

The Role of Shaykh Uthman Bn Fodiyo in Teaching and *Da'wah* Activities towards Spreading the Sunnah and Combating Bid'ah in the Bilad Al-Sudan.

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Abstract:- *Shaykh Uthman did in uplifting Islam through his da'wah towards spreading the Sunnah and attacking bad customs and innovations particularly during his period when evil hood is wide spreaded and very few Ulama' of Sunnah exist. His writings were to date relevance to contemporary Muslims throughout Nigeria and beyond. Shaykh Uthman is regarded as the most pious, educated and revered scholar of repute whom most of the contemporary scholars are trying to emulate. This paper highlights the biography and Da'wah activities towards spreading the Sunnah and combating Bid'ah in the Bilad al-Sudan of Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo. His teaching activities, Da'wah activities and preaching tours as well as highlight of some of his works in spreading the Sunnah and combating Bid'ah in the Bilad al-Sudan form the main body of the paper and finally the conclusion.*

Key words: *Da'wah, Shaykh Uthman, Relevance, Contemporary Muslims, Nigeria.*

I. Introduction on the biography of Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo

He is Uthman ibn Foduye, the leader and commander of the Jama'ah and its first Amir al-Muminun, According to Aminuddin: His name is Shaykh Abu Muhammad, 'Uthman Ibn Muhammad Foduye (Foduye is a Fulani tittle for a learned man or jurist) son of 'Uthman son of Salih son of Ayub, son of Harun, son of Muhammad gorde son of Muhammad Jibo son of Muhammad Sambo, son of Ayub, son of Masarana son of Ayub, son of Abi bakr son of Musa (Jakolo). It was this Musa Jakolo who migrated with his people from Futa Toro to Hausaland and settled there within its people until the appearance of the Shaykh.¹ He was born at a place called Maratta, in the land of Galmi, in the Hausa city state of Gobir.²

He was brought up under the guidance of his parents. The family moved to Degel which is on the edge of the main route between Birnin Kebbi and the Gobir towns of Alkalawa and few miles west was another route to Birnin Konni and Adar. His father Muhammad Foduye died in Degel and is buried there.³ He studied from a number of scholars; among them was his father Muhammad Foduye from whom he studied the Qur'an, his mother Hauwa'u bint Muhammad and his grandmother Ruqayya also taught him. He then moved to other teachers who included, Shaykh Bandura Al-kabawi who Uthman accompanied him for some two years and moulded himself to his pattern of piety, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, Shaykh Abdurrahman b. Hamda also taught him *iiraab*, He studied Tafsir (Exegesis of the Qur'an) under Shaykh Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hashim Zamfari, He studied Hadith especially the six authentic collections from Shaykh Alhaji Muhammad b. Raji and Shaykh Jibril b. 'Umar who influenced Shaykh Uthman by his scholarship and uncompromising attitude in following the Sunnah and attacking Bid'ah and local practices alien to Islam. He also studied from other Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri scholars, but none among his scholars was an Arab, this indicates the level of scholarship in Hausa land in those days.⁴

Adam Abd-Allah al-Ilori also observed the personality traits of Shaykh Uthman as follows:

¹ Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye, *Hidayat al-Tullab ila Sawab*, Editing and comentary by N. A. Abdurrahman, 1427 A. H. (np, np,) p. 8.

²S. A. Gusau, Economic Ideas of Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye, a paper presented at an International Seminar on Intellectual Tradition in the Sakkwato Caliphate and Borno, Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Sokoto, 11 – 14th April, 1987.

³ M. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longman, London, 1967, p. 4. As in Al-haji Junaid, *Idraak al-Amal*, 1962, (Ms).

