



MUSLIMS TEENAGE HAWKING IN NASARAWA TOWN: AN ABERRATION TO ISLAMIC NORMS AND CULTURE

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Abstract

The practices of hawking by the teenagers or under-aged children and have far-reaching consequences on their lives. It brings about a kind of loose family control. The hawkers eventually and gradually lost interest in education and schooling of whatever form. Petty materialism and high degree of sexual promiscuity, especially among the female Muslim hawkers become habitual in their characters. Uncultured people in the society take them to be sort of commercial instruments for sexual satisfaction. This paper intends to bring to the notice of public, especially Muslim, on the consequences this practice that is an aberration to the Islamic norms. The paper discovered that education of Muslim female teenagers in Nasarawa town and environment is affected by hawking practice. It's recommended that Muslim family should look for an alternative commercial work in place of teenage hawking.

Keywords: Muslims, Teenage Hawking, Nasarawa Town, Islamic, Norms, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Nasarawa Local Government is one of the 13th local governments in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The town housed the headquarters of the local government. The town was founded by one Umaru Makama Dogo in 1835. He was said to have a stop-over in Keffi, before he made his way and found what is now called Nasarawa. The town is predominantly Hausa/Fulani Muslims and are influenced by Islamic culture and traditions, hence the hawking practice negatively affected the well-known Islamic traditions and norms, the development that call for proper investigation.

Origin of Teenage Hawking in Nasarawa Town

Hawking is described as walking around, offering goods for sale. It includes going from house to house, streets to streets, public places, hotels, recreational places or gatherings and ceremonial places with petty articles or goods for sale. It also includes going about spreading gossips, rumours and fake news.

Mallam Usman Tailor explained that, female teenage hawking in Nawarawa town, started as tradition by young girls known as “Yammata”. They can be underage girls, close to marriage age or are spinsters, would had their bath, dressed in traditional fashion or attires and go out in the evening to a certain square, they meet with ‘samari’ bachelors of their age groups, where they chatted on love affairs.

Usman Tailor said, in a later development, the idea of cooking some farm products by these girls to their bachelors’ friends came up. Their bachelors’ friends according to Usman, purchased raw food items and handed to their girlfriends to cook and distribute to their bachelors friend. Competitions among these girls on who cook best arise; each girl could possibly have her own spouse, so they distribute these food items free. A girl would be happy to see that her food finished before other girls as a mark of love she had from boys around.

Parents of these girls too would be happy to provide what a girl would carry to the gathering or square free because they know one day their female children would eventually get husbands in that manner. (Usman) The system of distributing free cooked items by girls continued for long as a means of traditional way whereby marriages come about. It also enables the male children to have choice where courtship began and engagements resulted in marriage.

However, with the economic hardship that affected the most societies, the scarcity of foodstuff, free cooked food items ceased to exist. Girls would cook to the gathering but began to sale on a small amount. These began the practice of hawking by teenage girls as a commercial enterprise, these girls not only stayed in gathering but move about from place to place. The practice continues up to today.

The hawking by teenagers became prevalent in most societies nowadays and is done not only by female teenagers, male children can also be seen hawking from morning till night every day.

Hawking Items

In Nasarawa town, petty articles which are commonly found in the head of hawkers are not meant for any large scale economic transaction but are mere eatables because of the poverty level of the society. Many people do not afford food from restaurants; they always patronize food from these hawkers. The consumable items such as porage, beans cake, cooked rice, annual fruits, fried yams with eggs etc. Hawking items nowadays include pure water, lady dress, household materials soup ingredients others are bread, coke, (Kunu zaki) etc.

Reasons Adduced for Teenage Hawking

The interviews done to the stakeholders in Nasarawa town such as house wives, religious leaders, civil servants and hawkers themselves revealed so many reasons adduced by them for engaging in such petty commercial exercise.

Inability of Male Couples to Discharge their House Hold Responsibilities (Goshi)

A house wife said that some husband left the responsibilities of feeding and clothing to their wives, situations that left women with no other choice than to push their female children to streets to hawk for daily food to the family.

Misunderstood Hawking for Regular Trade

One of my sources told me that many people misunderstand hawking for trade. They therefore considered it as a kind of trade orientations given to children, especially female ones, so that if they grew up and in later time, they would not remain idle in their husband house. What these children learnt during hawking period, could equally use it to get their income.

She went on to say that this hawking practice is in essence would make female children not to depend solely on her husband to provide everything they needed she therefore said illiterate people believe that hawking is home occupation for married women, therefore by cooking hawks female children are also learning home economic. She further said that a newly married woman is given a small girl from her family. Possibly her younger sister to go along with her, this she said is purposely to assist her in her hawking business in her new home. She also has to train her in different items of hawk just as he was trained by her mother or relative.

A girl hawker admitted to me that a girl who does not hawk and has nothing doing could resort to stealing money from her mother's purse, and there is every possibilities for her, stealing her husband's money if

she is doing nothing even if the husband provides her since her needs may be more than what the husbands can afford she assumed that hawking is better than stealing. They hawk, she said in order to satisfy their economic needs, since their parents and “husbands” if they marry cannot provide them all what they need always.

