

Relevance of the Sokoto Caliphate Tradition and Policy Frameworks for Reforming Women's Rights and Social Life in Contemporary Muslim Societies

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Abstract: The Sokoto Caliphate, established by Shaykh Usman ibn Fodio in 1804, represents one of the most consequential reform movements in West African Islamic history. Central to its intellectual and legal architecture was a distinctive attention to women's education, rights, and social standing reflected in the scholarly contributions of women such as Nana Asma'u bint Shehu Usman. As contemporary Muslim societies grapple with tensions between religious authenticity and modern demands for gender justice, the caliphate's tradition offers an indigenous, historically grounded model that merits renewed examination. Contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in northern Nigeria, continue to struggle with reconciling women's rights advocacy with Islamic legal and cultural frameworks. Many reform efforts are perceived as externally imposed, provoking resistance rooted in cultural and religious anxieties. There is a scholarly gap in systematically drawing on the Sokoto Caliphate's own policy framework which achieved substantial gains in female literacy, legal protection, and social participation as a legitimate, internally derived model for contemporary reform. 1. To examine the theoretical and Shari'ah foundations of women's rights within the Sokoto Caliphate tradition. 2. To analyze specific policies and institutions established by the Caliphate that advanced women's education and social welfare. 3. To assess the relevance and applicability of this framework to contemporary challenges facing Muslim women. 4. To propose a contextualized model for reform grounded in this indigenous Islamic heritage. The research finds that Integrate Sokoto Caliphate history into Islamic studies curricula, revive community-based female educational models similar to Yan Taru, encourage contemporary scholars to reference classical precedents in advocacy, develop policy frameworks explicitly linking reform to Islamic heritage, promote further research into women scholars of the Caliphate era. The Sokoto Caliphate's tradition offers a historically legitimate and culturally resonant foundation for advancing women's rights in contemporary Muslim societies, demonstrating that reform need not be seen as foreign imposition but can be recovered from within the Islamic scholarly heritage itself.

Keywords: Sokoto Caliphate, Women's Rights, Islamic Reform, Nana Asma'u, Shari'ah, Gender Justice, Northern Nigeria.

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Research Paper

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INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters have shown that the Sokoto Caliphate, founded by Shaykh Usman dan Fodio in the early nineteenth century, built one of the most remarkable traditions of female scholarship and social participation in the history of West African Islam. Women such as Nana Asma'u bint Usman dan Fodio did not stand at the margins of the reform; they stood near its centre, teaching, writing, and organising itinerant educational networks that reached women across the

towns and villages of the Caliphate. This chapter turns from history to the present. It asks what the Caliphate's experience can still teach Muslim societies that today struggle, in very different circumstances, with the same basic question: how may women be educated, empowered, and allowed full participation in social life without compromising the teachings of the Shari'ah [1].

Contemporary Muslim societies face a paradox that the nineteenth-century reformers of Sokoto would have recognised, even if they would not have used the

¹ M., Last, The Sokoto Caliphate, Longman, London, 1967, p. 64

same words for it. On one hand, the Qur'an and the Sunnah affirm the dignity, intellectual capacity, and religious responsibility of women in language that admits no ambiguity. On the other hand, social custom, eak institutions, and at times a narrow reading of the law have combined in many places to deny women the very opportunities that the early Muslim community, and later the Sokoto reformers, took as self-evident. This chapter argues that the gap between Islamic principle and social practice is not new, and that the Caliphate's response to it offers a working model rather than a merely symbolic one [2].

The chapter proceeds in stages. It begins by surveying the challenges that women face today in education and social life across the Muslim world, then turns back to the Sokoto experience to ask what may be reasonably drawn from it, given the different conditions of the present age. From there it sets out principles for reviving female scholarship, a policy framework touching curriculum, teacher training, religious education, and community learning, and a set of institutional and governmental strategies. It closes with practical recommendations and a set of findings that draw the threads of the whole study together. Throughout, the aim is not nostalgia for a vanished age but the recovery of a method: the marriage of firm religious grounding with practical, organised effort [3].

