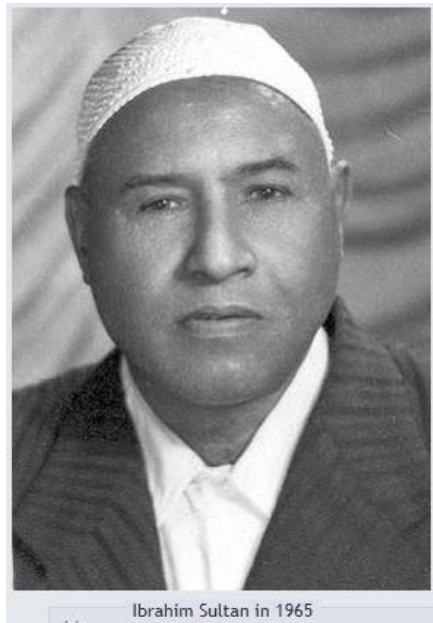


*A Short Biography
Of*
Ibrahim Sultan Ali



*Compiled and edited from the internet
By
Kidane Mehary Nashi*

Table of content

Early life

Working life

Political activities

- **Formation of Al Rabita Al Islamya**
- **At the United Nations**

Historic Contributions of Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan Ali

Exile and participation in struggle

End of life: two years before independence

Early life

Ibrahim Sultan Ali (1909-1987) was one of the original proponents of the Eritrean Independence movement. Ibrahim was born in the city of Keren where he was educated in Islamic and Italian schools. He worked closely with Woldeab Woldemariam before the Federation with Ethiopia to secure Eritrean Independence. He was the founder of the Eritrean Moslem League.

Birth and family:

Ibrahim Sultan Ali was born in Keren in March 1909 of a farmer/trader Tigre/serf from the Rugbat of Ghizghiza district in Sahel. He attended Quran School under Khalifa Jaafer of the Halanga of Kassala. In Keren, he attended technical training at Salvaggio Raggi and at Umberto School in Asmara. His only son Abdulwahab, lives in Paris.

Working life:

Joining the Eritrean Rail Ibrahim Sultan worked as a chief conductor from 1922 to 1926. From 1926 to 1941, he was head of Islamic Affairs section under Italian rule. served as civil servant in Keren, Agordat, Tessenei, Adi Ugri and even Wiqro near Mekele for six months. He had good command in speaking and translating Italian, Arabic and Tigrinia. From 1926 to 1941, he was head of Islamic Affairs section in the political affairs office under Italian rule. Under the British, he served as head of Civil/Native Affairs Office till April 1943. He resigned and established a modern cheese plant in Tessenei which he ran till end of 1945. The Eritrean Chamber of Commerce was established that year and he became one of its senior staff members till end of September 1946.

Political activities:

At the United Nations

At the United Nations, Ibrahim envisioned a violent battle for independence if the UN acted against Eritrean interests,

The Eritrean people's cause is a just cause of the independence of people who refuse and reject any form of annexation, dismemberment or a return to the hated colonialism no matter what type it would be, whatever form it takes, or from which direction it comes. This indisputable right to independence to which our country is attached can not be ignored without creating a new area of strife in East Africa, since the Eritrean people will never accept Ethiopian domination.

— *Ibrahim Sultan, "Statement by the Chairman of the delegation of the Moslem League of Eritrea". Fifth session Ad Hoc Political Committee. UN. 1950-11-21.*



Founder of Al Rabita Al Islamya

At UN, Sheikh Ibrahim is quoted to have said: "If a wrong decision is taken forcing us to struggle to safeguard our identity and obtain our independence, then the members of this Committee will shoulder the responsibility for the hostilities that arise in East Africa".

Al Rabita Al Islamya

Ibrahim Sultan was the founding father of Al Rabita Al Islamya though Abdulkader Kebire and Dejazmat Hassen Ali had participated in forming this organization. Although the organization was predominantly Islamic, its founding objective was not to spread and preach Islam but to liberate Eritrea. The organization made it clear that the people of Eritrea didn't want unity with Ethiopia and desired their independence.

