

The Road Metaphor and Journey Motif in Zaynab Alkali's *The Virtuous Woman*

FADARE, NURENI OYEWOLE

Abstract

The concept of "road" as a metaphor of human sojourn on earth is a recurrent leitmotif in African Literature in tandem with Africans' perception of life as a journey. This paper seeks to examine Zaynab Alkali's *The Virtuous Woman* as a novella that parades three female characters who are navigating the course of their life through the dilapidating and slippery road representing the major obstacles and challenges of life women contend with in their stages of development. This study adopts the Womanist and Stiwanist strands of Feminist Literary Theory in carrying out an in-depth analysis of the text. It is discovered that, women confront three major challenges in their peregrination: the good, symbolically represented by the character of Nana Ai, the bad, portrayed by the character of Laila and the ugly, depicted by the character of Hajjo. The writer aptly deploys the road metaphor and journey motif in the development of the plot and the thematic thrusts of the text. She sounds a note of warning to young women to be determined and focused as they make choices that may make or mar their life as they grow into womanhood.

Introduction

In the African worldview, life is perceived as a journey that revolves in continuum from birth to death. Africans do not see death as the end of human life as the dead play significant roles in the lives of the living and could return to their previous family through re-incarnation. What is paramount to this study is the perception that life is a journey which informs the Yoruba popular saying: *Ajo laye* meaning, "life is a journey." The concept of road as a metaphor is not alien to African literary scholarship. In the award winning novel of Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*, the road assumes a metaphor of everything that has gone awry in the country. Okri also uses the road metaphor as a signifier of life encumbrances as reflected in the opening paragraph of the text: "In the BEGINNING there was a

river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry.”(3) Alkali deploys the same strategy to lampoon the social and political inadequacies in the country. This explains why the major characters in the text have to embark on a journey as a symbolic representation of their development from childhood through adulthood amidst chaos and difficulties symbolized by the bad road (the country or the society at large) and the reckless drivers (the leaders).

To secure a safe journey, it is expected that the road should be in good condition with an experienced driver. These two major factors are lacking in the text. The road is slippery and full of potholes while the drivers who are plying the road drive with careless abandonment. The state of bad roads in most African countries especially Nigeria has also reflected the types of the leaders piloting the affairs of the country. *The Virtuous Woman*, though a novella, is a huge success. It raises some existentialist questions on the meanings of life. It is a warning and admonition to the young women and the nation at large to avoid recklessness and impatience in order to arrive safely at their target destination.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the novella with focus on the character development, thematic foci and the narrative techniques, especially the aspects of journey motif and the deployment of “road” as metaphor. The study disagrees with those critics who perceive *The Virtuous Woman* as the least successful text of Zaynab Alkali. The text is successful to the extent of its set goal which is to admonish young women to be assertive and determined in the pursuance of their life goal. The text also perceives early or child marriage as a choice capable of limiting the aspiration of young women. The writer also sensitises young women about the challenges they are likely to confront in the world that is male dominated.

Gender Discourse, Feminism and African Perspective

The field of gender discourse in Africa has taken various dimensions with the appearance of Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* about fifty years ago. Most African female writers always try to desist from being identified or tagged as feminists whether radical or mild. This trend begins with the first generation of female African Writers such as: Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head among others. Zaynab Alkali is one of the second generation of Nigerian

female writers and a leading voice from the Northern axis of the country. Most of her works are channeled towards discussing some of the constraints bestriding women in Nigeria, especially from the Northern parts of the country. Some of her major works are: *The Stillborn* (1984), *The Virtuous Woman* (1986), *The Cobwebs and Other Stories* (1997), *The Descendants* (2005) and *The Initiates* (2007). Alkali always deploys her personal life experience to mould the lives of her characters. Her thematic foci in the above listed texts are reflections of her own development. Therefore, each of the text represents a phase in her life. She is quoted to have argued that: “One thing I have discovered about my writing is that it manifests in accordance with my own growth. That is, it matures in accordance with my psychological maturity. And I feel I’m writing my own personal story.” (everythinliterature.blogspot.com.ng)

