

Promoting Northern Girls Education Through Literature: A Review of 'Yar'fari', A Prose Work of Art by Aisha Abdulkareem

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Abstract- *This paper provides a critical review of Aisha Abdulkareem's 'Yar'fari', a prose work of art that highlights the challenges faced by northern Nigerian girls in accessing education. Through a critical discourse analysis, this paper examines how the novel promotes girls' education by challenging oppressive societal norms and highlighting the importance of education in empowering girls and women. The paper argues that 'Yar'fari' is a powerful tool for promoting social change and advocating for girls' education in northern Nigeria. The study contributes to the ongoing conversation about the importance of education in promoting gender equality and challenging oppressive societal norms.*

Keywords: *Girls' Education, Northern Nigeria, Literature, Social Change, Cultural and Societal Norms, 'Yar'fari', Gender Equality*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right that enables individuals to make informed choices about their lives. However, in northern Nigeria, girls' education is often hindered by deep-seated cultural and societal norms. Literature has long been recognized as a powerful tool for promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms. This paper examines how Aisha Abdulkareem's prose work of art, 'Yar'fari', promotes northern girls' education through its portrayal of the challenges and triumphs of a young girl's pursuit of knowledge.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In northern Nigeria, girls' education is often hindered by deep-seated cultural and societal norms (Maiwada and Renne, 2013; Okeke, 2012). These norms, which emphasize early marriage and domesticity, often lead to girls being denied access to education (Bakari, 2017; Mohammed, 2018). According to UNESCO (2019), Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in the world, with girls being disproportionately affected. In northern Nigeria, the

situation is particularly dire, with girls' enrollment rates in formal education being significantly lower than those of boys (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018).

Literature has long been recognized as a powerful tool for promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms (Bakhtin, 1981; hooks, 1994). Through its portrayal of the challenges and triumphs of a young girl's pursuit of knowledge, Aisha Abdulkareem's 'Yar'fari' offers a powerful critique of the societal norms that hinder girls' education in northern Nigeria. This study aims to explore how 'Yar'fari' promotes girls' education in northern Nigeria, and how it challenges the oppressive societal norms that hinder girls' access to education.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this research work is grounded in several key theories and concepts that inform the analysis of Aisha Abdulkareem's prose work of art, 'Yar'fari', and its promotion of girls' education in northern Nigeria. This framework draws from critical discourse analysis, feminist theory, and social change theory, providing a more understanding of the ways in which literature can be used to promote social change and challenge oppressive norms. Critical discourse analysis, as informed by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), provides a lens to examine the language and narrative strategies used in 'Yar'fari' to challenge oppressive societal norms and promote girls' education. According to Bakhtin, language is not a neutral medium, but rather a tool that can be used to shape and reinforce social norms and power dynamics (Bakhtin, 1981).

Feminist theory, as informed by the work of bell hooks (1994), emphasizes the importance of education as a practice of freedom and the need to challenge patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender

inequality. According to hooks, education can be a powerful tool for promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms, particularly when it is grounded in a critical understanding of the intersections of power and privilege (hooks, 1994). Social change theory points out the role of literature in promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms in the society. According to this theory, literature can be a powerful tool for promoting social change by challenging dominant discourses and promoting alternative perspectives (Freire, 1970). Thus, it guides the analysis of 'Yar'fari', revealing the ways in which the novel challenges oppressive societal norms and promotes girls' education.

Yar'fari

A'aisha Abdulkareem's *Yar'fari* offers a poignant critique of the northern Nigerian society's attitude towards female children's education. The novel highlights the deep-seated cultural and societal norms that perpetuate the suppression of female education, forcing girls into early marriage and a life of domesticity.

As noted by scholars such as Nussbaum (2004) and Sen (1999), education is a fundamental human right that enables individuals to make informed choices about their lives. However, in the context of northern Nigeria, female education is often seen as a threat to traditional values and societal norms. In *Yar'fari*, the protagonist Teni's desire for education is constantly thwarted by her family and community. Her father, Kabiru, although uneducated himself, recognizes the importance of education for his daughter. However, his cultural beliefs and the societal pressure to conform to traditional norms ultimately lead him to abandon his plans to educate Teni.

