

WOMEN IN POLITICS: The Islamic Perspectives

By

Prof. ja'afar M. Kaura

Dept. of Islamic Studies

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Jmkaura56@yahoo.com jmkaura855@gmail.com

Introduction

Participation of Muslim women in politics has continued to generate discussions for quite a long time. Muslim jurists have varying opinion on whether a Muslim woman can actively participate in politics like her male counterpart or not. The views against their participation have been used by some writers, especially feminists, to accuse Islam of discrimination against female folk.

The paper intends to revisit this issue and discuss both opinions with a view to seeing how feasible will it be for Muslim women to participate in Nigerian politics. In addition to a survey of roles played by Muslim women in various Islamic states, the paper considers what kind of role they could play in various aspects of our political life.

Political Role of Muslim Woman in an Islamic State:

Politics, in the perception of Islam, is a collective religious responsibility. Muslims, as a group, must conduct their political activities in keeping with the teachings of Islam. Each individual is also required to do whatever is humanly possible to advance the course of Islam through his political undertaking.

Muslim woman is as responsible as the Muslim man is in establishing a just system in which the law of Allah will be supreme (Maududi, 1980,p. 11). She is also under obligation to contribute her own quota to sustain the system as well even if she should participate in political activities; elections and constructive criticism. Islamic history is replete with many examples when Muslim women took part in the struggle to establish and sustain Islamic caliphate. The early call to Islam in Makkah by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was sustained not only by the efforts and endurance of men but of women as well. In some circumstances women accepted Islam while their families remained pagan. They persisted in the struggle despite family pressure and persecution. Fatima bint al-Khattab accepted Islam while her brother, Umar b. al-Khattab (RA), was then a pagan; and Zainab (daughter of the Prophet SAW) accepted the religion while her husband remained an unbeliever. Hauwa bint Yazid underwent bullying by her husband, Qais ibn al-Hatim, for accepting Islam, while Umm Kulthum bint Uqba ibn Ma'eth was the sole member in her family who accepted Islam (The Muslim, December-March, p.32). Some early Muslim women, like the mother of Yasir, lost their lives while in the struggle. Others had to immigrate together with their men counterparts to Abyssinia to sustain the struggle (Ibn Hisham, Vol.I: 280-288).

While the persecution of the Muslims and all efforts to nip the new religion in the bud were intensified by the Makkans, the Prophet (SAW) was trying new outlets for the religion from among pilgrims which resulted into, among other things, conversion of some people from Yathrib to Islam. The two pledges of *Aqba* that took place in the

subsequent two years had a number of women participants (Ibn Hisham, Vol. II: 57 – 72). Muslim women served as special advisors to the Prophet and the subsequent Muslim Caliphs. When the Muslims entered into a truce with pagan Makkans at *Hudaibiyah*, some of the Sahaba were not happy with some of the terms. Therefore, when the Prophet directed them to disengage from the Umrah many of them did not comply. The wise advice of Um Salma, one of his wives, that the Prophet (SAW) should perform the ritual of giving up the *Umrah* himself saved the situation. For immediately he performed the ritual, the Sahaba complied (Saeed, P53)

Muslim women attended the battles fought by the Muslims under the Prophet (SAW) to safeguard the new faith and protect the newly founded Islamic State. What is worth noting here is that participation of women was not limited to providing the Muslim soldiers with water, gathering of arrows and spears or tending the wounded, but it also extended to physical engagement. Umm Ammarah, one of the Sahaba who paid homage to the Prophet at Hudaibiyah, for example, put up a defense when the Prophet was attacked at the battle of *Uhud*. She also strangled an enemy at the battle of Hunain and took his spear with which she fought bravely (al-Qardawi:, pp. 52 – 4). Other women who participated in actual fighting included Safiyyah bint al-Muttalib, Nusaibah bint Ka'ab, Umm Haram and her sister Umm Salim (The Muslim, December – March, p.33).

Similar struggles through the history of Islam were recorded, for example, during the times of the four rightly guided caliphs and of recent the nineteenth century reform of Shaykh Uthman Ibn Foduye.