As a dedicated African woman, mother, wife, literary writer, scholar of international repute and seasoned administrator, Alkali does not allow her social status blind her from her background. Therefore, her quest is not to profess ideologies that wage wars against men as it is the common practice among the radical feminists. Her agitation centres on the importance of female education which has been neglected for years in Northern Nigeria and most parts of Africa. One of her central arguments is that it is through functional education that women can meaningfully contribute their quota to the development of the society. *Praxis*, an online magazine, appraises the literary outputs of Zaynab Alkali in its editorial. The magazine reviews the work of Umelo Ojinma and Emman Egya Sule titled, *The Writing of Zaynab Alkali*. They argue that Alkali’s prime pre-occupation in *The Stillborn* is “the quest for self-fulfillment and self-realization not an advocacy for „a world without men,” but a world in which equity is assured for each individual, male or female.” (www.praxismagonline.com). In a separate interview with *Hallmark Magazine*, Alkali is also quoted to have disassociated herself from the feminist ideology for the obvious reason of creating enmity with men in the society. According to her:

I have always said if you want to know whether or not I am a feminist, you have to first give me a definition of feminism, and I will tell you. Assertively, I would agree with that, but rebelliousness, I wouldn’t. I have always tried my best to balance as regards gender issues. Feminism has along the way earned a lot of associations, which are not really nice. As I always say, where I came from, when you say a woman is a feminist, it is a derogatory term and I don’t want to be associated with that.

(www.praxismagonline.com)

Just the way other female African writers try to disassociate themselves from the derogatory meaning attached to feminism, Alkali abhors the tag “feminist” because women can assert their right in the society without being rebellious. Rather than feminism, Buchi Emechata argues that her own brand of feminism carries a small letter “f” because she is not writing to please the western world but writing to project the realities in her immediate society. She believes in the family life and detests the appellation of being called a feminist. She submits that “Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small „f.” (533)

Other literary critics such as Mary Modupe Kolawole in her work *Womanism and African Consciousness* eulogises the roles of a woman as a mother. This African version of feminism is coined by Alice Walker who argues that a womanist is a “woman committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Traditionally, universalist and traditional capable (sic).” (ix). The point of convergence between Feminism and Womanism is the fact that the two of them are striving to establish a new identity of women different from the former stereotype attached to them such as being a “second class citizen” or being inferior to men. Their divergent point lies in the Womanist argument that the prime role of women is the state of being a mother. This might be the reason responsible for the coinage of the word “Motherism” by Catherine Acholonu which extols the state of being a mother as the best virtue of a woman. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie argues that the word feminism refers to all the variant nomenclatures that are used to refer to a wide range of struggle for women liberation and derogatory meaning should not be attached to it. However, as her own contribution to the discourse of gender, she acknowledges the dangers that are associated with being referred to as a feminist in the African context and as a result, she forges ahead to coin the word “Stiwanism,” “STIWA,” according to her, is an acronym for “Social Transformation Including Women in Africa” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 550). Therefore, Ogundipe-Leslie’s version of feminism is

predicated upon social transformation of women in the African societies. In summary, Mary Ebun Modupe Kolawole, on womanism submits that:

Womanism is not man hating ideology. It underscores racial and cultural relevance, the centrality of the family, and the need for men and women to work together to achieve gender justice, gender equity and woman's empowerment. (26)

From the foregoing, African Womanism and its variants such as Stiwanism and Motherism emphasise the roles of women as mother and agent of social transformation. They uphold women assertiveness but condemn acts of rebelliousness. It is worthy to note that women cannot make any meaningful contribution in the society unless the society is re-organised to bring forth new orientation that prioritises gender equity, respect for women education and partners in marriage and not just male appendages.

The rest of this study will focus on the principles of Womanism and Stiwanism in analyzing *The Virtuous Woman*. The study will also focus on the importance of female education, condemnation of early female marriage and male recklessness. The text advocates for a mutual and cordial relationship between men and women in the society. The bad state of the road represents everything bad in the country, and Africa in general, amidst which women must strive to ascertain their identity, acquire functional education, get married and become the pillars of their various homes like the two female children of Dogo Musa in the text, Li in *The Stillborn* and Seytu in *The Descendants*

The Virtuous Woman: The Thematic Foci

There is no doubt that *The Virtuous Woman* is a Womanist novel aims at identifying some of the predicaments bestriding women in our society. It also strives to extol the beauty of womanhood. The overall thematic thrust of the text is subsumed in the college verse of the Queen's College, Kudu which goes thus:

Who can find the virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies
The heart of her husband doth
Safely trust in her
So that he shall have no need for spoil
She will do him good and not evil

All the days of her life...