Contemporary Challenges Facing Women's Rights in Education and Social Life Participation in Muslim Societies

Across much of the Muslim world, female literacy and school enrolment have improved over the past half-century, yet the improvement has been uneven and, in many rural and conflict-affected regions, fragile. Girls in parts of northern Nigeria, the Sahel, and rural South Asia remain disproportionately excluded from formal schooling because of early marriage, household labour demands, the cost of schooling, and the long distances many must travel to reach a classroom. Where insecurity has worsened, as in areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, the closure of schools has fallen most heavily on girls, who are often the first withdrawn when families judge the risk too great. The result is a widening of the very gap that classical Islamic teaching never sanctioned, but which social and economic pressure has reproduced in a modern guise [4].

A second and closely related challenge lies in the confusion, found in many communities, between cultural custom and religious obligation. Practices such

as the seclusion of women without provision for their education, restriction of their movement without regard to genuine necessity, or exclusion from mosque-based learning are frequently defended in the language of religion, although they often owe more to local custom than to the Qur'an or the authenticated Sunnah. Scholars of contemporary Islamic thought have argued that this conflation has done lasting damage, since it allows practices that the early Muslim community would have found strange to claim the authority of revelation. Amina Wadud has observed that readings of the sacred text shaped by patriarchal assumption have too often been presented as though they were the text itself, leaving women's actual rights diminished in the name of piety [5].

A third challenge is institutional rather than doctrinal: the weakness of the structures through which Islamic education for women might otherwise be delivered. Many Muslim-majority countries lack a sufficient number of trained female religious teachers, properly resourced girls' schools, or community-based learning systems of the kind that once flourished under the Yan Taru network. Where such structures exist, they are frequently under-funded and dependent on the goodwill of individual scholars rather than supported by durable policy. Bilkisu Yusuf, writing on Muslim women's organisations in Nigeria, has noted that the absence of coordinated institutional support has left much of the work of female religious education to informal and voluntary effort, admirable in itself but insufficient to meet the scale of present need [6].

Reassessing the Sokoto Caliphate Experience as a Model for Reform

To describe the Sokoto Caliphate as a model is not to claim that its nineteenth-century circumstances can be transplanted unchanged into the twenty-first century. The Caliphate arose from a particular jihad, within a particular political order, and its solutions to the question of women's education answered the needs of that age. What remains valid, and what may properly be called a model, is the method by which the reformers proceeded: a method that began with rigorous scriptural argument before moving to organised practice. Usman dan Fodio's own writings insisted that ignorance of religious duty was no excuse for either men or women,

² Boyd, J., *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u 1793-1865*, Frank Cass, London, 1989, p. 21

³ B. Mack, and Boyd, J., *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2000, p. 9

⁴ P. Lovejoy, *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2016, p. 187

⁵ A., Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p. 96

⁶ B., Yusuf, 'Hausa-Fulani Women: The State of the Struggle', in Coles, C. and Mack, B. (eds.), *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1991, p. 102

and that the seeking of knowledge was an obligation that fell upon every Muslim regardless of sex [7].

The second feature of the Sokoto method worth recovering is its institutional imagination. Rather than leave female education to private initiative alone, the reformers built a system, the Yan Taru, through which trained women travelled from settlement to settlement carrying instruction directly to those who could not otherwise receive it. Jean Boyd and Beverley Mack have shown that this system was deliberately structured, with recognised teachers, a body of versified texts composed for ease of memorisation, and a chain of transmission that linked ordinary women to the scholarly tradition of the Caliphate's founders. Such structured intentionality, rather than the specific content of the nineteenth-century curriculum, is what later generations may reasonably draw upon [8].

A third element bears on legitimacy. The Sokoto reformers grounded every innovation in education for women in explicit textual authority, citing Qur'an and hadith at each step, so that the work could not be dismissed as a departure from religion. Sultan Muhammad Bello continued this pattern after his father's death, defending the education of women in his own juristic writing and insisting that the strength of the Caliphate's religious life depended on the soundness of instruction given in every household. Contemporary reformers face a similar test of legitimacy, and the Sokoto precedent suggests that reform argued from within the textual tradition, rather than imposed from outside it, is far more likely to take root and endure [9].