⁴ A. A. Ilori, *Islam fi Nigeria wa Shaykh Uthman bin Fodiyo Fulaani*, (np, np) 1978, p. 94. See also M. Last, *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

Shaykh b. Foduye was bestowed with numerous qualities which other scholars of his time and there after does not possess in Hausaland... This is so because he hated evil and tried to stop it by way of preaching, then trying to stop evil physically, and later by waging war. He succeeded in establishing an Islamic state, which ruled the land through Islamic law as it was during the first generation of the Muslims in Medina. He did not seek the aid of any ruler... in establishing his state (the Sokoto caliphate)⁵

Shaykh Uthman bin Foduye, like other scholars, was able to preach and guide his people through his writings on following the Sunnah and restrain them seriously on the practice of syncretism (Bid'ah). He wrote several books in different fields of knowledge. These books are still relevant to contemporary period. They treat various religious matters that dealt with politics, *Shari'ah* the Islamic Law, theology, and many other issues according to the sciences of the Qur'an, the Sunnah and other sources of Islamic law. He was able to nurture and bring up over a hundred scholars that each continued to spread the knowledge of Islam. He possessed vast knowledge in ethics whereby the soul is purified by the glorification of God. He, like other reformers, took up arms and fought in the cause of Allah till when the word of Allah became uppermost and that of the disbelievers became the lowest of the low, this led to the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate which consisted of the majority areas of the present-day Northern Nigeria and some parts of the Republics of Niger and Cameroon. In short, Shaykh Uthman was a scholar, jurist, preacher, reformer, leader, a commander and a Head of an Islamic State.⁶ It was based on this that the works of Shaykh and his lieutenants were still relevant to the people as they addressed the specific needs of the situation. According to Kaura, Shaykh Uthman showed concern:

on the widespread of innovations and customs that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Innovations were promoted among the Muslims by venal scholars in all facets of life. By the time the *Jihad* scholars emerged, such innovations had become part and parcel of the practice of Islam. The common Muslims did not see anything wrong in them probably because the venal scholars had never preached against them... *Shaykh* Uthman attacked innovations in his preaching and teaching to enlighten the general Muslims and caution the students.⁷

The above portrayed the intellectual outputs of the scholar such that majority of his writings established a kind of references to the Qur'an and Sunnah and in fighting innovations to his specific target audience whom were the common people.

He and his lieutenants wrote many works on different specialty as was acknowledged by Shaykh himself where he advised in his book *Najm al-Ikhwan* that students should:

Take to reading the works of my brother Abdullah for he is, on the whole, concerned with the letter of the *Sharia'h*. Take to reading the works of my son Muhammad Bello for he is, on the whole, concerned with the preservation of the political science of the Muslim community with regards to persons, aims, time, place, and prevailing conditions. Take to reading my works too for I am concerned with the preservation of both.⁸

All (their) works are quotations and explanations of what had been generally treated in the works of Qur'an and Sunnah as held by previous scholars. In other words, the works of previous scholars that they emulated are explanation of what was generally treated in the Book (Qur'an) and Sunnah.⁹

II. Teaching activities

Teaching and preaching became of primary relevance to him because this method was employed to fight religious ignorance which was highly prevalent in Hausaland before the reformation of the area. Most of the un-Islamic practices that appeared in the region before the 18th century could be attributed to ignorance of

⁵ Adam Abd Allah al-Ilori, *Islam fi Nigeria wa al-Shaykh Uthman Bin Fodiyo al-fulani*, as quoted in Shaykh Muhammad Isa Talata-Mafara, *The Role of Islamic Scholars in the spread of Islam in Hausaland: Keynote address delivered at the opening ceremony*

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁷ J. M. Kaura, *Sokoto Caliphate Literature in the context of the 19th century Jihad in Hausaland: A reflection on the contemporary relevance and challenges, Being the Text of the 9th Inaugural Lecture of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, pp. 1-55, 4th June, 2009*

⁸ See Shaykh Uthman b. Fodiyo, *Najm al-Ikhwan yahtaduna bihi bi izn Allah fi umur al- Zaaman*, printed in a collection of titled *Wasiyat Shaikh Usman Bin Fodiyo* by Alhaji Dan Ige Sokoto, (nd), p. 69. Translation as in Ismail, O. S. A., "Some Reflections on the Literature of the Jihad and the Caliphate", in Y.B. Usman, (ed), *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, Third Press International, Nigeria, 1979, p. 170.

⁹ Y.B. Usman, (ed), *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, Third Press International, Nigeria, 1979, p. 170.

