

Tracing the Root of Unity in Da'wah Methodology and Brotherhood among Muslim Students in Nigeria: The Impact of Hassan Al-Banna in Perspective

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Abstract

Hassan al-Bannā, a great Islamic intellectual revolutionist of Egypt won global recognition for his contributions to Da'wah (call) methodology and dynamism. His works have been among the most appealing and influential basis for the Muslim youths championing the course of Islamic Da'wah in Nigeria. The respect accorded his writings has majorly been accounted for on the grounds of his proven intellectual influence and unified strategy to bring the Muslim youths together on a common platform. In view of this, the chapter examines the influence of Hassan al-Bannā on the unity of Muslim youth towards the enhancement of strategic approaches to solve divergent socio-religious challenges confronting the youths in Nigeria. This is with particular reference to the co-ordinated Da'wah activities by the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) members regardless of their social strata and backgrounds. Historical methodology is employed in the study. The findings revealed that unity of purpose by the Muslims, as demonstrated in Hassan al-Bannā's works will assist to combat some high level of immoralities and inter-face problems among the youths. The chapter concludes that the MSSN, through the application of Al-Bannā's writings, has effected positive changes in the socio-economic realm and ideal spiritual training of its members. Finally, it is recommended that juvenile delinquencies can be drastically reduced when youths of proven intelligence and piety are brought together on the platform of unity. This caliber of youths should be allowed to participate in the modalities for national integration and control of crimes.

Key words: *Da'wah, Hassan al-Bannā, Islamic brotherhood, Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Reformist.*

Introduction

Al-Ikhwānūl-Muslimūn (the Muslim Brotherhood) is an Islamic Movement founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Bannā in March 1928. The mission of the Movement was to realize a return of the Islamic Caliphacy which was abolished in Turkey in 1924 by Mustapha Kamal Atatürk. To realise this, comprehensive organizational activities were put in place for spiritual, intellectual, social and political training of its members in a way to meet up with contemporary challenges. These were enthusiastically administered through inspirational writings and collective reformist movement by the members *Al-Ikhwānūl-Muslimūn*. A relative agonizing experience in Nigeria was the infiltration of the Christian evangelism in the schools in Nigeria during the colonial era. The Muslim students in the British schools in Nigeria had no freedom of their religion. The groups of the concerned students in 1954 led by

then secretary general of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs; Late Dr. Lateef Adegbite organized themselves into a body in order to safeguard themselves from the loss of their Islamic identity. That body has since to date come to be recognized as the *Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN)*.

Although, the pioneers of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) then took a very brave and commendable step in creating a comfortable atmosphere for self-identity for the Muslim students in Nigeria, they still lack the vision and machination to bring about Islamic resurgence in Nigeria through the propagation of the pristine Islām. Then, MSSN activities were more of ceremonial one which did not go beyond singing and dancing etc. MSSN was still in this state when the wave of Islamic resurgence was blowing across the Muslim world especially in the Middle East. However, during the 1980s, some of the core members of the MSSN were finally shown the light towards the idea of reviving the true spirit of Islām by the time they came in contact with writings of the three major Islamic movements that bore this idea, namely; *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (The Muslim Brotherhood organization) of Egypt" led by Hassan al-Bannā, the *Jamā'at al-Islamiyyah* in Pakistan led by Abul-A'la-Maudūdi, and the *Islamic Revolution* in Irān led by Ayatullāh Khomeinī. Their writings served as sources of inspirations for the Muslim youths in the society, which eventually culminated into a continuous struggle for the revival of the true Islamic values and ideals in Nigeria.¹ Meanwhile, through the efforts of some members who were at the helms of affairs, large members of MSSN have been introduced to the writings of Hassan al-Bannā and in turn resolved to imbibe these teachings in their lives with the urge to fulfill their obligations to Allāh (SWT), their faith (Islām) and the Muslim community in general.

