

By Yusuf Abdullahi

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In the name of Allah who states "O men! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another; verily, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the one who is deeply conscious of Him. Behold, He is all knowing, all aware. Q49:13

May the everlasting peace and blessings of Allah be upon His chosen servant, our master Muhammad and his purified progeny.

The international women's day as marked by late Imam Khomeini of blessed memory. Consequent to the light of the grand Islamic cleric, the day is colorfully celebrated in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Yemen and other Shi'a awakened societies. The magnitude of the celebration by the Islamic Movement in Nigeria is largely and influential. On the other hand, the UN celebrates same on the 5th of March yearly. However, in most cases in the annual event, the accusing finger is pointed at Islam whenever issues on sexual and gender-based violence are concerned. The oft discussed issues revolve around polygamy, women's education, inheritance and the like.

From the Islamic point of view, superiority has nothing to do with sexes as the above verse expresses. The criterion for Allah's reward is based on individual's performance accordingly "we will give a pure and wholesome life to every one man or woman who acts righteously and has faith and we will reward them in accordance with the best of what they used to do"; Q16:97

The Islamic revivalism and societal reform led by Shaikh Uthman Bn Fodio was unarguably great. According to Professor Y. Adamu in a paper: Learning and scholarship in the Sokoto Caliphate: Legacies and Challenges. Consequent to the reform in the first quarter of the 20th century, colonial records have shown that there was an estimate of 19,073 (Adamu, 2003, p. 216) to 25,000 Muslim schools (Crampton, 1975, p. 98) with an enrolment of 143, 312 which, then, was three times that of Mission schools in 1918 (Adamu, 2003 p. 216). The above statistics apparently indicated the caliphate's level of commitment to learning and scholarship especially as it affected women. The Shehu set to fight the misinterpretation of Islam and the tyranny of Hausa leaders and transformed the society on the teachings of Qur'an and Sunna. The Ulama of the time, otherwise called Ulama al - su' by the Jihad leaders in their attempt to maintain status quo posed a great challenge to the Shehu intellectually.

According to Suleiman, 1978, p. 78, the Shaikh said "the evil of leaving women in ignorance, not knowing what is incumbent upon them, nay, not knowing Islam at all, is greater than the evil of their mixing with men, for the first evil relates back to religion, which is faith,

Islam and good works (Ihsan) and the second evil relates to genealogy&quot;. Generally speaking, education was highly improved based on the Islamic stand that knowledge acquisition is compulsory for all. The Ulama were well respected and students were supported by both caliphate and community. In the cause of scholarship many went outside the caliphate in search of knowledge. Nothing like the today's Almajirci existed at all. So, students in the Qur'anic sciences and other disciplines like theology, Jurisprudence and languages were sufficiently and honorably taken care of. And as attested by the colonialists, to a great extent the society was literate as Ajami -Fulfulde/Hausa correspondence using Arabic alphabets -was very prevalent even among sizeable female.

One of the most obvious achievements of the reform was evident in the Sheikh's family. Nana Asma'u, his popular daughter authored tens of poems which significantly contributed not only to the academic and moral excellence of women but men inclusive. As we mark the International women's day otherwise known as Mother's Day, this is our topic for this week. Who was Nana Asma'u? Born in 1793, she was well educated and made great impact in the whole reform. Her scholarly position and discipline were not unconnected with the wonderful training she received from her father, Sheikh Usman Bn Fodio, the great scholar and leader of the jihad. On her personality, Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd wrote in their book *One Woman's Jihad: ... was active in politics, education and social reform; she was a prolific author, popular teacher and renowned scholar and intellectual ... during warfare, she was an eyewitness to battles which she reported in her written works ... An accomplished author, Asma'u was well educated, quadrilingual (in Arabic, Fulfulde, Hausa and Tamashek), and a respected scholar of international repute who was in communication with scholars throughout the sub-Saharan African Muslim world. Mack and Boyd further discussed: the many books written by leaders of the [Sokoto] Caliphate ... along with Asma'u's poetic works were meant as practical guides to individuals at every possible level of social status and degree of academic achievement, from the illiterate to the scholarly. Those who could not read them could hear them; those who could not listen to Arabic or Fulfulde heard Hausa phrases, or particular messages in Hausa. Asma'u, like her colleagues, wrote for the betterment of the community and promotion of the 'Sunna', not for personal fame or gain.*

Boyd also wrote; ... the state of my knowledge and that of most people, about Asma'u was sketchy. She was certainly famous, but the known facts were few and were limited to the following: she was the Shehu's daughter and the sister of Bello, whom she had helped, in a miraculous way, when she was making his final attack on Alkalawa; she wrote poetry and her five compositions in Arabic were included in the standard list of Jihad literature. Everyone knew of her but no one I spoke to was able to tell me any details about her life".

A very significant methodology for moral and academic promotion was her women's education classes held as part of the 'Yan Taru movement. She commenced the classes in her room from Gidado's home which developed tremendously to a regular system where women from the surrounding villages came to receive extended education who in turn taught others leading to significant societal reform. Though her teaching of women and children experienced some setback with her demise in 1864, the classes continued beyond 1870's with her sister Mariam and niece Ta Modi. Asma'u was a twin whose brother passed away in childhood. Beside an in-depth scholarly activity, she was engaged in, she was equally inflicted with the enemies' persecution from childhood. She was married out to Gidado dan Laima who became one of her brother's lieutenants - Caliph Muhammad Bello. *The way of the pious*, written in 1820 on morality, was one of her first books, after which she wrote many poems and prose to the end of

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her blessed life. Asma'u's writings, were contemporarily exposed from her famous book, *The Caliph's Sister*, when Boyd wrote on her in a chapter needed about women published on the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in August 1975.

The Nana's books collected and compiled by Jean Boyd are easily obtainable in Britain and America than Nigeria. The impact of her works on women's education of her time and to date. Boyd and Mack (1997, p. 7) described her contributions as being "in transforming the women's organization that had existed among the non-Muslim women prior to their capture, and channeling their interests and needs into organizing representative of the Jihadic community's values. Through her organization of itinerant women teachers of other women (the 'Yan taru). Nana Asma'u made working of the community both desirable and honorable. Her legacies are with other Jihad leaders and the caliphate itself. According to Professor Yusuf Adamu, on learning and scholarship in Sokoto Caliphate, he cited 56 selected works of Nana Asma'u compiled by Jean Boyd, which she and Mack in 2000 categorized the areas of her interest as; eschatology: 18 politics; 8 women as sustainers; 12 history; 18 the family; 12 health; 4 the caliphate and idealism; 4 theology; 4 Sharia law and women; 4 women and Bori 4 and theology; 8.

In contrast to the West's incessant criticism against Islam on women's rights, the religion attaches unique attention to the morality and education of female who grow to become mothers as the moral standard of every society largely depends on its women. As such, they should be given more support and enlightenment so that they can play more significant role in the development of social, economic and political arenas. While commending the sisters' forum of the Islamic Movement for their efforts in pursuance of moral and academic excellence, I strongly urge the society to give the womenfolk more respect -as mothers, wives, sisters- educate, protect and empower them for the socio - economic growth and stability of our nations.

As usual, the Movement has observed the memorable occasion across the country reiterating the urgent need for the unconditional release of its leader Sheikh Ibraheem el-Zakzaky (H), whose spiritual and fatherly guidance are not only instrumental to his disciples but the society at large.

Wassalamu alaikum.