Although, she agreed with one that hawking is not a kind of trade accepted by Islam, but she said that they have to do because they want money.

Hawking as a Means of Getting Suitors

Majority of whom I interviewed one of the opinion that this is a means whereby a girl or boy gets a life partner. Hajiya Mairo said that in her opinion, by hawking, girls come into contact with many people and eventually make friends and consequently get or select one of them as her choice as husband, which she said would not have been possible should she remain at home.

These movements and interactions during hawking she said could eventually fetch her quite a number of suitors, otherwise known as “purpose or fiancé”, those who would seek her hands for marriage. That gives her the opportunity to make a reasonable selection among them, she also maintains that girls who are hawkers can get married easier than those who do not go out because people are not aware of their existence. Mallam Muhammad Awwal also is of the opinion that, the issue of girls going out with the intention that people might see her and later come to woo her for marriage is certainly responsible for the early practice of hawking in our society, and indeed help to its persistence to this day. He said that, he has observed in many places matured girls would come out, well dressed with head items on their head, pretended to be hawking, but along such girls are only looking for an opportunity for anybody to talk to them for marriage. He said that he even confirmed it from many parents who told him that they have many of their matured daughters ready for marriage but boys nowadays do not want to marry even though those girls move out possibly for people to see them.

Hawkers act as informants

Another reason adduced for hawking is that hawkers act as informants to their mothers at home. This is the opinion of Mrs. Hauwa Ahmed, a civil servant, who said that since the women in “Seclusion” are always at home, they therefore have no access to what is happening within and outside towns and villages. The only link she said, between them and the outside events are through their children hawkers. That is why immediately hawkers come back home, they would try to narrate to their mothers all that they saw in and around the town. She said moreover, adulterous women usually make their hawking daughters to be a link between them and their fellow adulterers somewhere within the town. They do that by sending their daughters to collect information and sometimes money for them from such men, but pretending as if they are selling their hawks. They could go as far as arranging through hawkers as to when and where they meet with those men whenever they want to do so.

Hawking as a result of poverty

In yet another reason adduced for hawking is that poverty is one main factor responsible for it. Mallam Isa Usman observed that while some families are extremely poor even though employed, others are not employed totally.

Those facilities he said cannot sustain them hawking by their children to them is a matter of necessity. He said he has seen a situation where children are hired in one house to hawk in another house simply because

the parents do not have the money to buy the items of hawking their children therefore act as commodities for hiring, and their labour in hawking is what the parents would eat that day.

There are many cases where a family head had to wait for their teenage hawkers to bring money before getting what to cook for the evening meal. Whereas, some family heads only provide foodstuff for the house, leaving the soup ingredients in the hands of their wives. The unemployed wives do nothing other than to send their children to hawk. Mallam Isa reasoned that hawking practice is on the increase. This in his opinion is because of the economic predicament that we are experiencing. He said the cost of living is on the increase and the corresponding incomes of many families nowadays are decreasing, many families this time depended solely on their children to hawk in order to get money for everything needed in the house.

If there is no money to buy items for hawking, as initial capital, children had to be hired by their house or should be sent to do other jobs, like attendants in food hotels, washing cars, conductors, land carriers and even be guides to the blind beggars, all of which are certainly child abuses.

Hawking as a Custom/Tradition

Many people unfortunately come to believe that teenage hawking is a Muslim tradition which Islam accept, with no any reflections on it consequences on children, this is the opinion of Mallam Akaramakallaha. He said that hawking by teenagers especially female ones is what they grow up and found it was practiced for years within the Islamic communities; he said people therefore see nothing wrong in doing; it has then become part of Muslims custom of trading by young people. More so, he said when one observe most house including those of Imans, Emirs, religious leaders and teachers together with even some influential persons in the community. Their children hawk in the street, therefore it is considered acceptable in Islam, one religious leaders do not look at the danger involve in it least to preach against the practice and for that reason it continued from generations till date.

The Islamic Norm is against Teenage Hawking

There are so many evils that are associated with the hawking practice in Nasarawa town which are considered as an aberration to the clear norms and traditions of Islam.

Hawking can Temper and destroy the Educational Development of Children

A renowned scholar of Islam, Abubakar Gumi said: Education in Islam should not only gear toward attaining knowledge, it is to stimulate the learner's moral and spiritual consciousness. That is to train the learner toward intellectualism and rational self-actualization.

The training impacted on children according to Alghazali must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality and create in him an emotional attachment to Islam and enables him to follow the Quran and Sunnah with knowledge, and understanding.

Such norms certainly cannot be found with the teenage hawkers. They are in most time illiterates and ignorant because they do not have time to attend and kind of school. Moreso, the parents of hawkers in Nasarawa town consider undesirability of female education, let alone, western education. Some of the hawkers could camouflaged or pretended to leave their houses for hawking but actually could only be loosed around the houses of some uncultured persons in the society thereby create religious and spiritual aberration. Islam is the religion of knowledge and practice with adequate knowledge. Allah said:

- Those truly fear Allah among his servants is them who have knowledge. Also Allah raise people of knowledge above all others Qr 58:11.

