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the honour of yellow brothers and sisters, Amin

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NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS (N. Y. S. C): THE ISLAMIC IMPLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of each academic session, the new graduates from Nigerian and overseas Universities including polytechnics are mobilized and posted to various states throughout the Federation, to render compulsory services to their father land, for the period of 12 months. Graduates from southern part of the country are posted to the Northern part. Likewise, those from Eastern part are posted to Western part and vice versa. This exercise which started in 1973 enhances unity and integration among different tribes in the country under the auspices of the NYSC scheme. However, this humble work traces the origin of this scheme and discusses its aims and objectives in the light of Islamic teachings.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the Nigerian civil war a need was felt during General Yakubu Gowon's Government that certain measures had to be taken in order to "Consolidate our gains in the task of nation building and integration in order to make further progress possible".¹ In pursuance of its objective, twelve states were created in 1968 in addition to the policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.² This notwithstanding, it was still felt that:

*to build an enduring national unity, Nigerian youths from all ethnic groups – (i) ought to be mobilized and put in the forefront of the task of nation – building and integration, (ii) patriotism, dedication to the Nigerian nationhood and mutual respect and understanding of the different ethnic groups that constitute the people of Nigerian ought to be deliberately engineered and nurtured.*³

Equally, the need to mobilize youths towards realizing nation building and integration became imperative considering the fact that youths are leaders of tomorrow.⁴ Also, the concern showed by the students of universities of Ibadan, Ife, Lagos and Ahmadu Bello who joined the armed forces during the civil war and their aspiration to play a positive role in the

realization of the three Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) set by the Federal Military Government, were greatly noticed.⁵ And while one may give credence to the saying that leaders are born, not made, one must also concede to the fact that the leadership in a modern society requires a certain degree of preparation and orientation before the assumption of that role.⁶ Bearing all the above in mind, the scheme, National Youth Service Corps, Decree No 24 which has now been repealed and replaced by Decree 51 of 16th June 1993 was formally promulgated⁷ in May 1973 with motto: SERVICE AND HUMILITY

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As it is with all projects the NYSC scheme aspires to achieve certain goals. These, as spelt out in Decree No 51 of 16th June 1993 are:

- (i) (a). to inculcate discipline in Nigerian Youth by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves.
- (b). to raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideas of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.
- (c). to develop in the Nigerian youth the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- (d). to enable Nigerian youth acquire the spirit of self reliance by encouraging them develop skills for self employment.
- (e). to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy;
- (f). to develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration.
- (g). to remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
- (h). to develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigerian

- (ii) in order to achieve the objectives in sub section (3) of this section, the service corps shall ensure :-
 - a. the equitable distribution of members of the service corps and effective utilization of their skills and area of national needs.

- b. that as far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin.
- c. that such group of youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigerian as far as possible.
- d. that the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria,
- e. that Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences.
- f. that members for the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one years national service career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labourer.
- g. that employers are induced partly through their experiences with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their states or religions.⁸

ISLAM AND THE YOUTHS

Islam considers youths as indispensable and required instrument for the development of any given society and leaders of tomorrow. With this in mind, Islam provides comprehensive and effective method of youth training. Oloyede refers to this method as Lugmanic paradigm for youth development.⁹ The fact that such method is inferred from the conversation reported in the Qur'an, between Lugman and his son, informs the adoption of "Lugmanic paradigm...." by Oloyede. Allah says:

We bestowed (in the past) wisdom on Lugman: show (thy) gratitude to Allah". Any who is (so) grateful does so to the profit of his own soul: But if any is ungrateful, verily Allah is free of all want, Worthy of all praise.

Behold, Lugman said to his son by way of instruction;

O my son! Join not in worship (others) with God: for false worship is indeed the highest wrong doing. And we have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: ...

Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (your final) Goal. "But if they strive to make you join in worship with the things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (And consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me (In love): In the End the return of you all is to Me,

and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that you did.

O my son (said Luqman), "if there be (but) the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it forth: for Allah understands the finest mysteries, (and) is well acquainted (with them).

O my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong: and bear with patient whatever befalls you; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of) affairs. And swell not you cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; Allah loves not any arrogant boaster.

