

# THE RELEVANCE OF THE BOOK: "KALILA WA DIMNA " FOR EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

*Tijjani, Ibrahim*

## Abstract

Nigeria has now assumed democracy, after many years of military dictatorship. When it came into office in 1999 with an elected president, state governors, National and state assemblies, the new government came face to face with a beehive of problems. In the light of the above statement, this paper examines the problem in implementing democratic ideals in Nigeria and the crisis it generates, through the study of the Arabic book entitled Kalila wa Dimna. Finally, the paper suggests possible solution with which the infant democracy in Nigeria is to be sustained.

## Introduction

Literary artistes have been using different ways to present to people the events in their society. In some instances, by mirroring the societal problems through using one's imagination with regard to animals' way of life. One of such works is the book entitled; Kalila Wa -Dimna by Baidaba, the philosopher. The book is a dramatic rendering of good governance using both wild and domestic animals as characters. The book was originally written in Hindu by its author popularly known as Baidaba, the philosopher, on the request of the then king of India called Dabshalhn. Later, the book was translated into ancient Persian language known as Bahlawiya, by Barzawaihi, the head of Persian physicians by the order of cosroes: Anushirwan bin Qubaz, the kind of Persia in those days. The Arabic translation of the book was done by Abdullahi bin al-MuqafTa a famous scholar of Abbasid dynasty. He did this work during the reign of Khalifha, Abu Ja'afar a! Mansoor.

The book got its title from the names of the two young jackals of which one of them is called Kalila and the other Dimna, they were assumed to be loyal ministers of the lion who was the king of the animals' kingdom.

The book is a treatise that eloquently discusses the problems of society and their possible solution, especially with regard to good, political administration. The book dwells much on issues of justice, harmony, diplomacy, co-operation, national development, human right and tolerance on one hand. And on the other, it discusses corruption, hatred, injustice, deceit, treason, hypocrisy and their evil consequences with an attempt to find solutions to all these vices.

The book is divided into fifteen chapters and each chapter carries a different issue with series of short stories to illustrate the point in question. Sometimes a story might teach the reader a number of lessons. Such as the story of the lion king and the bull.

## The Danger of Corruption

Shartaba, the bull lost his way and found himself in the forest close to the palace of the lion king. On hearing the roaring of Shartaba the lion sent one of his ministers Dimna, the jackal to call him. When Shartaba came before the king, he explained his situation and asked the king for help. The king sympathized with him and granted him asylum. A few months later, the king appointed Shartaba as his special adviser, Dimna was not happy with this appointment, so he began to think of how to eliminate Shartaba without any confrontation. After careful planning, the sweet-tongued Dimna succeeded in convincing the lion king that Shartaba was planning a coup against him and eventually the king attacked Shartaba and killed him. A few days later, the lion discovered that Shartaba was innocent and all what Dimna told him was false. As a result Dimna was also killed,

This tale revealed the danger of hypocrites, who cause, distrust haired and corruption in (he society. The story is realistic in solving tribal and religious discrimination in Nigeria. In a multi-religious and multi-tribal nation like Nigeria, there is need for accommodation and respect for differences. Islam calls on Muslims to harmoniously co-exist in any given society regardless of different nationalities, ethnic group, religion, tribes and even ideologies. Having come from the same origin. The Holy Qur'an says:

"O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other) verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (He who is) the most righteous of you, and God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (49:13).

Extending equality and welfare to all citizens is necessary for the sustenance of democracy in any country. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria stated clearly that it is mandatory In provide effective government and welfare to all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality and justice. Another lesson that may be learned from this story is the danger of putting individual or self-interest at the expense of national interest. In the zeal for acquiring prestigious appointments and having a strong grip on power, politicians in Nigeria are well trained to find their ways to get what they want without any

regard for peace, unity and stability of the country. It is this self-interest that causes hatred and mistrust among our politicians and consequently leads to constant crises in our National and State assemblies. In the National assembly, from 1999 to 2003, the senate had three different presidents. The first senate president was Chief Evans Enwerem who after a lot of crises, was impeached and was replaced by Chief Chuba Okadigbo, who served for a while and was subsequently replaced by Senator Anyim Pius Anyim. Page and Alabi (2003), state the causes of this problem as:

"Personality clash, sundry problem, non-budget implementation and communication breakdown were some of the issues that shaped the presidency/assembly imbroglio".

Thus, when personal interest takes the centre stage in any government, the consequences will be ethnic and sectional politics, which is dangerous to any democratic government.

### **Injustice**

Another problem of bad leadership is greed and dishonesty due to injustice, as the story of the crow and the cobra tells us; a crow built its nest on a tree and close to the tree there is a hole for a cobra. Whenever the crow laid its eggs the cobra went and ate them up. Sad and disturbed, the crow went to his friend a jackal for advice and the jackal told him to go to nearby town and snatch a necklace from one of the women in the king's palace. The crow went and snatched the necklace of the king's daughter and people ran after him and the crow kept on flying not far away from the people, when he reached the hole of the cobra he dropped the necklace into it, the cobra came out in fury where upon the people killed it and took away the necklace.