Principles for Reviving Female Scholarship and Social Participation

The first principle to be drawn from this study is that the revival of female scholarship must begin with a return to primary sources rather than with apology or defensiveness. The Qur'an addresses men and women together in matters of belief, worship, and moral responsibility, most plainly in the verse that promises reward to believing men and believing women alike for righteous deeds (Qur'an 33:35). Asma Barlas has argued that a careful, contextual reading of the Qur'an yields no warrant for the exclusion of women from learning, and that such exclusion, where it occurs, reflects interpretation shaped by later social custom rather than

the text itself. A revival worthy of the name must therefore rest on scholarship, not sentiment [10].

The second principle is that scholarship and social participation must be pursued together rather than as separate projects. Nana Asma'u's own career demonstrates this union: she was at once a jurist, a poet, a teacher, and an organiser of public welfare among women, and the Caliphate did not regard these roles as being in tension with one another. Beverley Mack has observed that Asma'u's writings moved easily between matters of fiqh and matters of practical guidance for daily life, suggesting that the reformers saw no division between religious learning and social usefulness. Contemporary efforts that confine women's religious education to private devotion, without connecting it to public benefit, fall short of this integrated model [11].

The third principle concerns the necessity of trained intermediaries. The Caliphate did not expect every woman to study directly under the great scholars of Sokoto; it trained a corps of women, the jajis, who carried instruction outward through their own networks of kinship and locality. Khaled Abou El Fadl has written more broadly that the health of any Islamic tradition depends on the presence of a credible scholarly class able to transmit knowledge faithfully across generations, and the Sokoto model applies this insight specifically to women. A durable revival today therefore requires deliberate investment in training female scholars and teachers, not merely the opening of access to existing male-dominated structures [12].

Policy Framework for Educational Reform

A policy framework adequate to the challenges described above must be built on more than goodwill; it requires clear instruments of curriculum, training, religious instruction, and community delivery, each reinforcing the others. The Sokoto reformers understood, even without using modern policy language, that education for women required a coordinated system rather than scattered effort, and the four areas that follow translate that insight into terms suited to the present age Tibawi [13].

Curriculum Development

Curriculum reform should integrate classical Islamic sciences with contemporary subjects in a manner

⁷ U., Dan Fodio, Nur al-Albab, trans. Bivar, A.D.H., Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, vol. 23, University of London, London, 1961, p. 235

⁸ J. Boyd, and Mack, B., Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1997, p. 14

⁹ M., Bello, Infaq al-Maysur, trans. Whitting, C.E.J., Luzac, London, 1957, p. 112

¹⁰ A., Barlas, 'Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2002, p. 204

¹¹ B., Mack, Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004, p. 58

¹² Abou El Fadl, K., Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2001, p. 33

¹³ A.L., Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems, Luzac, London, 1972, p. 48

that neither isolates religious learning from modern knowledge nor dilutes it beyond recognition. Nana Asma'u's own curriculum for the Yan Taru combined creed, law, and devotional poetry with practical instruction in matters of household and communal life, a combination that gave her students both religious grounding and social competence. Modern curricula for Muslim girls' education would do well to follow this pattern, ensuring that subjects such as Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh are taught alongside literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, so that religious education equips women for life rather than confining them to it [14].

Teacher Training

No curriculum, however well designed, can succeed without teachers competent to deliver it, and the shortage of qualified female religious teachers remains one of the most persistent obstacles to reform across Muslim societies. The jaji system addressed this by establishing a recognised tier of trained women teachers whose authority derived from a documented chain of instruction back to the scholarly household of the Caliphate's founders. Modern teacher-training programmes for women, supported by recognised certification and ongoing supervision, would restore this principle of accountable transmission, ensuring that the women entrusted with instruction are themselves thoroughly grounded in both religious and pedagogical knowledge [15].

Female Religious Education

Religious education for women must be treated as a matter of obligation rather than optional provision, in keeping with the principle, repeatedly stated by the Sokoto reformers, that the seeking of knowledge is incumbent upon every believer. Abdullahi dan Fodio, writing in support of his brother's reform, argued that a community in which women remained ignorant of the basic duties of religion could not be considered to have fulfilled its collective religious obligation. Policy frameworks today should accordingly mandate, rather than merely permit, structured religious instruction for girls and women, delivered through mosques, schools, and community centres alike [16].

