

Innovations

A Political Career of *Qäññazmač Semeneh Desta*

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Abstract: *This paper converses the political career of Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa, who played a crucial role and active involvement in the politics of Gojjam province, more specifically in Agäw- Meder, Mätäkäl, Baher Dar and even Ĉelega Awraja of Gondar, since the mid of Ethiopian patriotic resistance movement against fascist rule to the period even after the final collapse of Haile Silassie's old government and the coming to power of the Därg military administration. Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa claimed descent from a prominent noble lineage of Agäw-Meder and as a young man he become known for his regular engagement in the patriotic resistance campaigns of Agäw-Meder against the Fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia since 1935 to 1941. Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa had become a political leader served circularly in different districts of Agäw-Meder and Mätäkäl Awrajas with different hierarchical positions since 1945-1974 for about 29 years. . In the course of the study, I have depended mainly on primary and secondary sources, as well as oral informants, and archival materials. For archives, I have used DebreMarkos University Archive Center, Addis Ababa National Archives and Library Agency, Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University and Awi Zone Culture and Tourism Office. The interview was effectively addressed by qualitative approach through purposive sampling method. The age and the ability to remember the past events and the level of participation in the local affairs were given emphasis for the selection of informants. The data which I collected from oral sources were crosschecked with archival and secondary sources before interpretation.*

Key Words: *Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa, Därg, Gojjam, Agäw-Meder, Mätäkäl*

Necessary terms:

***Ato**-A civil title given to ordinary people, equivalent to Mr.; **Awraja (Sub-province)**- An administrative unit below the level of province; **Därg**-A committee (Government of Ethiopia from 1974-1991); **Fano**- proscribe men; **Meketel wäräda(Sub-District)**- Administrative unit below district; **Näçläbaš**- local militia; **Qäññazmač**- commander of the right wing, a politico-military title below Fitawrary; **Wäräda(District)**- An administrative unit equivalent to district below sub-province.*

Family Background and Formative Years of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa

Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa was born in 1922 at Asäm Selassé (relatively about 20 kilometers far north east of Injibara town, now administrative center of Awi Zone), in the former Agäw-Meder *Awraja*. Agäw-Meder is the region which is located south-west of Lake Tana, south-east of Qwara and north-west of the rest of Gojjam.

Seménäh was the son of a judge and relatives of many patriots and who himself was a patriot and paid a great scarification in his environ for Ethiopian liberation. Seménäh was enrolled at Injibara primary school to pursue modern education in that he attended up to grade four only. With this Seménäh able to understand the four basic mathematical operations and how to read and write much better than that of his traditional church education. This opened a wider gate for him to join the traditional eliet groups of the area. Seménäh lived closely with *Däjjazemač* Mengeša Jemberie (one of the noted patriot of Ethiopia during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia). This hastened his future promotion in the eyes of the ruling classes.

Seménäh had worked for about 24 years as a political leader in different districts of Agäw-Meder and Mätäkäl *Awrajas* (1945-1969) under the province of Gojjam and as a member of parliament for about six years (1969-1975) representing the peoples of Agäw-Meder. When Mängäša Jämbäré went to Addis Ababa to submit in hand the already captured patriot *Däjjazemač* Bälay Zäläkä of Gojjam, Seménäh had traveled with *Däjjazemač* Mängäša aimed to appease the Emperor in person. Mängäša also supported him in diplomacy. In his adjurement the emperor appointed Seménäh as secretary of *Ĉara Meketel wäräda* under Dangla *Wärädä*. Formerly Seménäh received good experience of leadership from *Däjjazemač* Mängäša Jämbäré and his father since his childhood. There, he served for about four successive years from 1945-1948.

When Seménäh was governing several districts his approach towards bandits and criminals was referred to be as a Tiger. He urged strongly to put peace and order to cease acts of robbery in the area. It was so difficult to criminals to escape from Seménäh`s hand unless they could expose the reality. The punishment was not restricted to bandits or criminals only, but also extended up to their family, who tried to hide and suspected of cooperation with bandits. For a time he was much successful in suppressing criminals and robbers in the area but due to increasäment of his brutality the people forced to oppose him.

By his diplomatic ability, for the complete surrender of any act of robbery, šifetenät and illegality or in general speaking incivilities, he established a close communication

in line with governor of district and sub-districts around his governing area. Thus, by using the ten soldiers accompanied by *Näčläbašes*, Seménäh had able to hang and gather penalites chained by bonds from both areas within and out of his sphere of administration. From Satema- Dangiya, Guagusa, Fageta, Faffa, Segela, šašena Gemejabet, Méča, Guta, Wonebärema, and other areas, many of felons were gathered and arrested at Asäm Selassé until they had been corrected and reflected parameters of behavioral change.

Then, Seménäh transferred from Satema *Meketel Wäradä* to governor of Dangla *Wäradä*. After he was governing Dangla for about two successive years of 1965 and 1966, two issues intervened in the life of Seménäh at Dangla. One was that due to his usual behavior of inflexibility and strong minded conflicts of opinions were become in the move of duties realization. The second was that in the time, border issues in the west of the country were become blistering and more than any time, it required a strong follow-up. To this end the hard working and active nature of Seménäh was become the most preferable and sustainable than others to defend the exact border lines from the Sudanese pressure of the time. Thus, Seménäh was transferred from Dangla to Mätäkäl-Danegur *Wäradä* as *Wäradä* governor and frontier defense from areas of Omédela to Guba and Qwara to Mättäma. There, Seménäh served from 1967-1969.