Injustice is an epidemic that can ruin any government no matter how powerful that government is. Islam makes it a duty for the ruling class to fight for the weak and the oppressed in-order to liberate them from injustice: the Holy Qur'an says:

"And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed) men, women and children whose cry is: "our lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors (Qur'an, 4:75).

As a result of centralization of power in a few hands and the failure of Nigerian leaders to fight injustice, the country suffered a lot of unrest at home and witnessed international isolation under the military regimes.

For any nation to develop and flourish, it must be ready to do away with all sort of injustice, and this can only be achieved when the government provide maximum security to the life and property of the citizens. Page and Alabi (2003), see this as the primary duty of the new democratic government in Nigeria:

The main challenge that has confronted the defence policy of the Obasanjo administration is the pervasive level of insecurity across the country. The ethno - religious violence in various parts of the country, wave of political killings, arm robbery etc. were serious challenges that the politicians of the fourth Republic have to contend with.

The above mentioned evils can never spread in any country unless there is injustice.

### **Violation of Human Rights**

Another factors that retards progress in any country is violation of human rights. Baidaba, the philosopher, illustrates this point in the story of a lion that invaded the territory of herbivorous animals:

There was a forest of abundant grass and water, but the animals in the forest could not enjoy this pasture because a lion came to live in the forest. So the animals for their own safety made peace agreement with the lion: to send him one animal every day. They chose the animals by casting a vote. One day, the vote fell on the rabbit and he went to lion alone and told him that he was sent by the animals to bring him another rabbit but on his way he met another lion who claimed to be the king in this forest and snatched away the rabbit. On hearing this, the angry lion followed the rabbit to see this new lion and to fight him. The rabbit led the lion to a deep well full of water, when they peeped into the well the rabbit deceived the lion into believing that the reflection of the lion in the water was the strange lion that snatched away the rabbit, and the lion really saw a rabbit beside that lion. Full of fury, the lion jumped into the well to fight the other lion and he was drawn to death.

It is the duty of the state to protect the life, property and the reputation of its citizen. Zaidan (1982) explains that, this duty extend to the protection of his (citizen) honour and respect from humiliation and degradation. Failure to give this right results in riot and crisis in the state. This is

because injustice encourages violence in the country. In the early days of Nigeria's fourth republic some government functionaries are reported to be involved in the shameful subjugation of their citizens, many governors, senators, representatives and top government officials have been alleged of various corrupt practices with rather negative responses from the government. Fagge and Alabi (2003).

There is urgent need for all Nigerians to unanimously fight corruption and its evils, in order to create a very peaceful and relatively conducive atmosphere for to facilitate righteous governance and guarantee the people an everlasting peace, freedom and security (Raji, 2001). Aggression

Any nation that institutionalizes corruption naturally creates violent conflicts that emanates according to Page and Alabi (2003), from increase in the cost of living, falling standard of living and increasing level of poverty.

As far as the people in power continue to exploit the wealth of the country opposition to the government and its policies will continue to increase, and no amount of military or economic power will protect the top government officials from the anger of the common people. It is like the big elephant that proudly crushed the eggs of the tiny lark, the bird and refused to apologize. The sad lark invited a flock of birds that went and pierced the eyes of the elephant.

Baidaba the philosopher, narrated this story to show the danger of aggression especially against a weak person.

#### Key Issues to Effective Democracy

Baidaba, the philosopher, raised several issues that will help to correct political controversies, atrocities and violence. These issues, if implemented, will bring progress and peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups in "Nigeria.

One of the factors that promote good political administration and peace among the society is the establishment of justice. It is when the vices of injustice are eliminated that good governance prevails. As Baidaba, the philosopher, advising the king Dabshalirn says. "It is incumbent upon reasonable leaders to provide their subjects with their rights accordingly" (p. 301). Justice can only be established in a society when the objects of aggression and corruption are destroyed. The killing of Shartaba, the bull was as a result of aggression and the killing of Dimna, the jackal was an attempt to re-establish justice within the community.

Another factor that promotes peace is cooperation or teamwork between the rulers and the ruled. Baidaba using a flock of pigeons as characters explains:

A group of pigeons fall into a large trap set up by a hunter and each pigeon began to struggle to escape by herself, but the leader of the pigeon, said to them, No one should try to escape alone, let us try to escape together. In this way, they broke down the trap and escaped.

#### Conclusion

Much can be done by the Nigerian leaders and other government functionaries in their respective areas to improve the quality of leadership, especially by considering the factors advanced from the foregoing discussion. And this can only be achieved by extending equality to all citizens without any discrimination between individuals on the basis of sex, colour, religion and wealth, kinship or friendship or anything else, on the basis of which people differ. This is the great principle of good governance.

#### References

- Ali, A.Y. (N.D.). *The Holy Qur 'an text, translation and commentary*. Dar al Arabia Becirut Lebanon.
- Page, K. and Alabi, D. (2003). *Political and constitutional development in Nigeria*. Northern Printers Ltd. Kano, Nigeria
- Raji, A.F. (2001). *Islam and Human Rights in broader perspectives*. Alashela Islamic Publication, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Zaidan, A.K. (1982) I.LF.S.O Salimiah-Kuwait.