Nuruddin Farah was born in 1945 in Baidoa, a small town in southwest Somalia, which was then a part of what was known as Italian Somaliland. He was brought up in Kallafo, a small town in the Western Somali territory of the Ogaden under Ethiopian rule. The population of this small town was divided into three groups; Somalis, who were the majority; a small Arab community which was mainly engaged in business and large number of Amharic speaking soldiers. However, on one of the two banks of the river, Shabelle, which divided the town into two, was exclusively for the Ethiopian soldiers wherein they ran the administration.

Farah attended his first school, Shashamane, there in Kallafo, while he was six years old. In a reminiscence article Farah writes that going to school at Kallafo “was a test of courage” as the children had to undergo the ordeal of crossing the river, often by swimming and “braving the crocodiles.” (1990) There at Shashamane school the Somali children had to receive education in the Amharic and Arabic languages. Farah completed his
secondary school education in 1964 at Instituto di Magistrale di Mogadiscio. Here Farah was to be taught yet in another language, the Italian.

For his higher education he went to a number of universities abroad. At Panjab University, Chandigarh he did his B.A. in English literature and philosophy in 1970. Then he attended the university of London in 1974/75 where he did a one year post graduate course in theatre, and was attached to Royal Court theatre. After that he went to the university of Essex, Colchester in continuation of his one year post graduate study in theatre, where he produced a play; *The Offering*.

He worked as a clerk typist in the Somali Ministry of Education and also as a secondary school teacher at 15th May Secondary School at Mogadiscio in 1969-71. After that he lectured at the Somali National University in Mogadiscio for about three years. He has been to a numerous universities as a guest professor: Bayrouth University, Germany in 1981, University of Jos, Nigeria in 1981-83, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis in 1988, State University of New York, Stony Brook in 1989, and then Brown University, Province, Rhode Island in 1991, and Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda in 1990. He is presently settled in South Africa.

### 2.3. His Works

Within a year after the completion of his secondary school, Farah, then only twenty years old, wrote his first book, *Why Dead so Soon?* A
novella in Somali language. Besides his studies at Panjab University, Farah worked on a number of books, plays, revues and novels. One of those revues, *Doctor and Physicist* got broadcast on All India Radio in 1968. The manuscripts of two apprentice-novels, which he finished in the same year, did not get published. He also completed the manuscript of a third novel in the first half of 1968, which was to become his first English novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, published in 1970. After that Farah proved to be a prolific writer by publishing as many as seven other novels.

*From a Crooked Rib* tells the story of Ebla, an uneducated eighteen-year old maid who runs away from her nomadic family so as to avoid her arranged marriage to Giumaleh, a forty-eight year old man. The novel opens with the news of her escape. In the first pages of the novel we meet Ebla’s younger brother, telling his grandfather, the only elder and the guardian of Ebla and her brother, that Ebla was gone and that was of certain.

After her escape from her nomadic family she comes to the town of Belet Wene. There she asks of her tribal cousin, Ghedi, and is shown. At Ghedi’s, she is used as a maid, and subjected to a hard housework by his wife, Aowrala. Then Ghedi sells her off to a broker for a handful of money. This leads to Ebla’s second escapade which brings her to the Somali capital, Mogadiscio. There she marries Awill, a young educated man, who works in the Ministry of Education as a clerk. But soon Awill goes to Italy for a study tour, leaving her to his landlady’s guardianship. Later when Ebla learns that her husband, Awill, is with an Italian girl friend, she gets for herself a
marriage of convenience and marries Tiffo, a rich married man. Thus, Ebla’s life becomes involved in as many men as four. In her conscience she feels guilt and shifts the responsibility of her actions onto others. In the end Tiffo divorces her after she tells him that as he is married to two wives she is also married to two husbands. Later Awill comes back from his study tour and the novel ends with their promise to each other to tell every thing in the following day.