Many hawkers do not perform daily prayers: it need secured and clean place, body and minds purifications, performance of ablution and clean place for prostration. A child that roamed in the streets and any kinds of place from morning to evening do not perform these rituals of prayers let alone. The parents of hawkers send them very early in the morning to hawk. They wash their faces not for prayers but to clean or clear away the remnants of sleep in their eyes to enable them see clearly. The parents (mother) of hawkers themselves do not have the habit of praying, the father only wake up and go to mosque without checking who pray in house. Household in Nasarawa town are more concern with what their children would gather in terms of materials for their future marriage. No religious obligations are entertained, but traditions and customs have replaced Islam rituals and norms (Hajia Goshi).

Moral and Social Aberration

Scholars of Islam in Nigeria, prominently among them was late Mahmud Gumi discussed hawking as an unfortunate development which took like trading but runs contrary to Islamic moral norms (adabul Islamiyyah). He said literally speaking, hawking strikes at the very root of Islamic civilization in this part of the Islamic world called Nigeria in general.

Sheik Gumi opined that illiteracy situation in Northern Nigerian societies could be attributed to hawking practice in that, it become a cycles. A hawker that is married out is given as company another sister of hers to do no other job for her than hawking. The situation continues to date. As the result, immorality exists as if it were the permanent features in Islamic society.

He concluded that the situations are products of prostitutions of married women, hooliganisms, disrespect for family, theft that originated form hawking, robbery and disease carriers. The hawkers are mostly unchaste right from their early ages and therefore corruptions and adultery are never viewed as evil in the area.

Gero A, 1996, divided the female hawkers into three categories; first class, second class and third class. The first classes are mostly selling fried chickens, cakes, eggs, household material and the likes. These hawkers are from average family standard, they are not from poor background as such but are there to attract and lured high level class in the society. They look for money beyond what articles they sell. The second categories are found selling things likes Oranges, bananas, groundnuts etc. Their customers are mostly commercial drivers, shop-owners traders and low income workers where they lured them to sexual behaviours.

The third categories are sometime underage girls, articles for sell are put in tray or rubber, they are counted, and customers only need to take a group and give them money. Car-washers, truck pushers, lepers, and beggars on the street are their customers. All of these categories of street hawkers are liable to illicit sexual affairs in the name of commercial transaction.

Measures taken by Islam to Sustain Moral Norms

There are a lot of measures taken by Islam in order to maintain and sustain moral behaviours by Muslims especially female folks, because they are the most vulnerable in the society.

Women according to Islam are not allowed to expose their body parts that are sensitive of attractions by the opposite sex. Allah said:

- Prophet, enjoin your wives and your daughters and the believing women, to cover their body when going out so as not be molested. Qr. 33:59.

If a woman is dressed sexually in the streets, she is attracting molestation by opposite sex and therefore is an aberration to the Islamic norms.

Men are enjoined to take care of women in all aspect of their lives, as mother, wife, daughter and sister, they are always dependents of men. Allah said:

- Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one them (men) to excel the other to spend and support them from their means. Qr. 4:34.

It is therefore an aberration for a woman to sell her body in the name of commercial activities, because she is supposed to be taking care of by men in the society.

Women are enjoined to guard their behaviours toward their appearance. Allah said:

- And tell the believing women to lower their gaze from looking at forbidden thing and protect their sex parts from illegal sexual acts, and not to show off their beauty to the outside world. Qr 24:31.

It is therefore an aberration for Muslim women to let themselves loose in character and behaviours, allowing their under-aged female children to roam about from streets to streets, place to place without education and ethical norms.

CONCLUSION

Muhammed Asa, a renowned Islamic scholar and historian after carefully studied the rise and fall of Islamic civilization wrote thus:

- It was not the Muslims that had made Islam great; it was rather Islam that had made the Muslim great during medieval period. However, as soon as their faith become habit and ceased to be a programme of life, to be consciously pursued, the creative impulse that underline their civilizations waned and gradually gave way to indolence, sterility, and cultural decay and aberrations.
- It is from these academic observations that the conclusion came. The society that pursue or throw their young ones into streets in the name of hawking without education and ethical conduct, are digging the grave for their future destructions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Northern Nigeria government in general and Nasarawa town in particular should make education not only compulsory but should be free because of the inherent poverty in the area.
- The authority in Nasarawa town should prohibit streets hawking by teenagers and under-aged children in the town.
- Islamic scholars should form awareness groups with the aim of preaching to the residents the evils associated with teenage hawking.
- Muslim parents should find alternative home trading that do not involve sending their under-age to hawk in the streets and other dangerous places not conducive for children roaming about.
- Teaching of Islam on acceptable form of commercial transaction by women should be followed strictly by the Muslim women.

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