Aisha (RA), the widow of the Prophet, took part in the famous battle of the camel during the Caliphate of Ali b. Abi Talib (RA), (Abdu, nd, pp. 61-2) Asma' and her sister Maryam, both daughters of Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye, popularized the ideals of the Sokoto jihad through their poetical compositions and boost the morale of the *Mujahidun*. The general women-folk in the camp of the *Mujahidun* went to the battle fronts alongside their men compatriots. They persevered and endured the hardships accompanying movements and attacks arising from the struggle (Kani, et.al; pp. 98 –99). Kani quoted Shehu Lawal who observed that:

A classical example of this endurance in suffering was during the first attack of Alkalawa and the infamous battle of Tsuntsua, where the Jihadists suffered heavy loss, and they had their families with them (ibid: 99)

It can, therefore, be concluded that participation of Muslim women in the establishment and sustenance of the Islamic state is very crucial. The Prophet of Islam and later other Muslim leaders encouraged women to partake in movements aimed at establishing a just system based on the Divine guidance. There has not been a report in which women were discouraged or forbidden from such participation just because they were women. Women were also involved in political administration. This will be the subject of discussion in the coming section

Muslim Women in Political Process.

Islam, as a way of life, makes involvement of women in politics of their *Ummah* obligatory, as is the case with their men counterparts. It

is obligatory upon all the Muslims to ensure that justice and equity prevail in the society. And that cannot be possible without a government. Failure to do that will not only affect Muslim men but also Muslim women as well. Thus, women have to participate in electing the leaders at all levels. They must also criticize and, if need be, fight any deviation perceived from the leaders.

The pledges of *Aqbah* in the early period of Islam could be seen as one of the many forms through which leadership is bestowed upon a leader by his people. The Prophet (SAW) accepted homage during the two pledges from both men and women (Ibn Hishmam, Vol. II: 57). If the presence of women at the two *Aqbah* pledges was not as important as that of men, the Prophet (SAW) would have asked the men to come alone during the second *Aqbah* and pay the homage for and on behalf of women. Similarly, Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab constituted a Shura committee of six with a directive to choose the next caliph from among themselves when he was attacked and injured. Other members of the Shura opted out from the contest voluntarily and opinion poll was conducted by Abdurrahman Ibn Auf on the candidatures of Uthman and Ali (RA). Muslims were met and their opinions sought. Women were also consulted during the poll considering their political roles during the time of the Prophet (SAW) and Caliph Abubakar (RA), as well as their level of awareness and education, (IET, p. 51). We should not forget that the Prophet (SAW) also consulted his wives when he was alive as also did by the Sahaba.

Muslim women had also participated in interpretation of Shar'ah especially on constitutional matters. Their vast knowledge of the

Shari'ah afforded them the opportunity to challenge people in authority where they perceived deviation from them. A good example was when Caliph Umar (RA) suggested putting a ceiling on the maximum side of the *Sadaq*. Immediately he made the proposal a Muslim lady challenged him saying that he has no right to put the ceiling since Allah has already decided on it in the Qur'an (Badawi, 1998, p. 24).

This trend continued in the subsequent caliphates where Muslim women were consulted on state issues and appointments. During the Abbasid caliphate wives, and sometimes mothers of the caliph, were involved in state matters where they offered valuable advice and sometimes criticisms as was earlier done by Aisha (RA) the widow of the prophet, especially during the Caliphates of Uthman and Ali Ibn Talib (Kaura et a; p.5).

During the early period of the Sokoto Caliphate, women were known to have participated in the politics of the Caliphate. Their roles started with the *Bai'ah* paid to Shaykh Uthman by the Muslims at Gudu after the *Ummah* emigrated from Degel. They, like their male counterparts, paid homage to the Shaykh, promising to follow him in all matters according to the provisions of the *Shari'ah*.

