

Contributions of Women to the Development of Hausa Literature as an Effective Means of Public Enlightenment: The Case of a 19th C. Female Scholar, Maryam Bint Uthman Ibn Foduye

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Abstract—In the 19th century Hausa land an Islamic revolution known as the Sokoto Jihad took place which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1808 under the leadership of the famous Sheik Uthman Bn Fodiye. Prior to the Jihad women in Hausa land (now Northern Nigeria) were left in ignorance and were being used and dumped like old kitchen utensils. The sheik and his followers did their best in the fight for women's right to education by using their female family members as role models who were highly educated and renowned scholars. After the Jihad with establishment of Islamic state, the women scholars initiated different strategies to educate the women on religious ground in the region. The most effective strategy was the 'Yantaru Movement. Which was founded by Nana Asma'u the daughter of Sheik Uthman Danfodiye in collaboration with her sisters around 1840.

The 'Yantaru movement is a women's educational movement aimed at enlightening women in rural and urban areas. The movement helped in massive mobilization for women's education. In addition to town pupils, women from villages and other nook and corners were coming to Sokoto and Wurno for knowledge, thus the birth of the 'Yantaru system of women's education. The 'Yantaru operates three tier system at Ward, Village and centrally Hubbare in Sokoto. 'Yantaru functions include: Imparting knowledge to elderly women and young girls. Step down enlightenment program on return home. The most effective medium of communication in the 'Yantaru movement was through poetry where scholars composed poems which were memorized by the 'Yantaru for reciting to fellow women when they go back home. Through this system many women were educated to extent that there was a teacher (Modibbo) in each and every hamlet or village by the time the British conard Sokoto.

Index Terms—Jihad, Sokoto Caliphate, Hausa land, female scholars, Yantaru Mvement-associates.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 19th century Hausaland Islamic revolution known as the Sokoto Jihad led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1808 A.D under the leadership of the famous Sheikh Uthman Ibn Foduye. The jihad started as an educational movement where the Sheikh was teaching and imparting knowledge to his students' and moulding them and purifying the religion of Islam from the syncretism associated with it by the people of Hausaland, especially the rulers known as Sarakunan Kasar Hausa. It therefore became a mass movement with the Sheikh attracting students and disciples from all over Hausaland. The

Sheikh's movement soon attracted the attention of Hausa rulers who saw it as a threat to their power and did all they could to suppressed the movement. When the harassment became too much the Sheikh and his followers embarked upon a hijrah from Degel where they were based to Gudu in 1804. This mark the formal commencement of the jihad and the Islamic revolution that was to swept away all the major Hausa states of Gobir, Kano, Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Daura and a large part of what is today Northern Nigeria, some parts of the republics of Cameroon and Niger. In their place a mega state, the Sokoto Caliphate was established with Sokoto as the capital of the new state [1].

II. THE STATE OF WOMEN IN HAUSALAND BEFORE THE JIHAD

Prior to the Jihad movement in Hausa land (now Northern Nigeria) women were left in ignorance. They had no rights even those granted them by Islam and were therefore treated like slaves to serve their male counterparts. The Sheikh gave special attention to issues pertaining women's rights especially their rights to education. In one of his works Nurul Albab the Sheikh was very critical of the Hausa society including some of its Ulama. In his criticism of the Ulama he wrote "...one of these impious practices is that most of the Ulama leave their wives, daughters and slaves neglected like animals without teaching what Allah enjoins on them regarding article of faith, their ablution, their prayers and other things permitted to them in their business transactions and the like"[2]. The Sheikh directly appealed to women thus "Oh Muslim women, do not listen to the words of the misguided ones who seek to lead you astray by ordering you to obey your husband instead of telling you to obey Allah and His Messenger. They tell you that a woman's happiness lies in obeying her husband. This is no more than a camouflage to make you satisfy their needs. They imposed on you duties which neither Allah nor His Messenger imposed on you. They make you cook, wash clothes and do other things which they desire while they fail to teach you what Allah and His apostle has prescribed for you"[2].

