

History and Feminization of *Maulud* Religious Celebration among Muslim Women of Dandume, Katsina State, Nigeria, 1995-2014

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Abstract

One important feature of Sufi brotherhood of Northern Nigeria, is the practice of *Maulud* (Muslim celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). In the emirates of Northern Nigeria where Islam has fully entrenched for centuries, the practice of *Maulud* has been patriarchal, not until very recent, when one Sufi Muslim woman scholar, Sayyida Rahmatullahi single-handedly ventured into the organization and execution of this religious activity. This paper therefore, attempts to explore the role of this distinguished *Tijjaniya* female scholar who initiated this spiritual religious practice of *Maulud* celebration as a form of Da'awa in some villages, cities and towns of Dandume in Northern Nigeria. She is one of the prominent first female *Tijjaniya* Islamic scholar who started to organize a women based *Maulud* celebration. The *Maulud* – is a celebration of the birthday of the prophet. It is observed by members of the *Tijjaniya* brotherhood. The ceremony was attended by thousands of women from different parts of Northern Nigeria. The paper will also examine aspects of her scholarship and initiation into the *Tijjaniyya* Sufi order, and how the *Maulud* activity created a network of Islamic scholarship among female Sufi scholars and their students in the area. The paper adopts both primary and secondary sources of historical research methodology. Oral interviews were conducted with her students, associates and others. Also, related written works on the area are utilized. As such this paper will adopt the theory which is a “critic of Islamic Feminism” in Northern Nigeria. It is total departure from Islamic feminist struggle and activism, agitating for the re-interpretation of the religion or advocating for a space within the public domain in analyzing the feminine role and contribution of this woman scholar in the Patriarchal society of Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

Maulud is an Arabic word which means.....the observance celebrations to mark the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad which is done on the 12th day of Rabi'ul-awwal, the third month in the Islamic calendar. It is said that, the Fatimids initiated the celebration of this birthday in lands under their control.¹

Kaptein observes that the oldest *Maulud* text claimed to be from the 12th century and most likely is of Persian origin. However, the first mention ever made of the *Maulud* celebrations reported in the writings of Jamal al-Din Ibn al-Ma'mun, who died 587 AH/1192 CE. His father was the Grand Vizier for the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir (ruled 494-594 AH/1101-1130 CE). [The earliest observation of the Prophet's birth as a holiday was arranged privately in the late twelfth century]. The only difference was that there was an increased number of visitors to the *Maulud* house that was opened for the whole day specifically for this celebration. This particular event usually take place on Monday, Rabi'awwal, which is associated with the beginning of spring.² However, the record did not show the organization of *Maulud* by women at that period. With time, the celebrations became popular among Muslims. However, in the twentieth century some women started organize a separate wing of women *Maulud* only. This paves way for us to look into the organization of such celebration by women at Dandume, the home town of Sayyida Rahmatullahi. Generally the history of *Maulud* in Northern Nigeria is obscure, as there are no documentation. The celebration of the Prophet Muhammad birthday by the *Tijjaniyya* followers among the Muslim world is referred as *Maulud*. This celebration was patriarchal in nature. Men organized and performed it with children in attendance. She and her students started this celebration around 1993. Since then Sayyida was invited to attend many *Maulud* celebration organized either by men or men and women. But at her home town of Dandume, she organizes it for women only. She attended *Maulud* celebration in states such as Zaria, Niger, Kogi, Zamfara, and many other cities and towns within and outside Katsina. Lectures were delivered concerning the life and times of the Prophet and his wives for the listeners to emulate. The methodology use in this paper is based on field interviews and other relevant secondary sources. The paper will brought the virtues attached to *Maulud* which will serve as a worthy of emulation to the *Tijjaniyya* Sufi women of Northern Nigeria.

The Organization

The organization of the first married women *Maulud* by Sayyida Rahmatullahi was held in 1995. Five women initiated this idea of the *Maulud*, they include Sayyida Rahmatullahi, Malama Umma Aimana, Malama Fadimatu Yahaya (Jummai), Malama Rabi'atu, and Malama Safiyya came up with this idea. These women were living together with Sayyida in the same extended family house of Shaikh Khalilu and also they were the first set of Sayyida's students. Initially, they wanted to organize a reception among themselves, buying some sweet and chocolate, and distributing it among their fellow women. Their plan was to invite women in the

absence of Shaikh Khalilu because, they feared that if the Shaikh was around, he would stop them. However, when they informed the mother of Sayyida Rahmatullah (Rabi'atu) about their plan, she welcomed the idea and supported them on their mission.³

In the first place, they thought of inviting only women of the family house, because of the large population of women living in the compound. However, they eventually decided to invite some women outside the house. Thousands of women attended the *Maulud* ceremony. Even those not invited witnessed the occasion, as it was the first of its kind in the town. The ceremony was held in the big house of the Shaikh. Women filled up all the available space in the house and the ceremony continues from that year up to the current time.