An unpopular view believes that Asma'u bint al-Shaykh relinquished her vizierate position to her husband after Abdullah Ibn Foduye transferred the office to her. If she had not done that voluntarily, she would have remained as the Prime Minister of the Caliphate, a position next to that of the Caliph. The influential Asma'u was also

instrumental to the appointment of Khalilu as Dangaladiman Waziri after he lost the vizierate, in a contest, to Muhammad Laima during the Caliphate of Abubakar Atiku. The same Asma'u, according to Murray last, administered Gombe Emirate by proxy which she subsequently passed on to her descendants, (Kaura, p. 108-110)

Appointment of emirs was, sometimes, influenced by Muslim women in the Sokoto Caliphate. In addition to the case of Asma'u cited above on the appointment of Dangaladiman Waziri, Maryam, one of the surviving daughters of Shaykh Uthman, caused the appointment of Muhammad Bello as the emir of Kano after a protracted controversy on succession after the death of Emir Abdullahi, (Kaura, p. 109). Another emir of Kano, Uthman Ibn Dabo, consulted Maryam severally on administrative matters. One of such consultations was on the migration of some people from Hausa land to the East on the assumption that Mahdi was about to appear (Kani, et al pp.96 -98). Considering the political importance of Mahdism in Hausa land at that time, the question by Emir Uthman Ibn Dabo will suggest the position Maryam was occupying in the Caliphate.

It is, therefore, clear from the foregoing that a Muslim woman is as free as a man to participate in the politics of her *Ummah*. She can participate in the election of her leaders, and offer advice on how the *Ummah* should be led. She is under obligation to criticize the leaders when she notices deviation, and can influence appointment of competent people into political offices. What, therefore, remains to be addressed is the position of Muslim women vis-avis the office of the caliph. This will be addressed by the next section.

Office of the Caliph.

Caliph, in Islamic political thought, is the representative of the Prophet (SAW) who takes charge of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Muslims. By virtue of his office, a Caliph leads Muslims in all spheres of life. He is the Imam in the Mosque, Chief Justice with whom appeals are lodged and commander on the battlefield. The four rightly guided caliphs, namely, Abubakar, Umar, Uthman and Ali (RA), all served in these capacities at Madinah, the capital of the Muslim *Ummah* and Kufah respectively. They, however, delegated these responsibilities to the governors they sent to different provinces. Other caliphates that sprung up in other Muslim areas did the same thing. However, when later caliphs could not execute these functions either because of enormity of state businesses or lack of required knowledge for the execution of the functions of the offices, they separated *Imamah al-Sugrah* and *Qadayah* from *Khilafah*, and appointed *Imams* to lead prayers, chief justices to hear appeals and commanders to take charge of the Muslim armed forces. These offices have been, and where found are being, held by men to the exclusion of women. It may not be a deliberate attempt to sideline women even though the conditions of appointment in all the four offices include manhood. Our concern, however, is appointment into the office of the *Khalifah*.

Majority view of Muslim political thinkers in particular and schools of law is that the office of the caliph can only be occupied by a male Muslim. Various reasons are offered in respect of this assertion, and none of them seems to suggest that a woman is incapable of holding

that position because of her sex. Rather the reasons have to do with religious stipulations on mingling between males and females.

Muslim women have been commanded to, while going out of their homes to attend to their needs, properly cover their body (Qur'an 33:59). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also commands for distancing between the breath of men and women and forbids a man to seclude with a non-forbidden woman. In another Hadith, a woman is forbidden to travel without the company of her husband or a forbidden relation (Hajib al-Marach, p.11). These precepts indicate one basic thing, i.e. Islam's abhorrence of free mixing between males and females without a valid excuse approved by the Shari'ah.

Muslim scholars are unanimous that a woman cannot go out of her home without valid excuse. This led to categorization of women with reference to their appeal to men. One of the books dealing with this subject is **Irshad alkhwan Ila Ahkami Khuruj al-Niswan** of Shaykh Uthman Ibn foduye. The Shaykh categorized women into three; charming, ugly and aged. The charming ladies, especially those with exceptional beauty, are not allowed to go out without valid excuse. Ugly ones on the other hand are allowed to go out; and to attend congregational prayer. The third category, aged women, is free to attend any function and run errand for women in the first and second categories. As can be seen, the categorization is made taking into consideration the attention each would attract from their male counterpart (Irshad, pp. 16 – 17). Therefore, going by this categorization, women in the first and second categories will not be

allowed to occupy the office of the caliph because of what close contact with their male subordinates would cause. However, women in the third category seem to be the only ones that Shari'ah may likely allow to occupy the position going by the categorization and what informed it.