Seménäh as a Member of Parliament

Apparently, there was an uprising in Gojjam from 1968- 1969 against the new agricultural income tax and issues related to administrative problems. Following all resistances in Gojjam had been broken down and the situation was fairly calm by the end of 1968 or spring of February 1969, in May 1969, Emperor Haile Sellassie toured the Province of Gojjam. The visit was intended to please the clergy, peasantry, and the gentry. Accompanied with feasts, the Emperor paid his respects for several monasteries. For gentry, with efficiency in administration as well as keeping peace and stability, the Emperor gave the title promotions and medals and even material as well as financial rewards. On the part of peasants the emperor also exempted them from tax arrears. Even the Emperor had made an edict of preventing the participants in the campaign of defending the will of the state in the same uprising from any punishments if they were committed a mistake in the war of suppressing the Gojjam uprising. When, the Emperor was at Bahir Dar for similar purpose, Seménäh eagerly went there to meet the Emperor for expecting rewards and promotion for his devotion since his adulthood. Earlier, related with the Gojjam peasant uprising of 1968- 1969, based on the comprehensive reports submitted by *Däjjazemač* Kefelé Eregätu, the Minister of Interior, and *Däjjazemač* Kefelé Dadi, a crown councilor, to

the central government, on 23 July 1968, *Däjjazemač* Šähayu Enqua Selassé, (the adopted father of Seménäh) was transferred to Käffa after eight years of administrating Gojjam province from 1960-1968 and *Däjjazemač* Däräjä Mäkonän, who had taken part in the mediation of both Gojjam revolts of 1951 and 1968 replaced him. Both the time governor of Mätäkäl *Awraja* named *Fitawerari* Emebiyal and *Däjjazemač* Däräjä Mäkonän of Gojjam province was stand against the will of Seménäh. Because, both disliked Seménäh`s upgrading for their respective reasons independently.

Incidentally, following the declaration of Ethiopian first written constitution of 1931, the tradition of parliamentary system in Ethiopia was first established by Emperor Hayläselasse I of Ethiopia by 1932. In accordance of this constitution, election of parliament members were held twice from 1932 to 1956, however, it did not allow the direct participation of the mass in the election process.

Following the 1955 revised constitution to the fall of the imperial regime, within four years of office term, about five round parliamentary elections were held in 1957, 1961, 1965, 1969 and 1973. This already adopted tradition of parliamentary election an inevitably gave a new life for the already collapsed and tetired political position of Seménäh Dästa. In the last two, implying, the fourth and the fifth round parliamentary elections Seménäh had been completed. In the 1969 election of the fourth round for member of Chamber of deputies, there were about 134 election *Awrajas*. Agäw-Meder was the one from the 134. In Agäw-Meder, election *Awraja* of Dangla election centre, Seménäh was registered by paying a recognizance fees, determined by the election board as a one criterion and others.

Under Agäw-Meder election *Awraja* about fourteen candidates were registered by paying a recognizance fees. These were *Ato* Mulukän Akalu, *Ato* Menayäw Engedayé, *Ato* Seménäh Dästa, *Ato* Bärhun Fäläkä, *Fitawerari* Bayeh Tässäma, *Ato* Bayenäsäñ Käbädä, *Ato* Tamer Däseta *Ato* Andualäm Béza, *Ato* Ayaléw Mädefu, *Ato* Ageud Negussé, *Gerazmač* Wäledä Amelak Zäläkä, *Ato* Wäledé Gäberu, *Ato* Gétahun Mogäss and *Ato* Färädä Engeda. Then Seménäh was registered to the candidacy and to had bless of triumph in the competition, the candidate had already enough to start a fantastic campaign of electioneer. He followed too systematic and technical procedures. In motivating the choosy people, he made a wider tour throughout Agäw-Meder. Additionally, to create conditions convenient, for usual activate and follow up, Seménäh actively assigned his relatives and sweethearted friends for areas in reign of his campaign.

Moreover, Seménäh summoned and gathered the peoples of Gojjam, who were living to south of Bahir Dar town up to Wänebära-Mätäkäl. In the east his march extended

as far as the source areas of Abay River that was Säkäla. Discussions were held and big feasts were served accompanied by the traditional music and dancing. The fame of the feast was extended even to Quwarit from Säkäla and Taliyan, Lijämebära. In fact, other candidates did not make a good preparation, the same to him. In this round of election in both the fourteenth provinces and Addis Ababa town, about 134 election *Awrajas* and under it about 1280 election centers were organized. From Agäw-Meder *Awraja* both Seménäh and *Fitawerari* Bayeh Tässäma were the winner holding the first and the second ranks respectively and become members of the parliament representing the Gojjam Agäw people. The geographical location of his environ nearby the main street that goes from Addis Ababa to Bahir Dar made communication to Seménäh very easy. It also believed to be that for the success of Seménäh, the role of his adopted father, *Däjjazemač* Šähayu Enequa Selassé at far was not undermined. Then Seménäh went to Addis Ababa with one of his daughter named Zäweditu, to hold the office of parliamentarian.

