

Blin Traditions and their peaceful Coexistence with Others

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ካና ድሊዪ ትልድ ምገትል ምገትል ሰ ከለላ ፍረ ኤድኹን እማ ናት እንተዲ በንሲያ ሰኩሮ ህምቡን። ደላም

ኮዶ ናውክ ነት ህምቦደናኸር ይድ ኤወደሲ ክምዲነት ኤረኹን። ደላም ጅጅ አኸረና።

ሻን ሓይሳን።

1. Introduction

Blin speaking people constitute about 3% of the Eritrean population. They inhabit in the central areas of the country, in and around Keren, 91 km north of Asmara, the capital. Their habitat is situated between the highland and lowland of Eritrea, which represent the Christian and Moslem cultures, fairly equally. Hence, Blin speaking people form a bridge between the highland and lowland of Eritrean cultures. This enables every Blin person to articulate in two or three Eritrean languages (Blin, Tigre and/or Tigrigna). Blin themselves worship both Islam and Christianity and it is not a factor of division within the Blin people. They are distinct with their own language, ways of living, dressing, behaviour, social fabric, and music and dance although they can't avoid absorbing the prevailing modern life styles. So far, most of their traditional practices remain intact and they also share some cultural elements with their neighbouring ethnic groups.

The inhabitants of Keren and environs have had some of the most devastating experiences during the war of liberation (1961-1991). Consequently, there has been a massive displacement and migration. Today, like the rest of the people of Eritrea, Blin speaking people find themselves scattered all over the world. Many live in the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Australia and in the neighbouring countries such Sudan and Ethiopia in large numbers. Today in Sweden, there is a huge number of Eritreans and Blin form a large portion of it. The Swedish Eritreans do bring in a new and rich history and cultural heritage in to the already established Swedish society enriching it further. In this, there are also skills and knowledge they bring with them that is induced in to the host society. I believe all Eritreans have been taking part in the culture and life of the Swedish but still retaining their traditions and identity features. Integration of Eritreans is seen vivid in all areas of the Swedish society. There have already been some great success stories to demonstrate this statement. For instance, you have elected members of parliament, you have people in policy making and advisers such as Mr Hamednaka Arhe including many university lectures, teachers, social workers, and many of you contributing in the: manufacturing, electronic, food and music industries. All evidences inform that Eritreans in Sweden are the most successful people in Europe. Their level of integration seems to have achieved both; integration with the host community and retention of your own history and cultural heritage. Congratulations.

Well-done to the BCAS for all the efforts to keep our culture alive.

2. Blin Traditions

There are numerous elements of traditions in which Blin can identify as a community with own eternity. Here are some of the traditions which can identify with Blinar:

1. **Men's particulars** ሰደርየት sedereyet, ጥቢቆራ Tbiqora, ግትር (Geter) መታልክ metalk, ታዊና tawina ሀርድ: hrd, መጀርገፍ mejergef, ግምቢ gmbi - (ሰነፋ snefa: ግገና agena: ክደራና kederana)
2. **Women particulars:** ካኒራ kanira, ድብላ dbila; ኩተና kutena, ታዊና tawina, ቀሚሽ qemish::

(ግድላ ዲ ሰርጎ ዲ) - Hair styles and ornaments

Traditional childhood styles such hroryet, gset, kelela, shimamet, are abandoned when boys are 18 and girls become adult and married. Women have the most distinct hair styles with its plaited hair and decorated with ንፍሐራ (nefHora — short gold tube worn on the head)፤ ጃቦራ (jabera)፤ ግረጥ (greT- own on the head)፤ ምስግነት (mesgnet - necklace)፤ ሶሚት Somit): በኸራ (bekhira - wrist worn bar)፤ ዋንጫ (wancha- wrist bar) and ኡጅል (Hjl- ankle worn bar)።

3. Traditional **Blin Home:** Simple rounded hut stone walls covered with hay or special wild grass and is divided into ወደን (widen-back room) with its traditional bed for all the family excluding the father who normally sleeps in ተረንጊ (fron/sitting room) or outside. The in-situ built bed found in weden is decorated with ህጋግ (Hgag): መሸኬት (mesheket) መጀራብብ (mejerabeb). Weden (ወደን) and terengi (ተረንጊ) are divided by a partition - ኡገሪፍ decorated by ግዳፍ (gdaf)፤ ቅለው (qlaw) and the entrance with (ቄንግባ) chinaba. All the above are types of mats of various sizes and decorations.
4. Traditional **Songs/dance:** ጎልያ፡goliya, ወሶሚያ፡wesomiya, ሰሰዲት፡sese'it, ጨፈራ፡chefera, ሸለል፡sheleel, ኤለለዎ፡elelewo, ኡውሎ aulo. Instruments: ከለንቡራ kelenbura (drum), ፋምፋም famfam -harmonica, ዕንድር ender- flute)

Blin are well-known ethnic group for their love for singing and dance. Some of the above forms of songs, rhythms and dances are shared with other tribes bordering the Blin but there is always some distinctly different applications in the performances.

