Society of Young Nigerian Writers

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History Explorer
Ilorin Emirate History

History of Ilorin Emirate

Ilorin is the present day capital of Kwara State in the north central Region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is a pre-dominantly Islamic City with people of diverse culture who have come together to live as one in peace and harmony. The Entire Ilorin community comprises of five Local Government Areas namely- Ilorin West, Ilorin South, Ilorin East, Asa and Moro. These Local Government Areas are all under one entity known as Ilorin Emirate.

Ilorin community was discovered in the 18th century by the duo of Afonja, Are-Onakakanfo, a Yoruba warlord and Sheik Alimi, an Islamic scholar. These heroes of Ilorin arrived Ilorin at different times and in different circumstances.

Sheik Alimi was an Islamic Missionary propagating Islam and its teachings across the land. He sojourned for many years through villages and towns across Yoruba land. He had followers with whom he moved around to establish the tenets and principles of Islam. He was temporarily settled at Kuwo village very close to Ilorin where he built mosques and houses. From Kuwo, Sheik Alimi continued to explore other territories where he could spread and establish his beliefs and settle down permanently.

During the course of his exploration, Sheik Alimi discovered a river that flows through villages, which he sought to know its origin. That river is river Asabuh known today as river Asa. He traced the origin of the river to the present day Ilorin. He thus began to visit the area with the aim of propagating Islam. He later settled at a hamlet within the vicinity of the river. The hamlet was
occupied by the Fulani, his kinsmen. The hamlet was known as Gaa Fulani and headed by Olufadi. Around this location were other hamlets like Idiape, Okesuna, and Gambari which also had their traditional heads. Within these hamlets was a major spot where there was a big stone that was used by the locals to sharpen their metal objects such as farm implements. That spot where the stone is located was referred to as Ilo-Irin. It served as a meeting point for the locals to interact. Unfortunately, Sheik Alimi could not interact with the people due to language barrier so he relied on Olufadi, his host, to interpret for him.

As Sheik Alimi began to interact with the people with the aid of Olufadi, he warmed his way into the heart of the people.

Meanwhile, Afonja, the Are-Onakakanfo of Oyo Ile, a war commander of the then Alaafin Aole of Yorubas was in a nearby hamlet, close to Gaa Fulani seeking refuge having lost a war, the Iwere war. In the then Yoruba tradition, a warlord must win any war failing which he must commit suicide.

Having lost a war and not ready to die, Afonja fled his native land, Oyo Ile, to escape the wrath of the Alaafin. He therefore sought refuge at Idiape. While in the community, Afonja with his status as a veteran warrior became very influential and powerful. He soon began to threaten peoples of nearby hamlets which hitherto have their leaders such as Gambari that had Hausa people with their leader known as Sarkin Gambari, Okesuna headed by Solagberu and even Gaa Fulani where Olufadi was.

However, as at the time of Sheik Alimi’s arrival at Gaa Fulani, there was palpable tension in the hamlet and its environs occasioned by the threat of Alaafin to invade the hamlets and effect the
arrest of the fugitive Are-Onakakanfo, Afonja. Afonja had sought the support of the people around him to protect him by not allowing Alaafin's soldiers to penetrate the hamlets, let alone, effect his arrest.

It is in the light of the forgoing, that news filtered to Afonja that a spiritualist with awesome power was in their midst i.e. Sheik Alimi. Afonja contacted Sheik Alimi and an agreement was reached that they will work together to defeat the Alaafin’s army. When the Alaafin army came calling, they were utterly defeated and this deepened the relationship between Afonja and Sheik Alimi. Afonja encouraged Sheik Alimi to take up permanent residence in that area with a promise of sharing war bounties together. From time to time, during the course of wars, any captured prisoners of war will be divided and Sheik Alimi will have his share. While Afonja used his as slaves, Sheik Alimi converted his own P.O.W to Muslims and subsequently set them free to normal lives devoid acrimony or animosity. This kind gesture of Sheik Alimi endeared him to many people of diverse cultures with in the hamlets who saw him as a compassionate person.

However after so many internal and external wars which further polarized the camps of both men and made them suspicious of each other, an eventual confrontation ensued and Alimi defeated Afonja. Having defeated Afonja, Sheik Alimi extended a hand of friendship to other hamlets nearby and formed a larger community with a common belief and destiny, which he headed. That community is now known as Ilorin. The city was named after that major meeting point of the people as a testimony of the unity of the people.