

Is Democracy Liberationist? The Gospel According To Late Malam SA'ADU ZUNGUR (1914-1958)

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Abstract: Malam Sa'adu Zungur a poet, Media practitioner, a detribalised Nigerian and a progressive politician of ideas was a leading Pro-democracy activist among the Nigerian Nationalist. The democratic ideas he espoused throughout his political career right from his membership of the NCNC to his activities in the NEPU showed Sa'adu as a politician committed to the unity of the country as well as the establishment of Social justice. More particularly his poems of *Arewa Jumhuriya ko Mulukiya* (The north: Republic or Monarchy) and *Jihadin Sawaba* (struggle for Dignity and freedom) were a clear expression of his liberationist ideas. Though Sa'adu subscribes to the idea of continuity with indigenous Institutions but he insists that they need to be purged of undemocratic and anti-developmental beliefs and practices. The fight against Poverty, Illiteracy and Injustice are cornerstones in the struggle for the establishment of true democracy in the ideas of Malam Sa'adu. The paper intends to present a brief biography of Malam Sa'adu Zungur outlining his political struggles. The democratic ideals espoused by Sa'ad through his literary works will be discussed and his commitment and fearlessness in the pursuit of his beliefs and the establishment of a new social order for his immediate community and Nigeria at large will be highlighted.

Keywords: Commitment, Democracy, Illiteracy, Liberation, Social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Malam Sa'adu Zungur was a Nationalist who had a vision of the kind Nigeria he would want see emerged after independence. It is a united country where justice, equity, liberty and freedom reigned supreme. This vision is poignantly expressed in his various literary works. This paper seeks to x-ray some of his poems to reveal his concern for the psychological transformation of individuals as well as his liberationist ideas. In this endeavour the paper will draw much of its information from Malam Sa'adu's poems of *Jihadin Neman Sawaba* (Struggle for Freedom) and *Arewa Jumhuriya ko Mulukiya* (The North: Republic or Monarchy ?).

Brief Biography of Malam Sa'adu

Ahmad Mahmud Sa'adu Zungur was born on 24 November 1914 in Ganjuwa ward of Bauchi metropolis. He started his early Islamic education under his father Muhammadu Bello the chief Imam of Bauchi central Mosque and a renowned Islamic scholar in Bauchi and its environs. At a very tender age Sa'adu acquired a good grasp of Islamic sciences. Infact reading was his hobby. With the introduction of Western education in Bauchi Sa'adu enrolled into the Bauchi Provincial Primary School in 1920 when he was just about Six years old. Sa'adu was adjudged a brilliant boy and by 1929 he was made to join the class of older, senior boys and successfully passed the entrance examination into Katsina Higher College, the highest institution of learning in Northern Nigeria. At Katsina College Sa'adu was admitted to train as a science teacher for a period of five years but within a period of three years he was adjudged to have surpassed the standard of learning of the college and was transferred to Yaba Higher College in Lagos the highest institution of learning in colonial Nigeria. Though Sa'adu did not complete his studies in at the Yaba High college due to a number of reasons part of which was his dissatisfaction with the course content of the school which seemed to him too elementary, the fact is that in all the schools he attended he was adjudged very intelligent and above his peers/colleagues[1].

The refusal of Sa'adu to return back to Yaba College and 'the stunningly inculpatory commentary he passed on the colonial system of higher education,' annoyed the colonial administration in Northern Nigeria and resolved to teach Sa'adu a lesson. The Assistant Director of Education sent a recommendation to the Director of Education that Sa'adu should be banned from employment by both the colonial Government and the Native Authority for a period of two years which was approved. However, on the pleas of Mr Mort the Bauchi Superintendent of Education, the ban was lifted but it was insisted that he should be employed in a junior post with a low pay. Malam Sa'adu's first appointment with the