There is, however, a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), which is used by some Muslim scholars to disqualify women from contesting the highest political position in the *Ummah*.

The Prophet was reported to have said that:

A nation will not prosper if it entrusts its leadership to a woman (Al-Sh'arani Vol.I., nd, p. 132)

Even though the Hadith quoted above does not disqualify woman because of her sex or incapability to rule, it is however clear that the impact of the Hadith restricted it to the position of the caliph. Therefore it means that Muslim women belonging to the third category can contest for other offices in an Islamic State.

To conclude this section, it can be said that Muslim women are allowed by the Shari'ah to contest for and occupy a political office other than the apex office such as that of the caliph, going by the meaning of the above Hadith. She can, however occupy, other offices such as Shura. It can also be said that women allowed to occupy political offices should not be attractive as to cause *fitna* by their appearance in the midst of men. Therefore, only old women who reach such age as would make them unattractive; and who stopped bearing children, could be eligible to contest election into

such offices. They must however observe the rules of *hijab* whenever they go out despite their old age; by covering themselves properly and limiting their discussions with the opposite sex to business of their offices. They should also refrain from using attractive dress and should not wear perfume. What has been discussed so far relates to participation of woman in the political process of the Islamic State.

The next section will dwell on her position in a secular political set-up.

Muslim Woman and Secular Politics.

Secular politics in this context refers to a political arrangement, in thought and in practice, in which Islamic guidance and morality are alien. The sources of such politics, being popularized by the United States of America (U.S.A) in the Third World countries, are atheism, materialism and human egoism. A country that operates this kind of politics is called a democracy. Power belongs to the people in a democracy and they decide on what they want. In other words, sovereignty belongs to the people in a democracy. They give laws unto themselves. But in Islam sovereignty belongs to Allah. Allah alone decides on what the ruler and the ruled should do. He gives laws to them which they shall obey. No man has absolute right to give unto himself a law or give it to others. (Maududi, 1980, p. 10) What a Muslim jurist can do is to either interpret the law or conduct *ijtihad* in the absence of a clear judgment on a particular issue, via the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Nigeria is a multi faith country where Muslims and Christians have to co-exist and pursue opportunities offered to them by the system in all

spheres of public life. Muslims must, therefore, participate in political activities side by side with their Christian counterparts like in other spheres of life. Islam allows co-existence with people of other faiths. It, however, likes a situation where each faith is recognized and protected, and members of the faith are given freedom to observe it to the fullest. Where such opportunity does not exist, Muslims are still urged by Islam to be tolerant and partake in the affairs of the society according to the guidance of their religion. For in whatever circumstance a Muslim acts, he would be judged by Islam according to its own provision. This, I believe, is what is supposed to guide the Muslims especially in politics.

Therefore, the main issue is: does Islam give Muslim women an open ticket to participate in political activities like their male Muslim counterparts? Is the Muslim community in need of their participation, and what benefits does the community expect to get from such participation? What should guide the political activities of female Muslims, and what are the areas they are supposed to participate? These are some of the questions that will guide our discussions in the next section.

Participation of Muslim Women in Politics

Generally, participation in politics can be categorized into; nomination, campaign, election and governance. Muslim women had participated in all these aspects of politics during the era of Islamic states. We will now take each area and see what is the position of Islam on it vis-à-vis participation of Muslim women in politics.

Nomination

Nomination entails that a politician endorses the candidature of a contestant by filling appropriate forms and signing them. The appearance of the nominator at a congress meeting where nomination would be confirmed may not be necessary. There is nothing from the Shari'ah, as far as I know, that prevents a Muslim woman from nominating a candidate that qualifies to contest a position provided that she is guided by the teachings of Islam in her choice. We have precedence in the Sokoto Caliphate where women nominated candidates for both elective and appointive positions. Maryam, one of the daughters of Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye, nominated Muhammad Bello for the throne of Kano after the death of Emir Abdullahi. Her nomination was not contested by the Caliphate. In fact she succeeded in seeing her nominee appointed as the Emir of Kano.