Al Rabita Al Islamya was established officially in December 1, 1946 in the town of Keren, during which every Moslem community in the country sent its representatives to the meeting where they elected their leaders. Seid Bekri Almurqani was elected as the president of the organization and Ibrahim Sultan the Secretary General. Religious leaders were also present in the election.

In May 1941, he was a founding member of the Patriotic Association till he helped found the Moslem League of Eritrea on 3.12.1946. The League took Keren as its headquarters till parties were shut down by Ethiopian interferences in the late 1950s.

As noted earlier, his activities in the emancipation of Tigre/serfs lasted between 1942 and 1946. The movement is usually known as the Emancipation Movement of Serfs (Harakat Tahrir al Aqnan). Ibrahim Sultan, who was the key figure in the establishment of Blocco Indipendenza in July 1949, had attended the 3rd UN General Assembly on 3.4.49 and the 5th Session of UN General Assembly in November 1950. In January 1951, he partook in the establishment of the Eritrean Democratic Front (EDF) and became its Secretary General.

He was a member of the first Eritrean Parliament when he won election on 15.5.1952 representing the Rugbat tribe of which he was the traditional chief from 1948 to 1950.

Jaafer Assad, a relation of Ibrahim Sultan who ran errands for the

man in Asmara in his childhood, is said to have told some years ago that Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan loved to watch films on daily basis in Asmara in the early 1950s and read the local daily Italian press. We could thus see that the commencement and growth of the Eritrean political struggle for national independence is linked with big patriots like Ibrahim Sultan Ali. He and his friends formed the Patriotic Association in May 1941, long before any political awakening in Africa. That era in the twilight of liberation struggle was deficient in experience and lacked examples that could be emulated.

Woldeab Woldemariam said of Sheikh Ibrahim: 90% of the credit of preserving Eritrea in one piece goes to Ibrahim Sultan Ali. He added: "Ibrahim Sultan is a heroic patriot who deserves the praise, the gratitude of the entire Eritrean people".

Exile and participation in struggle

According to Jaafer Assad, Ibrahim Sultan left Eritrea in February 1958 together with Idris Mohammed Adem. Abdalla Idris Abdalla of Ad Hashel, member of the Sudanese army, took him from Agordat to Khartoum.

Also according to Jaafer Assad, a long-time ELF member said Ibrahim Sultan, Woldeab Woldemariam, Idris Mohammed Adem and Mohammed Saleh Mahmoud, member of Rwaq al-jabarti and former editor of Voice of Eritrea, were meeting constantly in Cairo. Ibrahim Sultan was later dropped out of the newly formed ELF by Idris Mohammed Adem because Sheikh Ibrahim liked transparency but the key ELF man of the day did not like this outspokenness. In later years, Sheikh Ibrahim attended the first ELF congress in 1971 and the second congress in 1975. He stood with the ELF tendency, and was against disunity and thus remained opposed to the PLF of Osman Saleh Sabbe.



Quotes of Ibrahim Sultan

"My children, make peace amongst yourselves. Be united; Don't be Moslems and Christians. Avoid religious, ethnic and regional differences and confront your foes by forging solid unity."

He was nominally a member of the Eritrean Liberation Front, he broke away in 1970 and formed the People's Liberation Forces, which was an immediate precursor to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front where he was reunited with his old ally from the pre-federation period, Woldeab Woldemariam.

Historic Contributions of Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan Ali:

- He was the key actor in the emancipation of Tigre/serfs in Sahel and Barka who later filled the ranks of his mass movement for independence, the Moslem League of Eritrea (given that name, according to Sheikh Ibrahim, solely to counter the Ethiopian move to annex Eritrea using religion).

- He was the firebrand leader who helped found the Moslem League as the party advocating for self-determination.

- He had a significant role in establishing Blocco Indipendenza consisting six member parties.

- He was the first Eritrean political figure to widen diplomatic contacts, including a meeting with the Pope in Vatican.

- He was the voice of Eritrea at meetings in the United Nations.

- After federation, he was the Secretary General of the Eritrean Democratic Front (EDF).

- In the late 1950s, he became one of the exiled political leaders who became the conscience of the new liberation movement building up inside the homeland.

- Till death claimed him in 1987, Sheikh Ibrahim sided with the liberation movement and always talked about unity of Eritreans without distinction of region and religion.