Islamic teaching among the populace.¹⁰ Similarly, he and his lieutenants started writing numerous books to educate their society about correct *Aqidah* and Islamic form of worship to curb the violations of the *Shari'ah*, neglect of Islamic Education and the increasing tyranny of unjust leaders.¹¹

The situation was not for want of teachers, indeed there were many, but the teachers had kept themselves in their ivory towers making their knowledge available only to the few who cared to come, to the neglect of even their own families. There were teachers who instead of correcting the ordinary people, were in fact making fortunes out of their ignorance, collecting their wealth under several pretexts and condoning violations of the *Shari'ah* and often conniving with rulers to perpetuate all manners of injustices.¹²

According to Balogun, there is no record of the actual date when *Shaykh* Uthman started to teach, but if we consider the practice in Qur'anic schools in west Africa, by which the most advanced pupils are allowed to teach the junior ones, then probably, *Shaykh* Uthman started teaching as an amateur prior to his preaching, and subsequently he became a professional teacher when he started to gain followers. According to Abdullah Fodiyo, Uthman's teaching included such subjects as Prosody, Theology, Grammar, Zuhd, Law, Qur'anic exegesis, Hadiith and Arithmetic. He emphasized on the common people to seek the basic knowledge necessary for carrying out their daily religious obligations, and leave the details of law and theology to the advanced scholars.¹³ He was soon to be joined by his brother Abdullah, twelve years his junior and much later, his son Muhammad Bello. As if the society was waiting for them, many people responded to their teachings and soon a large number of followers were witnessed. Muhammad Bello has given an outline of the *Shaykh's da'wah* and teachings, he state;

As people started crowding around this young and rather daring scholar, soon Uthman found himself at the head of a circle of young people sharing some revolutionary ideas. This, unknown to them all, was the nucleus of a movement that was to transform Hausaland for good. Having taken off, the movement went through four distinct phases. The phase of teaching and public *da'wah* which aimed at reforming Islam to its pristine position., the phase of planning and organization, the phase of hijra and jihad and the post jihad phase during which the Caliphate was established.¹⁴

III. Preaching Tours Towards Spreading The Sunnah And Combating Bid'ah

In order to spread the Sunnah and combat Bid'ah *Shaykh* Uthman bn Fodiyo started his preaching at the age of 20 in about 1188 A. H. /1774 C. E. At that age he combined both preaching and studying at the same time. The basic objective of the *Shaykh's Da'wah* as reflected in his writings, was to promote the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar*. Thus, *al-ma'ruf*, in the context of the *Shaykh's tajdid*, means the restoration of the Sunni Islamic ideal to the Central Sudanese society so that it would live by the authorities of the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the *ijma'*. On the other hand, *al-munkar*, means the rejection of local beliefs and customs categorized as bad innovations.¹⁵

In the formative period of his preaching, he dedicated his time in explaining the fundamentals of Islam through the use and reliance of the primary sources of shari'ah. His *Da'awah* (preaching) received the response of many followers which encouraged him to continue and expand it beyond his home town to other parts of Hausaland. In *Tazyin al-Waraqat* his brother Abdullah stated:

Then we rose up with the *Shaykh* helping him in mission work for religion. He travelled for that purpose to the east and to the west, calling the people to the religion of God by his preaching and his *Qasidas* in other languages and destroying customs (and innovations) contrary to shari'ah.¹⁶

He therefore travelled to the neighboring states, starting from Kabi where he met its people and preached to them;

¹⁰ M. T. Usman, Continuity and change in the literary tradition of the Sokoto Caliphate, A paper presented at the International Conference on Preserving Nigeria's Scholarly and Literary Traditions and Arabic Manuscripts Heritage held on 7th and 8th, March, 2007, held at Arewa House, Kaduna in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, Abuja.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ U. M. Bugaje, *Shaykh Uthman Ibn Fodio and the Revival of Islam in Hausaland*: op. cit. p.6.

¹⁵ Ahmad Tahir, *The Social writings of Shaykh Uthman B. Fudi: A Critical and analytical study*. A PhD dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, Montreal. 1989, P. 2.