III. WOMEN'S EDUCATION UNDER THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

With the establishment of the Islamic state the need to educate women on the tenants of Islam became more critical. The sheikh wrote several treatises on the need to educate the womenfolk, the methods and the modalities of their education while the content and the curriculum remain the

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same with their menfolk. He and his followers did their best in actualising women's right to education by using their female family members as role models who were highly educated and renowned scholars whose writings have survived up till today. In the Sokoto Caliphate two systems of educations were evolved: The formal system where schools were established in all the nooks and crannies of the Caliphate. In These schools both girls and boys were given the same opportunity to pursue their educational career to the fullest where they were taught all the known Islamic sciences starting with Arabic alphabets and how to read the Quran. At the elementary level the schools were coeducational but once the student has advanced into the sciences the learning process became more individualised. The formal learning process terminates for most of the girls as soon as they get married except of those who got married to scholars or students involved in the learning process. In spite of this, the system was able to produce prominent and active women scholars among whom were Khadija, Fatimah, Hafsat, Maryam, Safiya , Nana Asma'u and many others [3].

IV. THE 'YANTARU SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

To make up for those women who could not continue with the formal education these women scholars initiated different strategies to support the Sheikh's efforts to educate the generality of women. The 'Yantaru movement was designed specifically by Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Sheikh Uthman Bin Foduye in collaboration with her sisters around 1840 A.D to mobilize, educate and enlighten the generality of women through an adult education system. The 'Yantaru in Hausa means 'associates' [4].

The 'Yantaru movement is a women's educational movement aimed at enlightening women on Islamic teachings in both the rural and urban areas. The movement helped in massively mobilizing women for education. In addition to town pupils, old women and young girls from villages and throughout the nooks and crannies of metropolitan Sokoto participated in the movement in the search for knowledge.

The 'Yantaru operates three tier system at village, town and the metropolitan capital of Sokoto. The 'Yantaru leadership structure includes Jaji (president), Waziri (vice president), Majidadi (right hand person), Imamu (religious leader), Beru (program officer), Zakara (orator), Zamzama (Chief whip), Atuwu (Food mistress), Maitaru (Chief hostess), etc 'Yantaru functions include: imparting knowledge to elderly women and young girls who step down enlightenment program on returning home. They also pay visit (*Ziyara*) to Islamic historical sites e.g. Tombs of renowned Islamic scholars in order to be up to date on the history of the caliphate, they also provide entertainment through *Bege* songs (poems) which were very educative and full of praises of the prophet of Islam (AS), Saints and leaders of the 'Yantaru.

'Yantaru movement adopted the poetry (*Bege songs*) strategy where the female scholars composed educational poems which were memorized by the 'Yantaru who on return recite them to fellow women at home. In addition to the poetry the women were also taught how to read and write in Arabic. Through this system women's education

flourished and many women were educated [4].

This paper examines the second leader of the 'Yantaru Movement, Maryam Bint Uthman Ibn Foduye and some of her poems especially *wakar Ni'imomin Ubangiji Ga Bawan Sa* Blessings of Allah on His servants). The poems were composed as part of the educational materials used in the 'Yantaru Movement.

V. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARYAM BINT UTHMAN IBN FODUYE

Maryam was born in 1810A.C. Her father Sheikh Uthman Ibn Foduye was the 19th century reformer and scholar who established the Sokoto Caliphate in 1808. Maryam was born, two years after the establishment of the caliphate. Her mother Mariyah was a concubine of the Sheikh Maryam was raised up in a family where equal learning opportunities and participation in decision making were given to both male and female, based on the Sheikh's teachings. She was therefore well educated which makes her one of the important female scholars that contributed a lot to the development of the Jihad literature. She was also the youngest of the 36 children of the Sheikh and the last to die. Maryam received her education from her mother, father, brothers and sisters as was the tradition in the Sheikhs' family. She was taught the Glorious Qur'an, Fiqh (Jurisprudence), Tauhid (Theology), Hadith (Prophetic traditions), Arabic language, Literature and grammar. She spoke Hausa, Fulfulde and Arabic languages fluently.

Maryam was married at a young age as was then the tradition in Hausaland to Malam Bi Abde (one of the Sheikh's lieutenants) with whom she had 2 children a boy and a girl. After his death she married Ibrahim Dabo, the second Amir of Kano who reigned from 1819-1846. With his death she returned to Sokoto and continued to serve the society in various respects [5].