From 1969 to 1972, Seménäh served in the parliament as a member of a job and election board and he got a title of *Qäññazmač* in 1972 by Emperor Haile Silassie.. While Seménäh was at the parliament, he worked strongly to defend the rights of the people whom he represented. For instance, once the government had already intended to impose a new tax on the people of Agäw-Meder in 1968. That was a *geber* locally referred to be as *Yäsäbo Geber* (a kind of tribute determined on the coverage part of the actual product as a duty) .Un like Bayeh Tässäma, starting even before he was elected, Seménäh convinced the government that the land was infertile and prone to constant floods which made the people to produce insufficient grains. With efforts of Seménäh the people he represented was exempted from such kind of *Geber*. More over Seménäh made a usual tour to Agäw-Meder and made his effort in the parliament for building of schools, health centers, religious institutions and wipe of roads. By all this actions Seménäh had become more popular and successful in Agäw-Meder *Awraja*. After four years of service, he returned to Agäw-Meder *Awraja* to prepare him self for the next round of election¹²⁵. That was the fifth round election of 1973.

In the fifth round parliamentarian election, his Excellency *Ato* Mulat Däbäbä, his Excellency *Ato* Abära Jämbäré, his Excellency *Ato* Yelema Hayelu, and his Excellency *Ato* Mäkonän Nureleññ were leaderships of the national election board. The first and the last were chair person and manager respectively, while the rest were members. Thus, for Agaw Meder election there were about four voting centers such as Faffa, Dangla, Banejja and Dangiya. Whereas the election board include *Qäññazmač* Sahelu Ayu, the governor of the same *Awraja* of the time was chairman of the *Awraja* selection board, while *Ato* Amarä Terunäh and *Ato* Dämeläw Mälässä were members. Under Agäw-Meder election *Awraja* about fourteen candidates were

registered by paying a recognizance fees. These were *Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa*, *Ato Nägaleññ Aläm*, *Ato Tamer Dästa*, *Ato Meneayähu Engeda*, *Ato Ayaléw Bärihun*, *Ato Yäšewas Bayeh*, *Ato Gärämäw Mängestu*, *Ato Mulukän Akalu*, *Ato Mäkonän Däbäbä*, *Ato Andualäm Béza*, *Ato Mulunäh Alämayähu*, *Ato Baynäsaññ Käbädä*, *Ato Lulé Tsegay*, and *Ato Gétahun Mogäs*¹³². To perform the action of the election, civil servants from different posts were assigned, mainly those who were with a lot of experience from the previous elections and other missions.

During the time of election security issues has given a great attention. To assure intelligence of the election centers guards were appointed for the four voting centers of each *Wärädäin Agäw-Meder Awraja*. Accordingly, for Dangla *Wärädä* election center, both *Aseräläqa Ayälä Gärämäw* and *Wätadär Bälay Alämu*, for Ankäša *worda* election centers both *Wätadär Genbenäh Täkelu* and *Wätadär Zäwedé Wassé*, for Injibara election center both *wotader Berehanu Kassa* and *Wätadär Biwota Alämu*, for Dangiya voting center both *Wätadär Märeša Abäbaw* and *Wätadär Ayaléw Dämärä* assigned to be the guardianship of the respective election centers.

The voting schedule was held from June 24, 1973 to July 8, 1973, for the successive two weeks. From 1976 total populations of registered electors, about 19695 of them were committed to give their vote. Finally, on 9 July, 1973, the voting number of each competent candidates and their respective rank was officialized. *Qäññazmač Seménäh* and *Ato Nägaleññ Aläm* took the first and the second ranks respectively with a vote number of 2565 and 2500. The rest twelve competents had a vote between 2017 to 403. The last and the least scorer was *Gétahun Mogäs*.

For the success of *Seménäh* there were reasons. First, in his second round election campaign of 1973, *Seménäh* was more popular than the previous one for the reason that *Seménäh* showed his effort and diplomatic ability of defending the rights and benefits of the people he represented while he was at the parliament. Second, there were no that much strong contesters in the area since the former candidates were assigned to administer different areas and leaving the competition. *Qäññazmač Seménäh*, Therefore, easily won and went for the parliament together with another lucky man known as *Nägaleññ Aläm*, the secretary of *Banjja Wärädä*, representing the people of *Gojjam Agaw*.

After serving almost half of a year, the 1974 popular revolution was brockout, which brought the end of *Halyäselass`*s old regime. This marked the beginning of the new chapter in life of *Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa* that was the Life of Cat and Rat with that of the *Därg*.

Seménäh's anti *Därg* Struggle: Seménäh's War Preparation Against *Därg*

To divert the already flared revolution, some aristocrats and ministers of Emperor Haile Silassie had gone steep. *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was the one who made an oath of alliance with some of those aristocrats and ministers. For instance, *Däjjazemač* Šähau Enequa Selassé, the adopted father of Seménäh and the former General Governor of Gojjam province and *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa made a plot against the *Därg* at the home of the former one. Using *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa as a middle man *Däjjazemač* got the loyalty of *Fitawerari* Awedäw Habäša who was then in Addis Ababa. The plot was exposed to the *Därg* members so that the *Därg* military government wanted to capture them. Soon by August 1974, *Däjjazemač* Šähau Enequa Selassé with his brother *Ato* Taddesse Enqua Selasse were encircled at Merehabété and at a valley area of Waqallo *Qäbälé*, Enesaro *Wärädä*, Sälalé *Awraja* by the *Därg* army which led by *Šämebäl* Zämanäh Gezaw. *Däjjazemač* Šähau Enequa Selassé was commuted suicide, while the brother *Ato* Taddässä was surrendered his hand. While *Därg* was searching to capture Seménäh, informed by one of the *Därg* General having special sensation to *Qäññazmač* Seménäh, Seménäh screamed from eyes of *Därg* by his tactical and technical flight to Agäw Gojjam.

Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa too attempted to escape into Gojjam via the main street that goes from Addis Ababa to Bahir Dar. However the road was under the surveillance of the police force with photograph of Seménäh and his name was announced through the National Radio. To this end *Qäññazmač* Seménäh made an excellent mechanism through which he would escape the obstacle. Instead of wearing regalia, he distinguished himself as a priest and abled to enter Gojjam without that much risk.

After his return back to Agäw-Meder, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh at his home seat silently for a time. In fact, local government officials tried to negotiate Seménäh through church men and local elders to come at *Wärädä* capital Injibara. But Seménäh was disobedient to summit rather wanted to form a counter revolution against *Därg*. To this he strongly instigate for a local rebellion. To this purpose, in having an aware and organized group of people that would be benefactor of Seménäh, with his close friends and relatives like Mängest Janegua, Yehuné Yegezaw, Wäreku Mulé, Qolläč Mulé and others, he travelled from area to area, He got many followers at Méça or Ačäfär, Guta, Fageta and other areas around Abay river as fars Quwarit.

In line with the other rightist groups, *Därg's* act of saddling and revolutionary measures on the functionaries of the old regime through summary act of execution, imprisonment and retirement, the 1975 proclamations related to land and business

organizations as well as a perception that the *Därg* was anti-Christian and pro-Muslim were the basic source of discontent for Seménäh against *Därg*. Consequently, in line with his sources of discontent, Seménäh actively disseminated anti *Därg* propagandas through out Agäw-Meder and its enviroms. The most importants anti *Därg* propagandas include: *Därg* is a Muslim government, and anti orthodox faith. The futurity of Christians would be horrible and somber or dark. From this time onwards there would be no religious liberation for Christians and there would be imposition of Islamizations. Due to his Islamization propaganda, most conservative Orthodox Christian Agäws determined to fight *Därg* for their faith up to death. Again, since the land procalamation of the provisional military government prohipted ownership of land by individualas and organizations, he also tried to persuade ordinary peasants that the new regime was threating their rest rights and no man would have even the right over his wife and children. *Qäññazmač* Seménäh had also discribed that the *Därg* was an ogre or man eater and butchely. Thus Seménäh won to have many supporters and followers from ordinary people in addition to the aristocrats.

To cement their unity, meetings took place indifferent parts of the area as far as Bahir Dar Using his wealth, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh supplied food and drink for paricipants of the meeting. Many aristoctartes also contributed on this business. The gathering at Baher-Hod around Asäm was the first and the largest meeting had taken place at the area of Agäw- Meder. The underlined discussion issues for their successive meetings were the way and place of collecting firarms, directions and times of fighting as well as even war discipline and power arrangement after victory. To his ability of diplomacy, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh also had contacts with leaders of rebellion in other regions. For instance, even the former General Governor of Gondär province who named as Major General Näga Tägäññ from Gondär once come into Tis Abay Water Falls to discuss and made alliance. *Lej* Haylä Mariam Käbädä the governor of Gojjam and *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa had also marched to the same place. Major General Näga Tägäññ encouraged *Gerazrmač* Ademasu Bälay and *Qäññazmač* Seménäh to coordinate the Gondär and Gojjam forces.

Not only *Qäññazmač* Seménäh, but also one of his right hand man and relative named Yehuné Yegezaw and Awedäw Habäša simultaneously established different meetings with the people around Geš Abay and around Ačäfär as well respectively. The three of them also held single mettings to identify and solve their common problems at Ameday Ĉaka near Fageta and Aksi.

In time of preparation, the source of armament was a big headache. To at least minimize the problem, traditional artisans were encouraged to produce traditional weapons like sword, spear and shield. *Qäññazmač* Seménäh and his followers usually refered to be as the “Fanos” increased gathering imported tifles through purchase

through out the rainy season until the dry season would come.

The activities of Fanos (proscribe men) under *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was exposed and reported by some opponents at Injibara for the *Därg* police force. As I stated earlier, for seeking a peaceful solution, the police force at Injibara continued organizing a group of elders and priests headed by teacher Abélnäh Endaläw and gave a mission once and again towards Seménäh in order to convince and hand over himself for the state at Injibara town. The mission was failed continuously since Seménäh had decided for formidable attacking on *Därg*. Then the *Därg* part by itself determined that the plan of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh was too challenging and could not be stopped easily. Thus the *Därg*'s government preferred to use an armed force. On the part of the opposite parties *Qäññazmač* Seménäh ordered the peasants to collect their harvest as soon as possible before the start of the war time.