Most of Farah’s critics see the novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, as one which deals with the Somali woman’s quest for freedom from the patriarchal tyrannies of fathers and husbands and her bid for “whatever little independent identity her period of national history will allow.”(Wright, 1990) Published as early as 1970 it made its author a renowned feminist pioneer of African fiction. According to Alden and Tremaine, “*From a Crooked Rib* laid the ground work for an international reputation that today, for most readers, rests entirely on Farah’s novels.”(31)

*A Naked Needle* (1976) is Farah’s second novel. Unlike *From a Crooked Rib*, the central character of this novel, Koschin, is a forty-year-old man who is professionally a teacher. He is widely travelled, highly educated man with a very mature and alert mind. The novel concentrates on the events in a day of Koschin’s life. In the morning he wakes up “weary, worried and tormented”(1) apparently by the expected arrival of Nancy, a British woman, who he promised to marry two years before.
The novel puts forth the character’s experience and disillusionment against the background realities of a widespread social and political corruption. It shows the bureaucratic absurdity, like the school principles that sexually abuse their female students, ministerial incompetence, nepotism and prostitution. However, the reader is made aware of all this on the level of statement rather than dramatic demonstration.

Human relationships, between men and women in particular, are said to be the central theme of the novel, where the man in every woman and the woman in every man are dealt from various angles. But the irony is that despite of the presentation of different levels of such relationships, Barre and Mildred, Mohamed and Barbara, Nancy and Koschin, and others, none of these relations is taken to a satisfactory conclusion. In Derek Wright’s words the “novel’s sexual centre is dissolved.”(41) Thus the reader is made to feel that all the issues and episodes in it are there only to help him/her know Koschin and his views on these issues. However, *A Naked Needle* stands alone in Farah’s novels as far as its political outlook is concerned. In it, the infant revolutionary regime of M.S. Barre is seen promising. It shows what Farah later called his brief love affair with the revolution:

In relation to its giving script to the Somali language Köschin tells Nancy: the greatest feat that has been undertaken by the revolutionary government is unabashedly and bravely to pronounce the fact that Somalia needed a script, no matter how much this angered several world factions. I worship them for this. I worship them even if they have committed several crimes that they thought were minor … hence, twenty first October 1972 is the most important day in Somali people's history. (120)
Critics find the novel technically exiting as it makes use of copious rendering of flashbacks and reminiscence interpolated in the dialogues in a number of times. Its protagonist’s postcolonial bent of mind by questioning the truth in a great deal of interdisciplinary subjects is often regarded one of its foremost difficulties.

_Sweet and Sour Milk_ (1979), Farah’s third narrative, is a very serious and stunning novel, which lays bare the despotic ways of the Somali dictatorial regime of General Barre. It tells the story of Loyaan Keynaan whose twin brother, Soyaan, suddenly died in an apparently government hatched plot. Soyaan was economic advisor to the presidency. He dined with his boss, the minister to the Presidency in the previous night. He suddenly fell ill. In his sleep, he talks of “pale ghostly beings which jabbed him with needles... These injections thought he to himself, how they pained.”(17) Loyaan sets to find out the cause of his brother’s sudden death by reconstructing Soyaan’s last days activities on the basis of a memorandum found in the folds of his pillow-cover, and other coded diary jottings. This soon lead him to suspect whether his brother was poisoned with the help of a Russian doctor, as Soyaan was the leading figure of a clandestine group of ten, which conducted subversive anti-Soviet activities. But this task soon proves difficult for Loyaan as he had to work in an extreme atmosphere of fear and suspicion created by the authoritarian dictator.
Instead of arriving at clear picture of the cause of Soyaan's mysterious sudden death, we find the regime collaborating with the twin's father, Keynaan, who is a police-informer, in changing the face of the reality. Whereas Soyaan was, along with friends, working actively against the regime, he is turned posthumously a revolutionary hero, a martyr of the Socialist cause, and Loyaan's efforts to defend his twin brother's principles by working hard to prove the real face of the dictator's revolutionary rhetoric comes to a dead end. He is sent to a virtual exile as he is appointed an ambassador to Belgrade. Thus, what materialises here is the fact that the dictator who acquires his power from traditional patriarchal base, succeeds to neutralise effectively the activities of the youthful members of the clandestine movement. Hence with the help of its dangerous and powerful oral campaign the regime is capable of turning the underground movement harmless.