There appears, in every generation, extra-ordinary artists. In my time, I have known some master poets and singers. Poets such as Abreha Amar of Ashera, Dafla Osman of Sequina and Hidru zer'e of Adefa and many more are now emerging.

Their lyrics were and are as a result of creative minds and in process they express, various issues including; social, political, economical and

religious. They also predict of what to come. Songs, lyrics and storytelling play a great role in transmission of Blin history.

5. **Stages of childhood leading to adulthood**

Blin go through external visible and ritual processions leading to their adulthood.

- Stage 1: any child will have a hair style particular to their family.
- Stage 3: **ምርጣጣ** (**መርጠጥስና**) Reaching 18 adulthood. Will have his hair plaited on both sides of his head.
- Stage 2: **ሸንጋልና** (**ሸንጋለ**) Shingale – a ritual process that the adult is now a man and possess all rights, is credible witness and part of any decision making.
- **ቅንጣጠ፤** This is the conclusion of the **ሸንጋለ፤** Shingale process. The young man is now declared (**ሸማገለራ**) **shimaglera**.
- Stage 4: **ክኻንትና** (**ክኻን**) No man is complete until married. Getting married and having children is the ultimate aim in the Blin society.

Following Shingale you become **መንደላይ** and it is a ritual process of bringing the Youngman into manhood. The process is quite long and tempting his will power, physical and mental strength. It can be celebrated at any time before or after wedding, although, traditionally it is celebrated between the period of engagement and wedding time.

Ritual Processions	Procedures & Meaning
ምርጣጣ (በጢሕ)	18 አመራ ተመመስና ግርውናር ምልክት ግን። ግስት ደው፣ ከለለ ደው ከብተ፣ አኹርሲ ለጃ ስምጥድ ገደልስና።
ሸንጋለ (መንደላይ)	ጃብረዲ፣ ዓረዲት ለሸና ፣ ግርውናር። ከሸርትኒ ወክትዲ ገውርስና ዲ።
ቅንጣጠ (ቀልዕስትና) (ሸማገለራ)	ሸንጋለር ተመምና፤ ሸማገለራ አክና
ሰመድና (ክንቲባ) ስምዶር ደምቢ፣ መርዓዊራ ዲ ስርጉ ዲ አክነኹ	ለጃ ሌማ ቀር ግናቲት ፣ ኤኢዲ ቀረዲ፣ ናዲ ከፍ የነኩ፣ ንሰኸውዲ ኡሰውዲ ኡኳርድኖር መታን ሌማኻ ገውረቲ፣ ላት በልድኖር መታን። በኸራ፣ ሶሚታ፣ ተላል (ተርቀ ቀር ካያ) ሰርና፣ ዓሽል ነስነስና፣ ገውርስና።
ኩነንስና (ኡሰው ካያ)	Going into extreme diet before getting married

The Traditional laws of ሕጩ Engagement include:

2. ሌዝያይ፣ ወንተተርኩ። ኒትክ ደለምዶ ሰና ሰገርገን የኩ። Agent – approaches girl’s family and express the wish for their daughter for Mr x’s son.
3. ሌዝያይ ሰገርገን የኩ። Upon being given green light informs boy’s family.
4. ሕጩ ሰገረሰኩ፣ (ኪሰ) ፈደገዲ ታዊና ብጭቂኹዲ ኤድኖ ሰገረገኩ። ገውርሰነኩ።
5. ሕጩር ወክትል ና ሰመያት ዋሰነኩ።
 - ሰመያት፡ 4 ገበታ ሸኝሰተኩ።
 - ወልታ/ለገታ ልዊ መትሉሩ ሸኝሰተተ

Traditional Laws of Dowry Procession መትሉር ወክትል

- What is agreed in the Engagement encounter is all paid. That includes: 4 (ገበታ ኤር ዲ) quintals, 6/7 (ልዊ) cows detailed in their age, quality etc. and are brought to the day of dowry offering day (መትሉር ግርጊል). However, the girl’s family may leave some giving excuses so as to help the boy’s family and of course the more they take the more they have to pay later.
- Nowadays a lump sum of 20 – 30,000.00 Nakfa is agreed as money is replacing cows. Also the bridegroom buys all bride’s necessities including ornaments and boy’s family are relieved of the dowry, so as the girl’s family.
- ቅብጢር፡ q’bTir: these are payments made during various visits by the boy’s family during festive, baby delivery etc. Thy normally are paid back in two-folds on wedding day.