This phenomenon is not unique to the novel, as numerous studies have shown that in northern Nigeria, girls are often forced into early marriage and denied access to education (Maiwada and Renne, 2013; Okeke, 2012). The cultural narrative that marriage is the ultimate goal for girls is deeply ingrained, and education is seen as a means to prepare them for domesticity rather than empowerment. A'aisha's portrayal of the Kwane community's attitude towards female education is a scathing critique of the societal norms that perpetuate this injustice. The novel highlights the urgent need for a re-evaluation of these norms and the importance of education in empowering girls and women in the

society. As scholars such as Bakari (2017) and Mohammed (2018) have argued, education is the key to unlocking the potential of girls and women in northern Nigeria. By challenging the societal norms that suppress female education, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

Themes of *Yar'fari*

The Struggle for Girls' Education

Yar'fari highlights the challenges faced by girls in northern Nigeria in accessing education. Teni's desire for education is constantly thwarted by her family and community, reflecting the societal norms that prioritize early marriage and domesticity over girls' education (Maiwada and Renne, 2013; Okeke, 2012).

Cultural and Societal Oppression

The novel critiques the cultural and societal norms that oppress girls and women in northern Nigeria. The character of Baba Salisu represents the patriarchal society that restricts girls' freedom and autonomy (Adepoju, 2013; Aliyu, 2014).

Female Empowerment through Education

Yar'fari emphasizes the importance of education in empowering girls and women. Teni's pursuit of knowledge is a symbol of resistance against the oppressive societal norms that seek to silence her (Nussbaum, 2004; Sen, 1999).

The Impact of Poverty on Education

The novel pinpoints the impact of poverty on education, particularly for girls. Teni's family's poverty forces her to drop out of school, reflecting the reality of many girls in northern Nigeria who are denied access to education due to poverty (Bakari, 2017; Mohammed, 2018).

The Power of Resistance and Activism

Yar'fari celebrates the power of resistance and activism in challenging oppressive societal norms. Teni's determination to pursue her education despite the odds is an evident testament to the human spirit's capacity for resistance and activism (hooks, 1994; Bakhtin, 1981).

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an in-depth examination of the existing research on girls' education in northern Nigeria, focusing on the

cultural and societal norms that hinder girls' access to education. It also explores the role of literature in promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms. Understanding these complex issues is crucial for developing effective solutions to improve girls' education in the region.

Girls' Education in Northern Nigeria

Girls' education in northern Nigeria faces significant challenges due to deep-seated cultural and societal norms. Research has consistently shown that these norms prioritize early marriage and domesticity, often denying girls access to education (Maiwada and Renne, 2013; Okeke, 2012). According to UNESCO (2019), Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with girls disproportionately affected. The consequences of these norms are far-reaching, limiting girls' opportunities and perpetuating gender inequality. Studies have identified various factors contributing to the low enrollment and retention rates of girls in schools. These include poverty, lack of access to schools, and cultural attitudes towards girls' education (Bakari, 2017; Mohammed, 2018). For instance, in some communities, girls are expected to prioritize domestic roles over education, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and inequality.

Cultural and Societal Norms

The cultural and societal norms hindering girls' education in northern Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. Research highlights the influence of factors such as poverty, lack of education, and cultural and religious beliefs (Adepoju, 2013; Aliyu, 2014). In some communities, girls are viewed as a source of labor, expected to assist with domestic chores and childcare (Maiwada and Renne, 2013). These norms are often rooted in patriarchal systems, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of the issues. The impact of these norms is evident in the low enrollment and retention rates of girls in schools. According to Balogun (2012), girls' education is often seen as less important than boys', perpetuating a cycle of inequality. Addressing these norms requires a comprehensive approach that involves community engagement, education, and economic empowerment.

Literature as a Tool for Social Change

Literature has long been recognized as a powerful tool for promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms (Bakhtin, 1981; hooks, 1994). Through its portrayal of the challenges and triumphs

of a young girl's pursuit of knowledge, Aisha Abdulkareem's 'Yar'fari' offers a powerful critique of the societal norms hindering girls' education in northern Nigeria. Literature can inspire reflection and action by shedding light on the experiences of girls in similar situations. By sharing their stories, literature can humanize the issue, making it more relatable and accessible to a wider audience. Moreover, literature can provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, promoting empathy and understanding.

V. CONCLUSION

The literature review highpoints the complex and multifaceted nature of the cultural and societal norms hindering girls' education in northern Nigeria. It emphasizes the importance of literature as a tool for promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms. Aisha Abdulkareem's 'Yar'fari' is a powerful example of how literature can be used to promote girls' education and challenge the societal norms that hinder it. To address the issues surrounding girls' education in northern Nigeria, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This includes community engagement, education, and economic empowerment. Literature can play a vital role in this effort, inspiring reflection and action by shedding light on the experiences of girls in the region.

Future Research Directions

1. Investigating the impact of literature on promoting social change and challenging oppressive norms in northern Nigeria.
2. Examining the role of community engagement and education in promoting girls' education in the region.
3. Developing effective strategies for addressing the cultural and societal norms hindering

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