Hassan Al-Bannā's writings such as: *Letter to a Muslim Student*, *The Message of the Teachings*, *To the Youth*, *Al-Ma'dhūrāt* among others had influence on the spiritual standard and united *Da'wah* methodology among the MSSN. As a result of this, numerous members constantly sought to understand the Glorious Qur'ān as the principal source of guidance for them. This was so, because, Hassan al-Bannā through his writings adopted a number of methods through which the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) would be understood.¹ One of such methods is the scientific and precise explanation of the Qur'ān in such a way that it could demonstrate the applicability of its rules to the modern society. Secondly, the need for individual Muslims to apply Qur'anic code of conduct to their family lives before it could be applied in the society was established in al-Bannā's writings. The emulation of the Prophet (SAW) as the role model of the Muslim community was also emphasized because the Prophet's traditions represent a perfect interpretation of the Glorious Qur'ān.² At this juncture, it is necessary to examine the background of Hassan al-Bannā.

Biographical Sketch of Hassan Al-Bannā

Hassan al-Bannā was the founder of an Islamic organization called *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (The Muslim Brotherhood). He was born in October 1906 in Buhayrah province, North-East of Cairo. His father, Ahmad Ibn Abdur-Rahman Al-Bannā, was an 'Asharite scholar.² Hassan al-Bannā showed, from his early school days an inclination and great zeal for calling people to Islamic teachings. At the age of twelve, in his home-town of Mahmudiyyah, he became the leader of the Society for Moral Behaviour, and soon thereafter he became a member of Hasafiyyah Sūfī order. At the age of thirteen, he was named secretary of the Hasafiyyah

society for the charity whose goals were to preserve Islamic morality and resist Christian evangelism.³

After Al-Bannā finished a modern school of education, he joined Dar al-Mu‘allimīn in Damemhūr in 1920,⁴ and later proceeded to Dār-ul-‘ullūm in Cairo in 1923 where he graduated in 1927 at the age of twenty-one. He was assigned a teaching post at Al-Islamiyyah school after which he developed the habit of delivering speeches and organizing study circles in the mosque near his residence.⁵ Hassan al-Bannā was so much concerned about the situation in Egypt where the Islamic heritage was gradually being taken away and replaced with the western way of life, and where Muslims remained under the rule of the foreigners in their own land.⁶ While he was teaching at Islamiyyah school, He established his society called *Al-Ikhwānūl-Muslimūn* (The Muslim Brotherhood).⁷ His motive to establish the organization among others, was to remind Muslim *Ummah* that only Allāh (SWT), Who is their sole Creator has exclusive right to make law for them. Also, the organisation was to construct a comprehensive Islamic movement to lead an entire generation imbued with Islamic ideals that are applicable to politics, economic and social life of people. Within a short period of time, the organization had grown rapidly and covered the nooks and crannies of Egypt while its members numbered half a million in 1948.

After a series of conflicts between the organization and the British colonial rulers, Hassan al-Bannā was assassinated by a secret police on the 12th February, 1949. He was survived by one son and five daughters. Some of his publications were:

Al-Ikhwānūl-Muslimūn (Magazine of Muslim Brotherhood;1933)

An-Nadhīr (the Warner;1938-1939)

Al-Manār (the Light;1939-1941)

As-Shihāb (the Mentor; 1946-1948)

Al-Ma’qdhūrāt (a collections of Supplications), etc.⁸

Hassan Al-Bannā’s *Da’wah* Methodology

Comprehensiveness, gradualism and dynamism have always remained constant in the means and method applied by Hassan al-Bannā and his followers in the realization of their goals and objectives of the Islamic Movement. The need for comprehensiveness was rightly accounted for due to the comprehensiveness of goals and syllabus. This should be so for a comprehensive operation which needs a comprehensive approach. This is a point clearly stated by Hassan al-Bannā when he posited:

As regards the means of our work in the general view, it is generally the reawakening and spreading of Islamic *Da’wah* with all available means of communication until it is understood by the masses and defended by them.⁹

In the message of the 5th *Mu’tamar* (conference) of the *Ikhwān* conducted by Hassan al-Bannā himself, he pointed out and explained in details the need for comprehensiveness in the style adopted by the *Ikhwān* in the training of individual brothers. According to him, there are three main phases (or stages) that are to be passed through before the final establishment of Islām as a state: (i) *Marhalatut-Ta’līm* (education stage), (ii) *Marhalatut-Takwīn* (formation stage), and (iii) *Marhalatut-Tanfīth* (execution stage).¹⁰