Boyd and Mack stated that when she returned to Sokoto "she left behind in Kano a reputation for piety and wisdom while taking with her sound knowledge of Kano politics"[6], which enabled her to take part in decision making in political matters. It was Maryam who was consulted during the Kano succession dispute in 1882 at a time when neither Caliph nor the vizier could agree on who the next Amir of Kano should be. She advised on the appointment of Muhammadu Bello who reigned from 1883-1892. She was also asked about the time of a great upheaval that will occasion the migration of people from Hausaland by Sarkin Kano Muhammadu Bello on seeing that many people were migrating from Kano towards Mecca. In response to his inquiry, Maryam composed a poem of 13 stanzas titled *Fadar Shehu Kan Watsewar kasar Hausa* (Saying of Shehu on The Disintegration of Hausaland).

Maryam also assisted her sister Nana Asma'u in the women's education program ('Yantaru movement). She led the program after the death of her sister Nana Asma'u. She was generous and used to distribute alms and horses to the Muslim Army whenever they were going on military campaigns. She led a pious life and was described by Waziri Junaidu as a saintly woman. Maryam was also given a leadership title of Nana Uwar Daje. Her other notable Hausa poems included *Wakar Nasarar Yaki*, 1880

(Commemoration of victory of the Muslim forces over the enemy), Wakar Limamci, 1884 (Expositions on Imamship) and Wakar Ni'imomin Ubangiji Ga Bawansa, 1866) (Allah's Blessings on His Servant). Maryam died in 1890AD [6].

VI. THE WORK UNDER STUDY

The title of the poem which is in Hausa language is 'Ni'imomin Ubangiji Ga Bawansa (Blessings of Allah on His servants). The copy used for this work was written in Hausa language using Arabic script which is known as Hausa ajami. It was discovered during my field work in the archives of the Centre for Hausa Studies of the Bayero University, Kano. The poem is transliterated first in Hausa language and then translated into English.

The poem was composed around 1283 AH (1866 AD), around middle of the 19th century. Before, during and after the revolution the jihadists came up with different strategies to educate the society in general and women in particular which included advocacy, sensitization, enlightenment campaigns and mobilization through preaching, write-ups and poems to ensure success and sustainability of the Islamic Shari'a in Hausaland. The Sheikh and his companions, both male and females wrote many poems to enlighten people on Islamic and related issues. This was one of such poems written by Maryam bint Sheikh Uthman Ibn Foduye.

VII. BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

A. Theme

The subject matter of the poem is to admonish and enjoin people to do good/righteous deeds and shun the prohibited deeds as has been demonstrated in all the works of the jihadists. The main theme of the poem was to make people to realize and appreciate Allah's blessings on them so that they may worship Him with sincerity. Other sub themes include educating the masses on the creation of human beings from a drop of semen which changed into a clot of blood, flesh added, formation of body and then a human being with a soul.

B. Content/Style

The poem was in 42 stanzas of 2 rows per stanza and was opened and closed with the usual 19th century style of thanking the creator and praising the prophet of Islam (AS). The poem has a rhyme of 'ta'. Throughout the poem the author was trying to convince Muslims on the necessity of obeying the rules and commandments of Allah. In doing so, she made use of some verses from the glorious Qur'an and prophetic traditions of the holy prophet Muhammad (AS) which she rendered in poetic verses explaining that the reason behind the creation of human beings and the jinns and giving them body, the sense organs and conscience was for them to worship Allah alone. She also brought in the issue of Tauhid, emphasizing the Oneness of Allah and His overwhelming power over everything here and in the hereafter.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the fore going discussion it is evident that the 19th century female scholars of Northern Nigeria contributed a lot to the development of Hausa literature. Using Arabic alphabets they wrote in Hausa language (Hausa Ajami) and almost all the writings were meant to educate and enlighten the public especially the womenfolk who were deficit in knowledge which was occasioned by some cultural practices. Although most of the literature they wrote was on religious issues this is understandable because it was a period of intense religious activities. That apart, their contributions to the development of Hausa literature is only being acknowledge now.