And be moderate in you pace, and lower your voice: for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass.¹⁰

Certainly, the verses quoted above represent the Islamic model of youth training. As outlined by Oloyede, a number of lessons contained in them include:

- (i) Avoidance of injustice. It is injustice to ascribe absolute authority to any sources besides Allah.
- (ii) Appreciation of parental goodness through kindness and love to them and by implication the same things to others.
- (iii) Accountability to Allah.
- (iv) Discretion and responsibility. love, appreciation and loyalty are no acceptable excuse for committal of offence of sins. A youth with his faculty is liable for his deeds.
- (v) Association with virtues and virtuous ones.
- (vi) All secrets are open and shall ultimately be revealed; therefore do not hide under anonymity or illusion of secrecy to commit injustice or crime.
- (vii) Inculcation of art and act of worship. Submission totally to Allah.
- (viii) Promotion of virtues.
- (ix) Prevention of vice.
- (x) Endurance and perseverance.
- (xi) Humility and courtesy.

(xii) Moderation and emotion!!

A critical look at the above will reveal that the basis of Islamic way of building responsible leaders of tomorrow (youths) is Oneness of Allah, the Creator of the Universe. Once a youth satisfies this, he has already found a solid foundation for himself to be a responsible leader of tomorrow. This model presupposes the belief of a youth (and generally mankind) that all creatures, himself inclusive, animal, heaven, earth, the Sun, stars, and the Moon are but handiwork of Allah. Hence, there is a need for acknowledgement of such wonderful and Merciful Creator. However, there is no way better to acknowledge Him except by total submission to His wills and not associating any partner to Him.¹²

Close to the first model is being good to ones parents as a way of appreciation to their ordeals before and after one's birth.¹³ This goodness is unconditional even if they dictate something forbidden. While, such forbidden act (Shirk) should not be carried out, a cordial relationship with them is always mandatory. For no matter how minute an action may be, Allah sees and judges sooner or later. In fact, this represents another Islamic model of building a responsible youth.

As the only differentiating factor between a Muslim and non-Muslim, prayer, for example, is placed at the high pedestal. This act of worship as a model of building not only the youths but Muslims generally, is very important. It provides worshipers with immunity against evil acts.¹⁴ Immediately attached to the act of worship is the need to always enjoy what is good and forbid what is bad.¹⁵

No doubt, Islamic models of training and building a responsible leaders of tomorrow are all practical and effective. The Prophet (S.A.W.) as a youth was an embodiment of such models. He was a role model¹⁶ as well as an exemplary leader. His proven character was acknowledged by Muslims and non-Muslim alike. Although, yet to be a prophet, he was nicknamed Al-Amin (a trust worthy and dependable one) for his impeccable characters.

The prophetic tradition equally strives to ensure that youths are well modeled so as to become responsible leaders of tomorrow. Knowing fully well that youths are vulnerable to social vices and hooliganism resulting from in-built ego in human beings generally, the Prophet (S.A.W.) provided a preventive measure to check such negative tendency. This preventive measure is two-fold; marriage and or fasting if there is no minimum means to engage in marriage. Importantly, fasting has a way of purifying soul from social ills which bedevil youths, any mankind.¹⁷

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NYSC SCHEME IN THE LIGHT OF ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Looking at its theoretical advantage, the purposes of NYSC which include inculcation in the Nigerian youths the spirit of selfless service to the community, the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians¹⁸ as well as its set goals¹⁹ among others, the scheme may be Islamically endorsed. The reason is not far fetched.

Islam, as a religion, regulates the relationship between a Muslim and Allah on the one hand and between him and his fellow creatures on the other hand.²⁰ It takes into consideration both spiritual and mundane aspects of human development using its golden means. While a Muslim is spiritually ordained to establish a communion with his creator via *salat* and other ritual acts, he is as well obliged to establish a healthy relationship with his parents and others in all matters. Islam, for example, preaches peace, respect and good relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. It decries compulsion in a matter of religion.²¹ It does not encourage aggression or attack against people of other religion, especially when they do not constitute any threat or persecute them.²² Equally, Islam recognizes the existence of diverse tribes and communities with their peculiar culture and customs.²³ It sues, always for peaceful co-existence emanating from mutual understanding and respect for other's religion, race and culture.²⁴ To this end, Islam is in agreement with NYSC scheme.