Strength and honour are her clothing
And shall rejoice in time to come (86)

The above excerpt foregrounds the qualities of a virtuous woman. She is a rare gem to find and always leads an honourable life. The writer makes a lot of effort to identify some of the attributes of a virtuous woman which she enjoins all young women to emulate. At the beginning of the text, we come across Baba Sani, the grandfather of Nana Ai, the protagonist of the text. He is portrayed as a highly respected man in the village probably because it is believed that he possesses some supernatural powers. He admonishes his daughter to always be of good moral. He warns her not to accept any favour from a stranger: monetary, clothes or a free ride because Baba Sani believes that: “to die is better than to commit a disgraceful act” (14). This simple admonition becomes an asset to Nana Ai when she is travelling to Birnin Adama with Laila and Hajjo, she politely turns down the offer of the free ride offered by a car owner.

The writer also extols beauty and intelligence as some of the attributes of a virtuous woman. Nana Ai is an epitome of beauty and brain combined. Her admission at the Queen’s College, Kudu, in 1960 is strictly on merit unlike that of Laila and Hajjo that is based on the quota system. According to the narrator:

This year the chance had fallen on the two girls (Laila and Hajjo) by sheer luck. At the Provincial Headquarters, some official had simply picked out the first two female names on the list of successful candidates for the famous college. (31)

As a quintessential virtuous woman, Nana Ai is an epitome of beauty and intelligence. Nana Ai, despite her physical challenges, especially, her limping leg which she incurs through a Polio disease that attacks her while young, remains an epitome of beauty, intelligence and maturity. The narrator submits that:

She could have attained a much taller height but for a paralysis in the left leg. In spite of this obvious disability, she bore herself with the utmost dignity, thus endearing herself to many people. Some once remarked that Nana Ai had a maturity that was conspicuously absent in her age-mates.
(11)

The writer sets the character of Nana Ai against that of the other two major characters in the text in order to foreground the expected qualities of a virtuous woman. The narrator argues that Nana Ai “... was an embodiment of her

aspiration, beautiful, intelligent and very kind” (6). The narrator delves into the family backgrounds of the three characters and their attributes in order to clarify the expected good qualities of a woman from the bad ones. Nana Ai loses her two parents at an early age due to road accident. She is, therefore, brought up by her grandfather, Baba Sani, who is renowned for his steadfastness and discipline. However, the second character, Laila, is born not by a virtuous parent but by “...a fat aggressive woman” (3) and her father, Boni, is too boastful, arrogant and loud, the traits that Hajjo has inherited from them. Her background has a significant influence on her upbringing as the narrator testifies:

Laila, a short, buxom girl of sixteen who looked much older, was fifth in a family of ten daughters and two sons. Having older sisters to care for her had turned her into an insufferably disorganized young woman. She was... incapable of retaining anger. (6)

Therefore, while Nana Ai’s parents are of enviable character which they transfer to their daughter coupled with the good character of her guardian, Baba Sani, Laila is not as lucky as she is brought up by a belligerent mother and a proud father. It could also be argued that Nana Ai’s upbringing is a combination of nature and nurture against that of Laila that is brought up in an unfriendly environment. Nana Ai is a product of good parenthood; Laila comes out as bad as her parents while Hajjo’s parental background is a disaster. It is in the common knowledge of people of Gidan Zuma that Hajjo is a product of street affair. Her mother had conceived her while still at the college and she was expelled from the school as a result. Hajjo gets to know about the truth of her parenthood from the gossips about her in the school. The shoddy background of Hajjo, is thus revealed as: “Twice, her grandmother in intense anger had beaten her on the head and had called her a bastard. In the school, she had come to know, through some envious classmates, that she was the product of a street affair” (7).

Hajjo’s background instills a sense of inferiority complex in her. She is treated as the *other* in the comity of the young children. The fact that she is an illegitimate child in a society that places a high premium on being of good parentage heightens her alienation. This makes her not to be so accepted within the circles of her family, her peers and the community at large. The circumstance of her birth is symbolically represented by her ugliness. On the account of the

narrator, it is deduced that

Other children playing a few yards away stopped and joined in the laughter. They loved to see Hajjo screw up her face, which was already funny to look at, with its big nose, ears that stuck out like a rabbit's and tiny eyes that were set near together under bushy eyebrows. A large black birthmark ran across the whole of her left cheek, leaving her face scared. People often remarked that her mother must have craved for bush rat when she was pregnant. (8)