In *Sweet and Sour Milk* Farah shows how the regime's dictatorial power is mainly the result of patriarchal authoritarianism in the sphere of the family. The conflict is mainly traditional: patriarchs believing the flat concept of the earth stand their sons' ways to a round ball-like concept of world view. To bring about this traditional patriarchal highhandedness there is the recurring motif of the twin's ball on which they have drawn a map of the world, a mini atlas, and Keynaan's (their father) cutting it into two:

Loyaan was with Soyaan, and the twins were fighting over a ball. Towering above was this massive figure, their father, who snatched the ball from them, and cut it into two. When he had just
walked away but was still within hearing distance, Soyaan said, ‘I will kill him.’ (95)

Thus, in this volume Farah is questioning this patriarchal highhandedness over the other family members which also reflects upon that of the General over the nation as one of the chapter opening epigraphs clearly states: “In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instruments of power.” (97)

*Sardines* (1981), the second novel of the *Dictatorship Trilogy*, presents Medina, a young beautiful lady, who is highly educated and journalist by profession as its protagonist. She became the editor of the national daily newspaper. But now she is sacked of the post and banned to publish any of her writings inside the Somali Democratic Republic. She is the leader of the clandestine group against the government, after Soyaan in the previous novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk*. The movement has now turned to, in Wright’s words, “a beleaguered impotence, [and] protest becomes more gestural than practical,” (1990) instead of proving to be a real threat to the regime. Medina is engaged in a war of two fronts; both in the domestic and the public levels. Domestically, she is resisting the family matriarch’s pressures to have Ubax, Medina’s daughter circumcised. In the national level, the General’s regime wants to silence the group, which is in this narrative under her leadership. In an ambivalent move Medina abandons home and husband, and moves to her brother’s house. This is considered to be one of the important gestural protests against the regime. She feels
betrayed by her husband, Samatar, who succumbs to the regime’s pressures as he is threatened a general political purge against his entire kinsmen.

As in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, in this volume the roles of orality and written word are juxtaposed. The regime as Wright observed, “dreads the written word and hunts it down,” and as publishing of any written material is banned literature becomes compulsorily oralised. (1990) For example, as Medina is forbidden to publish any of her translations of a number of world canons she resorts to the oral form of literature and gives them to her daughter, Ubax, “hot like maize cakes from the oven.” (3) In this way Farah explores the possibility of employing this orality subversively. Coupled with the access of modern technology, it is distributed in cassette form consisting of underground poetry against the regime.

But unlike in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines* is about compromise as Farah stated. However, one of the novel’s the central themes is about the dilemma faced by the Somali woman, as she is subjected to a number of authoritarian rules. The relationships the novel puts forth are mainly female-centred ones, mothers and daughters in particular. Medina stands for the educated and politically active. The novel, however, underlines the fact that her education proves powerless, which is one of the main thematic variations of the trilogy. Here the reader grasps the prevailing confusions and rootlessness that exist in Medina and her circle of female friends.
The final novel of the trilogy, *Close Sesame* (1983) presents a further dimension to this resistance. It concentrates on the final days of the life of an ageing asthmatic father, Deeriye, who from his young age has been true to the principles of justice and freedom. He spent the best part of his personal share of the national history in prison. During the colonial era, Deeriye was arrested by the Italians and in the post-independence era, most of the time he is kept behind the bars as he dared to raise his voice against the policies of the General and his empty revolutionary slogans.

Owing to his poor health, Deeriye is removed from the scene of activities and receives whatever little reality through rumours and indirect reports. He knows his son, Mursal, a professor at the national university, and three of his friends are actively planning to strike a severe blow to the regime, now that the powerless impotent protests of the clandestine group in the previous volume turns to be a full-fledged conspiracy in this narrative. But as they are eliminated one after the other, Deeriye, who always adhered to the principle of non-violence, joins the insane former high civil servant, Khaliif, in order to meet the General. But for Deeriye to meet the General means to shoot him dead. Ironically, his attempted assassination on the life of the General results in his own death, his passage to the heavens, wherein he is awaited by his beloved wife, Nadiifa. The narrative voice points out that his attempt was, perhaps, "his way of bidding farewell to a life crowded with ironies." (206)
In *Close Sesame* Farah presents Deeriye’s character as somewhat uncritically and sympathetically as a devote Muslim, committed nationalist, and a pan-Somalist and pan-Africanist who is well versed with the continent’s freedom movements. Contrary to the hated, mean and flat patriarchs like Keynaan in earlier instalment, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, and Sh. Ibraahim in this novel, Deeriye is a man “who has come to terms with himself, who knows who he is and where he stands.”(85) Deeriye also stands better chance of opposing the General than the “confused and rootless”(Turfan) members of the intellectual elite.

