

THEATRICAL APPROACH TO ISLAMIC ETHICS AND EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

Nothing can be compared with education. Education in this context is not limited to western education alone which many people erroneously believe should be gained before one can answer the appellation of being educated. This is not underscoring the importance of western education though but highlighting the importance of other forms of education such as Islamic education and cultural education which are being relegated to the background. In the same vein, Islamic ethics and values are not like the situation in the west where distinct lines are drawn between religion, politics and morals. Islam as a way of life gives the adherents ethical norms and values to guide and control the entire gamut of man's life. It gives a comprehensive code of behaviour for the individual and guides him to the highest possible moral excellence. It also gives ethical principles on which the edifice of a truly righteous society can be built. This paper examines the importance of Islamic education and some of its ethics viz a viz the theatre in an Anglophone country like Nigeria and submit that theatre remains one of the most vibrant techniques that can be employed for widespread of Islamic education and its ethics in Nigeria.

Key words: Theatre, Education, Islam, Culture, Ethics, Development.

Introduction

Education is light, so the saying goes and every society, whether simple or complex, have its own system for training and educating its youth, and education for the good life has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history. However, the goal of education and the method of approach may differ from place to place, nation to nation, and people to people. For example, the Greek idea of an educated man was one who was mentally and physically well balanced. The Romans on the other hand, placed much emphasis on oratorical and military training. In Nigeria and several old African countries, the warrior, the hunter, the nobleman, the man who combined good character with a specific skill was adjudged to be a well educated and well integrated citizen of his community. It should be pointed that in Nigeria and several African

countries, the purpose of education is not ambiguous: functionalism is the main guiding principle. The society regarded education as a means to an end, and not as an end in itself. Education is generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood. In particular, compared to western education, African cultural education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values. Children learnt by doing, that is to say, children and adolescents were engaged in participatory education.

, a wise man was also quoted for saying: 'There are three things that are most important in life. 'the first one is education, the second one is education and third one is education' . Almighty Allah himself command us His creatures to go in search of education wherever it could be found even if it is in China. In fact, the revelation to the Prophet Muhammed (PBOH) was for him to Read or Recite, Rehearse in the Name of His Lord - Iqraa 'thus 'proclaim in the name of your Lord is most Bountiful, He taught the use of the per. and taught man that which he knew not ... ' (Holy Qur'an 96: 1-5). It then becomes glaring that the issue of education is very important in Islam. I: is the 'be all, end all'. It is a major unique quality of Islam among al religions in the world. Education forms the basis of Islamic faith as the Almighty Allah commands us to know Him before believing in Him. It is therefore incumbent on individuals to seek for knowledge in whatever way that will benefit mankind

Theatre and Drama

The power of theatre and drama as an instrument for educating people and effecting positive change in the society cannot be over - emphasised. As the oldest genre of literature, theatre and drama has served as a means of not only entertainment but also of therapy. reformation, information, dissemination, a potent tool for ideology propagation, national unity and most importantly, education. Therefore, the act of singing, dancing and acting goes far beyond mere entertainment, as it is capable of achieving religious piety, teaching moral education and enhancing community development, which ultimately bring a desirable change in human endeavor. This paper therefore examines the importance of the theatre and drama not only for their entertainment values but also religious and moral teaching, which undoubtedly are the mainstay of good society.

Drama as genre of literature refers to performance. It embodies a corpus of creative imaginative works of art meant to entertain, teach morals, inform and educate its audience. It therefore communicates ideas about life and man. Through drama, we get insight into the nature of man and the world around us. Dramatic writings deal with a range of themes such as social, political, philosophical, cultural, religious etc. defining drama, the B.B.C English Dictionary (1992:342) referred to its as a serious play for the theatre, radio or television and defined theatre as a building with a stage on which plays and other entertainments are performed''. However, Adedeji (1978) viewed theatre as 'a composite art whose resources include the use of mind, body and voice in expressions that communicate with an audience. While it relates to all other arts by reaching out and unifying them dramatically, it serves as the educible of language, literature, philosophy, sociology, psychology and religions. It at the same time of performance presses science and technology into service.