THE POEM

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
May the blessings of Allah, the most High be upon the great prophet.

Let us be grateful to (Allah) the everlasting,
The Merciful, the only one who shall give us relief.
Let us invoke peace and blessing on our prophet,
his Companions and their immediate followers in general.
I am going to compose a poem to enlighten the brethren
On his commandments for when we shall meet Him.
And His prohibitions for you to take note,
to avoid them and be saved from the hellfire.
He enjoined good deeds,
For you to observe them, so as to enter paradise.
And then the forbidden ones you hear,
for you to desist from committing evil deeds.
For the messengers have surely conveyed the message,
Good and evil are clear unless you choose to go astray
He is the One who created us and the jins,
for us to worship him and have peace.
We can't feed Him or increase His wealth,
He is the One who enriches us oh! People.
Our beginning was a drop of semen which changed into a
clot of blood, It later became flesh, take note oh! my
brethren.
It became bone, and then flesh was added,
It became body and then a human being as He decreed.
The soul was inserted into the body,
He is all powerful, the knower who does what He likes.
He then brought us out of the womb of,
Women our mothers out of his blessings
We knew nothing; He gave us the sense of hearing in
addition,
And sight out of his attribute, the merciful.
Then the heart for us to be grateful,
Let us be grateful for Him to increase His blessing.
He made the tongue for us to talk
and the nose for breathing easily.
And the hands for all work to be done with,
He made for us, out of mercy for us to worship Him.
Then the legs are made to carry the weight of the body
and the head,
Walking and the stomach for food out of His wisdom.
He is the Only One who decrees death to the creature,
To visit him as we have seen in the reality.
Each soul will experience the pain of death for,

Allah the almighty has decreed so, be sure.
When it (death) comes for a person surely,
There is no power to stop it and is enough for us to be
frighten.

Who so ever knows Him (Allah) and follow the right path,
Will be relieved of its (death) fangs.

On the day of resurrection he will be raised up gently,
Allah is the only One with authority on the day of
judgments.

If it is the world you need He is the Only One Who can
enrich you,

If your intention is religion he will guide you to the right
path.

If it is wealth or even clothes is what you desire, Gold or
silver due to greediness or horses or even camels and,
Donkeys, cows and Sheep altogether.

Or wife to get children and a farm,

So as to cultivate to increase in resources.

Or you want to be a king of a given land,

So that you earned peoples respect for ever.

If it is the paradise you desire, He gives you,

Garden of Firdausi to dwell there in comfort.

In which there is so much blessing that is,

Uncountable to us as decreed by His will.

Only seeing the Lord passes the joy in paradise,

Let us supplicate to Him for His bounty.

Or people lets fear our creator and stop being foolish,

He owns the universe, the merciful and the benevolent.

Let seek the Paradise from Him, it is the real abode,

For the world you should know is just a mirage.

The dome of poverty with very little riches,

Its wealth vanishes as quickly as it comes.

The dome of enmity and sadness,

Sickness and old age are it signs and symptoms.

Let us remember and shun away the world and follow the
way of the prophet,

So that we may meet with our prophet face to face.

On the Day of judgement for his sake, Oh! Creator,

Protect me and my people from all evils.

I have now completed. May Allah accept, I praised,

Surely the Lord, the owner of the sky.

It is Him that I besought to give us happiness,
In the world and in the grave to give us peace.

Over forty I count this poem for

You to count and to be sure.

And I say let peace and blessing of Allah be upon our
prophet

His companions and those who followed them.

Date of writing the song was (FA-SHARUHU)

So you hear for your information

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She also worked with donor organizations like UNICEF under Girls Education Project (GEP) as LGA coordinator 2005 to 2008, USAID-Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI) FOMWAN program officer 2011 to 2013, where she translated many documents into Hausa for the benefit of her work and also served as translator on the field and during trainings.

She also a staunch member of the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) a non-governmental and non-profit making faith based organization. She is currently the state president for the Sokoto state branch of FOMWAN. Her other publications include: Hausa Home Videos, Technology, Economy and Society, Kano, Nigeria, C.H.C.S. 2004.