Campaign

Campaigning for votes in an election is part of politicking. It is a way of meeting people to solicit for their votes on the understanding that the contestant is going to justify the position he is contesting for. Even though Islam does not permit a Muslim to converse for a position, the case with our situation in Nigeria is that you have to go out and shop for votes before you can get elected. Since Muslims are stakeholders in Nigerian politics and could only get such position by the number of votes they could score, permission for that could be granted under legal dictum 'choice between two evils'. On the part of Muslim women, campaign can only be permitted if and only if the law of segregation between the two sexes is observed. Islam abhors free intermingling between the opposite sexes where it is not necessary.

The Prophet also directed that we should distance between breath of men and women. But where candidates for a contest are not all Muslims, a Muslim woman may participate in the campaign if her absence can cause the defeat of the Muslim.

Islam, therefore, does not approve for a Muslim woman to participate in the kind of a free-for-all campaign that is characteristics of Nigeria where she has to rub shoulders with all kind and manner of men when it is absolutely not necessary. However, Shari'ah might not raise an eye brow if a Muslim woman conducts house-to-house campaign where she meets women. Similarly, if a rally is wholly meant for women, a Muslim woman can address it.

Election

By election here it means casting of votes to elect a contestant. Election consists of actual voting and also serving as agent of the contestant at the polling booth and counting/collating centre. Islam allows both. In Islamic history, many instances abound where elections are conducted. The first Caliph, Abubakar al-Siddiq, was elected through a popular homage after he was nominated by Umar b. al-Khattab. Similarly, Uthman b. Affan, the third Caliph, was elected through sampling of opinions of the Muslims.

It should also be noted that, it is a duty imposed by Islam on every Muslim to struggle for the enthronement of a just and equitable government no matter the environment, Islamic or secular. For it is part of the teachings of the Prophet (SAW) for a Muslim, male or female, to put to right any wrongdoing by the use of his hand or tongue. Where a Muslim cannot do that, he/she should hate the

wrongdoing. Therefore casting of vote could be seen as one of the areas a Muslim can put to right a wrongdoing in governance.

A Muslim woman can, therefore, come out of her house to cast her vote. The allowance for separate row for women at the polling centres that is practiced in Muslim dominated areas even makes it mandatory on the Muslim woman to cast her vote. However, a Muslim woman cannot serve as a political agent either at the voting centre or at the counting/collation centre. This is because her presence there contradicts the essence of the teaching of Hadith that directs for the distancing of the breath of the opposite sex quoted above. Similarly, the two venues are not conducive for the dignity of a Muslim woman even if she is a full time politician. Moreover, there are men who can do it.

Contesting an Elective post

Islam does not object to a Muslim contesting for a post where it is only through the ballot that post can be occupied. This is, however, in addition to Islamic stipulation that one should not contest for a post one is incapable of holding. In other words, a Muslim should only contest for an office he knows he can administer sincerely, judiciously and equitably.

Contestable positions in a democracy could be narrowed to executive and legislative. In Nigeria, the elective executive positions are the offices of the president, governor and chairman of local government council. Under the legislative tier there is Senate, House of Representative, state assembly and local council legislature. There

are, in addition to these elective offices, non-elective political positions at the Federal and the state such as minister/special adviser, commissioner/special adviser and chairman/member of boards. All eligible citizens, both male and female, are free to seek these elective and non-elective offices. What then is the position of Islam with regard to a Muslim woman contesting for the elective offices and getting appointed into non-elective offices?

There is no consensus among Muslim scholars as to whether a Muslim woman can contest the office of the president or not being the highest ranking office at the Federal level. By implication the offices of governor and chairman are also affected by the non-consensus because they are also executive positions. Some scholars are categorical that a Muslim woman cannot contest the apex office. They hinged their argument on a sound Hadith reported from the Prophet that:

A people will not prosper if they let a woman
Be their leader (Al-Sh'arani Vol.I., nd, p. 132)

The above Hadith was uttered by the Prophet when he heard that the Persians had made a woman their leader. According to Ibn al-Arabi, by the text of this Hadith a Muslim woman cannot be a leader (Caliph). The views attributed to al-Tabari and Abu Hanifah to the effect that a woman can serve as a judge and can adjudicate in a matter she has knowledge about respectively have been rejected by scholars who do not permit apex leadership for a Muslim woman. (Al-Ansari, nd, p. 451, Alusi, 2005,214). The Maliki School of Law, which is popular in Nigeria, is also against a woman occupying the apex position (al-Ansari, nd, p. 451)