Traore (1972) opines that theatre is man's expression of his feeling, emotions and experience. It is a creation by man and as such forms part of his cultural. This assertion was equally agreed to by Hanson (1991) who stated that theatre is a human institution of significant value to the society which employs it. Looking closely at the definitions, it is realized that there is, however, no clear-cut distinction between theatre and drama as they overlap due to their close relationship. Infact, some people regards one as an acronym of the other. The reality of the issue is that the essence of drama centres upon the concepts of 'shared experience'-the feeling of being part of a group, connected by a central context, and interacting positively with others. Dramatic methods have been used for years as a means to explore, understand, assess and develop human values and needs. This is why skilled and sensitive drama practitioners use drama to explore subjects and issues and improve communication and societal goals.

Drama often manages to address all of these objectives at once. Theatre, on the other hand, arises as a product of the drama process and drama becomes theatre when the process becomes performance. The two tend to merge and boundaries are often blurred as drama works often on elements of theatre and theatre always contain drama. Explaining the interconnection between drama and theatre, Akwe & Ibrahim (2000) noted that drama is audiovisual in nature while theatre accommodates stage, heavy lighting system, costume and other essentials. The authentic yardstick for evaluating the success of a play is to stage it. In other words, drama is a literary form designed for the theatre. Drama deals with life in a more distinctive way. It is improvisation or recreation of life. Thus, drama is but a stage. Olu Obafeml (1999) says drama ordinarily refers to play scripts while theatre means performance and its problem, including play -making. However, when \I': know that the Greek word from which drama emerged means deed, n will immediately occur to us that definitions can be problematic and unignorable in an intellectual discuss of drama and theatre.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The social index of change according to Ajayi and McGurk have underscored different overviews from social scientists and media scholars leading to different postulations, submissions and theories. On the necessity for social changes in any given society, causative factors that necessitates social re-ordering and the spiraling effects of such change-actions is basically out of necessity. However, what most social scientist considered as the bulwark of these theoretical reaction is the conceptualization of change in an upward movement central to human development. In other words social change must be seen to respond unconditionally to human need and aspirations.

In the evolutionary theory as espoused by Spencer, the traces of which abound in the works of other social scientists like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Emile Durkheim (Marshall 1996: 163), human society is bound to improve : change was progressive and this consequently led to further civilization and moral improvement of human society. The capacity to change the environment accordingly is achieved mainly through the process of structural differentiation. These processes of structural differentiation are as spencer proposed ' the development of special institutions to perform the social functions necessary to meet the increasingly specialized needs' the contention of evolutionary theorists is in the attribution of organic or biological features to the society.

These features, which include drama and theatre, if cohesively harmonized, is functionally expected to produce change in the human society and invariably in the people.

Brief Historical Background of Theatre and Drama

Brockett (1979) informs that drama started in Ancient Greece as far back as the 6th century B.C. Naturally, the Greek civilisation produced the first great era of the theatre which was between 5th and 6th centuries. Theatre got a boost from the Athenian government when it accorded it an official recognition and financially supported drama which made the contest for the best strategy during the Dionysian festival a keen and interesting one. This led to the emergence of Tragedy which, Aristotle (335-223BC) in his poetics reported to have emerged from improvisations by the leaders of the dithyrambs, through a hymn sung and danced to in honour of Dionysus the Greek god of wine and fertility. These activities were transformed into a literary composition by Arion (c.625 -585 B.C.).

However, some scholars later submitted that drama actually started in ancient Egypt contrary to many people's belief that it started in Greece. Among the scholars is Pickering (1978:8) who informs that 'Egyptians quite early developed a highly sophisticated civilisations, far in advance of Greece or any other society in the Western world. Most of the surviving Egyptian plays are contained in the fifty - five pyramid texts which date from the beginning of the Old kingdom'. He further reveals, in terms of dramatic rituals, two examples of what seem to be an annual fertility rite which are of great importance. The first is the memphite play which dates from approximately 2,500 BC. This play resembles the spring rites and it is performed annually. It tells the traditional of the death and resurrection of Osiris and the resulting coronation of Horus. The second ritual fertility drama which is easily the most important in terms of popularity, size and complexity is the Abydos passion play. Again the subject - matter is the death of Osiris at the hands of his brother, Set, who dismembers his victim, burying parts of Osiris all over, Egypt in an attempt to prevent his powerful brother's resurrection.