Dynamism and gradualism in the means and method of Hassan al-Bannā's *Da'wah* too can never be overemphasized. It is itself a constant factor in all the phases and places of the *Ikhwān* operation even right from the first day of the Imām's *Da'wah*. For instance, it is on record that the first productive *Da'wah* of Hassan al-Bannā started from the Tea Coffee-house since he tried Mosque but was disappointed.¹¹ Hassan al-Bannā never stuck rightly to the Mosque but set out for other avenues to call people to his mission. Nothing could have informed him of this instinct but a sense of dynamism and gradualism.

Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in Retrospect

Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) was founded on the 30th of May, 1954.¹² Alhaji Tajudeen Adisa Aromoshadu clearly gave the background to the formation of the MSSN according to his statement:

Thus, the embryo gradually developed and was born at

Ansar-ud-Deen (Alakoro) School Hall on 30th of May, 1954.¹³

The establishment of the Society took place at a meeting held at Ansar-ud-Deen School, Alakoro, Lagos. The aims and objectives of the society include among others the encouragement of Muslim students towards learning of Arabic language and protecting the statutory rights and welfare of the members.¹⁴ It was founded to roll back the frontiers of Christian missionaries in their exodus conversion of the Muslim students into Christianity. To go to school then, most of Muslim pupils had to enroll in a catechism class and get baptized. They were required to drop their Muslim names and be ready to worship with others in the chapel provided by the school authorities who were predominantly Christians. This situation was not only prevalent in the southern part of the country but also in the north.¹⁵

According to Late Dr. Abdul-Lateef Adegbite, the first president of the society; in some schools, examinations were fixed on days of Muslim festivals to compel Muslim students to attend the schools. Equally it was impossible for Muslim students to attend *Jum'ah* service on Friday.¹⁶

Religious Ideology of Hassan al-Bannā and its Impact on the Unity of MSSN on *Da'wah*

Hassan Al-Bannā's writings have not come with any new ideas or beliefs with a view to moulding modern Muslim personality alien to the first generation of the Muslims. But rather his religious ideologies are beliefs which are replica of the original and sound Islamic ideology as he has reiterated it in one of his books while discussing the characteristics of an ideal Islamic personality that must be of sound and original ideology. He stated thus:

The first duty of the Muslim Brotherhood is to demonstrate to people the perspective of Islām in a clear and evident way, no additions, no deduction and no confusion. This is the theoretical part of our thought. As for the practical, it is to demand them to fulfill these perspectives, urge them to implement them and put them into action.¹⁷

In order to clarify it more, Al-Bannā added:

The programme of the Muslim Brotherhood has clear and definite stages. We know exactly what we want and how to fulfill it: We want to mould the Muslim man in his thought and ideology, in his morals and affection, in his deeds and actions. This is our moulding of the individuals.¹⁸

To buttress the spiritual influence of Hassan al-Bannā's writings on MSSN, the following instances may suffice. In the past and the present, the booklet; *Al-Ma'ḍhūrāt* (book of daily supplication, morning and evening) has constituted the first and foremost daily supplication for an average member of MSSN. No book after the Glorious Qur'ān has really gained wider spread and use in the MSSN than *Al-Ma'ḍhūrāt*. It contains verses of the Holy Qur'ān and *Ahādith* of the Prophet (SAW) in form of supplication on different occasions. The prayer book is consistently being used by the MSSN. Remarking on this, 'Abdul Hakim Bakr declared:

The position of the use of *Al-Ma'ḍhūrāt* in our midst and at our programmes has been like that of gun in the hand of a soldier. Infact, it has become a tradition among us that at the commencement of our programme and before any other thing else the congregational recitation of it takes place.¹⁹