In contrast to the aforementioned character portrayal of Laila and Hajjo, Nana Ai is a blend of what is lacking in the making of the two previously mentioned characters. She is elegantly beautiful and adorable and her enviable character dwarfs that of her peers. The narrator continuously eulogises her attributes in order to foreground the fact that a virtuous woman should be an embodiment of beauty, maturity, patience and intelligence. In one of such eulogies, the narrator comments that

At seventeen, she (Nana Ai) was more composed than many an adolescent woman. She never hurried and had a positive outlook on life. The soft, fair skin and silky hair braided in four long ropes gave her a girlish look. The long, full eyelashes concealed a pair of dark eyes. (10)

In tandem with the Womanist tenets, Nana Ai aspires to become a Medical Doctor in the future. Her father had been a medical doctor in the city before he met his untimely death. This means that a woman must have vision and clear imagination of what she wants to become in the future and the choice of one's career should not be limited by issue of gender. Baba Sani, Nana Ai's grandfather, is a traditional herbalist who is an equivalent of a medical doctor in the modern sense. In most patriarchal African societies, the Medicinal profession is seen as the prerogative of men. It is assumed that a woman should only aspire to be a nurse but Nana Ai is different. She aspires to become a Medical Doctor in future even though it is not so clear to her if a woman could reach such feat. According to the narrator:

Nana wondered if she would have followed her grandfather's footsteps if she had been a male. Medicine...was in the family. Her father, whom she was not fortunate enough to know, was said to have been a medical doctor in the city. Perhaps, she said to herself, "if I were a male, I would be a doctor also." (10)

In further pursuance of this noble goal, Alkali makes sure that her central female character in her subsequent novel, Seytu in *The Descendants* (2005) becomes a medical doctor and just like Li in *The Stillborn* (1986) becomes the pillar of her family. In the present age, the notion that certain prestigious professions are preserved exclusively for men needs to be challenged. A female can aspire to become whatever she wants to become in life. It is wrong to deny women the right to aspire in life as this will have a lot of implications on their economic status which, will invariably, make them subservient to male hegemony and dominance. Closely related to the above thematic thrust is the importance of female education. In most African societies, women education is always taken with levity. It is wrongly believed that the place of women is in the kitchen; therefore, they need little or no education. Most of these out-dated traditions promulgated, propagated and promoted by men in order to sustain their patriarchal dominance. It is erroneously believed that a well educated woman will not be so easy to control and silenced by men; such females are always suspected to challenge the male hegemony and dominance. As a result, many of them are married off at a time they are supposed to be in the school learning or be apprenticed to a craftsman or woman that could train them in a trade that will be useful to them later in life.

In *The Virtuous Woman*, there are two categories of young women: those that are aspiring to acquire western education that will make them selfindependent in the future and those being hurried into marriage. The narrator refers the child bride as “the silent veiled figure” who is being taken “...to her husband.”(43). Elsewhere, the child bride is described as a thing: “she pointed to a small figure heavily veiled and seated a few yards away from the crowd.” (40) The argument of the writer is that rather than sending young children (child bride) to an early marriage, young women should acquire education or skills that will make them self-sufficient and independent in future. To further strengthen this argument, the writer lampoons the patriarchal view that an educated woman is of no value to her immediate family. She illustrates this with the story of Musa Dogo. Musa Dogo has a wife who bears him six daughters and a son. He later sends the wife away with two of her female children: Adama and Talatu. Musa Dogo is one of such men that have vowed not to educate or train their female children because they stand to gain nothing from such huge investment. According to him:

What is the use of sending a female child to school? If she turns out well,
the man she marries gets the benefits of her education. If she gets spoilt, I

get the blame. It's my name that gets dragged into the mud. It's my house that becomes her refuge. Whichever way you look at it, the father of a female child is the loser. Let the girls stay at home and help their mother when it is time for them to marry, let them marry. (47)

Alkali has succeeded in revealing the collective unconscious of most African societies; a factor that has been largely responsible for low enrolment of female children in schools. To the utter disappointment of Musa Dogo, two of his female children: Adama and Talatu, grow to become "...the pillars in Dogo household." (51) This fact alludes to one of the central foci of the Womanists that when female children are accorded the same space and given equal opportunities with their male counterparts, they can contribute significantly to the family glories. When Dogo Musa is completely down it is his female children that come to his aid. In a literary interaction in Port Harcourt to celebrate Women Day, Alkali was asked about the choice she recommends for the young children: marriage or education? Her response: "Both: to school first, then to your husband's house" (www.dailytrust.com). This response indicates that Alkali prioritizes female education over child marriage. A young woman should acquire relevant education and learning before getting married.

