

An Appraisal of Contributions of Jama'at Nasril Islam to the Spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract: *The evolution of Islamic societies in Nigeria can be traced to the determination of Muslims to be more committed to their religion, promote unity among the Muslims and also inspire Muslim parents to be alert in their responsibilities in their upbringing and to encourage all and sundry to make freedom of religion where no one will oppress another because of their differences in religion is another factor that motivated some people to form Islamic Society. Methodology relied solely on biographic appraisal of such studies that are related. It is intention of this paper to summarise activities of Jama'at Nasril Islam from its inception. The paper will look at its formation, aims and objectives, challenges of growth and development as well as its problems at formative stage. An appraisal of the contributions of Jama'at Nasril Islam to the development of Islam in Nigeria will follow and conclusion.*

Keywords: *Contributions, Jama'at Nasril Islam, spread, Islam, Northern Nigeria.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Before dwelling with the appraisal of the contributions of the JNI to Islam, it is appropriate to mention the fact that in any society, there are rules and regulations guiding a society. Some societies are small while others are large but the Islamic society is universal and all-embracing. The term of society, literarily can be defined as follows:

“A group of persons united for the promotion of a common aim”

“An association of individuals, as a nation, organised for mutual profit and protection”

“Persons from any region or any period of time viewed in term of manners, customs or standard of living”

“Human beings collectively seen as having some characteristics in common”

Therefore, if a society is to be preserved and needs to survive, then it must be based on sound moral principles that commensurate with time and provide a goal, a role model for its members.

An Islamic society to be held in high esteem, the underlisted rules must be observed:

- Members of the society should believe in Allah with devotion;
- To promote moral principles as ordained and taught widely by Allah and explained by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH);
- To promote spiritual well being as well as enlightenment of the members;
- To promote real brotherhood and to make justice. Its basic fundamental principles
- To teach mercy, forgiveness and indulge in generosity to all and sundry.

According to Allah in Q26:215 “And be kind and humble to the believers who follow you”.

It is imperative for any Muslim leader to treat their subjects kindly and search sincerely for what benefits them as well not to cheat them or to overlook their needs.

2. THE FORMATION OF JAMA'AT NASRIL ISLAM SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

With the attainment of independence in 1960, the spread of Islam began to receive official support from the Sardauna of Sokoto, a grandson of Sheu Uthman Danfodio. The exposure and foresight of Late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto geared him up when he met Muslim leaders at the international level. This perhaps affected his thought and guided his ambition for an Islamic

organisation to echo Islamic voice for Nigerians abroad. In February 1960, the honourable Premier, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto appointed a committee to carry out an investigation on how the existing number of Quranic and Islamic schools could be improved in the Northern Nigeria so that they could meet the needs of modern age.

The society called *Jama'at Nasril Islam* was floated. The Late Premier mentioned the following as the task before the new society (i) To propagate the religion of Islam and improve Muslims welfare, (ii) To give Islam a uniform voice internally and externally (iii) To coordinate Islamic activities within Nigeria, (iv) To educate people as well as responsible for the spread of Islam, and lastly (v) Uniting Islamic scholars together. The meeting was held on 5th January 1961. According to a report, the birth of *Jama'at Nasril Islam* was as a result of the desire to put in place a body that will be responsible for efficient supervision and monitoring of Islamic education.

On the other hand, it was reported that the idea of establishing *Jama'at Nasril Islam* came to Ahmadu Bello's mind when he visited the *Ansarul Islam* Society of Nigeria's headquarters in Ilorin. He was moved and happy with the activities of the society in Ilorin. This made him to resolve to establish a similar organisation. In another report, it says that it was in the Holy City of Mekkah where bin Ahmadu Bello together with the Late Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi went to perform Hajj, that they got idea of establishing *Jama'at Nasril Islam*.

It is of the view of this writer that three opinions can be accepted and synchronized together as motivating factors leading to the establishment of the Pan Northern Islamic organisation.

3. CHALLENGES OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The society, like any other similar bodies, had its initial challenges which were mostly financial, manpower and logistic. The society is a purely charitable society whereby its source of income is restricted to the few landed properties, donation from generous individual Muslims and some Muslim countries. On another level, there were other complications, for instance the Sardauna was the backbone of the JNI and many people are aware that not all the Emirs liked him and so immediately he was assassinated on January 14, 1966, the society ran into serious financial crises. JNI at the early stage, faced the problem of how people will understand it as well as the aims and objectives.

4. OVERCOMING PROBLEMS OF FORMATIVE STAGE

With regard to the financial problem, the founder as well as the initiator of this society Sir Ahmadu Bello shouldered the responsibility of raising funds from within and outside the country notably from Saudi Arabia and other Arabian countries. The leader and other members of this society contributed more than any other persons to its achievement.

