ASSESSING THE ROLES OF SOME ILORIN EMIRATE MUSLIM SCHOLARS IN THE PROPAGATION OF ISLAM DURING THE ERA OF SHEIKH ALIMI

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Abstract
Ilorin is considered as a melting pot for Muslim scholars in West Africa. Although, people came from different nooks and cranny of the country but they lived and settled together regardless of their race, tribe, language and color. They were united under the same banner of Islam. Their major focus was to disseminate Islamic message, educate people and get rid of idol and idolaters. The aim of this paper is to access the roles of some Ilorin emirate Muslim scholars in the propagation of Islam during the arrival of sheikh Alimi in more than two centuries ago. The use of historical cum analytical and library based method shall be used to carry out the study. The research findings reveal that the giant achievements plus unprecedented efforts of those scholars have been neglected and sunk into oblivion. The paper suggests that works of the founding Muslim scholars of the Emirate should always be accessed, studied and emulated. This will immortalize their histories and serve as great lessons worthy of imitation for posterity.

Introduction

Sheikh Solihu bn Janta popularly known as Sheikh Alimi was a renowned Fulani Muslim scholar who initiated a successful Islamic movement in Ilorin. Historical accounts revealed that upon his arrival in Ilorin, Alimi who came with the first part of the Quran exegesis called; *Tafsir Aljalalain* written by the two noble scholars; Jalaludden Al-Mahali and Jalaludden As-Suyuti also found the second part of the book with the then Muslim scholars he met at Ilorin in the ancient period.

Further researches showed that they requested for the first part of the copy of Al-Jalalain from Sheikh Alimi as well as its learning. In response to their request, Alimi gave and taught them the first part of the book in order to facilitate the work of Islamic *Da'wah* .He was therefore named Alimi meaning; "the scholar".

Arrival of Sheikh Alimi in Ilorin

Al-Ilory (1971) emphasizes that when Sheikh Alimi decided to establish the Islamic empire in Ilorin, he solicited the assistance of those scholars he met in the ancient community of Ilorin. Amongst them are his students and companions from different tribes such as; Nupe, Hausa, Fulani among others and they all obliged him in order to accomplish his unique idea of scholarship and religious overhauling of the community. Sheikh Alimi engaged himself and others in different prayers, fasting, and other means of invocation to Almighty Allah. After the formation of giant Islamic empire in the city, the Muslim scholars started the propagation of Islam firstly by establishing Islamic cultural and traditional circles of knowledge where the method of Quran recitation and memorization are being taught. They also taught other Arabic and Islamic Studies most especially for daily worships. The city therefore became a preserved center for Quran learning and secured citadel for Islamic scholars where religious teachings emanated to other corners of the world. It also became a new center for Arabic and Islamic civilization where scholars of different tribes, ethnics, cultures but similar faith reside.

Due to their specialization in different Islamic sciences e.g. Arabic language, Rhetoric, Quran and its science, Islamic law and jurisprudence, e.t.c., the scholars established series

of Islamic schools. They graduated competent students who later became experts and great scholars that propagated Islam in diverse regions.

Categories and Roles of Muslim Scholars in Ilorin

In view of their diverse functional responsibilities, Muslim Scholars in Ilorin can be categorized into different groups namely: The Preachers, Teachers, Writers, Orators /Public speakers, and Sufis and jurists.

The Preachers are also categorized according to Al-Ilory (1971) into:

– those who organized their preaching in mosques every Friday immediately after *Fajr* \ dawn prayer or every Friday night after *Isha* prayer.

– those who dedicated certain day or night for their preaching in public places so as to be attended by different men and women from every nooks and cranny of the city.

– those who sacrificed their time, health and wealth for reaching out to people from one city to another. They spent nothing less than a week in every city they reached.

The most famous scholar in this line is Sheikh Saad An-Nufaawiy who converted thousands of idolaters in different villages and town into Islam. Al-Ilory (1982).There were some other preachers who gave admonitions in different circles of occasions like wedding, naming ceremonies, mourning the deaths e.t.c.

However, the teachers include those scholars who only sit at their mosques to teach Quran at lower elementary schools (*Kuttab*). Students learn from them different types of subjects in Islamic Studies and Arabic language. The *Kuttab* were established next to mosques which focused on teaching, reading, writing the Quran and other calligraphy works. The *Kuttab* which still exists until today in some parts of Ilorin is similar to elementary schools.

Sometimes, a single *Kuttab* would accommodate hundreds of students who live around the vicinity of their (*Mallams)* teachers. Tuition was free and education was available to all classes of society. There was no discrimination between the pupils. The children of the poor learn alongside with the children of the affluence parents beside the son of the rich. Students write lessons on slates *(Wala)*. They used black ink called *(Tadaa)*.