It has become clear in his first trilogy, *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, Farah dealt with the activities of selected intellectual elite in the gruesome and fear-dominated recent Somali history under the leadership of General M. S. Barre’s regime. The group’s various “ideological platforms, their world views, as well as their perceptions of aspects of the Somali and other societies”(Ibid.) are shown satisfactorily. But while that may tempt many to consider Farah’s works as “the persuasive power of the propagandist” it emerges that this is, in J. P, Durix’s words “the lucid and the paradoxical analysis of the genuine artist assailed by doubts.”

*Maps* (1986) Farah’s next work, which comes after *The Dictatorship Trilogy*, centres round Askar, an orphan boy, who grows to a young man. Both of his parents dead, he is brought up by Misra, a childless, Ethiopian woman. The novel does not only tell Askar’s strong parental relationship with Misra, the surrogate mother, but it also depicts how they seem to have a
sexual body closeness, and their subsequent separation by “the abstract intellectual hatred of creed and country that are awakened by the Somali-Ethiopian” Ogaden conflict of 1977/78. (Wright. 186)

Unlike all the other novels of Farah the setting of the early part of Maps is Kallafo, a small Somali town in Western Somalia which is under Ethiopian colonial rule. Askar’s father was an active fighter in the struggle to liberate the Ogaden from Ethiopian domination. He died few months before Askar’s birth in an Ethiopian prison. His mother died at the time of his birth and was discovered by Misra, who works as a maidservant for the family of Qorax, his paternal uncle. The maid, who herself is childless, spends some sixteen hours nursing him without bringing the news of his existence or his mother’s death to any one’s awareness. When she later tells the community of relations about him, he is left to her for his up-bringing. This leads to their existence in a close world of each other’s life. As for her, the second person narrative voice of Askar’s selves says: “The point of you was that, in small and large ways, you determined what Misra’s life would be like the moment you took it over. From the moment you ‘took her life over,’ her personality underwent a considerable change.” (8) And as for him the ‘I’ voice states; “I was dirty, yes; I was nameless, yes; but I existed the second she touched me... can I simply say she brought me into existence?” (24)

In this way of existing in their entwined worlds there emerges their strong bond of oneness. But this does not last long. As Askar enters boyhood
his body closeness to Misra is separated by, as Wright observes “the abstract intellectual hatred of creed and country that are awakened by the Somali-Ethiopian war in the Ogaden,” in 1977/78. (186) Askar comes under the influence of the prevailing national, colonial and ethnic climates. He soon becomes leader of a group of boys who train themselves in preparation for the nationalist war, and his consciousness is occupied by the thought of growing up to a young man so that “he would be provided with ample opportunities to prove that he was a man” to be “recruited as a member of Western Somali Liberation Front, the front fighting for the liberation of the Ogaden from Ethiopian domination.” (96) However, these very events of the Ogaden bring Askar to Mogadiscio, where he comes under the care of his maternal uncle, Hilaal, and his wife, Salaado. As his new guardians are intellectuals they make efforts to educate him and give him an opportunity to free his Ogaden by his intellectual powers rather than that of the gun. But Askar remains a divided self. He is haunted by his unbecoming situation where he feels pained by a sense of guilt that he is not fighting as “a man,” for the liberation of the Ogaden. Referring to his letter in which Askar expressed that sense of guilt Hilaal asks him;

And what do you mean by saying that you haven’t become “a man” so I can sit “in a Mogadiscio of comforts, eat a mountainful of spaghetti while my peers in the Ogaden starve to death or shed their blood in order to liberate it from Ethiopian hands?” (19)

While Askar is yet undecided of which way to take there emerges Misra in Mogadiscio. She is accused of betraying hundreds of Somali freedom fighters because she found for herself a young Ethiopian lover.
Though Askar’s old neighbours in Kallafo insist on her betrayal which results in the death of eight hundred soldiers, Misra continues to deny the charge when she meets Askar, and claims that she was gang raped by Somalis. For Askar, no evidence though, she is no longer the mother figure with whose help he used to locate himself but a “whore,” who is also the enemy within. However, while in a hospital in Mogadiscio Misra is abducted and brutally murdered.