5. VISIONS AND MISSIONS OF JAMA 'AT NASRIL ISLAM

JNI envisions a total war against ignorance in Islam and encouragement of the distribution of Islamic literature in Nigerian local languages, building mosques and Islamic centres of learning, promoting unity among the Muslims regardless of brotherhood affiliation and reform brotherhood society. Similarly, JNI envisions to act as a voice externally on behalf of all Nigerian Muslims, as well as to coordinate Islamic activities within Nigeria and to educate people, spread the religion of Islam, teach average Muslims on how to carry out his religious obligations as well as consolidate the development of Northern States under the atmosphere of peace and stability.

The missions of JNI were drawn to meet the objectives of the society in other words to achieve its visions. These include: To propagate the principles of Islam thereby striving to win more adherents to the faith. To remove or eradicate immorality in the society and maintain Islamic morality among the Muslims and to promote friendly relationships among Nigerian Muslims in particular and world Muslims in general. To promote friendly relationships not only at national level but also at international level. To put into practice the ideals of Islam as prescribed in the Glorious Quran and practised by the holy prophet of Islam, in other words, to teach the Muslims the normal way in which the religion of Islam is practised as targeted by Qur'an and explained in the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

6. AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAMA 'AT NASRIL ISLAM DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

The effort to disseminate knowledge by JNI started by its determination to make Shariah, as a way of life, understood by not only Muslims but non-Muslims alike. And this was made possible by a

platform for national seminar on Shariah. In February 2000, such a seminar was held and was well attended by many erudite scholars and important personalities that cut across Nigerian citizenry, religious and various interest the academic, legal luminaries, Christian Monks, Muslims Ulama, the politicians and the masses.

The JNI has trained many preachers and teachers which was increasing by about seventy to ninety percent over the years. It cannot be controverted that the foundation of good education is the provision of learned and trained teachers with experience in teaching and preaching methodology.

In provision of education, each state in the Northern States of Nigeria, has its own school established by the JNI such as primary, secondary and college of education.

7. PROMOTION OF TOLERANCE AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

There are many groups of Islamic societies which preach peaceful co-existence, most especially in Nigeria but JNI is one of them, especially against the backdrop of the past and recent developments in Nigeria. For example when the founder of the organisation was killed in 1966, JNI did not make inflammatory remarks, so also it refrained from compound problem each time there was religious crisis in Nigeria.

For example, the Secretary-General of JNI stated in a press released in Punch Newspaper, when he was reacting to the violent clashes in the year 2001 in Jos, Plateau State Capital. He said that JNI condemned in strongest term the killing in Jos as it also condemned unfortunate situation where worshippers were followed to their places of worship and brutally killed, maimed and but charred while worshipping. He advised Muslims in the country to give peace a chance and live in harmony and added that Muslims, wherever they may be, should not react to this situation negatively.

8. RECONCILIATION

One of the important contributions of JNI to Islam in Nigeria was the great effort made in reconciling between members of *Tijaniyyah* and *Qadriyyah* orders whose members used to antagonize each other. The conflict was the one that happened at Toronke of Sokoto Emirate in 1964, where many people were killed. The reason was on the standing posture during prayers either *Sadlu* or *Qabdu*. JNI resolved the issue, whoever wants to lead prayers should maintain the *Sadlu* postures and *Qabdu* to be performed at home by individual who wished to do so.

Apart from the spreading of Islam, one of the duties of the JNI, also embarks on conflict resolution among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria.

Almost all the branches in different states have Reconciliatory Committee that is in charge of listening and reconciling between Muslims with a view to minimizing the rate at which Muslim washes their dirty liners in public through the court litigation. The committee is mandated to look into so many cases ranging from child custody, marriage dissolutions, inheritance and violation of trust, even though all the branches of JNI in Northern Nigeria, proud of having the committee.

9. ACHIEVEMENT OF JNI

- JNI created unprecedented awareness in training many of its teachers and preachers so that Islamic Religious Knowledge could be inculcated in Muslims in order to form a strong point.
- JNI is the father of several Islamic societies in the northern Nigeria. This means that most Islamic societies are under umbrella of this organisation.
- The formation of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was initiated by the JNI in Kaduna, in 1974 so that Muslims in Nigeria can speak with one voice with common identity.
- JNI also established the Nigeria Aid of Group of JNI on 30th October 1975 to help control crowd and the traffic at Muslim ceremonies.
- JNI put to an end the rivalry between *Tijaniyyah* and *Qadriyyah* whose members in certain of the northern Nigerian were almost at the neck of each other.
- JNI also operated a programme of bringing healthy relationship among all Muslims irrespective of their differences.

- Finally, the JNI succeeded in helping the Federal Government to douse tension on the controversial issue of polio vaccine through prompt action taken on investigating the cause(s) of suspicion by setting up a panel which did a thorough job by establishing the fact that polio vaccine is a very harmless treatment for polio cases.

10. CONCLUSION

It is clear that *Jama'at Nasril Islam* is an important society in Nigeria. Having examined the various mission and aims and objectives of this society, it is ideal to conclude that this society is making progress in the execution of its mission. In order to execute its mission, it has embarked upon certain measures such as contributing seriously to the society, receiving donation from within and outside the country. Also, this society worked seriously towards gaining the confidence of the people through series of enlightenment campaign such as lectures, seminars, it also succeeded in attracting many non-Muslims to Islam.

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