In Seménäh's mobilization within Agäw-Meder and its environs, the response of the people was two kinds. First, peoples lived in most of areas located east of the main street, that pass from Addis Ababa to Bahir Dar, specifically Fageta, Asäm, Dangla, Janguta & Merketa, Asäwa, Injibara, Säkäla, Guta, Taliyan, Jambära, Gudära, Lejambara, Käbäsa, Méča and Ačäfär were created a strong determination of resisting the *Därg*. Second, peoples lived in most of areas located west of the main street and with short distance east of it, made an oath with Fanos (proscribe men) half heartedly. Earlier they showed the act of alliance with the Fanos (proscribe men) but later on the eve of the war time, they simply chosen none aligned strategy. They tried to avoid any affiliations with either of the two blocs for the fear that their intrusion supporting any one of them could lead them difficulty. This was a strong calculating to join the victor one. Later on, most of them were allined with the *Därg* mainly for two reasons First, in thinking the consequence of the war on their material property and human life, for purpose of avoiding the coming war through declining the force of Seménäh. Second, they distrust the people of the Fano (proscribe men) itself. The Agäws had conflicting relation with the peoples of Quwarit, Säkäla and its environs for Agäws historical campaign to the area in serve of the state will in 1968 last days. Thus, since the Fanos from Säkäla and Quwarit were on the fore front of Seménäh's force the Agäw people of those areas feared their revenge.

Injibara had become one of Seménäh's attacking sites. To minimize the destructions of the coming war, peasants of the village around Injibara town mainly at Yesa, Asära, šarata, Zerehi and Täkulusta performed a great preparation. They were busy in digging trenches and Burrows and hid their grain under ground. Peoples in areas west of the main street around Injibara town were advised by Seménäh to move their livestock to the back side of Zerehi Mountain, north of Injibara with their families. In January 1975 Seménäh also sent a message for areas east of the main road to retreat

the livestock to Guder River basin to wards the directions of the Mädenta and Zanebela villages.

For husbands, sons or brothers, the respective wives, sisters and mothers increased preparation of dry foods like *Quaneta* (dry meet) and *Dabo kolo* (dry muffin). Seménähhim self made ready enough to feed the Fano. The half-hearted peoples also relvetantly accepted Seménäh"s order of providing supplies as well as making themselves ready for war.

In latter meeting, Fanos (proscribe men) raised two types of ideas about timing of the war. The ideas of some aristocrats was infavor of searching conditions of delaying the war time as much as possible until the Fanos strengthened enough in material and human power and got popularity throughout Agäw Meder in both east and west areas of the main road. On the contrary, the idea of other aristocrats such as *Qés Bogalä Yegezaw* was intended infavor of fastening the war time as soon as possible. Otherwise, they assured that they would side the Därg force and fighting against the Fanos. After detail discussion, the idea of fastening the war time got acceptance.

For the aime of making the area clear for the coming war, on January 1975, Seménäh took his flock of cattle from Läkuma towards Fageta further to the east. Soon, this news reached to the ears of the Därg police force at Injibara. Therefore, the police force reported to the province for the arrival of Fetenodäraš (special force) from Däberä Marqos. Even befor their arrival *Balamebäras Mängäša Kassa*, the governor of Banjja *Wärädä*, guarded the town of Injibara using the former police force of the deposed regime and other Näçläbaš`s. But the battle of Injibara had become in inevitable.

The Battle of Injibara

At the battle of Injibara *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa lost the fighting, and following this the *Derg* force destructed all things belongs to *Qäññazmač* Seménäh. It burnt both hall and spherical Dwellings, barns of cattle, sheep, goat, and store house of cereals. Anyway, *Därg* had looted several things owned by Seménäh Dästa and his relaives.

Following this, the battle of Fagita was resumed. At the battle of Fagita initially the Fanos got victory over the Därg army. The already encircled Fätenodäraš was unable to free the town from the control of Fanos. How ever, two war planes came to Fageta but returned back with out any measures because it was difficult to distinguish nicely the, state force from that of rebels one. The commander of the Därg army since the battle of Injibara, captain Täsefayé, sent Corporal Adamu Seyoum from the Näçlebašwith some followers to Injibara in order to report the condition for the

province through telegram. With recommendation of a group of Därg members took a mission of observing the conditions headed by *Mätoaläqa* Bäwuekätu Kassa, one *Šameble* army from camp of Nägälé Boräna was come to Fageta by plane.

However, with the arrival of the fresh force, the balance of power was changed infavour of Därg bloc, yet, the fighting was continued for about four successive days from Tuesday of 1 April to Friday of 4 April -1975. While understanding the influence of the Därg force has become strong in fear of complete defeat Seménäh ordered the Fano to make a systematic retreat. Thus, for the time, fighting was given up. A kind of dead lock was created. Both lived no much far away to the area in a stealth approach of the rat and the cat for some days.

The Battle of Čegagit

Suppressing Seménäh's anti government *resistance* was not become an easy task for the *Därg* force. In standard of the Fanos owned, the well armed and disciplined army of *Därg* made frontal confrontations with that of the Fanos twice within two successive months at Injibara and Fageta on 30 January, 1975 and April 1-4, 1975 respectively. These battles were not become the last and decisive. Still it was impossible to the Därg to crush down the back bones of Seménäh's uprising. So that the *Därg* force decided for another scuffled with the spilfired man *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa.