Still on the question of marriage, the writer encourages parents to desist from forcing their children into marriage. The young female children should be allowed to make their own choice though they could be guided or admonished but not forced. A young man accompanies Laila's father to Baba Sani's house, the young man stares at Nana Ai and he is awestruck by her beauty; her grandfather comments on the young man as being lazy. Through this action, it is clear that Baba Sani will not wish his granddaughter marry a loafer. Through authorial comment, the narrator states that

True, many people had approached him about Nana, but while he had not said No he had not encouraged them either. He did not believe in choosing spouses for his children. He let them make their choice, discreetly guiding with his subtle encouragement or discouragement. (19)

Forced marriage known in local parlance as *Ahure Dole* is a common practice in some parts of Nigeria whereby young women, mostly underage teenagers, are

forced to marry older men for economic or political reasons. This needs to be discouraged because of its negative impact on the education of a girl child.

The Road Metaphor and Journey Motif in The Virtuous Woman

Zaynab Alkali's fiction is a blend of advice and admonishment for the younger generation, embellished with metaphor and journey motif. As earlier mentioned, human life in African society, is perceived as a journey. Therefore, the journey embarked upon by Nana Ai, Laila and Hajjo represents their journey of life and development stages. The journey also serves as an epiphany for them. It is a journey of freedom for Nana Ai who travels alone for the first time. She also becomes aware of her womanhood and the needs for a man in her life for the first time. Laila, on her part, is experiencing life and coming in contact with modernity for the first time. The story is set in Gidan Zuma, "a small beautiful and isolated village way out of reach of casual travelers, eight kilometers inland from the major highway, only a small bush path joins the village to the busy highway." (1) Gidan Zuma is described as a cosmopolitan settlement with "...many ethnic groups as there are household heads..."(2) This description makes the setting of the text a microcosm of the heterogeneous Nigerian society.

On the final day of Nana Ai's and her colleagues' journey, Baba Sani accompanies them to the main road before leaving them to explore the remaining parts of the journey on their own. They encounter their first challenge when they come across a car owner and his friend looking for young women to give a lift. The men are predators searching for their unfortunate preys to devour. It is not a mistake that they are men! The narrator describes them thus:

The flabby man at the wheel poked his large, square head out and fixed his tiny red eyes on Nana ... His voice was disturbingly thin like that of a woman and when he smiled, he exposed a set of red, rugged, kolanutstained teeth. (23)

When Nana Ai and her friends arrive at Birnin Adama, they realize that the man at the wheel is the Education Secretary who is scheduled to provide them the logistics that will aid their travelling to Kudu. The young women come across two other boys at the Secretary's office: Bello and Abubakar. The Secretary assigns an old man called Mallam Jauro as their escort as a punishment for their reluctance to yield to their offer of free ride. The children board a lorry with the inscription "*Hakuri*"

meaning “Patience” (35). There are other two lorries loading at the motor park: “*Allah Sarki* God is king” and *Allah Kiyaye*, God protects.” (35) The narrator describes the bad condition of the road that Nana Ai and the other two girls are plying as bad. According to him:

The roads were bad. A narrow dusty track was a common sight in those days; or where the roads were supposed to have been tarred, potholes and sharp edges made them more dangerous than the laterite ones. (39)

It is reported that no sooner than the journey commences than the rain began to pour such that: “The laterite road, now soaked, became muddy and slippery.” (p.39) *Allah Kiyaye* and *Allah Sarki* drivers are reckless at wheel and sooner than expected, they get trapped in the muddy water and the drivers and their passengers have to accept their fate and sleep on the highway overnight. The passengers are now stranded due to the bad condition of the road, the heavy down pour and the recklessness of two of the drivers plying the road. Despite the predicament confronting the travelers, they turn the ugly moment to a joyous one. Abubakar and Bello are sent to the nearby village where they purchase a ram that is later slaughtered, roasted and served to all passengers. One of the central arguments here is that one can always make a good use of a dangerous and precarious situation. The journey of life always brings its own misfortunes and the choice is wholesomely ours to make good or bad use of the situation. The narrator submits that

The passengers organized themselves into a dancing group. The fire grew big as more twigs were fed into it. The darkness around cleared considerably. The dancing and singing accompanied by cheerful laughter, created a kind of festive occasion. (44)

While plying the road of life, there are some elements that are stronger than human beings upon which they have no power. Consequently, they must device a means of escaping the inevitability of the elements through caution and patience and not recklessness. For instance, the narrator states that: “once more, clouds gathered threateningly and the drivers accelerated dangerously. Nana’s lorry followed at a slower pace.” (8) The whirlwind, the thunderstorm and the rain are the elements that may work in favour or against (wo)men depending on how human being conduct themselves.