It seems, this group of scholars consider, in addition to the above Hadith, the Islamic antecedent when the Caliph was not only the political head, but was also the Imam in the mosque, chief justice with whom appeals are lodged and commander of the armed forces on the battle field. They also consider the various Hadith of the Prophet which prohibit intermingling between foreign opposite sex some of which we have quoted earlier. Therefore, by their judgment a Muslim woman cannot sit in court and lead men in discussions on state matters, neither can she lead prayers or command Muslim armed forces. It should, however, be noted that Muslim leaders today delegate responsibilities to other professionals such as lawyers (chief justice), jurists (imam) and soldiers (head of various armed forces) and hold unto the political leadership only.

The second category of scholars believes that a Muslim woman is allowed by the Shari'ah to vie for any political position including that of the president, governor or chairman of a council. According to their understanding the Hadith of the Prophet which is used by the first category does not convey prohibition. Rather, to their understanding, it connotes observation on the particular incident that happened. One of such scholars, Abi al-Faraj from Shafi'i School of Law, opined that a woman can serve as a judge because the ultimate objective is for the judge to listen to claims and counter claims, establish the right claimant and pass judgment. And by implication she can also occupy the apex office because jurists consider the two positions as the same from the teaching of the Hadith. (Al-Ansari, nd, p. 451)

Another interesting view presented by a contemporary writer is worth noting here. What the writer did was to conduct an analogical deduction based on another analogy conducted by another scholar on a related case. The first analogy was conducted by al-Maududi on the Caliph of the Muslim Ummah. According to the general Sunni view, which derives its authority from an authentic Hadith, only a Quraish man can be the Caliph. In the absence of a Quraish man, any qualified Muslim can be appointed. But Al-Maududi opined that the ultimate objective of the khilafah is to better the condition of Islam and the Ummah. Therefore, competence of whoever is going to be appointed should be of paramount importance to the Muslims and not who becomes the Caliph. In this regard, if there is a competent Quraish man he should automatically occupy the office. But where we have a more competent non-Quraish man we should prefer him over the less competent Quraish man. Where the two candidates are all competent, the Quraish man should automatically be appointed. Therefore, Kausar argued that:

The same criterion can be applied to the Problem of women's leadership. If there is no man who possesses all the necessary Leadership qualities for the caliphate, a Woman possessing these qualities would be More eligible than any man. But, if there is a Man who possesses all the necessary qualities For leadership, then he would be preferable To a woman possessing all these requirements (IIIT, 1998, p. 120)

Therefore, by this argument a more competent Muslim woman should be preferred over a less competent male contestant. Where a Muslim woman, fielded by a political Party, is found to be more qualified than

the other contestants she should be preferred and elected by the Muslims.

Legislative (Shura) Position

Islam allows for a legislature in an Islamic state. The function of the legislature is to interpret existing laws, conduct *ijtihad* on a new matter that requires a law and offer advice to the ruler. Members of the legislature should be jurists with vast knowledge on current affairs. They should be guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah in their law making endeavor. However, the case with our own legislature is different since no religion guides members in their law making business. Nevertheless, qualified Muslims who have knowledge of Islam should contest and participate in the activities of the legislature. Their presence and participation can benefit Islam and the Muslims.

Muslim women with requisite qualification and understanding of the teachings of Islam could be allowed by the Shari'ah to vie for seats in the legislature at the Federal, state and local levels. The Hadith quoted above is on the apex executive office which legislative seat is not. There is also minimal interaction a Muslim woman may have with foreign opposite sex looking at the membership, schedule of activities and seating arrangement among others.

We have earlier seen how a Muslim woman challenged Caliph Umar b, al-Khattab (RA) when he wanted to limit *Sadaq*. This and similar instances abound in Islamic history. Wives (RA) of the Prophet (SAW) had contributed their own quota in the success of administration of the Islamic State during and after the time of the Prophet by availing their good advice to the Prophet (SAW) and those in authority after him.