A week after the bloodshed of Fageta, the *Därg* force camped at Injibara enjoyed reinforcement from Däberä Marqos in combination of tank supports. The fresh force of *Därg* created awkward condition to the Fano's. In fact, on the way the force of *Därg* had informed about the strength of the Fanos so that they checked the difficulty of gaining an easy victory. From a strategic point of view, changing the system of fighting has become necessary. Accordingly instead of direct moving from Injibara town to Fageta area where the Fano was still prevalenced, moving down wards to Addis Kidam town and then turn to the east ward to Fageta was become preferable.

In their way from Injibara to Fageta through via of Addis Kedam, they burnt houses of innocent peasants lived in village's of Zamebela Mareyam, kedaneta e.t.c using tank. This was done deliberately not only to destroy the material power of the Fanos but also to kill their moral of fighting after looking the flame of the fire. They also did so to show that how far the *Därg* force was muselful and in intention of minimizing the new alliances to *Qäññazmač* Seménäh aimed to neutralize *Qäññazmač* Seménäh from the community and made him ionesome who may easy to be captured. Because of Därg's crise at Čegagit its campaign of burnings to the rest villages of Finzit, Jagola Mareyam, Fulic, Asäwa and others was come to confined. Then after, by the aforementioned

tactics of *Därg*, the Fano areas becoming frustrating and gave up fighting to save their children and property from similar destructions. However, the rebels had showed better performance at early, finally it was humiliated. Then the Fano force of Seménäh had become weakened and decompressed. Following this most of the Fanos mainly *Qäññazmač* Seménäh and his closest followers went eastwards to the Abay river basin around the source, Gišé Abay area and an open revolt against *Därg* was to come to an end²⁴¹. Both Fanos and their respective relatives encountered unexpected crisis. The *Däg* soldiers slaughtered and looted cattle and sheep belonging to Fanos and their relatives. But except some balabates such as Baša Alämayähu and Corporal Adamu Seyoum, the peasant army of *Därg* was not participated in the looting. Because, most of them were massacred at Fageta battle and the remnants were too sad due to loss of their friends & relatives. Even the house and wealth of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh in rural parts of Agäw-Meder was also destroyed. His houses in towns were put under the control of the government due to the 1975 edict of nationalization of excess houses.

The state gave orders to the police force to search and capture families of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh for imprisonment and punishments. Therefore, his families immigrated to different areas to lead an exile life. The only relatives or families of Seménäh who remained in their home were *Gerazmač* Abäbä Wärqenäh and Meheräté Bogalä. It was because both were announced their neutrality for the police and *Näčlebaš* forces at Injibara after battle of Injibara.

Due to these battles of Injibara and Fageta including Čegagit casualties in the society were not easy but were too heavy. Houses were burnt, stores of cereals were burnt, cattle were slaughtered and other properties looted by members of both opposing parties, schools in Faigta, Dangiya and Kuakura were burnt down and looted and closed.

***Qäññazmač* Seménäh`s Exile to the Sudan**

Following his defeat in successive battles, his Excellency *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa accompanied by some of his followers moved to a sickly and yucky fugitive life, moving from one area to another. With intercommunication, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh tried to reorganize the anti *Därg* resistance movement of his peasant force from Yelemanadänsa, to Säkälä as far as Quwarit and Motta²⁷⁴.

While the attempts of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh to incite the local gentry was not materialized due to economic and social constraints for remobilization much more than the earlier, a strict and crack down of *Därg* towards him and peoples even his

relatives and families like his son-in-law known as Dessalgen together with his wife, (daughter of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh him self lived around Fageta) increasingly worked to forbear him, as well as his intension of come up with modern weapons, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh determinedly decided to leave his home to the Sudanese from where he would get necessary war logistics from members of EDU.

Immigration to the Sudan was started on a month of January 1977, from a village of Asäm Selassé. In the way, crossing areas of Fageta, Segela Yohannis, Asäwa Mädehaniyaläm and other smaller villages, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa together with some of his Fano followers arrived at a rural town called Affäsa that was the town of kuakura *Meketel Wärädä*. In the near there was church of Kuakura Kidanä-Meherät. There, *Qegnazamach* Seménäh took a rest for a single day in church of Kuakura Kidanä Meherät.

Led by Zämänä Gälagay and Alänä, Seménäh with some of his followers continued his long march move to the Sudan. From Chara, through via of Däqe Afaf now part of Jawi *Wärädä*, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh reached at a river or valleys of Gelegäl Bäläs a boarder line for the two neighboring districts scalled as Ačäfär and Ĉelega. From Gelegäl Bäläs, Seménäh waited for a single of night at valley of Abat Bäläs. In the next day, Seménäh crossed to Mätäkäl Danegur *Wärädä*. In Danegursome peoples who knew Seménäh, while he was govering the same *Wäräda* almost nine years ago, tried to encircle Seménäh but *Qäññazmač* Seménäh steadily escaped from the area and have a food in a small town near by a river called as "Ayeman River". Then, by crossing a river at Ĉelega *Awraja* called Šenefa with no much difficulty, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh reached at Ethio-sudanese border towns of Sudan first Mendeka and then Tiya, where the training chump of E.D.U members like Atanaw Wassie, Girzmač Ayälä Čäkol and TPLF, were found after two weeks move in foot²⁷⁹.