colonial civil service was with the Regional Health Department and posted to Kano School of Hygiene to train as a third class Sanitary Inspector in 1935. The fact that Sa'adu was far above the position he has been employed was recognised by the Senior Health Officer just one month after Sa'adu had reported and he telephoned the chief Inspector of Education that they intend to promote him to the post of Instructor. After having completed and passed the Sanitary Inspectors' Course (London Matriculation) with distinction, Sa'adu was in 1939 transferred to the School of Hygiene (later School of Pharmacy) in Zaria. A year after his arrival at Zaria he obtained the prestigious Meat Inspectors' Certificate making him the first Nigerian to acquire that type of credential [2]. While at Zaria Sa'ad involvement into political activity that was considered inimical to the interest of colonial administration brought him into conflict with the administration and resulted into his transfer from the urban Zaria to rural Anchau to join the anti-morsitans campaign and resettlement scheme of the Sleeping Sickness Control Programme. His posting to Anchau further complicated his already declining health from tuberculosis of the lungs and other illnesses [3]. It was in connection with this that Yakubu opined 'It is difficult to exonerate the colonial administration from the charge of making Sa'adu bad case worse...to let Sa'adu's medical condition finish him off[4].

Sa'ad was invalided from government service from 4 March 1943 on the recommendation of a Medical Board. His £90 gratuity was only paid after petitioned the Senior Health Officer for the Northern Provinces. Malam Sa'adu died on the afternoon of Tuesday 28 January 1958[5].

His political struggles

Sa'adu's stay in Lagos while he was at Yaba college around 1934 was an important formative stage for his subsequent political carrier for he was said to have attended debates on the negative effects of colonial rule, took part in political rallies and composed political poems[6]. This most have convinced him that efforts should be made to bring about changes in his own society.

His transfer to Zaria in 1939 provided him with an opportunity to experiment his ideas of political organisation. Zaria is an ancient City with good reputation for administration and scholarship; it has large concentration of western educated elites, a number of institutions and establishments, and is an important Railway town. These opportunities attracted Nigerians from other regions to flock into the town in search of employments, thereby creating a cosmopolitan town, with cross fertilisation of ideas.

Sa'adu's first move was in 1939 at the age of 24 when he organised the Hausa Youth Keep Fit Class this was later transformed into the Northern Nigerian Youth Movement and finally in 1941 became the Northern Provinces General Improvement Union (NPGIU). The Union was a broad based forum for both the younger elements of the Northern intelligentsia but also the Traditional elite which dominated the upper echelons of the Zaria N.A as well as British colonial officials [7]. At its foundation meeting Malam Sa'adu attacked the colonial Government system of Administration of Indirect rule as unnecessary to the peasant's way of life and lacked any religious or structural necessity [8]. Topics of discussion in the union meetings included the nature of the N.A system and to its conditions of service, most particularly promotions that are not based on merit but patronage and equality of women in Modern educational opportunities. When these ideas of the Union started becoming popularised through publication on the pages of *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo*, the colonial Government speedily banned the Union and members were dispersed by routine administrative postings. Malam Sa'adu was posted to Anchau[9].

After his invalidation from Government service, Sa'adu returned home in Bauchi and in 1945 founded the *Jam'iyya Ta Ci Gaba a Bauchi* (Bauchi General Improvement Union). The union evolved an organisational structure with elected officers and defined responsibilities. Malam Muhammadu Baba Halla, an N.A Veterinary Officer and Malam Aminu Kano, a teacher at the middle School served as Chairman and Secretary respectively. Malam Sa'ad as Organising Secretary was the convener and prime mover [10]. The membership of the Union (BGIU) was open to all Nigerians. The fact that all the prominent members of the Union were N.A members or Government employees, it fell on Malam Sa'adu to present and defend the Union Objectives to the N.A and provincial administration. According to Sa'adu the main objectives of BGIU were:

1. To voice out the sentiment of the local intelligentsia by way of representation, through proper channels, to the authorities in all matters affecting the progress and welfare of the people of this District educationally, socially, economically or otherwise.
2. To foster cooperation with the Authorities in all matters affecting the country as a whole and to prove to our fellow countrymen irrespective of classes, creed ...that Nigeria is one body, the union of all classes, creed or districts as helpmates to the administration inevitable[11].

