

Dagu: A Means of Communication

Written by Winta Woldeyesus



In today's age of information technology, information is power. You will know about an incident happening in a very far end of the world in an instance. You also can contact any one in any part of the world and this is all being available thanks to the modern information technology such as the World Wide Web, email, face book and the list goes on.

Long before such technology was introduced, people used to pass information through a messenger. And this information transformation varies according to society's norms and culture. In the Afar ethnic group, passing message through a messenger is called Dagu.

Dagu includes information about marriages, death and travels of the people in the society. If you meet someone in a street from your home land, the first thing you do is ask if he has any Dagu meaning if he has any information about the homeland. This information transfer method usually involves the lives of the societies. Beside family and individual updates, Dagu is also used to transfer any kind of message.

Another incident that can be a topic of Dagu among the Afar people is when there is a guest in any of the families of the society. Once a guest arrives among the Afar, he/she will be accepted with great hospitality and after having water to drink and wash, the guest will be asked if he/she has relatives in the area. If the guest does not have a relative in the area, he will be treated with great hospitality in the first house that he/she arrived. Here also again the word of a guest's arrival will be out. After the guest has some rest, it will be time for exchanging information, both the guest and the families he/she is staying with will have all the information they needed through Dagu.

The information transferring process among the Afar has its own rules and regulations. Any one who passes information in Dagu has to be able to verify the information and has to be able to answer question in times of cross-checking, incase such a thing is needed. Any one that used Dagu to distribute false information for his/ her benefit will be punished severely by the council of elders in the Afar society. Once a person is proven of disseminating false information through Dagu, he will be isolated from the society and is treated badly among the society. So every member of the Afar society knows the rules of Dagu and abides by it because no one wants to be labeled as a liar and isolated from the rest of the society. Those rules also make the information that comes through Dagu to be true and reliable.

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In addition to those rules, the Afar society also has another way of verifying the source of the information that is passing through Dagu. Once one is transferring information the recipient will ask where he got the information and who said what and to whom so that in case of false information, any one will be able to trace back the source of the false information. Any one that transfers false information without knowing that the information is false will be proven innocent by tracing back the source and set free.

Dagu, with its set of rules and regulation has been the means of communication among the Afar society for long. Even when livestock are lost, people exchange information through this method about the number, type and whereabouts of the animals.

Dagu has the virtues that today's technology can't have, though this means of information transformation is limited and slow, it is by far more reliable. Hence, having easy access to information should not prompt us to ignore such means and these disappearing virtues of societies should be preserved.