The death and dismemberment is remarkably like the death that is later undergone by the Greek god-Dionysus who has been referred to as a later Greek version of Osiris. One major characteristic of Egyptian drama was that it never went profane unlike the drama in ancient Greece and medieval Europe. It remained a purposive part of religious ceremonies. This probably accounts for why the theatre never fully developed because it remained sacred.

In Africa, drama has been part and parcel of African life in form of different rituals during ceremonies -- marriage, naming, burial, worships, various forms of festival etc. Corroborating this assertion, Ogundeji (2000:3) submits that 'art, particularly theatre and drama, is an integral part of African life'. African since art is functional in the lives of the people. In Nigeria, the emergence of theatre and drama in the modern form could be traced to Hubert Ogunde who in Jun 1944 staged the Garden of Eden and The throne of God. He later produced plays such as Tigers Empire, Worse than Crime, Darkness of Light; Bread and Bullet, Strike and Hunger (which earned him imprisonment). Following his footsteps were Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo etc. Modern literary drama in Nigeria owed its emergence to Wale Soyinka who wrote and directed 'Dance in the Forest for Nigeria's Independence in 1960. Among his contemporaries and old students are LP Olake, Ola Rotimi, Dapo Adelugba; Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Bode Sowande etc.

Ojeyemi (2018: 32) informs “ religion had something to do with the development of drama”. Taking into cognizance that the classical Greek religious ceremonies are in worship of a complex and imperfect god Dionysus, a being with god-like power and immortality but endowed with human virtues and vices, ranging from emotion, passion, drunkenness, revenge, love, beauty and fertility. In the same vein, Biokun, (2019: 61) informs that the Dionysian religious ceremonies rehearsals , fire-torch and parades were exciting all0 involving national festival which came to be performed yearly.

History tells us that Islam came into Nigeria through the Arab world. Logically it therefore becomes pertinent to examine the practice of theatre and drama in the Arab world. Ornotoso (1978) reveals that drama 'is the outstanding exception of all genres of modern Arabic which does not have some roots ill the classical literature of the Arabs. Despite this fact however, to say that the Arabs of the classical period Arabic history (622 -- 1258) have no know ledge of what is called drama is not totally correct. Citing what H.A.R. Gibbs called the 'fleeing moment' in classical Arabic literature when drama was almost developed and incorporated into the literature of the Arabs. Omotosho informs that when these ‘fleeing moments’ were closely examined, it was discovered that it was the contact with the West that truncated the development of drama in the Arab world.

Drama that existed then in ancient Eypgt was of a functional and religious nature with texts just serving as mere aid- memoirs for priest. Another example one could point to is the ‘maqamat’ (a session of dramatised story-telling). This was usually performed by a wondering minstrel who earned his living by his wit. Perhaps the most important of these ‘fleeing moments’ was that of the passion play, the ta’ziyyah which is enacted around the murder at karabala of Husayn lost his life has been celebrated annually from the ninth century C.E till the present time. It is on record that Arab playwrights have used drama to propagate their culture religion.

The person, who could be regarded as the father of Arabic theatre according to Oseni (2002) was a Lebanese, called Marun Naqqash (1817-55). It was he who blazed the trail by setting and staging the stage, which later led to the development of the theatre in Arab world. In 1884, he staged an Arabic version of Moliere’s The Miser, which he entitled al-Bakhil. Two years later, he staged Abu al-Hasan al-Muglwffal. (Abu al Hassan the Gullible). This seem to open a floodgate for other writers as people, like Najib Hadad (1869-99), Muhammed ‘Uthman lalal (1828-98), Salim Naqqah and Adib Ishaq started writing. Their writings, however, were carefully tailored to follow the pattern of European drama and tried to imitate Western writers. This set of writers was succeeded by a crop of young, new playwrights who write plays with a measure of originality and competence. These include Ya'qub Sannu, Najib al-Rayhani, 'Abd al=Rahman al-Sharqawi, Ahmad Shawqi, Najib Surur, Farah Antun, MahmGd Taymur and Tawfiq al-Hakim who seem to be the most prolific of them all.