To demonstrate their belief in one Nigeria, Sa'adu tried to reach out to the NCNC of Azkiwe and some understanding was reached leading to the appointment of Malam Sa'adu as the accredited correspondent of the

Associated Newspapers of Nigeria a conglomerate of Five Newspapers- the West African Pilot, Eastern Nigerian Guardian, Nigerian Spokesman, Southern Nigeria Defender and the Daily Comet [12].

Having realised the fact that, British colonialism was a formidable monster ravaging not only Bauchi and Northern Nigeria in particular but Nigeria in general, Sa'adu thought that the best option was to join the largest anti-colonial movement in Nigeria, the NCNC. Sa'adu saw in NCNC a political party that offered the promise for the actualisation of his ambition of a free and independent Nigeria as well as a forum for building National unity [13].

Sa'adu joined the NCNC with a clear vision of what he wanted. In a 45- minute speech he delivered at the first annual convention and national assembly held in Kaduna from 5—11 April 1948, Sa'adu was emphatic that ,he was not interested in freedom from British Colonial rule for its own sake but in the sustenance of freedom for all Nigerians after regaining independence from imperial rule. He told delegates that:

We should be prepared to wage war on two fronts- war against those who deny us political, economic and social freedom, and war against those individuals or groups of individuals that attempt in any way to retard our speed towards a united Nigeria, with a united purpose and united action[14].''

Sa'adu was also a leading member of *Jamiyyar Al'ummar Najeriya ta Arewa*(JANA) otherwise known as the Northern Element's Progressive Association (NEPA) together with Abubakar Sadiq Zukogi, Habib Raji Abdullah. A very glaring objective of the Association was to exorcise the demon of fear of those in authority from the minds of people so that they will rise to challenge local bureaucratic intemperance and British exploitation. The strategy for achieving the aim was educating people through the establishment of evening classes and study centres [15]. While in Lagos as the federal secretary of NCNC he tried to organise people of Northern origin living in Lagos and other areas of Southern Nigeria to found a branch of NEPA at Agege. The aim as in the North was to raise the Political consciousness of Northerners living in parts of Southern Nigeria so that they could be support the broad anti- colonial Movement represented by the NCNC. Therefore NEPA was not established to rival the NCNC but as affiliate. Since the NCNC itself was an amalgam of several ethnic Unions or socio-cultural associations [16].

While he was serving as the federal secretary of NCNC in Lgos in the North some socio-cultural associations known as the *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa a Yau* (JMAY) and *Jam'iyyar Jama'ar Arewa* (JJA) coalesced at a joint meetings since they all share common objectives. Saad took time off to attend the meeting of the amalgamated association known as the *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa* in Kaduna in October 1948. It was Sa'ad that proposed the English name for the association as Northern people's Congress (NPC) [17]. Malam Sa'adu was elected as adviser on muslin law to the Association. It was in this capacity that he issued a ground breaking *Fatwa* (religious ruling) that it is permissible to admit women into the congress since even the Shehu allowed ladies into his classes [18]. At this stage the NPC insisted that it was a cultural club without any Political ambition. Its major focus was stated to be War against the three dominant phenomenon in the North *Jahilci* (ignorance, illiteracy) *Lalaci* (idleness, dissipation, laziness) and *Zalunci* (oppression)[19].

Sa'adu was a radical politician that believed in positive action that explained why as the Federal secretary of the NCNC he founded the Youth wing of the Party the Zikist National Vanguard and recruited people like Malam Habib Raji Abdallah and Anthony Enahoro into the movement [20]. In 1950 when Sa'adu found that the NCNC leadership have abandoned the initial ideals of the party by trying to present itself as a moderates and pursuing a path of favouring a section of the country in its programmes such as denying suitably qualified Northern candidates from benefitting from the parties Scholarship scheme, he silently distanced himself from the party and focussed his attention towards building NEPA. His departure from the party followed by Sadiq Abubakar Zukogi ,Abdallah ,Zanna Bukar Dipcharima dented the image of NCNC as a national Party[21].