Traditional laws wedding day ክኻን

In about August the boy’s family approach the girl’s family requesting wedding.

- ማርያምሰ/ያኸኒሰ. ክኻን ወንቀርሰኩ፣ Request for a wedding
- መሸውሰ. ቋልኖሰና ይሰተኩ። መሳቀለውዳ ግርጋ እንሸውሰኩ። ኒን ይኸ ኪዳ መሸው እውን ግን። decision for wedding day is made provided the there is a healthy harvest.
- ግርጋዲ ምንድቅሪ ኸር ሸኝሰተተ (ልዊ ላ ካነድ ግረሪ/ሳኻ)
- ሰመድና (ሰምዶ) preparing bride and bridegroom to be wedded and are declared bride and bridegroom at this procession.
- ፈርወንተር/eve of wedding for bride

- ክኻን ግርጋ wedding day is when bride leaves her parents home and joins the bridegroom's family home and the next day she enters her temporary home ablura (ኤብሉራ).

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- ኤብሉራ (Ablura) ንጉስ (ከንቲባ)፤ ንግስቲ፤ ሸንክሪኹ፤ (ማስ) 12 ዓለከር፤ ስርጉር መቀል፤ እትየታት፤ ገን፤ ሸማግለ። Following the end of the wedding some incredible training and education practices are made. These practices include: games, debates, court processions, all legal and social education and practices are exercised. All sections of the society take part: some learning and others teaching.
- A complete administration system is established: the King (bridegroom) the queen (bride) Prime minister (best-man) Soldiers (12 friends of the bridegroom) who are allocated various responsibilities in the system. Local elderly men and women have special part as consultants and as mediators in case of excessive punishment are taken.
- ሸኪ ዲ ማሳ ፋሕ ይነዲ። Follows strict traditional laws

3. Blin Traditional laws in peaceful coexistence with neighbours – how Blin Traditional laws are applied to resolve conflict with neighbouring nationalities

Blin Hierarchy: ሲም፣ ጭቃ፣ ሽግግለራ፣ ዲባ።

Blin neighbours are: Beit Juk, Maria, Bin Amer, Hadareb, Tigrinya, and Mensae. As Blin do all these nations have their own traditional laws to assist them to live in peace amongst themselves and their neighbours. Blin are one of the most peaceful people and neighbourly people. They do not wish to seek something not theirs and strive to avoid confrontation with their neighbours. Their culture and is based and mode of administration is based on a federal system even within the Blin themselves. Blin are quite a diverse society and all live in harmony and brotherly manners.

Blin do come in contact with their neighbouring nations mainly through the following: Land use and grazing, Conflict of individual people, marriage, travel and movement looking for work.

1. **Land use & grazing rights**, Borders between the nations are clearly defined and in most cases there are no conflicts. Blin and their neighbours do extensively cooperate especially when it come s to grazing. As the beginning of rainy seasons varies pastoralist move around wherever they can find grass for their animals. Blin go to other places so as others come to Blin land looking for grass and water for their animals. There is much cooperation and conflicts are rare.
2. Due to grazing aggravation and disputes may arise at times leading to young people fighting which can result in injuries and death. At initial stage if people used their animal to graze restricted Blin areas they will be told to remove their animals peacefully. It is expected that they do remove their animals with immediate effect. If there is a continuous evasion of the request elderly interfere and give warning. If still not resolved the Blin elderly or law enforcers approach the neighbouring nation where the culprits come from and at this stage the problem is bound to end.
3. **ኩና ወሪ አዳም አኻ ደርብድክ ሀሽኩብና Injuring or Killing Someone**, ሕገ ብሊናኹድ፡ (1) አዳም ኩኒል፡ ጠርቅ እውስተኩ። (2) ኩቶ ብሰብሮ፤ ደአም እን አዳም ክረገን ወሪ እግሮ ፋን፤ ጠርቅ ገፍ እውስተኩ። (3) አዳም ጠዓምብሮ ሀሽኩብረን፡ ጠርቅ ገፍ ወሪ ርቡዕ ደፍዕረኩ። (4) መድረን፤ ጀሉጥ፡ ስና አብሰንቲራ ዲ ፍንጢራ ዲ ኩረኩ። (5) ኩሰሪ ተመድና ትክሰ ሊለቱኹ ግን፡ ላ ሽብካ ላ ልዊር አራኻ ግን፤ ብሊና ሕገሲ ጠርቅ፡ 60/30 ልዊ ዲ። ፈርዳ ሰርጊት ዲ (ተውቀ)፡ ኮዶ ኤኢ ብር ገንጅሮር መታን፡ እውስተኩ። (6)