Arabic / Islamic Theatre and Drama in Nigeria

Theatre and Drama in Nigeria has been part of the people's indigenous culture to a large extent. It required no rigorous or long training as most people learnt singing folksongs, and dancing naturally to pass away the time while going about their normal day-to-day activities or as a form of relaxation under the tree in the evening after a hard day's work. With the passage of time, however, the theatre grew from the schools and the church as earlier discussed. In spite of the

booming theatrical activities in Nigeria and its potency as a weapon of education in virtually all spheres of life, Islamic scholars did not take advantage of the situation to propagate Islam.

Fafunwa and Oseni (1982, 2002) in their various submissions noted that the only area where drama was developed was in the private and government Arabic schools. Short Arabic plays were staged by these schools on ceremonial occasions such as the Eid-el Fitr, Eid-el- Kabir, Maulud Nabiyyi (the Prophet's birthday) and Lailatul Qadr (The Night of Majesty', a night in the month of Ramadan when the Qur'an is believed to have been first revealed to the Prophet). The pupils present plays based on the life of the Prophet. These are very similar to the Roman liturgical plays and Medieval miracle plays that succeeded them. According to Oseni (2002), prominent schools noted for such presentations include Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Ilori's the Arabic Training Centre, Agege, Lagos, the Nigerian Arabic Institute, Elekuro, Ibadan, Shaykh Apaokagi's EI-Adabiyyah School for Arabic Students, Owo, Ondo State and the Arabic Institute established in Auchu, Edo State by the Ansar-ud-Deen Society in 1963. Other plays performed by these schools include al-Dahri, Tawaddud al-Jariyah (extracted from the Arabian nights in 1964 by Ya'qub Elamah and Al-tajir wa Sahib al-nuu'am (The Trader and the owner of the Restaurant) by Z.I Oseni, Sulayman wa Bilqis (Solomon and the Queen of Sheba) and AI-Nabi Yusuf(The Prophet Yusuf).

Within the academia, there is ample evidence that Arabic and Islamic theatre is taught in many Universities. In fact, Professor Z. I. Oseni's al-Amid al-Mubajjal (The Honourable Dean) (1994) is the first published Arabic play by a Nigerian. The second one is Ustadh Raguna Anfihi (A Teacher by Compulsion) by Shaykh Mas'iid Abdul-Ghani Adebayo (Chief Imam of Oyo). Oseni had published two other plays captioned AI-Tajir Wa Sahib al-Mat'am (The Trader and the Restaurateur, 2005) and Al- Tabaqat al-Ulya (The Upper Class, 2006). Recently, Dr. B. Adetunji published a play entitled Baqd' Muqddar (Born to Survive, 2005). So also is Abdul-Ohani Alabi Adebayo who published Qad Ghiirat al-Nujum (The Stars had set in 2005). All these have socio- ethical themes rooted in Islamic cosmology.

However. it is unfortunate that writing and performance of Islamic plays by these scholars is yet to be fully developed. Apart from this writer and a handful of Muslim artistes like Bashir Akande who wrote skits for University of Ibadan Muslim Students Society presented during the welcoming night for new students, there had been not much in that regard. The reason many adduced for this is that Islam abhors drama that is imbedded with polytheistic ideas. Another school of thought submits that Islam forbids dancing, singing and use of representational art. From their perspective, therefore, theatre does nothing other than to corrupt the society through its practice. This easily brings to mind the view of John Northbrook, a Western critic who poured venom on artistes and then recommended in his article "A Treatise Against Dicing" Dancing, Plays and Interludes" (1973: 162) that "artistes should be taken for rogues and punishment appointed for them is to be burnt through the ear with a hot iron of an inch compass".