The reckless driving of *Allah Kiyaye* and *Allah Sarki* drivers eventually results to accident that claims many lives. Most of the disasters that befall human being are manmade and avoidable like road accident and other life disasters that humankind encounters in life. The narrator wonders why there are so many road accidents which have always resulted into the loss of precious human lives and property: "It is becoming so common that every other person you talk to has been affected one way or another by a road accident. Why! By God, it's becoming an epidemic." (79). The narrator forges ahead that:

I never used to care that the roads were bad, until now. The few tarred ones are not maintained: dangerous potholes and jagged edges have become the order of the day. By God such roads are worse than the tarred ones. Then behind the wheels, what have you... Recklessness, undisciplined and unqualified drivers, who should not be on the road, but who somehow got their driving licences even before they had touched a steering wheel. (7980)

From a political view-point, the drivers are the political leaders running the affairs of the country to its inevitable perdition. The road is, therefore, a symbol of bad governance, corruption, inequality and such other encumbrances that retard the growth of the nation especially the development and attainment of women goals and aspirations. It is in the midst of this obvious confusion that Nana Ai, Laila and Hajjo are negotiating their life goal. The political action and inaction of the leaders have direct consequences on the lives of the citizens and the narrator argues that most of the predicaments confronting the nation persist "...because a handful of greedy and corrupt people in places of authority have failed to place God on their priority list" (80).

Another existentialist viewpoint of the writer is the concept of individualism. The essence of appointing the old man to accompany Nana Ai and her friends is to curb their waywardness and excesses that may be caused by their youthful exuberances. However, the old man as the representative of the adult world fails in his duties to curb the children because of his own incapacities. As a result, the children are practically on their own and responsible for their action and inaction. In the view of Nana Ai: "The old one was good...But with him we were all by ourselves." (77) The journey serves as an epiphany for the young children. It opens them to the reality of life. Life is not a bed of roses as Laila had thought. The

accident scene creates panic in the young ones: "many of the passengers were

dead...and many others injured. The girls moved in a daze, their eyes scanning the man-made chaos.” (63) The children are grieved by the incident they have just witnessed and this constitutes a monumental event that will forever mould their perception of life. This is vividly captured in the effects of the accident scene on Nana Ai: “She grieved for the loss of her innocence; yet, she could regret it, for somehow, she was beginning to grasp the true meaning of life. The only thing she regretted was the tragic end to their meaningful journey.” (73) The writer takes a cue from the existentialist philosophy which perceives human life as meaningless; this explains why life must end inevitably with death as occurred to the accident victims. This is also applicable to life goals; while some will come to reality, others will be unfulfilled and aborted.

Conclusion

This paper examines Zaynab Alkali’s *The Virtuous Woman* with focuses on how the writer deploys road metaphor and journey motif in advocating for women assertiveness, agitation for female education and condemnation of early marriage, waywardness and recklessness. It eulogises intelligence in women, beauty, hard work and a clear vision pursued with doggedness. It lampoons bad leadership in the country leading to the destruction of the life goals of both young men and women. The strength of this paper lies in the recognition of the narrative power of the writer and the deployment of road metaphor and journey motif in the analysis of the plot and thematic foci of the text. Have Alkali’s efforts and advocacies for improvement in female education in the Northern parts of the country yielded any fruit? Yes! Her writing has created more awareness as reflected in the enrollment of women in school in the Northern region today and the positions of authority being occupied by them. In the words of Zaynab Alkali: “We have a lot of progress where women are concerned. Most women are now educated and many are occupying important positions in politics, the civil service and so on.” (everythinliterature.blogspot.com.ng). It is on this note that the paper recognises the writer as one of the leading voices in literary writings from the Northern Nigeria and a literary giant in the country as a whole.

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