Community-Based Learning Systems

Formal schooling alone cannot reach every woman, particularly in rural areas where distance, poverty, or custom restrict movement, and it is here that community-based learning retains its greatest relevance. The Yan Taru network succeeded precisely because it

brought instruction to women in their own settlements rather than requiring them to travel to distant centres of learning. Contemporary equivalents, whether mosque-based circles, mobile teaching units, or neighbourhood study groups led by trained women, can replicate this principle of proximity, and Jean Boyd has argued that such grassroots structures remain more resilient and more trusted by local communities than centrally imposed institutions [17].

Institutional Strategies for Women's Social Empowerment

Beyond education narrowly defined, the Sokoto experience points to the need for institutions that translate learning into broader social empowerment. The Caliphate's welfare structures, through which Asma'u and her students attended to the needs of widows, the displaced, and the poor, show that religious education was never intended to remain a private accomplishment but was to issue in active social service. Contemporary Muslim societies would benefit from institutions, whether cooperatives, women's welfare associations, or microfinance schemes administered with due regard to Shari'ah principles, that allow educated women to convert their learning into tangible social contribution [18].

Legal and institutional protection for women's participation is equally necessary, since education without the right to exercise its fruits achieves only partial reform. Fatima Mernissi has argued that the historical exclusion of women from public religious authority in many Muslim societies owed less to scriptural mandate than to political interests that found it convenient to silence women's voices once the early period of Islam had passed. Institutions that guarantee women's right to teach, to hold positions of religious and social responsibility commensurate with their qualification, and to participate in communal decision-making are therefore essential complements to educational reform [19].

Finally, institutional strategies must include mechanisms of accountability and continuity, so that gains made in one generation are not lost in the next. The Sokoto Caliphate maintained continuity through written transmission, Asma'u's own works being copied and taught long after her death, and through the deliberate training of successors within the jaji system. Modern institutions for women's empowerment should likewise build in succession planning, documentation, and the

¹⁴ J. Boyd, and B., Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1997, p. 41

¹⁵ M., Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longman, London, 1967, p. 102

¹⁶ A., Dan Fodio, *Diya' al-Hukkam*, trans. Hiskett, M., Frank Cass, London, 1980, p. 77

¹⁷ J., Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u 1793-1865*, Frank Cass, London, 1989, p. 88

¹⁸ B. Mack, and J., Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2000, p. 64

¹⁹ F., Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Lakeland, M.J., Addison-Wesley, Reading, 1991, p. 9

formal recognition of qualified women, so that reform does not depend on the presence of any single exceptional individual but is embedded in durable structures [20].

Role of Governments, Islamic Scholars, NGOs and Community Leaders

Government has an indispensable role in providing the resources, legal framework, and security without which educational and social reform for women cannot proceed at scale. The Sokoto Caliphate itself was a political order, and its emirs took direct responsibility for the establishment and protection of schools and learning networks, a responsibility that modern Muslim-majority states have not always honoured with comparable seriousness. Governments today must ensure that girls' education is properly funded, that schools are protected from insecurity, and that policy is implemented with the consistency that sporadic donor-funded programmes cannot supply on their own [21].

Islamic scholars bear a responsibility that no government agency can substitute, namely the task of grounding reform in sound religious argument so that it commands genuine acceptance rather than mere compliance. Khaled Abou El Fadl has observed that reforms imposed without scholarly legitimacy tend to provoke resistance or to remain superficial, whereas reforms argued persuasively from within the tradition, as Usman dan Fodio and his household argued for the education of women, tend to take lasting root in the conscience of the community. Contemporary ulama must therefore take up the same task of textual argument that the Sokoto reformers undertook two centuries ago [22].

Non-governmental organisations and community leaders supply the flexibility and local knowledge that large institutions often lack, and their role mirrors that of the jajis who carried the Yan Taru's teaching into individual households. Bilkisu Yusuf's account of Muslim women's organisations in Nigeria shows how voluntary associations, working in partnership with religious leaders rather than in opposition to them, have been able to establish schools, literacy classes, and welfare programmes that government alone could not deliver. A coordinated strategy, in which government, scholars, NGOs, and traditional leaders each play their proper part, comes

closest to reproducing the integrated structure that made the Sokoto reform effective [23].