While this writer agrees absolutely that Islam must not condone debauchery, immoral acts and indecent dressing under any guise whatsoever, it should be realized that there is no profession that does not have its dark sides. It will, therefore be foolhardy to throwaway the bath water and the baby. Or do we go nude because some people wear scanty clothes that hardly cover the body? Absolutely no! In the same vein, it should be noted that theatre and drama, just like any other profession could be used positively or negatively. It is in this regard that another English critic, Jeremy Collier advocated for a better use of theatre in his article entitled "A Short View of

the Immorality and the Profaneness of the English Stage"(1973:351) where he was very succinct and direct as regards the social functions of theatre and drama. He argued as follows:

The business of plays is to recommend virtues and discountenance vice; to show the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice; 'tis to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible and to bring everything that is ill under infamy and neglect.

It is on this premise that this writer believes Islamic scholars should approach the use of theatre and drama. It is also against this backdrop that this writer and a few others write plays and skits for the University of Ibadan Muslim Students' Society which were usually staged on the mosque ground during the welcoming party for new students. It is also worthy to mention that such plays/skits are intentionally put at the end of the programme so as to keep the audience on their seats because the moment the play ends, they (audience) tend to take their leave. This writer also writes for the youth wing of the Muslim Association of Nigeria (MAN) Ibadan branch. The plays are presented during their annual camp week. Such plays and skits do not only entertain; they also educate as they are usually thematically woven round a social vice which has an Islamic resolution

One major organization which, in its quest for religious propagation and education, makes extensive use of drama and theatre to inform, and enter-educate the people is Mr. Rasheed Akinbiles' Sufi Caring and Sharing Centre, located at scout camp area in Ibadan. This writer had on numerous occasions assisted in scripting various stories from the Qur'an that were later dramatized by the drama troupe of the centre. What this writer is trying to imply is the importance of theatre in educating the populace. The theatre, just like any other profession, can be used positively or negatively. Therefore, any attempt to resist practice of theatre and drama in a secular society like ours is tantamount to fighting a lost battle. There is hardly any home in Nigeria today where people do not watch drama either on stage, television or home video. Quoting Ibn Majar, Basheer Hajaltom (1982:94) reported the Prophet as saying that "The search for knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim". It is also believed that Allah enjoined all Muslims to search for knowledge as far, as the end of the world. Again, Hajaltom quoted the Prophet as saying "Whoever among you sees any evil doing let him change it with his hand; If he cannot do it, let him change it with his tongue; and if he cannot do it, let him change it with his heart and that shows the weakest faith".

If such is true, and it is equally true that all knowledge comes from God who does not discriminate, it therefore becomes expedient on theatre and drama practitioners to ply their trade not only for the propagation of Islam but also for the betterment of the society.

Conceptualizing Islamic ethics, values and drama.

Ethics refer to moral principles governing or influencing people's behavior. Islamic ethics however goes beyond these in that it contains some religious inclination. Islamic ethics is meant to build a society free from vices and entrenched with fear of Allah. It is therefore built on such values such as; wisdom, truth, justice, love, goodness, beauty, steadfastness, piety or fear of God, self denial or abstinence, sympathy or sacrifice, and love for the prophet (PBOH). On the other

hand, disruption of lives through vices which are direct opposite of these ethical values are nothing but the values to life and the society. Therefore, suicide, infanticide, murder, arson, rumour mongering, offensive nicknames etc must be avoided because they are against Islamic ethics. All these though can be read literarily, they form the crux of theatrical engagement for the society. It is pertinent to examine the thematic preoccupation of some issues treated in the plays.

Wisdom: Wisdom is a human idea. It is something which is distinguished from conjecture and imperfect knowledge. Allah advised the prophet to pray for advance in knowledge prophet Nuhu Dawud, Suleiman and others possessed considerable knowledge.