¹⁶ Abdullahi B. M. Foduye, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, op. cit.85.

He called them to the reform of the faith, and to Islam, and good works and to abandon customs (and innovations) contrary to it (Islam). Many of them repented, and travelled to him in groups, when he returned to his homeland, listening to his preaching, and God caused them to accept him for the first time.¹⁷

Then he moved to Zamfara where he spent some five years calling several pockets of people who had not in fact accepted Islam yet. Shaykh Uthman and his lieutenants had to remain there preaching and admonition people to Islam. Shaykh Abdullah said:

Then we moved to the country of Zamfara to call its people to Islam. We remained there about five years, and it was a land over whose people ignorance was there theme; the majority of its people had not smelt the scent of Islam. They used to come to the sheikh gathering mingling with their women. He aggregated them, teaching them that mixing together was forbidden, after he had taught them the laws of Islam.¹⁸

Shaykh Uthman's method of educating both male and female did not go well with all, certain devils of men were in the habit of spreading mischief about that saying the Shaykh's gathering was a place for the mixing together of men and women. Therefore, he questioned the sincerity of all those people making the accusation in the first place, saying, people observed their women attending illegal marriage ceremonies, they also see them dancing and singing and intermingling with men, moreover they left them going out for 'Id ceremonies in their full make-up without denying them these. But when they see them going out in pursuit of learning they claim this as reprehensible.¹⁹ The most significant reference sources of Uthman's teaching and preaching activities was the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).²⁰

Shaykh Uthman was to remain, for some 19 years, as an itinerant scholar always on the move. Where ever he went he stayed long enough to establish a community and always left behind some of his students and disciples to continue his job. It wasn't only preaching and teaching, however, as he had to be writing at the same time not only to produce the texts to be studied in the various circle he was creating but he had to reply to numerous questions and issues which his *Da'wah* in spreading sunnah was raising and reply critics who were busy trying to stop this rising wave of awareness of Islamic religion.²¹ According to Bello;

When the Shaykh rose up to call to (the path of) Allah and admonish the servants (of Allah) and destroy the issues of disbelieve and evil customs and (also) to revive the Sunnah and educate the people on worship of Allah and devotional practices in order to show them (the path) of Allah...many whom Allah guided went to him and many people entered the religion of Allah in troupes.²²

Wherever Shaykh visited he will deliver *Da'wah* and teach the people, those who know how write also copy his books thereby spreading his call. In *Sauq al-Ummati ila itiba'i al-Sunnah* for example, the Shaykh prayed Allah to benefit all those who read the book or go through some of its contents or copied it or called upon people to use it. This book is a composition of Ahadith from Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim on issues of belief and devotional practice to simplify them to the Ummah for the spread of the Sunnah in Hausa land particularly in those days when there is no printing press and very few scholars could possess Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim. Shaykh Uthman also wrote many works to guide the people to the right path. These writings include:

Ihya' al-Sunnah wa Ikh'mad al-Bid'ah,²³ is one of Shaykh's major work and was considered as the best work which demonstrated the priorities of Shaykh's *Da'wah*, that was to strengthen the Sunnah and drive out paganism and evil customs and innovations. He quoted extensively from the primary sources of shari'ah on the proofs for the obligation of following the book of Allah and Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), as well as the limit and prohibition of innovations. He also cited the effort and character of the companions, followers of companions and the generation after them in following the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and avoiding innovations, which will serve as a model for his contemporaries and beyond. Finally the Shaykh cited the ways of the Sunnah in beliefs, devotional practices and *mua'malah* and pointed out what the people of innovations had invented in those aspects so as to warn people from it. This book has received the attention of all Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'ah in his period and beyond. The motive behind the work was to disseminate Islam as it

¹⁷ Abdullahi B. M. Foduye, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, Ibid. p. 86.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Shaykh Uthman Ibn Fodiyo, *Irshad al-Ikhwan ila Ahkam Khuruj al-Niswan*, p. 7.

²⁰ Muhammad Jameel, "Danfodio's Islamic Reform and the Lessons for British Muslims," Lewisham & Kent Islamic Centre, 2004.

