

The Character of Our Times

[Page 1]

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May peace and blessings be upon our master, Muhammad, his family and his companions. I have started this poem today, Thursday, before the time for zuhr prayer.¹

Oh Our Lord, Oh Our Lord, Oh the Only One,

Oh Allah, the Ruler, the Single One,

Oh Allah, offer me wisdom, Oh Lord,

as I compose this poem about the nature of our times,

for You are the Lord of these times.

Children and elders alike no longer care about the truth!

Oh my friends, come and listen to the warning!

If this warning pleases you, it will be beneficial to you.

Today, what causes a sister to suffer

is her love for mundane ceremonies and money. So do not lament!

If you speak [the truth], they say you are telling lies.

¹ The fourth Islamic obligatory prayer and the second prayer of the day.

In contrast, wealth speaks to them and gets their attention.

Surely, wealth is a gift from Allah.

Oh Allah, put us on the path of the wealthy!

While the rich can go as far as Egypt,

the poor cannot even go to the nearest local market!

Having a source of livelihood

Oh my sister, strive to have a source of livelihood, hear me!

Being able to feed yourself is a good thing, my sister.

[To the men], your shirt² together with your white trousers,

gown, and hat, together with your shoes from Kano,

if you have enough money, you can also buy new piece of cloth,

and a flashlight that you can use to walk in the bush at night.

[If you are wealthy], you always have the final word. I have seen what wealth can do!

You could even have a watch and the latest beautiful walking stick.

If you don't have any skills, you can't get anywhere.

² Here the poet uses the Hausa word *wundi* which is a special shirt produced in Kano that men generally wear in ceremonies.

You'll just be counting your prayer beads and seeing where you land!

Today, when you see delicious food [in a covered dish] with oil and meat,

it is surely someone with a livelihood will be enjoying it.

[Page 2]

Lift and carry [your merchandise] until you are a successful trader!

Looking for means to feed ourselves is what we all ought to do, my sister.³

The search for blessings is the best undertaking.

To the misinformed people, oh you who follow your whims, listen!

A sudden separation between my beloved brother and I

I weep for the loss of my brother,

a patient and grateful brother.

He neither got angry nor fought, and was always patient.

Whatever you told him, he obeyed without complaining.

I swear by Allah that he truly stood by me.

He enjoined me to be relentless and not to play around.

³ After talking to men in the previous verses, now the poet addresses women just as he started out with them. Now, he draws women's attention to the fact that just as men strive to have a livelihood in order to feed themselves, they should also do the same.

He did not farm or perform manual work,

for he devoted himself to studying. He was truly committed to it.

He had set up a Quranic school in the bush.

I swear by Allah that my teacher gave me a hoe!⁴

The teacher is now resting. Oh people, let us take heart!

He is gone forever, and is now in Barzahu.⁵

Oh Allah, Our Lord, open the door of Paradise!

Please, shower him with fragrance and light at once.

Please, include him among the people of the Prophet

so that he can benefit from his intercession on Judgment Day,

along with his household members and all his siblings.

Oh Allah, forgive all our transgressions.

⁴ The teacher here is the poet's mentor. He gave his disciple a hoe to farm and earn a livelihood, instead of relying on others or begging. By giving him a hoe, the teacher taught the student work ethic and urged him to farm in order to be able to feed himself and his family. The suggestion here is that Islamic knowledge must be combined with work ethic and having an occupation. This is in response to those who think that the learned should rely on others for their livelihood rather than being self-reliant.

⁵ The poet uses *Barzahu* (from Arabic *Barzakh*), which refers to the phase between people's death and their resurrection.

We seek help from Allah

Oh Allah, bless me with privileges from the Selected Prophet [Muhammad]

and from those of Shaykh Ahmad, the founder of the Tijaniyya, the straight path.

Oh Allah, offer me wealth and knowledge,

and make me beloved by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Oh Allah, make me benefit from the words of the learned scholars.

To you teachers who educate people, always follow the truth.

Be self-sufficient and give everyone what they deserve,

and do not call a stranger a black dog.⁶

Similarly, you Malam [teacher], stop denying the truth.⁷

If you deny the truth, I swear by Allah that you will be disappointed on Judgment Day!

⁶ By urging teachers never to call the strangers (guests) in their community "black dogs," which is offensive in Hausa culture, the poet reminds teachers that outsiders must be treated with utmost respect, as Islam teachers.

⁷ Here the poet asks teachers (Hausa: *malam*) not to be afraid to tell the truth anywhere and anytime, and to be ready to speak truth to power. In so doing, the poet suggests that teachers will fulfill their moral obligations as guardians of the truth. Otherwise, according to the poet, they will be held accountable on Judgment Day.