Mekatilili Wa Menza

Mnyazi wa Menza was her real name, and became Mekatilili when she had her first baby boy Katilili. Mekatilili is likely to have been born in the 1860s at Mutsara wa Tsatsu, a village between Ganze and Bamba, in Giriama land Kilifi county. In her early years, Mekatilili loved to listen to the stories told by her grandmother regarding the interventions of foreigners such as the Arabs, Portuguese and the British that were foreseen by a Midzi-Chenda prophetess (Mepoho). Once in a while, she used to bring her trading goods for sale at the town of Malindi, and to the great Takaungu market near Kilifi town. There she frequently came into contact with Arabs and British, she became suspicious of them because of their behaviour, attitudes and actions towards the native people, particularly when her brother Mwarandu was taken for good by slave merchants.

Mnyazi was traditionally married to Dyeka wa Duka at Bungale, a village close to Lango Baya in Magarini. She became an active member of traditional women’s fellowship; Makushekushe and hijadu. She later became the head of Makushekushe. She became so devoted in her religion, traditional leadership, culture, land, and rights of the giriama people. She was sociable to foreigners but did not tolerate intimidation.

As a young countrywoman, she became unhappy with the British scheme and used to appease God and ancestors (koma tsi mulungu dzulu) in order to gain their intervention. Mekatilili received divine wisdom, boldness and courage which enabled her to challenge men to come forward and resist the British demands that interfered with the Midzi-Chenda way of life. Her main aim was to protect the well-being of the community from British oppression during the period when Kenya had become a British Protectorate after 1895, with the introduction of the Imperial British East Africa Company and different versions of Christianity that were meant to replace all Midzi-Chenda political culture (chitamaduni), economy (utsumi), and religion (chikwehu). On 13\textsuperscript{th} August 1913, Arthur Champion; a British administrator called for a public meeting (Baraza) and gave his demands to the community; Mekatilili was in the meeting and opposed what Champion’s demands. There was confrontation of words and she dared her life by slapping Champion. In defending Mekatilili, the giriama men were determined to deal with Champion but he was rescued and taken away.

Earlier the British had undermined the influence of Mekatilili; latterly they discovered their assertions were wrong when they saw how powerful she had become and how she had gained trust from the Midzi-Chenda community. With anger and outrage, the British schemed to arrest Mekatilili and succeeded on 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1913. Wanje wa Mwadorikola was also arrested shortly after this and both were taken to prison in Kisii land. They later escaped from prison in April 1914 and came back home and continued with the liberation movement. Mekatilili’s liberation movement resulted in the Giriama uprising of 25\textsuperscript{th} Oct. 1914; many giriama people died. Also, perpetrating this was the fact that a British policeman raped a giriama woman.

One legacy she left for Kenyans and the Midzi-Chenda community was the urge and determination to seek for community rights for independence. The second legacy left by Mekatilili was love of her people and traditions. She was a true patriot. The third legacy is that of giving up life for the sake of rescuing the community. She mobilised the community and showed leadership qualities, she was a respected sage. She was not corrupt, she protected the rights of children, and she valued her culture.