Allah says in the Qur'an

“When he attained his maturity and became full grown,
we granted him wisdom and knowledge
and thus We reward those who do good (Qur'an 28 :14)“

Truth: In Islam, it is ethical to always say the truth no matter what it takes. Truth is one of the attributes of Allah. Allah frowned on those who tell lies and says
“woe unto those who fails to tell the truth in
the day after (Qur'an 74:45)

Love: Man shall show love to God as a complete embodiment of all moral values are above everything else. Man should be kind and loving to parents especially the mothers who bear him in pain upon pain and gave birth to him in travail. Love should be extended to the kins and neighbours far or near strangers and wayfarers and love for the indigent. Prophet Musa was advised to speak to

Pharaoh gently with love. Therefore the Muslims should be compassionate and love one another. They should forgive and overlook what others might have done even though it put them in danger. Allah says in the Qur'an:
serve god and not any partners with him in love and do good
in love to parents kings fork orphans those in need neighbours
who are near neighbours or strangers the companion by your side
the wayfarer you meet and what to write had process for god loves
not the arrogant the vainglorious (Qur'an 4:36)

All this can of course be expressed through theatrical practices which will invariably wewent understood by the audience

Beauty: God possesses most beautiful names and highest excellence. Man is created in the in the best of mould and is given the most beautiful shape. The most beautiful revelation is from God where righteousness is a beautiful companion and so that Qur'an gives beautiful preaching. Exchange of greetings is part of beauty in Islam as well as exchange of good for evil is an ideal, while beautiful deeds will attract highest reward in this world and in the hereafter. (Sheriff; 1963: 164).

Allah says in the Qur'an: He created the heavens
And the earth With truth, and He shaped to you, then made
goodly your shapes and unto Him is the result (Qur'an 64 :3)

Consumption of alcoholic drinks is regarded in Islam as a moral decadence of the highest order. The impact of this felt greatly by non muslims during Ramadan. Most beer palours, restaurants, hotels and inns are closed to customers only to be opened briefly at night. The partial withdrawal of the fasting Muslims from taking alcohol in order to maintain their moral uprightness during the month has greater impact on a non muslim colleagues because the latter were left isolated in the hotels, in their respective homes or briefly at their usual rendezvous whenever opportunity affords itself.

The goal of Islamic ethics is to inculcate in the mind of the adherents of the religion God consciousness. Adequate training in Islamic ethics through theatrical productions enables the potential accountant or doctor or an engineer to be God conscious having thus imbibed enough moral ideals like honesty humility self discipline which are all packed in a well rehearsed theatrical production with which you will dutifully practice is profession and the lack of which might lead him to professional misconduct

Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of Islamic ethics is to inculcate in the mind of the adherents of the religion God consciousness. Adequate training in Islamic ethics through theatrical productions enables the potential accountant or doctor or an engineer to be God conscious having thus imbibed enough moral ideals like honesty humility self discipline which are all packed in a well rehearsed theatrical production.

Having brought to the fore the evolution of theatre and drama and its importance in education and religious propagation, one could conclusively say that the practice of theatre in our society should be given more encouragement. Arabic and Islamic Scholars should find a way and see how theatre and drama could be used positively towards religious propagation and world peace attainment.

In addition, it is better to learn from antecedents. When theatre initially started in ancient Rome, there was serious antagonism towards it. The church eventually barred all actors from coming to church. However, when it was realized that people preferred to go and watch the actors rather than come to church, the church threw its doors wide open to the actors and they (actors) were encouraged to stage stories from the Holy Bible. This marked the beginning of liturgical plays.

In the light of the above, it is hereby suggested that all verbal, financial, spiritual and moral attacks on theatre and drama as well as the practitioners should cease with immediate effect. Muslims should use the theatre and drama to teach religious morals to children and society at large without compromising the strict tenets of Islam. It is my belief that this is possible, rewarding and admirable.

Though some Islamic theatre practitioners like Bashir Akande, Kareem Adepoju (a.k.a Baba Wande) and these writers are trying their best in this regard, a lot of ground need to be covered. While these writers and Bashir Akande are in the academia, Kareem Adepoju runs a television series programme entitled Iwa Le'sin {Behaviour is a reflection of religion} where he used various chapters of the Holy Qur'an to settle conflicts and explain knotty issues hitherto raised in the play. Muslim parents should encourage their children and wards to study Theatre. Dramatic, Creative or Performing Arts in the Universities. Philanthropists are also enjoined to sponsor Islamic productions and give grants to playwrights to write scripts for stage, television and film.

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