In addition, the writers are those scholars who excelled in Arabic and Islamic Studies but only specialized in authoring books. At that time when there was no printing press, books were copied in handwriting. This made books somehow scarce and expensive that poor students were unable to purchase them. It was even recorded that some then Muslim scholars copied the glorious Quran with hand. They also authored some other Arabic and Islamic books in Arabic Language.

The Sufis are those committed Muslim worshipers and scholars who devoted all their lives to asceticism and mysticisms. They are committed *adhkaar* (Allah's remembrance) every day and night. They majorly focus on spiritual devotion and renounce materialism. They contributed immensely to the propagation of Islam by calling people into total devotion and ascetic lives for reformation of societies.

Al-Ilory (1971) asserts that the first two major and popularly known Sufis movement in Ilorin were *Qodiriyyah* and *Tijaniyyah.* The *Qodiriyyah* was established by Sheikh Abdul Qodir Al-Jaelani. The movement which has its centre in Baghdad also has many followers in West Africa especially in Ilorin. However, the *Tijaniyyah* movement can be traced back to Algeria. It was established by Sheikh Ahmad At-Tijani. It was later spread into different African countries by Sheikh Ibrahim bn Abdullah Nyasse.

Muslim scholars in Ilorin who were the followers of these Sufi movements later established different *Zawiyah* (*Adhikr circle*) in their homes for daily practice of their activities which include daily congregational *Adhikr* and weekly *Kubura* every Friday evening. Some of the Sufis scholars use their mosques as *Zawiyah* while some have separate *Zawiyah* at homes apart from mosques. They also organize annual *Maolud nabiy* in commemoration of the birth of the noble prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Moreover, some Sufi scholars reached out to people in rural areas with the aim of spreading their Sufis doctrines .In doing so, they let people embrace Islam and later became their *Muridis* (Students /followers).They spent many years in a certain settlement. They built mosques and *Zawiyah* where they observed their daily religious practices.

The *Khutabaa* (orators / public speakers) are those scholars who were very talented in Arabic language. They were very eloquent and maintained high standard in linguistic styles. They also employed the use of paronomasia and synonymous words to attract the attention of their listeners. They mounted *Minbar* (pulpit) every Friday to admonish people on their religion, lifestyles, doctrine, e.t.c. In accordance with the Quran and *Sunnah*. They were also the Imams of central and community mosques. It is also worth mentioning that those scholars engaged in different Islamic conquests in order to expand the Islamic boarders and to purify the land from disbelievers and practices of paganism and heretics.

Abdul-Malik, A.A. (2013) maintains that after the demise of Sheikh Alimi, his eldest son Abdus-Salam was installed as the first Emir in recognition of his father's efforts and achievements in establishing a secured and peaceful Islamic movement in the city. With the assistance of Fulani and Hausa Muslim soldiers from the north, Abdus-Salam conquered Afonja (a Yoruba warrior who migrated to Ilorin from Oyo Ile) because of religious skirmish that occurred between them. Muslim scholars also led major jihads and conquered many neighboring cities and towns. A notable example of the jihad was that of Offa that was conquered in 1886 by Ilorin Muslim scholars according to Abdul-Mumin, A. & Abubakar, S.I, (2018).

However, the jihadists' movements invited Yoruba leaders to Islam. They requested them to either adopt it as a religion or remain under its control otherwise they should prepare for Jihad. As a result, majority of them embraced Islam and it began to spread rapidly into new rural and urban cities of Yoruba land. Nowadays, various Muslim scholars and experts in Islamic *Da^{c}wah* have emerged in Ilorin and the Yoruba lands. Some of them established Arabic and Islamic schools where students are equipped with sound Arabic and Islamic education and later obtain elementary, junior and senior school certificates in Arabic and Islamic studies. Another set of people establish Islamic nursery and primary schools where pupils are taught both western and Islamic education. Some other set of scholars also establish *Asalatu* (Islamic organization/ societies) where elites among civil servants and most especially women attend during the weekend to observe congregational invocation and to learn about their religion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is now more than 200 years memory lane, the legacies left by those scholars (may Allah be pleased with them all) have continued wax stronger and relevant up till the present moment in Ilorin in particular and the entire Yoruba land in general. Muslim scholars should intensify more efforts in the propagation of Islam through seeking for sound knowledge, calling and inviting people to Islam according to the laid down Islamic methods of *Da^{c}wah*. Muslims should also endeavor to establish more Arabic and Islamic schools in every tenable areas around the country so as to facilitate and improve long-age inherited *Da^{c}wah* work. Muslims are also urged to always access the works of our traditional Muslim scholars to serve as motivator for promoting Islamic *Da^{c}wah*.

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