

THE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract: The factors responsible for the spread of Islam in West Africa are—religion, economic, politics and education. In this research i much more concerned on the religion’s economic and educational issues, simply because the development in the region are mainly through the activities of Trade and Business transaction, migration of the scholars as well as the efforts of the preachers, the research problem is that many people have no idea on how the religion reaches their father lands in the history. The aims and objectives is to find out the factors responsible for the spread of Islam in west Africa.

I. INTRODUCTION

Abbul Hassan Ali, Assammaniy proclaimed that Islam spread in West Africa through the activities and efforts of Al Murabidun(strugglers) i.e. Almurabids who intended to open the cities of Andulus but later changed their mission to the activities of extending Islam in to West Africa.

According to Ali, the first tribes who accepted Islam in West Africa from the hand of Almurabids were Kanem, Hausa and Fulani of northern Nigeria and Yoruba in Southern Nigeria¹.

In Northern Nigeria, Almurabids have started their propagation with the old city of Daura, from there to Sokoto and Kanem Bornu.

The Emirs of these Emirates have accepted Islam and Instructed their Subordinates to do the same. It is from these Emirates that the Da'awah and preaching of Al Murabidun was extended to the large area of West Africa.²

The power of Almurabids was very great to the extent of waging wars against any attempt to revert the people who accepted Islam. These people i.e. Murabids had successfully achieved their ambition and mission for propagating Islam through the following ways:

Jihad and Islamic militant:—The opening of West Africa by the Islamic militant led by Uqbah bin Nafiu was very successful, because they opened the western Sudan and the cities of Tukuru, that is Sokoto, Daura, Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Hadejia etc in North Nigeria; Gao and Timbuktu in Mali.

A part from these, they also opened Ghana, Kanem Bornu and some Bilad of Western Sudan who had already accepted Islam and propagated it in their domain to the extent of building some mosques, even before the coming of the successors of Uqbah bin

Nafiu. Ibn Khaldun was Quoted to have said that Musa bin Nasser and his sons had worked harder for the spread of Islam in Africa. He sent his people to Western Sudan and to the clan of Bar-Bar with subjective instructions to accept Islam long before the activities of Al Murabidun. Ibn Nasser has further instructed Berber tribes to learn Qur’an, Fiqh and Hadith, and with the assistance of these Berber tribes, he and his subordinate, Ismail bin Abdullah bin Ubay Al-Muhajir, opened the Bilad of Andulus and their neighboring states.³

Trade and business:—The trade and business has greatly changed from the trans Saharan desert trade routes to the inter-West African trade routes, mainly the Western and the Northern Sudan. These changes had brought a great business activity with an extension of Islamic activities from Western Sudan to Kanem Bornu Empire. The routes mainly used for spreading Islam through trade activities were many, among which include:

Ways from West Africa to the Northern Sudan through Qairawani, Gadama and other important areas. Another way was through Sajalmasa to Tawwab up to some important towns of Northern Sudan. This was through Samara areas of Northern Sudan and Senegal.⁴ With trade activities the Muslim scholars had extensively promoted the spread of Islam and its trailing to the larger area of West Africa.

Migration (Hijrah) :-With migration of Arab Muslims, thousands of people have migrated from one place to another in-order-to propagate Islam. Muhammad Abdullah Al-Naqeera said that thousands of Arabs and Bar-Bar Muslims had flown into West Africa and settled therein with the intention to propagate Islam.⁵ This was in line with religious, educational, economic and political reasons. Although there was no any authentic historical

¹ Abbul Hassan Ali Assammaniy , Assiyasi al-Islami fi Daulat Sokoto P23.

² Ibid P.23.

³ Assammaniy, Ibid., P.24

⁴ Ibid., P25.