እርኩ ወሪ ዕል ፍረገ ኮዶ ይኸ ኒሰና ደፍዕተኩ። ናገ ዲል መደቅል ይኸ ጠርቅ 30,000 ናቅፋ ሰላዲ ዲ፤ ኤኢዲ እውሰተኩ።

In the event a Blin person is injured or killed by any other nationality, all the Blin compensation rules apply: ie: Terq (ጠርቅ) 60/30 cows or equivalent, decorated horse (ተውቀ) and a girl to be married to family of the deceased to create a blood relationship for lasting peace amongst the feuding families. If it is an injury, the extent of the injury is assessed and be determined as half of the full lose of life compensation or quarter and payment will be made accordingly.

4. If the deceased or injured is from other tribe or nation, then Blin will abide by their traditional laws. In comparison of most of the traditional laws practised around Blin, Blin laws are more generous and if the injured or deceased is from other tribes and have a close blood relationship with Blin would opt for the Blin Traditional laws of compensation. For instance; in mid 1980's, two young Blin men had a fight with a young man from the Maria tribe. The mother of the Maria man was from Blin (Tawke) and he knew that he will benefit more if he pursues the matter through Blin compensation laws and the matter was settled using Blin (Tawke) laws.
5. **Laws of Marriage**: although it is not very much appreciated, Blin are quite tolerant for a Blin man or woman to get married to a nationality other than Blin. If both are Blin but different in their faith it was taken as normal. And no much furore follows the wedding. *'Isa bdinu and Musa bdinu'* - meaning *Christian to live as a Christian and Moslem to live as a Muslim*. They still can retain their religion or even changing religion by one of them is not taken as a crime. If one of them is of other religion and nationality it is not very much appreciated but Blin are tolerant enough and they accept that, too. In most cases, the girl's father is given the opportunity to choose the laws he wishes to apply for the engagement and wedding.

4. Concluding remarks.

Blin are exceedingly liberal society with liberal views and attitude. Blin are law abiding people and any exception comes as a shock in the Blin society, nevertheless, no society is free from exceptions and when exceptions occur the culprit is isolated from the society and be forced to seek apology or leave. Rebellious behaviour is culturally suppressed and indifference in the society is not very much tolerated. Dialogue forms centre stage in decision making and probably to the extreme at times. So people are given adequate opportunity to peacefully come in to terms with the grievances they may.

Blin are trusted neighbourly society with extremely little problems taking place with other nationalities. If any is only caused due to mistakes committed by young cow or goat herders. They respect and express much respect to guests of from other nationalities.

Blin traditional laws have been through changes so as to accommodate the changing needs of the community and in the last 60 years so many changes have taken place. For instance: **ፍቲሕ መጋሪሕኹ፣ ተርቀር ፍቲሕ፣ ብሊና ፍቲሕ፣ ፍቲሕ ወረቢኹ።** besides, they seem to be quite similar in their content. In any case, the most important point is that they sit and pick whichever suits their needs so as to deal with whatever issue they may have.

Debate and resolving issues in assembly is the most important practice in the Blin society. They discuss and discuss endlessly, until the required satisfaction is met.

Firstly issues are brought to the elderly (ሸማገለራ) shimagelera – appointed mediator in village. If he fails to resolve it he and the (ጭቃ) Chiqa - village head brings selected elderly and knowledgeable people together and forms (ዲባ) diba — a legislative body and deals with the issue at hand.

If the matter is utterly out of hand and not resolved then it goes to the (ሲም) sim — head of clan/s who will bring an end to it.

It is unfortunate that the Blin traditional laws and the traditional hierarchy was outdated when the Eritrean revolution first started. Today much of the traditional laws are abandoned especially when it comes in to resolving disputes. The Blin traditional laws never had the opportunity to revolve with time and develop to meet the modern society needs while retaining the original values. However, the elderly mediation is still there to benefit those in rural areas. But much of the cities people now follow the central government rules.

።። ወደሐገኩም ።። ኪሰረሱ ።።