During the first *Maulud*, Malama Ummu Aimana (Umma) served as the Mistress of the ceremony (MC), introducing guests and coordinating the agenda of the ceremony. Malama Safiyya opened the occasion with recitation of Qur'anic verses. Then the ceremony was declared opened to lovers of the Prophet. More students read different books of *Hadith* (Sunnah of the Prophet), *Fiqhu* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Sira* (Islamic History), Arabic poems, and many more.⁴

Malama Hadiza, who was the younger sister of Sayyida Rahmatullah discussed the history and life times of the Prophet. She explained the simplicity of the Prophet's life, and his generosity to mankind. Malama Rabi'atu on her side highlighted the history of the Prophet's wives, teaching the women how to emulate the role of the Prophet's wives. Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya (Jummai) preached to the gathering on husband and wife relations, emphasizing that women should respect their husbands, and obey them provided it is not beyond the teaching of Islam. She also called on the women to be neat and clean their environment. Malama Fadimatu elaborated on the spiritual rewards attached to women for bearing the difficulties in pregnancy, breast feeding, and raising of children. Most of the women that spoke on that day were the first set of Sayyida's students.⁵

On the part of Sayyida Rahmatullah, she thanked everyone for their contribution to the successful organizing of the first *Maulud* for married women. She preached for all women to be careful in observance of their daily prayers. Finally Sayyida Rahmatullahi read "*Fairul Ahmadi*" (a *Tijjaniyya* book on the history of the Prophet and genealogy chart narrative of all Prophets from Adam to Prophet Muhammad).⁶

In the final stage of the occasion, Shaikh Khalilu came to bless the ceremony. In his remarks, he said whosoever attended this ceremony would enter paradise straight. In addition, whoever disputed the importance of *Maulud* will not be among those that will enter paradise. He quoted a Hadith of the Prophet "*man Ahabbani kana ma 'i- fil-Jannati*" (that whoever loves me, he is with me in paradise).

Since its beginning in 1995, the *Maulud* celebration continued to take place in the inner house of the Shaikh. However, in 2007, while some women were about to enter the house for the *Maulud*, they expressed their wish for the next *Maulud* to take place outside the compound. This got to the ears of the Shaikh and he ordered that the occasion should hold outside. Many women were very happy on this. There was the provision of canopies and chairs that allowed the women to stay

comfortably in that year's *Maulud*. Finally, all the *Maulud* ceremonies, from the inception in 1995 to 2014, were under the leadership of Sayyida Rahmatullahi, until her death in July 2014.⁷ The *Maulud* used to hold at night every year. However, with the death of Sayyida Rahmatullah, the *Maulud* continued to hold every year under the leadership of her immediate sister Malama Hadiza. In 2015 the ceremony took place during daytime because some men did not allow their women to attend the night ceremony. Below is a cross section of some women during the 2013 *Maulud* at the inner house of Shaikh Khalilu.



Source: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Funtua 2015.

The Spread of Sayyida's Women *Maulud* in other towns

Sayyida Rahmatullahi, also attended several *Maulud* ceremonies in different towns, cities and villages. For instance, she attended *Maulud* at Dutsinma, which is located in Northern Katsina Emirate. This was the first town that invited Sayyida to deliver a lecture at *Maulud* ceremony to both males and females. The event was organized by Shaikh Shehu Sa'adu *Hayin Gada* in 2000. Many women attended the occasion, and Sayyida preached: "on Islamic teachings on marital relationship and reward attached to living as husband and wife" "good parenting and the need for women to seek for education".⁸

For example, in one of her lecture at *Maulud* in Dutsinma, Sayyida Rahmatullahi "discussed the status of women during the pre-Islamic period". She said that women were not entitled to inheritance after the death of their parents or husbands. During those days, people detested giving birth to a female child because the society regarded her status as inferior. Majority of the people buried their own female babies alive to show how they detested them. Sayyida however mentioned that, with the coming of Islam, women got their full right and Islam made them acceptable to society, enjoying all their rights.⁹