⁵ Assammaniy, Ibid., P. 25

account about the first Muslims who migrated to west Africa, but the Ghana empire has experienced the presence of Muslims long ago. Also Muhammad Al-Bukhari (179 A.H.) posited that there were some people who are called Al-Hunaiyin from the clan of Banu Umayyad, who migrated from Baghdad to Ghana area. It was also felt that large number of Arab Muslims were said to have migrated to the city of Zagari and Timbuktu all in Mali and settled for Islamic propagation. Furthermore, some group of Sanhaj Muslims had migrated to Niger republic for Islamic propagation.⁶

Consequently, large number of Arabs and Berber Muslims were said to have migrated to koko in Sudan and built some mosques and centers for Islamic propagation. Ibn Batuta added that some group of Arabs and Berber immigrants have once settled in various cities and towns of west Africa and mixed with dwellers to the extent of having inter marriage with each other.⁷

Preachers:-The position of Ulama'u , Fuqaha'u and Qurra'u was very great as far as the spread of Islam in west Africa is concerned. They were the founders, the authorities and the tutors who gained the ground of Islamic activities in West Africa. The Ulama'u i.e. scholars were the back - bone who insisted the people to follow all the codifications, rules and regulations there in the Shariah and Islamic law in west African region. It is the scholars who planned for the systematic way of learning both Qur'an, Sunnah, Fiqh, Tarbiyyah and all other related Islamic courses for the benefit of the Muslim Ummah in West Africa. It is they who laid the foundation stones for learning Arabic, Islamic studies, Literature, Fiqh and its Usul, as well as Balagha, Nahwu, Sarf and all other Arabic / Islamic related subjects in the west African sub-region.⁸The Ulama'u were said to have introduced some arrangements amongst themselves on how they could be attending the emir's parliaments, judges courts and even the Emirs in their palace , in –order to consult and give them some guidance on how each and every legal and business transactions could be done and exercises in accordance with the Islamic rules and regulations in the Shariah codifications extracted from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the prophet (S.A.W.)⁹ This is because in the west African states, emirs and judges as well as the rulers were taking inspirations from the guidance of the Ulama'u, i.e. scholars.

Abdurrahman Al-Sa'adiy even went to mention the names of some Ulama'u who contributed immensely for the propagation of Islam in West Africa. These include: Kadi Muhammad of Timbuktu of Mali who used to be the judge with final rulings on any case

brought to him. Abu Ubaid Al-Bukhari Al-Maghreb was another scholar who used to be reciting from the verses of the glorious Quran and Sunnah of the prophet (S.A.W.) in his efforts to guide the rulers on how to use the government Treasury judiciously¹⁰, Abdullah al-Balbaliy, who was one of the famous Imams in the largest Masjid of Timbuktu where he always used to summon the people on the current issues of religious affairs¹¹. Doctor Muhammad Abdullah Al-Naqiriy - Who wrote a book of Al-Da'awah in Islam, p/393 is quoted, where he encouraged the people to enroll their children in the Quranic schools with the intention and mission of memorizing its verses and getting some additional knowledge in Hadith and Fiqh. With these contributions, Abdurrahman As.Sa'diy, was considered to be one of the greatest scholar in the field of instruction for learning both the Qur'an, Hadith, and Luggah in the Bilad as Sudan in particular and West Africa in general. In recent time, Abu-Bakr Mahmud Gumi of Nigeria brought a revolutionary stand in the Qur'anic exegesis. Scholars like Mallam Isah Wazirin Kano, Mallam Ja'far Mahmud Adam , Ibn Usman Kano, Muhammad Auwal Ahmad Albany Zaria, Ibrahim Daurawa Kano, Imam Yusuf Abdurrahman Ya'u Hadejia, e.t.c. will not be forgotten due to their efforts for propagating Islam in Nigeria by using the simple methods of Qur'anic exegesis i.e. Tafsir.

According to professor S.A.S Galadanchi (1993), in his book *-Harkat al Luggah al-Arabiyyah Wa Adabuha fi Nigeria*, Islam entered and spread in to Nigeria in-between eleventh to fourteenth centuries. The first King of Kanem – Bornu who embraced Islam was Ummi Jilmi (1085-1097) the twelfth king of Kanem Bornu who had changed his name to Muhammad bin Suleiman and ordered all his subordinates and rulers to accept Islam. Galadanchi also said that Islam entered into Hausa land through Kano in the fourteenth century; and the first Emir of Kano who embraced Islam was Aliyyu Yaji (1385-1349). From there it spread all over the areas of Kano. It then spread into its neighboring emirates such as Hadejia, Kazaure, Gumel, Katagum and Bauchi emirates.¹²

However, some Arab writers gave another assertion that Islam entered into North Africa and firstly accepted by the then powerful traditional rulers from an Islamic militant.¹³

Secondly, the Arab writers also posited that the religion of Islam entered and spread into Africa

¹⁰ Ibid., P.32

¹¹ Ibid., p.32.