Another instance is the view of Hassan al-Bannā on the issue of *Tawhīd* (unity of God) – which is often appreciated not only by MSSN but also by learned scholars of Islām. This is as regards the debatable views on whether the alleged “human attributes” with which Allāh (SWT) described Himself should be taken as they are or be rationally interpreted. This includes the Almighty Allāh (SWT) describing Himself as “having hand, capable of getting angry; descending unto the last heaven in the third part of the night” etc. Al-Bannā laid the controversy to rest on this issue when addressing the *Ikhwān*, saying:

The opinion of the *Salaf* (the orthodox Islamic scholars) is *Aslam* (safer) while that of the *Khalaf* (later Islamic scholars) is *Ahkam* (sound more rational). However, I prefer to share that of the *Salaf*.²⁰

Appreciating this submission of Al-Bannā as it is, Mas'ūd Ballo remarked:

Long before we came across the submission of Hassan al-Bannā many of us had been at logger head with each other in view of the different stands maintained by the scholars of Islām on the understanding of *Allāh*'s attributes which have human interpretations. But the Imam's opinion has solved the problem to a greater extent.²¹

In a nutshell, many MSSN members are seen taking after the method of *Ikhwān* today in their Spiritual training as in the reading of the Glorious Qur'ān and *Al-Ma'ḍhūrāt* on daily basis (morning and evening), observance of *Tahajjud* (mid night supererogatory prayer) regularly, and organizing spiritually-oriented programmes. “Letter to a Muslim Student” is the English translation of a letter that Hassan al-Bannā wrote to one of his students who was studying in the West. The sincere advice contained in this letter reminds the addressee and indeed all the Muslim students that the first and foremost goal in life is to please Allāh (SWT) and live in accordance with His sacred law. Also, it brings home that studying ought not to be an end in itself or for seeking material gain; a Muslim ought to excel in his or her study in order to work for Islām and benefit humanity, etc. ...”²².

Manifestations of the Impacts of Hassan al-Bannā's Writings on the *Da'wah* Methodology and Unity of the MSSN

The intellectual impacts of Hassan al-Bannā's writings on the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) appear to be the most permeating and indelible influence left on the image

of the Society. The influence could be felt on a wide spectrum of ideas in Islām: however, these could be summarised in respect of these two concepts.

Understanding of Islām

Understanding of the concept of Islamic *Da'wah* and its methodology

To practically understudy the impacts of the teachings of Hassan al-Bannā on MSSN, the Lagos Area Unit of the B-Zone will be of special focus. This does not imply that the impacts were not felt in other Area Units (State Chapters) of the MSSN. Manifestation of these impacts can be seen in the themes of programmes and lecture topics of their various activities of the Lagos Area Unit, and also in some civil actions (socio-political activities) which are carried out by the Unit.²³ Going by the analysis of Hassan al-Bannā on the stages of Islamic work, MSSN has practicalised this by putting in place some educative programmes and enlightenment activities. These include *Usrah* (weekly family gathering), *Da'wah* week (at various branches), public lectures, annual Holiday Training Programmes (HTP), December Islamic Vacation Course (IVC), *Ummuāt* (all married women) programmes and Jihad week among others.²⁴ All these are done in recognition and fulfillment of the first stage of *Da'wah*, i.e. *Marhalatut-Ta'līm* (education stage). An appreciation of this stage also informed themes such as: "Let the Qur'ān Intervene", "Re Echoing Our Mission", "Evolving New Strategies for the 21st Century Challenges", "Islām and the World", "The Prophetic Mission", "Towards Understanding Islām", "Islām and Terrorism"²⁵ etc. These themes and other related topics underneath were targeted at educating and orientating MSSN members towards having the correct understanding of Islām.