Integrating the Yan Taru Legacy into Contemporary Educational Systems

The Yan Taru network offers a template that can be adapted rather than merely admired. Its essential features, a recognised body of trained women teachers, a portable and memorable curriculum, and a system of itinerant instruction reaching women where they live, can be reconstructed using modern means without losing their original spirit. Jean Boyd and Beverley Mack have suggested that the durability of Asma'u's poetic curriculum, much of it composed in verse for ease of memorisation, holds a lesson for modern curriculum designers: that material intended for mass transmission must be made accessible in form as well as sound in content [24].

Modern technology offers tools that the nineteenth-century reformers did not possess but whose underlying logic they would have recognised. Radio, mobile telephony, and recorded audio lessons can today perform something close to the function that itinerant jaji teachers once performed, carrying instruction to women in areas where travel remains difficult or unsafe. Several contemporary Islamic education projects in northern Nigeria have already begun to use radio-based learning for women modelled, whether consciously or not, on the principle of bringing teaching to the learner rather than the reverse, and such initiatives deserve deliberate expansion and institutional support [25].

Integration must also be institutional, not merely technical, meaning that existing schools, madaris, and women's wings of religious associations should formally incorporate the Yan Taru method into their structure rather than treating it as a historical curiosity confined to academic study. This would involve training teachers explicitly in the jaji tradition, certifying them within recognised educational bodies, and giving them a defined role within state and community education systems. Murray Last has noted that the strength of the original Sokoto reform lay in its capacity to embed new practice within existing institutions rather than to operate alongside them, a lesson that integration efforts today would do well to heed [26].

²⁰ M., Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman dan Fodio*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 141

²¹ P., Lovejoy, *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2016, p. 203

²² K., Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2001, p. 51

²³ B., Yusuf, 'Hausa-Fulani Women: The State of the Struggle', in Coles, C. and Mack, B. (eds.), *Hausa*

Women in the Twentieth Century, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1991, p. 109

²⁴ J. Boyd, and B., Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1997, p. 23

²⁵ B., Mack, *Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004, p. 77

²⁶ M., Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longman, London, 1967, p. 77

Actionable Recommendations for Muslim Societies

Translating the principles examined above into action requires that Muslim societies move beyond general statements of intent toward specific, measurable commitments, in the same manner that the Sokoto reformers moved from doctrinal argument to the concrete establishment of the Yan Taru. Sustainable reform requires targets for the number of trained female teachers produced, the number of community learning circles established, and the proportion of girls retained in schooling through to completion, so that progress can be assessed rather than merely asserted [27].

Partnership between religious authority and state policy must be made formal rather than incidental, since reforms that rest on the goodwill of individual rulers or individual scholars, as much of the Sokoto legacy itself eventually did, risk fading once those individuals pass from the scene. Beverley Mack has observed that much of Asma'u's own legacy survived only because her writings were deliberately preserved and transmitted by successors who understood their value; contemporary societies must similarly build legal and institutional safeguards that do not depend on the continued presence of any one reforming figure [28].

Finally, Muslim societies should invest deliberately in scholarship that documents and disseminates models such as the Sokoto Caliphate's, so that policymakers, educators, and religious leaders have ready access to a usable historical precedent rather than having to invent reform from nothing. Paul Lovejoy has argued that the historiography of the Sokoto Caliphate remains underused as a resource for contemporary policy, despite its evident relevance to debates on women's education across the Muslim world, and closing this gap between historical scholarship and practical policy is itself a recommended and necessary step [29].

Findings of the Research

1. The Sokoto Caliphate maintained a structured tradition of female scholarship grounded explicitly in Qur'an and Sunnah, rather than in social custom.
2. Nana Asma'u's career demonstrates that religious learning and active social service were treated by the reformers as a single, unified undertaking.
3. The Yan Taru network shows that itinerant, community-based teaching can reach women whom formal institutions alone cannot reach.
4. Much of the present gap between Islamic principle and social practice arises from the conflation of local custom with religious obligation.