Nevertheless, there are contradictions in some of the NYSC scheme objectives. This can be seen when one looks at the activities which take place in the orientation camp where youth Corps stay for three weeks after the call up.

One may submit that paramilitary training activities—like drills, physical training and elementary field craft, Man O' war activities comprising circuit training, obstacle, rope climbing and elementary first aid²⁵ are encouraged by the noble prophet (SAW) for proper fitness.²⁶ However, other activities in the camp are anti-moral, negating article (1) sub section (b) of the objective of the NYSC scheme. This submission is not based on a mere conjecture. Far from that, it is a practical experience of the writer. "Seeing is believing" the saying goes.

Ideally, in the course of building a viable society through massive mobilization and orientation of youths, morality is supposed to be the bedrock. And any scheme devoid of such is bound to crumble.

Morality is the term which corresponds to *akhlak* in Islamic sources.²⁷ It could be defined as discipline of the mind and manners, good education and good breeding, politeness, a mode of conduct of behaviors.²⁸ It is the

science of virtues and the way to acquire them, of vices and the way how to guard against them. Its subject is innate disposition (*akhlak*), the acquired virtues and the rational soul as far as it is affected by them.²⁹ The above definitions portray the Islamic concept of morality. It instills in man some qualities and virtues which make a responsible and conscious mankind. All put together in a youth make a good leader of tomorrow who will manage the affairs of his subjects with utmost sincerity and accountability.

We believe, no right – thinking parents will visit the orientation camp and be satisfied with the high rate of immorality which permeates the camp. In fact, upon his assessment of the camp, a critical observer will have no choice but describes the scene in the camp as a resort of harlots and indeed an industry of social vices. The unchecked and free mixture of both sexes accounts for this description and submission.

Also, the rigorous and military-like training in which female, like their male counter-parts are compelled to participate in what does not suit the feeble and fragile nature of womanhood. In the same vein, the training kits (top- shirt and short pant) designed for females and males indiscriminately breeds and stimulates indecency and obscenity.

However, some conscious Muslims, males and females (and some decent corps members) do try to reject this immoral and indecent way of dressing. While the latter put on a semi trouser outfit which covers knees, the former adorn their veils and pairs of trousers. This modification, is not objected to by camp officials.

Indeed, immoral activities in the orientation camp may have vindicated the earlier opposition from parents, students and Nigerian press, at the time when the scheme was being nursed.³⁰ Of recent, due to increasing rate of unemployment, many Nigerians have called for the scrapping of the scheme suggesting that 12 month allowance be paid to the new graduates at a go to encourage self-employment the government is agitating for.

But for the unrelenting efforts of Muslim Corpsers Association of Nigeria (MCAN), the orientation camp could have been a lion den for Muslims who jealously guide their faith and live an Islamic life. Most interesting is the ability of the Association to organize PARADISE NIGHT PARTY in place of as CAMP FIRE NIGHT.³¹

CONCLUSION

It could be seen from the foregoing that the NYSC scheme was introduced because of the loft aims and objectives which no rational being can contest theoretically. The scheme has recorded a tremendous

success in the area of promotion of common cultural ties and fostering bonds of relationship among people as some youth corps get married to one another, notwithstanding their different cultural backgrounds and languages.

Having said so, the scheme would have been considered an effective training platform for the youths who are the leaders of tomorrow if morality is regarded as its bedrock. Unfortunately, morality is not given any proper consideration in the quest of the scheme to prepare potential leaders of tomorrow. However, for the scheme to meet the target, religious leaders should be involved in its activities to in order to check male immoralities that are common in the camp.

We are not unaware of the fact that Islam and Christianity are the two predominant religions in Nigeria, For this reason. *Imams* and Pastors should be engaged during the orientation camp to preach morality to the youths, otherwise, the N.Y.C.S scheme could be described as Allah describes gambling and intoxicants which He says: are useful and harmful as well, but the degree of their harmfulness outweighs their usefulness³²

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29. Adebayo *cit* p.23
30. FIRE NIGHT CAMP is a night party organized inside the camp on the eve of passing out ceremony. Various forms of immorality take place there. But in an attempt to rescue and discourage Muslim from such immoral event ,MCAN normally organizes simultaneously PARADISE NIGHT where Quranic competition , Quiz and Lecture take place.
31. Q: 2: 219.