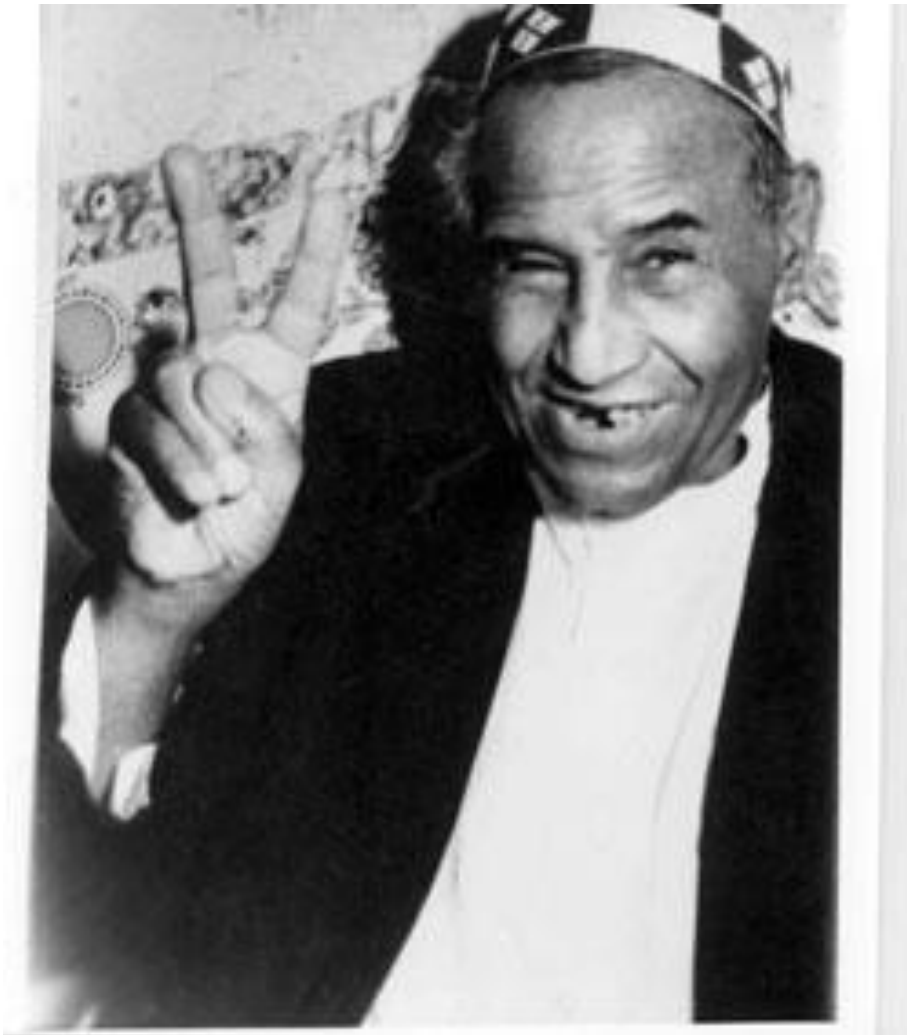
End of life: two years before independence

On the 1 of september 1987, Eritreans were as usual celebrating Revolution Day. But at the end of that day, they learned that Ibrahim Sultan Ali died in Cairo. It was a meaningful day and death. Ibrahim died in Cairo, after having been sick for many years. He was buried on 5 September in Kassala.

Ibrahim was a revolutionary in his own way and a great liberator not yet well known by many Eritreans who should know.

His comrade-in-struggle Woldeab Woldemariam once attested that there would not have been an Eritrea as we knew it were it not to Ibrahim Sultan who had a big role in averting its partition and again was instrumental in creating a sort of status around which the trappings of patria and patriotism could be built by succeeding generations.

As already noted, Sheikh Ibrahim died on Revolution Day in 1987 in Cairo, at 4pm after having been sick for many years. Buried at 6 pm on 5 September in Kassala, 5000 people attended the funeral procession. He was buried at Khatmia near Mount Taka. Ibrahim Sultan was eulogized by Woldeab Woldemariam, with whom he has taken his place as one of the "father figures" of the Eritrean nation.



Last picture available of the nations gallant patriot
Ibrahim Sultan Ali