

Chieftaincy Among Muslims in Ghana and Nigeria

When Africa is mentioned several aspects of its components emerges in the mind, its diversity in culture, language, and tribes, its religions, and chieftaincy as its governing system etc. Many writers divide Africa history into three separate phase; the pre-colonial era, colonial regime and post-colonial but I prefer to take a different stand in this area on the timeline of African history by dividing it into pre-Islamic, Islamic era and post-Islamic and independence because the focus of this article is related to Islam in Ghana and Nigeria and its chieftaincy.

Ghana and Nigeria have several things in common when it comes to Islam in Africa and chieftaincy issues compare to other West African countries across the continent. In Ghana for instance, during the pre-Islamic era, the northern region of Ghana was populated by tribes and chiefdoms such as Dagbamba, Konkomba, Basari, Gonja, Chakosi, Chamba, Bimoba, Kotokoli, and Kabre. The Dagbamba which is the language of the Dagban state, they had the largest population in the region with over fifty percent of the population of the northern region and the other tribes occupying about ten percent of the population.

All the above tribes had their small states with their chiefs that govern them, with the Dagban state being the most powerful state and kingdom among the rest because of their population and expertise in several areas in the society.

Nigeria, on the other hand also had several states in the northern region with seven different states which were known as Hausa seven or Hausa Bokwoi within the Habe kingdom. Daura state was the heart or the center of the kingdom. The Fulani state also existed alongside with the Hausa Bokwoi kingdom which they all coexisted peacefully as it was in the northern part of Ghana in the pre-Islamic era.

Islam was introduced in Nigeria through the northern region of the country by the Malinke scholars who originated from the Mali Empire and also through the traders and migrants from Mali between 11th and 12th century, other sources also depict that the Kanem and Bornu had been in contact with the Muslim traders as early as the 9th century. Islamic knowledge was well established in the Hausa land by the 15th century with many schools which had the Arabic language as the language of instructions.

On the contrary, Islam arrived in Ghana late compare to Nigeria. Islam entered into Ghana through the northern region as in Nigeria by scholars from the Hausa land around the 16th century and Dagban kingdom embraced Islam around the 17th century. The message of Islam went across the region by the effort of the Arab traders from Sudan and Egypt all centered in the northern Ghana. Tamale became the center of Islam in northern Ghana where most of the tribes and the Dagban clans accepted Islam, they all lived peacefully and were able to maintain the chiefdom with the introduction of a new religion.

Chieftain in the Hausa land was also maintained and movement among the Hausa clans and the Fulani tribe was sound. The Fulani and the Hausa land were well-connected with all the sovereignty at the side of the Hausa until the late 17th century where Shehu Usman Dan Fodio observed the ruling of the Hausa rulers as a deviation from the true teachings of Islam. Different groups of followers emerged for the support of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio's mission to turn the ruling of the Hausa land to the orthodox ruling laid down by the Islamic religion. He launched a Jihad against the Hausa rule and by the beginning of 18th century he defeated Gobir and most of the Hausa states was under his control where he finally declared a Muslim Fulani empire.

He appointed his brother to rule the south-west half, and the north-east half was ruled from Sokoto by his second son, Muhammed Bello. Usman Dan Fodio took the title of Khalifa but later devoted himself to writing and teaching. At his death, Muhammed Bello succeeded to his father's title, thus creating the Sokoto Caliphate, initiating a period of artistic achievement. The transition was successful without any conflict or misunderstanding between Muhammed Bello and his uncle the brother of Usman Dan Fodia, Abdullai. The Hausa land was still under Muhammed Bello's rule even after the demise of his father Usman Dan Fodio.

Ghana, on the contrary, maintained the ruling of their various states and chiefdoms even with the arrival of

the new religion Islam but the Dagban kingdom continue to embark on their old traditional rituals which were considered against Islam. There were no conflicts between the Dagban clans until the visitation of Shehu Ibrahim Niasse to Dagba in 1952. Ya na was the king of Dagban in Yendi by the time, Shehu Ibrahim Niasse visited Dagban king in Yendi, Ya na had only one son who hopes to succeed his father but the son had deformities which disqualify him from becoming the next king of Dagban after the demise of his father Ya na, the succession of the kingship will be transferred to another clan of Dagban, this had been the expectation of the Dagban kingdom until the arrival of Shehu Ibrahim Niasse.

When Shehu Ibrahim Niasse arrived in the northern region in 1952, he paid the king of Dagban a visit at his palace and Ibrahim Niasse was told that the king's son was to succeed to Ya na but due to his deformity the succession will be transferred to another clan of Dagban. Shehu Ibrahim Niasse prayed for the king's son and assured them that the son shall succeed his father and finally became the king after the demise of his father. The other clan of Dagban was dismayed by what Ibrahim Niasse did, besides the guest visit and his supplication to the king's son; he was not able to visit the leader of the other clan on Dagban kingdom which also led to enmity between the two clans of the Dagban kingdom.

Many commentators' tribute Ibrahim Niasse's visit to Dagban as the cause of their disputes and differences. And some also argue that Ibrahim Niasse was not to be blamed in this but rather the people who hosted him because he might not know the clans within Dagban kingdom else to visit them.

After the independence in 1957 in Ghana, the northern part of the country were able to maintain its heritage and lineage till but looking at the southern part of the country, the chieftaincy of several tribes is main but not as powerful as in the northern Ghana.