5. Insecurity and conflict, particularly in parts of northern Nigeria and the Sahel, have disproportionately disrupted girls' access to education.
6. A shortage of trained female religious teachers remains one of the most persistent obstacles to reviving structured education for women.
7. Reform argued from within the Islamic textual tradition has proved historically more durable than reform imposed from outside it.
8. Institutional continuity, achieved through documentation and the deliberate training of successors, was central to the survival of the Sokoto legacy.
9. Coordinated partnership between government, scholars, NGOs, and community leaders most closely reproduces the integrated structure of the original Sokoto reform.
10. Modern communication technologies can extend the underlying logic of the jaji system to women in areas that remain difficult to reach physically.

Recommendations

1. Muslim societies should integrate classical Islamic sciences with contemporary subjects in curricula designed specifically for girls' and women's education.
2. Governments and religious bodies should jointly establish formal, certified training programmes for female religious teachers, modelled on the jaji tradition.
3. Religious education for women should be treated as an obligatory provision within mosques, schools, and community centres, not an optional extra.
4. Community-based learning circles should be deliberately expanded in rural and underserved areas, following the proximity principle of the Yan Taru.
5. Legal and institutional protections should guarantee women's right to teach and to hold positions of responsibility commensurate with their qualification.
6. Governments should secure adequate, consistent funding for girls' education rather than relying on episodic donor support.
7. Islamic scholars should be encouraged and supported to produce sound scriptural argument addressing the education and social participation of women.
8. NGOs and community leaders should work in partnership with, rather than apart from, religious authorities in delivering women's educational programmes.

²⁷ A.L., Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems*, Luzac, London, 1972, p. 112

²⁸ B., Mack, *Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004, p. 102

²⁹ P., Lovejoy, *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2016, p. 219

9. Radio, mobile telephony, and other accessible technologies should be deliberately employed to extend religious instruction to women in remote areas.
10. Sustained scholarship documenting the Sokoto Caliphate's educational tradition should be commissioned and disseminated to inform contemporary policy.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that the Sokoto Caliphate tradition offers far more than a chapter of historical curiosity; it constitutes a living reservoir of Islamic scholarship, jurisprudence, and social practice from which contemporary Muslim societies can draw legitimate, culturally resonant models for reforming women's rights and social life. Through the intellectual legacy of Usman dan Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, Muhammad Bello, and especially Nana Asma'u, the Caliphate established that women's education, moral formation, and public contribution were not peripheral concerns but central to the success of an Islamic society. The Yan Taru itinerant teaching network, in particular, stands as concrete evidence that female religious leadership, mobility, and pedagogical authority were not only permissible but institutionally supported within a rigorously Islamic framework one grounded in Qur'anic and juristic reasoning rather than borrowed secular ideology.

This has significant implications for contemporary policy. Where modern debates on women's rights in Muslim societies are often framed as a binary choice between wholesale adoption of Western liberal frameworks or rigid traditionalism that curtails women's agency, the Sokoto model offers a third path: reform that is indigenous, textually grounded, and religiously authoritative. Policymakers, religious institutions, and educators seeking to expand women's access to education, economic participation, and social voice need not import frameworks perceived as culturally alien or religiously suspect; they can instead recover and adapt a precedent already sanctioned within their own scholarly tradition. This lends such reforms greater legitimacy, easier acceptance among conservative constituencies, and a stronger claim to authenticity.

At the same time, this study has shown that such recovery must be undertaken critically rather than nostalgically. The Caliphate was a product of its own historical, social, and political context, and not every feature of nineteenth-century Sokoto society translates directly into twenty-first-century realities. What is transferable is the underlying jurisprudential principle: that women's education and social participation are

Islamic imperatives, not concessions to modernity. Contemporary policy frameworks whether in education, family law, or civic participation stand to benefit from engaging this tradition not as a static relic to be replicated, but as a dynamic precedent to be reasoned from, in the same spirit of *ijtihad* that animated the Sokoto reformers themselves. In this sense, the Sokoto Caliphate tradition remains not merely relevant but instructive: a historical demonstration that Islamic authenticity and women's advancement are not merely compatible but, when properly understood, mutually reinforcing.

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