Malam Sa'adu returned to the North with the hope of organising a political party for the region as well as help in setting up a scholarship fund from *Kudin Taimakon Arewa* (Northern Self Help fund).As stated earlier, even while Sa'adu was in Lagos with NCNC Secretariat he did not distanced himself from political developments in the North. Therefore upon his coming he found easy accommodation within the NPC and was very active member in the formation of a branch of the party in Bauchi. However, Sa'adu's romance with NPC did not last long as the emirate aristocracies hijacked the party thereby abandoning its radical objectives. This situation also alarmed Sa'adu that, there was the danger of the North becoming a one-party state which 'would make the idea of competitive politics meaningless and positive social change difficult, if not impossible to realise [22].

Even before NPC declared itself a Political Party on 1October, 1951, The Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) an offshoot of NEPA had emerged on 8 August 1950. The *Sawaba* declaration which outlined the Party guiding principles, identified two antagonistic social classes in Northern Nigeria, the *masu sarauta* (emirate aristocracies) and the

Talakawa(commoners). The party identified itself with the *Talakawa* in their struggle to emancipate themselves from the clutches of the aristocratic class. Although the declaration was a party document as observed Yakubu it is easy to see Sa'adu's hand in its drafting. Sa'adu's intellectual input became even more glaring in later periods. He was said to be the sole author of a number of the party's well-articulated statements of objectives, and petitions against injustices of the NA [23].

From 1952 onwards Sa'ad was in and out of Hospital resulting from Tuberculosis and other ailments as a result he could not take an active physical part in the running of the party, but he remained the real ideologue. As observed Yakubu 'it was this role which Sa'adu played in support of NEPU Party at both the local Bauchi branch and the National headquarters to the end of his life'. Malam Sa'ad died at a tender age of 44 on Tuesday 28th January 1958 two years before Nigeria gained Independence [24].

Ideas of Liberation

Malam Sa'ad Zungur was a Poet, and a Social critic committed to the emancipation of the downtrodden (*Talakawa*) from the domination of the privileged few. To Malam Sa'adu, the struggle for democracy and independence is not pursued for its own sake but for the establishment of a just society. As early as 1948 Sa'adu's speech at the NCNC convention in Kaduna Sa'adu clearly stated the ultimate objective of their struggle for freedom. He stated thus:-

Our hope is when we secure freedom for this country; the members of all tribal groups will have, at least, a chance to live as citizens of a great nation. There would be a chance to construct people's lives on the surface of Nigeria in the free light and sweet air, rather than underground in the mutually exclusive darkly, fateful, and ignorant corridor of the colonies of the ants. Our purpose therefore is not only freedom. Freedom can never be a purpose in itself for freedom like slavery, is resultant and those who try to seize it in itself, like those who grasp for images in water, will lose the gains they have[25].''

Moreover, in his poem *Maraba da Soja* composed to welcome Nigerian Soldiers that served in the Second World War back home, Malam Sa'adu pointed out in clear terms that true independence and democracy must be one that liberate the people from injustice and Poverty. It was his firm belief in these ideals that made him to leave his earlier Political Parties the NCNC and the NPC when he noticed their abandonment of the initial liberationist ideals they were established on. In the *Maraba da Soja* Poem Malam Sa'adu expressed these views in the last stanza thus:-

<i>''Babu amfani ga 'yanci, Babu yin zarafin aminci, Babu kyawun shugabanci, Babu amfanin zumunci, Kuma babu yawan butulci, Babu kasawar mutunci, Sannan 'yanci yake tsayawa.'''</i>	<i>Inda akwai halin talauci, In da masu kwafa a zuci, Sai idan akwai adalci, Sai fa inda akwai karimci, Babu keta, ba sakarci, Babu mai yunwar abinci,</i>
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<i>Useless is freedom Surely there would be no peaceful atmosphere Worthless is leadership Useless is ((blood) relationship (And until) there is no much Ingratitude No degradation</i>	<i>when there is Poverty when someone is in distress unless there is Justice unless there is mutual assistance No oppression, no foolishness (And until) there are no hungry ones</i>
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Then freedom would endure [26]