Muslim Women and Political Concessions

We have discussed Islamic perspectives with regard to Muslim woman participation in Nigerian politics. In this section, our concern will be to examine the roles women liberation movements, government and the media play in enlightening women politically and attempts being made to get political concessions for them. We then narrow our discussion to what would the Muslims do in the circumstance that concessions were granted to both Muslim and non-Muslim women.

Women, both Muslims and non-Muslims, participate in Nigerian politics. But available data show that they are not faring well at polls. This is even more concerning the female Muslim contestants. This makes women liberation movements to complain that women are generally discriminated against by their male counterparts and Muslim women in particular are discouraged from participation on religious ground. There is also the feeling that women have not been given adequate political awareness (Chizzes, et.al, p.23). Out of this feeling, concerted efforts are being made by women societies and associations as well as government and print and electronic media to bring a change in a system that discriminates against women. This 'project' has started from the time of the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd). What is common and central to their activities is total emancipation of women from the domination of men. According to Ezeigbo, "the proliferation of women's clubs; increased autonomy from husbands, evidence in economic independence; the number of divorce cases, all go to show that

subtle influence of what has come to be called women liberation movement” (Olurode, P.121). Thus women need equal opportunity like their men counterparts in all spheres of life. The global concern for women, which of course adds impetus to the efforts of local liberation movements, could be seen in the number of proposals and actions on women development programmes aimed at ameliorating the condition of women. “The United nations Decade for Women, 1976 – 1985; the World Bank Special Projects Fund for the Poor and Women; and expanded inflow of donor assistance for women’s programmes are clear manifestations of this increased concern” (NACEMA, P.2). Beijing Conference and its aftermath all point to the attention being paid to women development.

Governments in Nigeria, in furtherance of United Nations’ Decade for Women and the Arusha Declaration of African Women, embark on a number of projects to enhance the status of Nigerian women. The most important aspect of these projects are political mobilization programmes initiated by first ladies beginning with Maryam Babangida, such as Better Life Programme for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and Women and Youth Empowerment Programme (WAYEP) The programmes are meant to give exposure to women so that they could be able to, through them, participate fully in politics since they would benefit from civic and political training programmes designed for that purpose (Chizea, et.al; P.37).

Women have started to enjoy some concessions from the Military Government of Babangida towards the end of that regime. Each Sole

Administrator was directed to include a female commissioner in the state cabinet. Each Local Government council had a female councilor appointed into its council. With the introduction of deputies to sole administrators by the Babangida Administration, two female deputies were appointed one each for Kaduna and Lagos. A Federal Ministry for Women Affairs was created at Federal level and duplicated in some states of the Federation to enhance political mobilization of women.

There is now a move to find a place for the office of the first lady in the constitution. The female members of the House of Representatives have formed an association aimed at wrestling out political rights of women from men. Some political parties had, in the previous elections, waived nomination fees for their female nominees. There are also indications that political parties will at the end of the day succumb to pressure being mounted on them to reserve some elective posts for women. Many more concessions are certainly in the offing.

All these concessions by government and political parties are for both Muslim and non-Muslim women. What then should be the response of the Muslim woman in this circumstance? Is she allowed by Islam to “join” the secular politics and contest especially those political offices or should she concede them to non-Muslim women who have been encouraged by their religion to contest? Will her absence in governance be felt by the Muslim *Ummah*? If yes, what should the *Ummah* do?

The issues raised by the above questions are as serious as they are fundamental for Islam and the Muslims. It is true that a secular

political set-up is antithetical to the Islamic political system. It is also true that Islam does not allow all women to participate in Islamic-oriented political activity. Only old women, as shown earlier, could be allowed to participate. Even these categories of women are only allowed to occupy lower offices. Now the problem is that Muslims must and have to co-exist alongside with people of other religions and they have to partake in the secular politics if Islam and the Muslim *Ummah* are to be represented adequately. Will this then form a basis for *ijtihad* in search of *maslaha*, goodness for the Ummah to allow Muslim women to contest all positions available in Nigeria?