¹² Sheikh, A. S. Galadenchi (professor)

Harkat allugah Al-Arabiyyah Wa Adabuha fi Nigeria. Altiba'a at thaniya 1993.p34

¹³ Ibid., P. 34

⁶ Ibid ., p 26

⁷ Ibid., p. 27

⁸ Ibid., P.30

⁹ Ibid., P30

through its northern part, by the support of travelers, traders and crusaders. This second way of entering Islam into Africa is likely older than the first one, simply because the activities of the Berber and other Muslim traders had started right from the beginning of eleventh century.¹⁴

According to professor A. Babs Fafunwa (1974) in his book- *History of education in Nigeria*. Islam was first accepted by the Kanem ruler Umme Jilime who ruled between 1083 and 1097 at the hand of an eminent Muslim scholar Hamid Muhammad Mani. Umme jilime's son Mai Dunama (1097-1150), also continued with his father's interest in learning and practicing Islam, and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. During the reign of Dunama II (1221-1259), contacts were developed through correspondence with Tunisia in Maghreb and in 1257 a Kanem embassy was established in Tunisia, as mentioned by the famous historian Ibn Khaldun (d.1406).¹⁵

Around this period, a college and a hostel was established in Kano (the seat of Islamic learning) for the scholars from the Kanem Bornu region, who went there in search of knowledge. The college was named Madarasah Al-Rashiq. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, Kanem Bornu became a centre for Islamic learning, and famous teachers came from Mali to teach Islamic jurisprudence. By the middle of the thirteenth century, Kanem established further relations with the Muslim countries.¹⁶ During the fourteenth century Kanem scholars and poets achieved a very high standard in the writing of the classical Arabic language.¹⁷ The real Islamization of Bornu took place during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma, (1570-1602).

Hausa land:-According to Hamid Alkali, Islam was brought to Hausa land in the early fourteenth century by traders and scholars. About forty wanganarawa traders were thought to be responsible for introducing Islam to Kano during the reign of Ali Yaji, who ruled Kano from 1349 to 1385. A.H. Masjid was built, and an Imam, Muezzin and Kadi were appointed.¹⁸ During the reign of Yaqub (1452-1463) some Fulani scholars migrated to bring with them Books on Islamic theology and jurisprudence. During the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1463-1499) Islam became firmly rooted and Islamic principles were practiced in different places. It was during this period that Muslim scholars from Timbuktu came to Kano to teach and preach Islam.

Muhammad Rumfa used to consult the Muslim scholars about government affairs. It was he who used the famous Muslim scholars and theologian, Al-

Maghili to write a book on Islamic government during the latter visit to Kano in the fifteenth century. The book is a celebrated masterpiece called: *The obligation of princes*.¹⁹ Al-Maghili later went to Katsina which had also become a center of Islamic learning during the fifteenth century. Most of the pilgrims from Mecca used to visit Katsina, similarly, a number of scholars from Sankore University, of Timbuktu, visited the city of Katsina bringing with them some books on divinity and etymology. In the seventeenth century, Katsina produced native scholars like Wali Muhammad Dan- Masani (d. 1667) and Wali Muhammad Dan- Marina (d.1655). Learning developed among these Ulama'u (learned men), says Hamid Alkali, through contacts with centers of learning such as Timbuktu.²⁰

A group of these Mu'allimeen, most of whom seem to be interrelated from an intellectual harmony have flourished in to Hausa land, and among them the state of learning was much higher. They were organized into a sort of guild, and a master would grant a recognized certificate (Ijazah) to those students who satisfactorily passed the prescribed course of study under him. This system continued until the coming of the British to Nigeria.²¹ However, the coming of colonial leaders does not stop Muslim scholars from teaching their students some knowledge of Qur'anic sciences and other related subjects.

Conclusion: The responsible factors for the spread of Islam in west Africa are: jihad and Islamic militant, trade and business men, migration and Islamic preachers.

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¹⁴ Ibid., P. 35

¹⁵ Fafunwa A. B. history of Education in Nigeria George Allen and Unwin, London (1974) p.p 53-54.

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Hamid Alkali, A note on Arabic teaching in Northern Nigeria, Kano studies No3 (June 1967) p.11

¹⁹ Hamid Alkali, ibid., P.11

²⁰ Ibid., P.11

²¹ Ibid., P. 12.