As mentioned earlier, Sa'adu played a prominent role in the establishment of NPC, he was said to be responsible for coining the English name of the party. However, when the party was hijacked by the traditional aristocratic class which was in alliance with the British colonialist, Sa'adu abandoned it. In his Poetry, Malam Sa'adu became very critical of the marriage of interest between the NPC and the colonialist which he saw as simply aimed at continued enslavement of the common man through arbitrary taxes, unwarranted arrest and other forms of harassment. In his poem the *Jihadin Sawaba* (Struggle for Freedom), Malam Sa'adu lambasted both the colonialist and their indigenous collaborators. He started by listing some of unjust treatment meted upon the *Talakawa* (peasants) under indirect rule. In stanza 19 to 26 Sa'adu voiced out that:-

<i>Sarka, gigar, ankwa da mari Chains, fetters and handcuffs</i>	<i>Duk makamai ne na kisan garari Are all weapons of oppression</i>
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Mu biya gandu mu biya ushuri
We pay tax and pay ten per cent

Mu biya tara da shiga hadari
We pay fines and yet in trouble

Mu biya tikitin mota a gari
So also money for licence and court commissions

Da kudin lasin da kudin ushuri
And pay bus ticket in the city

Da kudin rumfar tallan mazari
And stall fee for selling spindle

Da dukkan haja har mandawari
And every item, even braiding

Da kudin karar lamari
And for complaint on all matters

A gaban Alkalin masu gari
Before the elite judge

A kama mutum ba gaira bare
One is arrested without cause

Sababi da dalili sai fahari
Explanation or reason jjust like that

In kayi afil ma kayi barin
If you appeal you have merely frittered away

Kurdirin ka a tafkin 'yan garari
Your money in the pond of the oppressors

Sun maida talakka kamar dabba
They treat the poor like animal

Dokin sukuwar su na masu gari
Their pony for horse racing²⁷

Furthermore, Malam Sa'adu proceeded in his critic of colonial rule by exposing the shallow propaganda of the colonial government aimed at bribing the Northern elites, to create an enabling environment for the success of their devilish policy of divide and rule. Sa'adu's demystification of the British colonialist propaganda in the Northern part of Nigeria is captured in

'Mu turawa ba mu burin
(They say): 'we Europeans have no intention

Dawwama a Arewa Kasa ta gari''
Of permanent occupation of the North, a good country

'Mun shekara hamsin tare da ku
'We spent fifty years together (with you)

Saura saba'in bisa alkawari''
Seventy remain, according to the treaty''

'Ku dai ku cika mana alkawari
'Just keep your promise

Don Arewa ta rayu kasar garari''
So that the North persists as (our) playing ground''

'Ga kasarku kasa mai albarka
'Your country is blessed one

Ga salama babu yawan hadari''
Peaceful and without much trouble''

'Kar ku yarda da 'yan Kudu arna ne
'Do not trust the Southerners, they are infidels

Za su gaje kasarku da al'amari''
They will take over your land and lead (you) in all affairs''

'Za su gaje aiyuka masu yawa
'They will monopolise Government posts

Siniya sabis da na masu gari''
The senior service and the Native Authority[28]''

Critics of Sa'adu have described him as ideologically reactionary since he supported the perpetuation of the autocratic rule of the Emirs and kings in his poem *Arewa Jumhuriya ko Mulukiya?* (The North: Republic or Monarchy?)[29]. However, this kind of argument as suggested by Amin stems from a misconception. A closer study of the poem could reveal that, in no way did Malam Sa'adu say Emirs should be followed blindly. Rather, he charges them, to cast their minds back and remember the goals and objectives for which their emirates were built.³⁰ They should bear in mind that their Emirates were established under the leadership of their forefathers in a bid to establish the religion, truth, Justice and good governance. Infact even Sa'adu's definition of Monarchy is enough to absolve Sa'adu from the statements of his critics. Sa'adu's conception of Monarchy is clearly stated in the verse:

Sarki da gidajen shawara
Emir and consultative councils

Da shari'a kun Mulukiya
And justice, is Monarchy [31]

Therefore, in contrast to the conventional conception of Monarchy as a government by one individual not subject to any legal limitations, Sa'adu's definition of monarchy in the poem is more of Democracy than monarchy [32]. So Sa'adu did not refer to Monarchy in the real sense of the word.