It is the view of this paper that Muslims must have adequate representation in order to safeguard their interest and the interest of their religion. Similarly, Muslim women who are no longer attractive to men because of old age should be allowed to contest elections and fill the offices especially reserved for women. Muslims should not prevent their women from contesting elections, because doing that would give women of other religions opportunity to use our resources against our own religion. On the contrary, if Muslim women occupy political offices they will protect their religion and probably enhance its status.

Conclusion

It is clear from what has been discussed in the preceding pages that Islam does not discriminate against women in an Islamic political set up. Islamic history is replete with many examples of women who

participated actively in the administration of Islamic states. They were, for example, consulted on appointment of the leader of the Islamic state, and also on critical issues affecting the state. They criticized people in authority and influenced appointment of competent people to leadership positions. The only area where Muslim jurists differ is whether a Muslim woman can occupy the apex position of the Caliph. This does not, however, question the ability and capacity of woman to execute activities of the office of the Caliph. The conditions militating against her are purely legal.

It is based on Islamic stipulations that participation of a Muslim woman in Nigerian politics was looked at. The areas in which she can participate without restrictions, and having taken into consideration Islamic ethos, include nomination, campaign, voting and standing election for national, state and local legislatures. As for the office of the chief executive at the three tiers of government, a position needs to be made by the Muslim jurists based on observations made in this presentation.

References

- Al-Ansari, M.A. (nd), *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Maktaba al-Iman, Cairo
- Al-Jariri, A. (n.d.), **Kitab al-Fiqh ʿala Mazahib al-Arba'ah**, Vol. I,
Dar al-Fikr
- Al-Ma'arafi, A.H. (n.d.), **Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah Li-Ibn Hishan**,
Vol. I & IV, Sharika al-Taba'ati al-Fanniya, al-Muttahida.
- Al-Qardawi, Y. (n.d), **Nisa'u Mu'minat**, Maktabat Wahabah, Cair
- Al-Sabuni, M.A. (nd), *Safwa al-Tafsir*, Dar al-Sabun, Madina Nasr
- Al-Sadar, A.B. (1982), **Introduction to Islamic Political System**, Y.k.Nafsi.
- Al-Sha'arani, A.A.A. (n.d), **Kashf al-Gumma ʿan Jami'il Ummah**,
Vols.I & II, Ibn Saud, Kano, Nigeria.
- Chizea, D.O. *et.al* (eds., 1991), **Nigeria Women and the Challenges of our Time**, Malthouse Press Limited, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Ibn Baz, A.A. (1409 A.H.), *Musharakah al-Mar'ah lial-Rijal*, Islamic University,
Madinah
- Ibn Foduye, U (n.d.), **Irshad al-Ikhwān Ila Ahkam Khuruj al-Niswan**,
Abubakar Waziri, Hubbare, Sokoto.
- Ibn Taymiyyah, S. (n.d.), **Hijab Al-Mar'ah wa Libasuha fis Salat**,
- IET, (1992), *Misconceptions about Islam*, IET, Minna, Nigeria
- Ismaeel, S. (2007), *Controversial Questions About Islam and Comments*,
Al-Attique Publishers Inc.,Canada
- Jarisah, A.M. (1979), **Dinun wa Daula**, Dar al-Buhuth al-Ilmiyyah,
- Kani, A.M. *et.al* (eds., 1990), **State and Socety in the Sokoto Caliphate**
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

Kaura, J. M. *et.al* (1995), "Participation of Muslim Women in Modern Politics: A Challenge to the *Ummah*", paper presented at an International Conference on Islam and Political Challenges of Modern Times, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto Nigeria.

Kaura, J.M. (1981), Sokoto Jihad Leaders and Emancipation of Women, B.A. Project, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Sokoto

Maududi, A.A., (1980) Human Rights in Islam, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester

NACEMA (1991), **Women in Development**, National Centre for Economic Management & Administration, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Olurode, L.(ed., 1990), **Women and Social Change in Nigeria**, University Publishing & Research Co., Lagos, Nigeria.

Shabbir, M.(1998), Women in Feminism and Politics: New Direction Towards Islamization, by Zeenath Kausar, in American Journal of Islamic Sciences, IIIT, Washington D.C.

The Muslim (December, 1976 – March, 1977), "The Reawakening of Muslim Woman".