At the end of the novel Askar is questioned by the police in relation with Misra’s death. In his consciousness the novel’s three alternative narrative voices merge and become three-in-one different, but related selves of his: “He was at once and the same time the plaintiff and juror. Finally, allowing for his different persona to act as judge, as audience and as witness, Askar told it to himself.”(246)

In writing *Maps* Farah has written one of his intellectually most complex and technically dynamic works. While it presents a serious debate on the elusive frontiers of Africa, which act as time-bombs for the reform minded intellectual, it also deals with the nomadic reality of the Somali’s national and individual identity. In Derek Wright’s words, *Maps* represents “the first novel of the body” in African literature (1990). Being the first of his second trilogy, *Blood in the Sun, Maps* proved that Farah is really a dynamic artist whose fiction moved into exciting, uncharted new territory that reveals “a marked shift from a political geography to psychophysiology, from powerescapes to mindescapes.”(Ibid.) The Conradian
epigraph with which a part of the novel opens, which reads as “every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt,” is a typical Farahan style of capturing the present post-colonial ethnic-segregated Africa. And to bring the more aggravating existence of uncertainty, all powerful and victimising, Farah denies us even the chance to form one, ‘and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitude.’

*Maps* is followed by *Gifts* (1992). It evolves round Duniya, a middle-aged single parent. It mainly tells the love affair between the heroine and Bosaaso, a widower working for the United Nations and formerly based in the United States. As Alden and Tremaine observe; her “life is marked by a number of stations all managed by men through their gifts,”(133) Duniya is herself gifted to an old blind man, Zubeir, for a horse gift he presented to her father when she was still a mere child. She also received gifts from her brothers and lover but as she discovers that gifts are not given for nothing and have as many strings attached to them she puts forth a determined resistance to them. She does not accept her children to bring home unauthorised donations of food, money, etc., even if from uncles, aunts or step-fathers. What she does not want is to be defined as per others’ obliging generosity. With this strategy she curves the boundaries of her individual existence and keeps the sphere of her independence intact and unviolated: “I hate when people take me for granted as a woman.”(25)

But that is the private part of her story central it is though. In its background Farah paints, in Wright’s words, a “large canvass of political
and social reality which opens out into wider perspective of international gifts”(131) of the privileged west to the impoverished nations of the Third World.

And in Duniya’s consciousness even a lover’s offer of dinner or lift in his vehicle is never less undermining than a German or Scandinavian Aid to Somalia, or any other wretched Third World country. In one occasion to make Bosaaso, her lover, understand the reason for “her reluctance to accept his gifts,” Duniya says:

Because unasked for generosity has a way of making one feel obliged, trapped in labyrinth of dependence. You are more knowledgeable about these matters, but haven’t we in the Third World lost our self-reliance and pride because of the so-called Aid we unquestionably receive from the so-called First World? (20-21)

Therefore, in spite of the fact that this work presents an entirely new aspect of the writer's attention to love and lovers, “the complex psychology of the donorship” and its impact on both the parties, the donor and the recipient, is aptly explored and exposed.(Wright.131) And while Farah is scathingly critical with ‘this domination of generosity’ his foremost concern is indeed to add new dimensions to the individual’s struggle to have a proper space of existence for him/her. Besides Duniya’s resistance to the power and the imposition of material-oriented identity, by questioning the psyche of the donor and the recipient, it is the process of what Alden and Tremaine term as “self-narration” and “political autonomy” that ensures the success of her
struggle for individuality: “Duniya sees the outlines of a story emerging from the mist surrounding her, as the outside world impinges on her space and thoughts.” (1)