Battles around Yesemala and the Death of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa

With one of his right hand man *Fitawerari* Awedäw Habäša, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa who collaboratly with *Fitawerari* Awedäw Habäša, *Gerazmač* Ayälä Čäkol, Sebehat Beyabel, *Fitawerari* Daññenätu Šaräw, Atanaw Wassé, BäléŠaräw, Abanäh Tägäññä and the like had been fought against the *Därg* milita in areas of Ĉelega, Aläfa, Šawera, Dälegi, Dänegäl Bär, Mati, Mäneta Däber, Gomänegé wubär, Šawamenta, Šinfa, Tiya, Matäbiya, Gonotärara, Mättäma, Särqo, Qwara, Wodäbärezin (Kulit), Čaço *Meketel*, Wäheni kätäma, Tumänt, Mendoka, Märetärhad, Dokemawuha, Dass, Abedärafi, Gundänadeza, Mahebärä Selassé, Guang, Čänkel wänez, Qokit, Takussa *Meketel*, Lominat, Gonešomatäbiya, Tänekäl, Sätit, Agamwuha, Kumar, and anothers arived in the arid and semi arid lowland areas of Ačäfär through via of Bäläs river. Leading more than 500 Fanos *Qäññazmač* Seménäh and *Fitawerari* Awedäw Habäša

reached near Yesemala town on 22 June 1977.

Speculating the coming causalities, from the highland peoples of Ačäfär, the *Wärädä* governor *Ato* Semačäw had arranged many elders and church men and sent them to the Fanos for negotiation to persuade the rebels not to fighting. Following the refusal of the Fanos, negotiators sided with the Fanos so that increased the man power of the Fano and Semačäw determined to lead a war of preventing the *Wärädä* town Durbété. The Administrator of Ačäfär *Wärädä*, and the police commander, who at the time had 70-80 fighters only, asked the government an enforcement army from Däberä Marqos. But for an immediate action, the above mentioned Därg fighters including some peasants from Yesemala such as Därebé Täräri, Agumas Meneté, Wänedé Atikäm, Yegezaw Sämahäññ, Käffé Sämahäññ, Awäkä Agedäw, Gädamu Agedäw, Addisu Gälagay, Mäberat Amebaw, Ayähu Bäkälä and others an inevitably marched to a village located north of Yesemal town suchas Kuala Mareyam, Baka Mädehaniyaläm andothers, where the Fano had already reached, before the capture of Yesemala town to defend from far.

The first frontal military engagement between the two opposing parties had opened in the evening of 22 June 1977, at a village of Kuala Mareyam. In the next full day, the war was continued. The government sent large ammunitions and 50 guns for the peasants of the area to fight the Fanos. Peasant mobilization also took place from Adet and other areas. For important trainings the government sent a milita from Deberä Mareqos. This force quickly went to Ačäfär. Since by the time any propaganda and appeasments of the government side were valuess for those rebels, who were on the verge of continuing an offensive war on 24 June 1977 areas of Kuala Mariyam, Baka Mädehaniyaläm, Ruč Gote, Azanoč Gote, Senguč Gote, were burned by the Därg force. Fanos retreated back to the lowland Engäramora Giyorgis and Jankit Mareyam.

Areas of Ačäfär called Kuala, Baka and Yesemala, Jankit Mareyam and Tati *Qolla*, Engäramora, Šamebela Michael, Däberäsina, Däbräsina, Zebest Kidanämehärt, Täräfit Giyorgis, Qälamebo Mareyam had became under the control of Fanos under the overall command of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh and *Fitawerari* Awedäw Habäša. Trailing the Fanos, the Därg force marched to Qälambo Mareyam, where the Fanos were retreated to it, since it was strategically preferable. On 2 July 1977, the Fanos and the *Därg* made the most destructive bloodshed than the previous wars at the village of Kuala and the near by. Qälambo Mareyam had located about 25 kilometres far to Yesemala in the North West of it. In this battle the Därg force was disqualified and made a systematic retreat to Zebest and Däberäsina south west and west of Qälambo and Yesemala respectively.

Having expanded in the area, for two successive days on 11and 12 July 1977, Fanos continued fighting against the state force at a plateau of Zebest and Däberäsina,

where one of the *Därg* camp was found since Zebest and Däberäsina had been suspected that through it *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa would inter to Gojjam. Shortage of provisions and ammunitions for the sate force created a golden opportunity for the Fanos. Again at Zebest and Däberäsina the total causalities of the war had been increased on the state side. The increasing fighting moral and confidence of Fanos forced the milita to retreat eastward towards one of their head quarter at Yesemala town. For front runner, Fanos attacked the retreating army. With exception of the Sälato Camp at south of Yesemala town, the Fano controlled large part of Yesemala and released many of prisoners can be reffered to be as „Tabek Eseräñaoč „ (who were prisoned due to only their blood relation with that of members of the Fano group) at Yesmala. Many fighters from both had become victims of the war in death and injures. For the increasing war crime, on 13 July 1977, the government tried to reinforced the milita by sending ammunitions and provisions through about seventeenth heavy trucks that the state force able to chase the Fanos from Yesemala. With an ambition of searching a strategic location, the Fano retreated the west ward from Yesmala town to the near by lowland rural areas of Šamebela and Tati *Qolla*. For a time a kind of deadlock was created for a brief period of time which would be continued until the newly mobilized peasant army from Damot, Mätäkäl, Däberä Mareqos, Agäw-Meder, and Yelemanadénsa and Bahir Dar with good war and fooding logistics in the area.