Moreover, in the poem Malam Sa'adu variously makes countless appeals to the Emirs and the populace to imbibe 'truth' 'honesty and to strictly adhere to it and shun all forms of evils. He exhorts the Emirs to:

To sarakai sai ku yi tattali
So emirs better be prepared

Na adala ban da haramiya
For justice not the unlawful [33]

In the same vein, in his reference to Bauchi emirate, Sa'adu drew the attention of the emir on the style of governance of his great grandfather Yakubu which he describes as:

Da shirin mulki mai ka'ida
And principled style of Administration

Na adala ban da haramiya
Based on justice, devoid of unlawful

Imi na sana'a mai yawa
Abundant knowledge for acquisition of skills

Da shirin addinin gaskiya
And establishment of the religion of truth

Da shari'ar bin bahasi da kyau
And justice without fear or favour

Babu hanci, ba kuma toshiya
Free from bribery and corruption [34]

Furthermore, in the poem Arewa jumhuriya ko mulukiya?, Malam Sa'adu emphatically condemns a series of social vices that have developed among Hausa society partly as result of the misrule of the Emirs. He warned that, Emirs should as a matter of urgency, face them head on to change for the better or the entire society will suffer the consequences. He laments that:

Matukar a Arewa da karuwai
As long as there are prostitutes

Wallahi zamu yi kunyar duniya
By God we shall suffer worldly shame

Matukar 'yan iska na gari
As long as there are hooligans in town

Dan Daudu da shi da Magajiya
Pimp and the influential brothel lady

Da samari masu ruwan kudi
And young men who shower money
Matukar yaranmu suna bara
So long as our boys go begging

Ga maroka can a gidan giya
To praise singers in beer houses
'Allah ba ku mu samu abin miya!'
'May Allah give you so that we get from you what to buy soup with''

A gidan birni da na kauyuka
In the cities, villages

Da cikin makarantun tsangaya
And Koranic schools

Sun yafu da fatar bunsuru
Covered with goat skins

Babu shakka sai mun sha wuya
Undoubtedly we shall suffer

Matukar da musakai barkatai
So long as there are numerous destitute

Da makaho ko da makauniya
Blind men and women

Ba mahalli na su a Hausa duk
Having no proper place in Hausaland

Ba mai tanyonsu da dukiya
nobody assists them with wealth

Birni kauye da garuruwa
Cities, villages and towns

Duk suna yawo a Nijeriya
They roam about in Nigeria

Wagga al'umma me zata wo
What will such a community perform

A cikin zarafofin duniya?
In all aspects of worldly endeavours

To sarakai sai fa ku himmatu
And so, monarchs better get ready

Don ku gyara kasarku da gaskiya
And look after your domain honestly [35]

From the above lines one could discern Sa'adu's commitment towards fighting the cultural ills of his society without the fear of been condemned as a renegade condemning ones culture. This he believed is necessary, as these aspects of culture are impediments towards the liberation of man and society's progress. Malam Sa'adu's writings in Newspapers, letters and poems from 1941-1956 are united by interrelated themes, the most visible being justice and the final overthrow of British colonialist and their cohorts[36].

CONCLUSION

Malam Sa'adu as a politician and a writer believe that he has a social responsibility to his society. That underscores his efforts to identify those elements and forces that pull the society backwards, to expose them and condemn them. He also strove to identify progressive elements in the society that was committed to fighting the ills of poverty, illiteracy and injustice which he believed were the corner stones of Democracy, and positively associate himself with them. In the discharge of this responsibility he was fearless, as he rightly pointed out that. 'We will surely continue to tell the truth even if we are going to be roped on the penis tip''.

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