Secrets (1998), Farah’s latest published work, concludes the second trilogy, Blood in the Sun. Like the previous two volumes of this trilogy the title of its final instalment captures the core issues in it; secrets in Secrets are numerous and are involved by all. They are either formed, harboured, burrowed, divulged or waffled about and dabbled. They, as Nonno, the head of Farah’s imagined family in this novel, says: “define us, they mark us, set us apart from all others. The secrets which we preserve provide a key to who we are, deep down.”(144) They are compared to “the growths on the body, boils never maturing to the pus-forming stage, at which they might burst.”(144)

Nonno’s present existence is shaped by secrets. Early in his youth, as a Koranic and supernatural mysticism scholar, he dabbled with numbers and alphabetical secret codes of the profession and, as a result, had to run for his life, with his teacher’s curse placed on his head. Leaving Berbera, his hometown in the North of Somalia, he comes to Afgoi, the down south, and he starts his life from the scratches as he had to “over-haul” his identity and change his name from Misbaax - meaning ‘light’ in Somali and Arabic - to Miftaax - meaning ‘key.’ The outcome becomes a successful and independent personality with a prosperous estate. This is, as far as the
making powers of secrets are concerned. But Nonno has also power over animals and over other people’s lives through his secrets.

The secrets that “mark” and “provide a key to” Kalaman’s identity, which are central issue to all others, are mainly Nonno’s. The protagonist’s very problem of identity stems from his name, ‘Kalaman,’ an unconventional name among the Somali names, which is bestowed to him by his grandfather, Nonno. And he is determined, though advised against it by Nonno, to find out the ‘truth’ about his identity. In the end the truth that he discovers or emerges makes him not only confront with the reality of himself but also that of his parents, particularly his mother’s.

The presence of Shaloongo, also a name unknown to Somalis, identified as a shape-shifter girl, who has easy access to both worlds of human and animals, and whose negative character is probably related to the narrative’s sole defining, influence of stars, in the scene threatens all the secrets and their keepers. Without pointing out what pressure she intends to apply, her demand is made secret to no one including Damac, Kalaman’s mother: “I am here to bear a baby ... I want you to be the father of my child,” she tells Kalaman after she found her way to his bedroom mysteriously. She tells his mother that she wants him to impregnate her because she promised, in their childhood, to give him a sibling.

These are secrets that cannot be easily delved into, but in relation to the protagonist’s sought-after “truth” they are, unlike the maps and the gifts
of the earlier two instalments, safely utilised as Alden and Tremaine observe: Kalaman’s own life “at last ‘takes shape’ and commitment: a decision to marry Talaado, a wish to produce a child and a determination to participate in the reconstruction of his family as a legitimate ground of identity.”(78)

In *Secrets*, again in Farah’s fiction, the individual and the family secrets are those of the nation as well. In its backdrop there looms large the Somali nation’s dismembering civil war and the impeding collapse into blood-letting anarchy,(90) resulting political disintegration by which the Somali national identity becomes all but empty. (Alden and Tremaine. 77)

We have so far seen in the previous pages that Nuruddin Farah is a prominent and prolific writer. It must, however, be brought to light that though Farah is an established writer and enjoys world reputation because of his novels he also has a number of plays and revues to his name. However, only one play and a revue are broadcast on radio: *Doctor and a Physicist* (revue) on All India Radio (1968), and *A Spread of Butter* (play) on B.B.C. African Service (Dec.24th 1978) Another of his plays, *Yusuf and His Brothers*, was produced at the University of Jos, Nigeria, 2-4 July 1982. Thus, it is paradoxical that though Farah saw himself as a dramatist rather than a novelist the bulk of his plays and revues remain neither published nor produced nor broadcast, and hence unknown to most of his readers.
2.4. Awards

Since the publication of the *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the first instalment of his *Dictatorship Trilogy* Farah has been receiving a number of world acclaimed awards. The first of these awards was English Speaking Union Awards for the publication of *Sweet and Sour Milk* in 1980. In 1991 he was awarded Tucholsky Prize in Stockholm, Sweden, for work as literary exile. And a year after his publication of *Gifts* he was awarded Best Novel Award in Zimbabwe. Again in 1998, after the French edition of *Gifts* come out in May, he received St. Malo Literary Festival Award, and the novel, *Gifts*, was named The Book of the Month (June) for all French libraries. This was followed by his receiving The Naustadt International Prize for Literature, becoming its 15th Laureate, at University of Oklahoma in October 1998.
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