However, *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was bussey in circular battles of Ačäfär, in on and of through scaping holes, his collaborations and intercommunication with other enemies of *Därg* in *Ĉelega Awraja* was not completely slip. The collective popular army from Bahir Dar *Awraja*, *Qolla Däga* Damot *Awraja* and Agäw-Meder *Awraja* took a mission of hunting the Fanos under *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa. Under the overall command of *Šamebäl* Ademasu Akalu, the Gojjam Province Police Crime Protection and Directive Officer, the Bahir Dar *Qäbälé* called as the Näbero Tor, *Qolla Däga* Damot and Agäw-Meder organized in areas of Däberä Sina, Zebest and Tati *Qolla* respectively.

The large militias of Agäw-Meder and its environs led by *Balambäras* Mängäša Kassa and *Balambäras* Yehéyes Alämu under Dässaläññ Bärre, who was the chairman of Ethiopian Workers` Party (EWP) in Agäw-Meder, marched in to the area where the Fanos under *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa were found. Therefore, the milita force surrounded the fortification of Fanos at night. The final war between the *Därg* and a marksman Excellency *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa took place on 20 July 1977, at Täräfit *Qäbälé*, village of Dindiqa located east of Zebest, west of Tati *Qolla* deserted area, north of Däberäsina, and south of Qälambo Mareyam. In that place there was an ancient fort, called as „Mänebäru kab“ was said to be built by a man named as Mänebäru where *Qäññazmač* Dästa Kassa and *Qäññazmač* Alämu Mälesäw were

fortified against Fascist Italy. Now *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa made temporal live here.

The battle started at 4:00 AM at a place specifically called Täräfit and continued for the next 6:00 hours. Hearing the barking of weapons, militias at Däberäsina and Zebest kidanämeherät marched to Täräfit and fired their rifle to Fanos. From both many of fighters were killed. However, at around 10:00 AM *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa had succeeded in killing the administrator of Ačäfär *Wärädä*. Aggressively, the two brave fighters and sons of the already murdered man marched to the back positions of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh and attacked him. Despite of the initial success, the Fanos lost the battle because of the brave and marks man *Qäññazmač* Seménäh was fatally wounded and then captured followed by his beheaded sorrowly.

Shocked by the unconditional surrender of their leader and comorad Excellency *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa, the fighting moral of Fanos was totally killed not to be recover again and then lead by Šämebäl Gälayé and Awedäw Habäša retreated to Qälamebo Mareyam to secure their life from the Därg reinforced force which becoming greatly uncontrolled ³⁴⁸.

Following this event, having atrocity to convince the people about the strength of the Därg and to shaw the end of war at the area, Dässaläññ Bärre moved round hovering Seménäh`s head on car throughout Agäw-Meder and Bahir Dar and even Gondär towns. The lower dead body or corpse of *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was buried in the farmland of *Qés* Mälekamu Zärihun at a village called Denediqa in Täräfit *Qäbälé*³⁵⁰. But know the real skeleton is not found at the place because the grave area is totally eroded by the flooding as looking bellow. My informants told me that the land was eroded and become drain of flood after the relic of Excellency *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was buried.

Coclusion

Qäññazmač Seménäh Dästa was one of a true patriot and arch-conservatism in both religious and cultural matters. His tendency towards foreign threat was strongly against. There is no doubt that Seménäh could not be sustained by his boyhood. Joined with the local patriots in jungles life, his unfrustrated engagement for the political, religious and cultural freedom and honour of the society against Italian occupation of the country was important indications. This five years of forested live influenced him to have life of shiftnet for a while period of time after liberation. His life of banditry for a while period of time was not come from his nature of illegality or inconvenience and poverty of his home as well as personal political reason. Rather it was the adaptation that influenced by his five years forested life of patriotism. In his

shiftnet, Seménäh does not mean that much dragon and macabre. After shiftnet, his political career serving as secretary, governor and member of the parliament, I assessed that *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa had been honest, loyalist, strong minded and committed in performing the state service in line with securing the right of peoples. His hardship looking towards corrupt and inefficient colleagues, robbery, illegality or incivilities in general as well as his active working in the parliament for the will and benefit of the peoples he represented are relevant testimonies for his able and dear leadership that made him popular among the mass but selfish brigands and illegalities even from co-workers. The fact that he served as head of the Fano against Därg is clear indications for his zeal for power. There is no doubt that *Qäññazmač* Seménäh Dästa was the spirit behind the uprising. He played an instrumental role in organizing and „fostering and sustaining“ Fanos uprising and is credited for the victories which the rebels scored. He appears to have been strong in his opposition to Därg. His nature was too spitfire and dogged. Even though he clearly knew that he couldn't win, he insisted on continuing resistance against the regime even after the uprising was crushed by the *Därg* force in Agäw-Meder. He seems successful in this regard to the extent that he was able to continue despite all odds until his last homicidal. Seménäh's career, particularly his banditry activities, his role and motive in uprisings against Därg, his relation with the diverse participants in the uprising, mainly with the nobility, and his position as head of the Fano against *Därg* is surrounded with controversies.

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