
Some Outstanding Women of African Continent

KAK Akhtar

*Editor-in-Chief
JSOGP*

Not all women of African continent have been or are submitted or uneducated. Only a few out of the prominent ones are mentioned here.

Those of Ancient Times

Hatshepsut: a Pharaoh (1508-1458BC)^{1,2}

While most Pharaohs were men, once in a while women got a chance to rule ancient Egypt, like the well known Cleopatra and Merneith etc. However less well known, but one of the greatest



Pharaoh was Hatshepsut _ a lady emperor who got the throne at the death of her husband, while the next male descendant was only an infant, thus she became the 6th Pharaoh of the 18th dynasty and ruled Egyptian Empire for nearly 21 years and 9 months, the longest that a woman Pharaoh ever ruled. She brought peace, prosperity and glory to the area, after a long time. She achieved ambitions plans calling herself a 'King' and not a queen. One of her major accomplishments was reestablishment of trade routes and trade relations, which were interrupted earlier. She sent raiding expeditions to Punt, Byllos, Sinai, Nubia and Canaan. Being successful in warfare she brought back lots of wealth which was

lost during earlier foreign occupations of Egypt. Being fond of arts, lot of statuary came up during her reign which is now seen in almost every museum of the world.

She was one of the most prolific builder Pharaoh in ancient Egypt and commissioned hundreds of projects in both upper and lower Egypt.

Her successors being jealous of her tried their level best to destroy all evidence of her superiority. But the archaeologists and Egyptologist have detected the Temple of Karnak at Deir-el-Bahri, constructed during her times at a site chosen by her to become the 'Valley of Kings', with perfect symmetry that predates Parthenon. Djoser-Djeseru is the main building of mortuary temple. Her grave with lots of artefacts and Hieroglyphic clues has now been discovered and which had perhaps remained concealed by myrrh tree grown over it.²

Muslim Arab African Ladies

All of them were not just backward women, as some excelled in unique manners, for instance

Fatima-Al-Fihri and her sister **Mariam-Al-Fihri** (Early 9th century AD).³

Daughters of Mohammad-Al-Fihri, a wealthy merchant from Tunisia who settled in Fes, Morocco. Fatima and her sister Mariam inherited lot of wealth from their father.

Fatima^{3,4} was well educated and planned to build a mosque Al- Karaouine, the largest in North Africa. During construction of the mosque University of Al-Karaouine came up (located within the compounds of the mosque) as the first leading spiritual and educational centre of Muslim world. Guinness Book of World Record has recognised it to be the oldest continuously operating institution of higher learning in the world at large.⁴ Grammar, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, history and geography etc. were taught there. In the library of this university ancient manuscripts were kept safely. Fatima`s wisdom, perseverance and kind heartedness were exemplary.

Mariam-AI-Fihri³ on the other hand built grand mosque of Al-Andalus.

Outstanding African Women of Present Times

Out of the whole arena of women working for the betterment/uplift of the African women, I will mention only a few here, in particular those dedicated to the cause of eradication of the horrible practice of Female genital mutilation (FGM).

Efua Dorkenoo⁵

Born in Ghana in 1949, she herself escaped genital cutting somehow, but had witnessed one in 1976, with lasting effect on her. By the age of 17 she became a nurse and thereafter left for London to pursue higher studies. At the same time she started campaigning against



the ugly practice of FGM since 1980. She published various reports, on this topic.

By 1983 she had established a London based Foundation for health of African women, with particular focus on FGM. By her efforts Britain outlawed this practice in 1985. She later joined WHO as the acting Director of women`s health in 1990. Later still she joined United Nations, at which forum she could effectively act against the ugly practice of genital mutilation of African women, in addition to their other health protective avenues.

In 1994 Queen Elizabeth II of England named her Ms Dorkenoo i.e. an Honorary officer in the Order of British Empire. In 1996 she wrote a book entitled `Cutting the Rose`. Through her efforts various organisations called the practice of FGM as `human rights violation`, even the United Nations declared it as such in 2013. In 2014 the British government prosecuted it as a crime and place a ban on young girls being sent to their ancestral lands for genital cutting. Checks and bounds were put to force at Heathrow and other airports,

Furthermore Dorkenoo inspired a generation of activists across the world to take up the cause of banning this practice. At her visits to Africa she would knock at the doors of Africans to stop this practice. In London suburbs she would do the same to the Africans settled there.

She was called `Mama Efua` by her fans and `Warrior in Chief against FGM` by the others who appreciated her efforts.

Despite her`s and other`s efforts, this menace though significantly reduced, is still prevalent in huge numbers in some countries of Africa etc, as

well as in people of African origin living elsewhere. Efua Dorkenoo died on 18th Oct, 2014, in London at the age of 65 years, after having lead a 30 years of successful campaign against genital cutting and for welfare of girls and women otherwise.

Naima Abdullahi⁶

A 37 years old lady of Kenyan-Americans origin, living in Atlanta was herself cut at the age of 9 years. Thus knowing the misery she currently runs a support group for the victims of FGC, not only in Atlanta, but elsewhere too, educating them about the drawbacks of this malpractice. Her other purpose is to engage the community to talk about as to why this practice is continued? Some answers to this question have already been highlighted in the previous issue of JSOGP.⁷

There are numerous other women of African origin, currently engaged in curtailment of genital cutting and various other health parameters of African women. Time and space does not allow discussion on all those activists.

References

1. Hatshepsut-Hi five@Express tribune.com.pk
2. en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatshepsut
3. Muslim women-Fatima-al-Fihri and her sister-Islamic design house, sister`s magazine.2008 word press.com
4. Aijaz Zaka Seyed. When we were wise. The News International 2014 Sept 26th:6.
5. Doughlas Martin. Efua Dorkenoo. International New York Times 2014 Oct 30th:2.
6. Naima Abdullahi. International New York Times 2014 June 12th:5.
7. Akhtar KAK. Annotation: Obstetric and Gynaecological status of African women with plight of girls—Experience and Interest. J.Soc.Obstet. Gynaecol.Pak.2014;4(4):214-216.