Another topic, she also discussed, at yet another lecture was in the Dutsinma *Maulud* “the importance of husbands allowing their wives to be attending *Maulud*”. Attending *Maulud* is far better than attending naming or wedding ceremonies. She pleaded with the men to be soft and patient by granting their women permission to be attending *Maulud*. She criticized those who do not allow their women, saying they will intermingle with men in such event. In response, she cited an example of a bus in Motor Park on how women attached their hips with their unmarried men. She said which one is better? Finally she encouraged them to give alms to poor people, as God will reward them twice the amount of what they gave. She strongly told the women to seek for education, as it is the only means to know the religion properly.¹⁰

In another lecture at *Badole Maulud*, (a street in Dandume) Sayyida Rahmatullahi urged women to thank Allah in whatever condition they found themselves. She said God has reserved so many good things to women, which is not visible in this life. She commended the effort of some women who dedicated themselves to learning. As she remarked: “Today we found women who can read and even translate *Akdari* (a book on purification)”. Sayyida Rahmatullahi also preached for the love of Prophet Muhammad, adding that this will lead someone to enter Paradise. She commended the organizers of the occasion on the successful organization of the *Maulud*.¹¹

In 2008, the women of Dogon Dawa, a town in Birnin Gwari of Kaduna state, invited her to their school’s first *Maulud*. These women showed much love to Sayyida Rahmatullah. More than one thousand (1000) women attended the ceremony. Sayyida Rahmatullah preached on: “the history, life and times of the Prophet”. She also reaffirmed the *Tijjaniyya* brotherhood to some women at the gathering, and initiated other women as new members. Because of the love these women have for her, they all applauded when she finished the preaching.¹²

Tarasulullah a wealthy woman of Tudun Jukun, Zaria, organized a *Maulud* ceremony, and invited renowned male scholars of *Tijjaniyya*. When Tarasulullah heard about Sayyida Rahmatullahi, she decided to invite her as the only female scholar invited along with the male. This is a gathering of both men and women. Sayyida Rahmatullah was accompanied by her senior students: Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya, Ummu Amaina (Malama Umma), Sa’adiyya Usman, Aminatu Sa’ad and Khadija Khalilu. Sayyida Rahmatullahi preached, stressing that attending a *Maulud* was more important than attending wedding ceremonies, because at *Maulud* people will be taught the love of Prophet, and the religion entirely.

In 2011, a school known as *Ansarddinis-salam li-ummahatul mu’uminat* (school for helping married women parent in Islam), established by some male students who studied at Dandume under Sayyida Rahmatullahi, and invited her for their *Maulud* in Lokoja. At this celebration, she discussed the status of Shaikh Ibrahim Nyass from a book, titled *Majamu’ul Mirwakul Ushshaki* (A book on the speeches and dignity of Shaikh Ibrahim Nyass). This was also a large gathering of different people of both men and women. The above school used to send group of thirteen to fifteen (13-15) female students from Lokoja to receive *tarbiya* (spiritual training within the *Tijjaniyya* Sufi order) from Sayyida at Dandume, especially in

the month of Ramadan. From 1999 Sayyida Rahmatullahi established not fewer than fifteen (15) schools in various places, villages and cities of Katsina and some parts of Kaduna State.

Conclusion

Sayyida Rahmatullah was a distinguished female *Tijjaniyya* scholar. The Dandume society needed her scholarship and philanthropic disposition. She rose to a high position of authority in the *Tijjaniyya* community of Dandume. The poems she wrote to the *Tijjaniyya* scholars greatly shows her ability in Arabic literature. The organization of the women *Maulud* also marked a significant development of women participation in the activities of *Tijjaniyya* brotherhood in Dandume. Sayyida Rahmatullahi made a breakthrough in educating men and women on the impact of attending *Maulud*. Secondly, as an unsung woman scholar.

Endnotes

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2. Ibid
3. Opcit interview with Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya, 8th February 2015.
4. Ibid interview with Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya, 8th February 2015.
5. Ibid interview with Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya, 8th February 2015.
6. Ibid interview with Malama Fadimatu bint Yahaya, 8th February 2015.
7. Opcit, Malama Ummu Amaina
8. Sayyida’s audio Maulud lecture at Hayin Gada Dutsinma, year 2000.
9. Sayyida Audio Maulud lecture at Dutsinma on 10th June, 2003, Maulud, “status of women during the pre-Islamic period” organized by Da’iratul Anwarul Nurul Muhammadi.
10. ibid
11. Sayyida Audio *Maulud* lecture at Badole Dandume, August, 2011. Theme- “the Impact of reading and writing by our women” Organized by Married students of Madrastul Ansarul dinil Islam Li- Sayyida Rahmatullah at Badole.
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