

AL-Zarība: A Case Study

By:

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In this presentation I tried to explain the importance of AL-Zarība as a cultural space and to stress upon the different roles and functions played by AL-Zarība as a religious institution which attracted the attention of many people from both inside and outside the area in which AL-Zarība Masīd is located. Among the different roles and functions played by AL-Zarība, I tried to deal with the educational, social and cultural functions which could be considered as the most important roles.

My speech on this subject is a continuation or a complementary to Dr. Idris Salim presentation which has been recently delivered. It is the application form of his theoretical assumptions on the subject under discussion i.e. AL-Masīd as a Socio-cultural and Educational Institution.

Before presenting my contribution about AL-Zarība Masīd in specific aspects. I should like to give short notes about AL-Zarība geographically and historically. This is because such a background will greatly help in understanding the roles and functions of the place in its surrounding areas.

Also I think, it is very essential to give definitions for certain words which are closely related to the subject to be discussed.

For Example:

- (AL-Zariba): Literally means the place where the animals are kept. But here it refers to a rural settlement (a village) in Kordofan State, where Sheikh AL-Bana'e is lodging.
- (AL-Masid): is a place where the pupils are taught lessons on Quran and other skills on reading and writing Arabic Language.
- (Tuggaba): means a certain wood fire which is used to give light for the pupils while they are learning Quran.
- (Huwar pL. Hiran): Pupil/pupils who is/are learning in AL-Masid.

AL-Zariba is located in Northern Kordofan State, North-east of AL-Obied the capital of the state. It represents a centre for many villages surrounding it. The place lies on a sandy land in a poor savanna region.

The history of this village started approximately one hundred and fifty years ago. The village began its construction by the settling of Sheikh Mohammed Wad Waga'e Alla on the site. He started his residence accompanied by his (Hiran) and established his masjid, and since then AL-Zariba Masjid began its practice by simply teaching Quran and Islamic doctrines, then bit by bit the village and AL-Masid were flourishing and soon have been known by the residents, later on it have been well known to most of the Kordofanian and the Sudanese people, moreover recently some neighbouring countries are aware about this religious institution.

Sheikh AL-Bura'e and his ancestors are followers of the Sammaniyya tariqah which is one of the Sufi sects in the Sudan.

AL-Zariba as an institution has many functions and roles which it carries out among the settlers in its district and sometimes far away beyond the international borders.

I shall point out only three functions precisely, and with short notes on each function (i.e. only as samples).

Firstly, I shall start with the educational function which historically the first role the institution started with. AL-Zariba Masjid has done great efforts to clear out the illiteracy of a lot of children who are not only those who are in the surrounding areas, but the children from far away districts. It is well known that the illiteracy in the Sudan is over 80%, and the capacity of the elementary schools is far beyond the children population who are seven years of age, then we could notice the considerable contribution of such institutions, bearing in mind that there are many other institutions all over the Sudan.

Secondly, if we think about the social functions which are carried out by AL-Zariba as an institution, we notice that it has many contributions in this aspect. But here within I shall direct the attention to a very specific samples. For example this institution as a place being open for different ethnic groups and nevertheless it encourages Sudanese people without any signs of racial discrimination to come and unite together as Muslims in one social society, looking only at the benefits that they could do for themselves by such unity, and all people having equal rights, without any differentiation on ethnic basis concerning marriage or work. This for sure diminishes racial crisis.

Encouraging youth towards marriage, recently – two years or less ago – the late Sheikh AL-Bura'e was advocating co-operative marriage of more than one thousand of the youth who are lodging in villages around AL-Zariba. This means

that more than five hundred new families were added to the society. Also if we put in mind the AIDS disease which is the global illness of today, for sure this institution had given the society one of the disease deterrents by keeping the sexual needs to be within the family and thus the community health has been served.

AL-Zarība Masīd during the year of drought and desertification of the eighties last century, it was being an area of support for the poor who had lost their cattle. They simply lodged near AL-Masīd, and they found great help in feeding themselves, so they could resist the poverty dilemma. This role that AL-Masīd carried out at that period was somewhat similar to the role of any aid organization (local or foreign) could present to the population in the region.

Moreover AL-Masīd institution has a healthy role by presenting traditional medicine, specially in the area of psychiatry curing for the diseases of (Jin and Zar), inspite of whether that curing is true or false. It is a psychological treatment and somewhat satisfactory to society at the case of absence of hospitals or any healthy units. So such service will be of some value to those unlucky poor settlers.

The cultural function although it is not the last of the functions of AL-Masīd, but I consider it only the last of samples.

Culturally AL-Masīd represents an important factor through which many artistic knowledges are practiced by the settlers. For example the (Mādhīh) which is a kind of religious folk poetry for praising the Prophet of Islam and Muslim saints (locally the Awliya).

One of Sheikh AL-Bura'e contributions in changing the (Madih) musical style is his adaptation of traditional songs melody and rhythm. Such changes become artistically very attractive and appreciable to the youth, especially when listening to them from Awlad AL-Bura'e who are a professional Madih group of performers established by their sheikh specifically to chant his Madih poems.

The other form of Sufi practice is the (Dhiker) which is normally accompanied by drums (Noba and Tar) or other ideaphones. These Sufi performing sessions, beside their religious satisfaction to people, have an entertainment function that attracts many audience and participants.

AL-Masid through his Sheikh taught people the basic rules of their religion and answers the questions related to Islamic doctrines concerning (Halal and Haram) i.e. allowable and unallowable. Also teaching people what is right and what is wrong according to Islamic orders. Such a service is of great value to the illiterate population who statistically form the majority.

Finally, an important question must be asked and must be answered. Why AL-Zariba Masid and the other Masids must be considered as an intangible cultural heritage?

Anyway, in order to explain the case I stressed on selected social, cultural and educational examples, aiming that it will be clear to those who are interested in the protection and continuity of intangible cultural heritage in the Sudan that AL-Zariba is an important masterpiece due to its (Masid) and also a cultural space due to its community, where many tradition genres are practiced and performed.

All these aspects of the traditions of AL-Zariba are badly in need for protection and means to continue. I am looking forward for a programme for collection,

documentation and preservation of these traditions before they vanish away for ever. I think the best means of preservation is to study the case from the point of view (how we can cause these traditions to survive by continuing performances in the society).

** Please, I request you to have a look at a very compressed and very short video tape shots which has been edited from a collected data since 1993, when our team from the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum had been to AL-Zariba for collecting Sudanese traditional music to be deposited in the folklore archive for the benefit of the researchers in general and the post-graduate students in particular.