advice is one of the qualities that made him stand out. His sharp observation skills and power of remembering details of events, not only those he was a participant in, but also those he is told of, are still a mystery to me. His connection with people across generations is another quality Said had. He was a great mentor to many young people, be it in life in general, or in the profession of short story writing for which he is praised as the "king of Short Story writing". A lover of all kinds of art, one day I

sent Said Jama the photo of a painting exhibited in a hotel in Addis Ababa, by an anonymous artist, and as usual he was able to find a way to use the same painting to express his feeling about the sociopolitical state of Somali society. He wrote me back "This type of miniature art belongs to the era of impressionism in painting. Such a pathetic expression on her face must have been moved by a very disturbing spectacle, like seeing (a) Dante's Inferno - a dreadful calamity or (b) the catastrophic precipice the Somalis are mindlessly heading towards." He was an artist and art historian, who would tell you in his own words to discover the thought and emotion which the artist of the painting has portrayed.

Fluent in English, Arabic, and of course Somali, his mastery of six languages has made him have a wider world understanding and the capacity to express his thoughts beyond a language limit. His principle of tolerance and kindness is a human characteristic he wished the Somali community developed more for peaceful coexistence. For this, he has contributed immensely by bridging the language gap through the translation works he did.

There are many incidents I could write as a tribute to him, but I remember our conversation in 2016 in London. I was intrigued to know about his childhood and perspectives and asked him "who is your childhood role model that impacted your life?". I remember the way he looked at me with a heartwarming smile and checked our surrounding if anyone was looking at us followed by saying in a very low tone "is it only us?". I was surprised and thought it was a simple question and

said "yes, it is only us". Said laughed so hard and loud with my response which was still confusing for me. Then he reached out to his bag and brought out messy papers written all over them, and he said, "I have a gift for you". It is some writing that I have been collecting and I call it "is it only us". We both laughed aloud. He then said "it is not yet a book or something you can read. But try to read and make it look like a book, print it, and let it reach people." He then added, "you have a look at it and you will find the answers to some of the questions you just asked me". This is how the book "Ma innagii uun baa" came to be with my curiosity and interesting conversation with the great storyteller.

Someone very close to him characterized him by saying, "he is a nation on his own" which I agree 100% and will add that the nation he was is one of peaceful, tolerant land where everyone is accepted and heard. That is what he makes you feel when you are around him, and it doesn't matter who and what you are; he had space and love for everyone. This is how he impacted many lives in the past 60 years. He embodies a person of civic virtues, creative writing, eloquent storytelling, hospitable, sympathetic, and considerate and many more things beyond words.

Though well-read and connected to the world of books and ideas, his love of soccer might be something a lot of people do not know. He played the game when he was young in Aden, Yemen, and his favorite number was No. 8.

Nabadgelyo macallin.

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