SOMALI FOLKLORE - A TALE OF THE EL ALI METEORITE
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Introduction: In June 2020, a team of artisanal miners were in search for opal minerals and were prospecting in West Hiiraan, in El Ali and Buq Aqable area. The team belonged to a small-scale company called Kuraim. As they scoured the bushland in the search of opal, they spent weeks and left no rock unturned. However, their effort paid off when they spotted a huge brown rock with metallic lustre. The rock was different from the sandstone/limestone rocks that dominated the area. It was very dense, magnetic, with unusual shape – rounded with potholes and partly immersed in a small impact crater. One of the miners recognised the rock as a meteorite, and took a sample for a laboratory chemical and mineralogical analysis from the massive rock. It was a very difficult job to chop off small pieces from it. The result was a find of 15.15 tonne meteorite, that was moved away in September 2022 to Mogadishu.

Discontent: When the news spread through the nomadic communities in the area, the folks became furious as their heritage, identity and folk traditions was lost and taken away by prospectors. In the search for understanding their primordial sentiment, I stumbled on a great folk mythology. Recently, the folk tale was narrated to me by various individuals from El Ali: Hodan Hussein, a public health worker; Shigshigow, a businessman and Mohamed Goodir, an MP in Hirshabele State Parliament. There are many people who narrate the discontent of the locals in the West Hiiraan Region.

Narrative: The story goes like this: “A few thousand years ago, the people of the Shabeele River Valley were nomads who raised camels, goats and sheep. The land was greener than what it is today; the rain was more frequent and intense; every kind of animal roamed the grassland and the pasture was plenty. The people came from the west and travelled through treacherous land, because Waq, the only Creator of everything ordered them to move east. However, after many years of prosperous life, the people started to disbelieve and disregard Waq, and Waq became very angry at them. The land erupted with black volcanic rocks, covering Buq Aqable, not far away from El Ali and the people were petrified. And today you can see the Petrified Aw Guure depicting varieties of human-looking rocks. Again, in his fury, Waq was not yet done with the people. He threw from the Heavens a heavy piece of metallic rock that sped through the air and struck El Ali area with deafening sounds and vibrations. The few people who survived surrendered to Waq and they never provoked Him.

Denouement: Since then, the metallic rock has been at the centre of the history, identity and lifestyle of the Gaaljecel Clan who are settled now in the Shabelle River Valley. As time passed, the people changed their religion to Islam, and instead of Waq, Allah the only one Creator filled up that position in their minds.

Some myths are so enduring that they’ve lasted thousands of years. While people once used them to explain natural phenomena, they continue to entertain, inspire, and fascinate.