In the midst of this as well, some socio-religious activities are being carried out by the MSSN in the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria in the reflections of Hassan al-Bannā's intellectual dynamism. Instances of this are the various peaceful demonstrations and rallies organized by the Lagos Area Unit of the MSSN at different occasions in relations to the issues such as the return of schools/prayer congress to the Christian missionary advocated by the then Lagos State Governor; Senator Bola Ahmad Tinubu, (now the President of Nigeria) in a meeting held in his office on the 13th of July, 1999, with Muslim leaders as well as their Chief Imāms.²⁶ On the side of the MSSN, they approached the issue intellectually by inviting various Muslim societies/institutions to be part to a convention/prayer congress against the return of schools to the missionaries on the 8th of August, 1999 at University of Lagos Central Mosque. At the venue, Muslim Youths Convention on the Return of Schools (MYCORS) was formed to champion the course in which MSSN directed the affairs.²⁷ On the 20th January, 2000, (MYCORS) organized a press conference with the attendance of other Muslim organizations such as: National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO), Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), *Ansār-ud-deen* Society of Nigeria, *Jamā'at-ul-Islamiyyah* of Nigeria, *Anwārul-Islām* Movement of Nigeria, *Ahmadiyya* Movement in *Islām*, *Nawar-ud-Den* Society of Nigeria, Council of Chief *Imams* and *'Ulamāu*, Representatives of Muslim Schools Proprietors, Representatives of News Agency of Nigeria, etc.²⁸

The representatives of Muslim organizations met the committee set-up by the State Government to implement the return of schools to the missionaries. In their meeting they demanded to see the Governor which he later consented to meet with the MSSN executive officers. The meeting came up on the 17th September, 2000 at the Governor's office, Alausa,

Lagos State.²⁹ At the meeting, the MSSN observed the trends in the return of schools to the Missionaries with concern as neo-colonialism and an attempt to de-emphasize Islamic education. The Muslim students have suffered enough of religious discrimination and harassment in schools even now that they are under the control of Government. Some of the cardinal issues discussed were:

Muslim students are being forced to pray in Christian way in government-controlled schools. Christian teachers are teaching Islamic knowledge.

Muslim students in some secondary schools are parked in one class and their Christian colleagues in other classes. King's College was a good example. The meeting ended successfully in favour of the MSSN because MSSN was able to rub mind with the Governor on issues that were of more importance to the society.³⁰

The successful outcome of this meeting would not have been possible if the issue was handled with violence. All these were dynamic means through which the message of Islām is spread to the world: either for the purpose of education, correction or reformation. It is to be reminded that this is the kind of *Da'wah* methodology preached by Hassan Al-Bannā and imbibed by the MSSN. Allāh (SWT) says:

Invite (mankind, O Muhammad) to the way of your Lord (i.e. Islām) with wisdom (i.e. with the divine inspiration and the Qur'ān) and fair preaching, and argue with them In a way that is better...(Q16:125).

Conclusion

The influence of Hassan Al-Bannā's writings on the spiritual and intellectual developments of Muslim youths championing the course of Islamic *da'wah* cannot be overemphasised. The impacts of his revolutionary activities have been felt in the various sectors of Muslim endeavours. This respect accorded his writings has majorly been on the ground of the comprehensiveness and dynamism of his message. The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria through pragmatic application of the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic revolutionary principles has effected positive changes in the socio-economic realm and ideal spiritual training and ascension in Nigeria.

However, the MSSN has not done much towards overhauling of the Nigerian youths through an Islamic designed citizenship education. The present socio-political predicaments of Nigeria in terms of corruption, mistrust, maladministration, political thugery, ritual killings, kidnapping and assassinations of political opponents are critical challenges facing the Nigerian Muslim youths. The impact of the MSSN in training its members to salvage the country from bad leadership through their direct participation is indeed daunting. Seemingly, in consideration of all that had been written above in terms of prospects and problems, the following suggestions are humbly submitted:

That MSSN authority should devote conscious effort towards the writing of its own history which should be reviewed and supplemented from time to time.

That it is high time the leaders as well as the followers of the society (especially in the B-Zone) resolved their internal crises and turned over a new leaf as a way of forging ahead in championing the course of the real Islamic work.

That MSSN should make itself felt in the overall life of Nigerian society such that its spiritual, intellectual and moral values would be positively imparted in the life of an average Nigeria.

That the society should make itself felt in the body polity of the country in influencing the government policies to be people oriented and welfare packaged.

That the society should try as much as possible to make itself internationally relevant in the Muslim World like other Islamic organizations. This calibre of youths should be allowed to participate in the modalities for national integration and control of crimes.

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