²¹ U. M. Bugaje, *Shykh Uthman Ibn Fodio and the Revival of Islam in Hausaland: The Phase of Teaching and Public Da'wah*,

²² Muhammad Bello, *Infaq...* op. cit.

²³ Uthman bn Fodiyo, *Ihya' al-Sunnah wa Ikh'mad al-Bid'ah*, edited by Muhammad Mode Shuni, centre for Islamic Studies, UDUS, in *Mukhtarat min mualifaat Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo*, 2013, pp. 40-245

should be observed and practiced by the people of Hausaland, and to reform them for renovation for what an ideal Islamic Ummah.²⁴

Attached to the above, Shaykh Uthman (May Allah SWT have mercy on him) also wrote some pamphlets like *Bayan al-Bid'ah al-Shaytaniyyah* which is identical, in many respects, to the *bid'ah* section of *Ihya' al-Sunnah wa Ikh'mad al-Bid'ah*. Again his *Nasa'ih al-Ummah al-Muhammadiyah* is similar to the section of the of *Ihya' al-Sunnah wa Ikh'mad al-Bid'ah* headed *Tanbihat* Another pamphlet, *Wathiqat al-Ikhwan li-Tabyin Dalilat Wujub Ittiba' al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Ijma' wa Dalil Ijtinab al-Bid'ah* corresponds largely the *Nur al-Albab*.²⁵

The main problems confronting the Shaykh and his students were the tendency of the people to intermingle Islam and paganism. Converts to Islam failed to abandon completely their pagan unbelief and un-Islamic social customs. Although they uttered the first article of faith, they continued to offer sacrifices to trees and stones, as they believed that such practices were efficacious. *Tamyiz al-Muslimin min al-Kafirin*, *Hisn al-Afham*, *Nasaih al-Ummah*, *Nasihah Ahl al-Zaman*, *Irshad Ahl al-Tafrit*, *Najm al-Ikhwan*, *Tanbih al-Ikhwan* like the *Nur al-Albab* formed the works that prohibited the new converts from their syncretism. These books classified the peoples of Hausa land into three groups: those who are pure Muslims; those who mix Islamic and pagan practices; and those who are pure unbelievers.²⁶ The works are still relevant to our contemporary Nigeria. Another work *Shifa' al-Ghali' fi-ma Ashkalah fi Kalam Shaykh Shuyukhina Jibril* is concerned with refuting the Kharijites' ideology maintained by his teacher Jibril b. Umar on grave sin. He quotes Ibn Umar's poem as evidence of his Kharijite views which labelled grave sinners as polytheist. The shaykh refuted this claim by quoting various varied sources of Shari'ah to support his stand.²⁷

Another important work of the Shaykh is the *Asanid al-Faqir* which is a biographical material; it helps us in understanding the Shaykh's link to the eighteenth century Hadith networks. His two teachers, Ibn Raji and Ibn Umar, came under the influence of the Hijazi ulamah of Hadith. Muhammad Ibn Raji studied under Abu al-Hasan al-Sindi, who was also the teacher of Muhammad al-Hayat al-Sindi, one of the teachers of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab. As for Ibn Umar, he studied under Muhammad Murtadha al-Zabidi, a student of Shah Wali Allah of Delhi.²⁸ These teachers impacted heavily on the life of the Shaykh in his Da'wah towards spreading the Sunnah and combating *Bid'ah* and gave him a firm grounding in his religion.

IV. Conculsion

From what has so far been mentioned above, it is clear that none of the later scholars in Hausa land have done what *Shaykh* Uthman did in uplifting Islam through his *da'wah* towards spreading the Sunnah and attacking bad customs and innovations particularly during his period when evil hood is wide spreaded and very few *Ulama'* of Sunnah exist. His writings were to date relevance to contemporary Muslims throughout Nigeria and beyond. Shaykh Uthman is regarded as the most pious, educated and revered scholar of repute whom most of the contemporary scholars are trying to emulate (May Allah have mercy on him).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Ahmad Tahir, *The Social writings of Shaykh Uthman B. Fūdi: A Critical and analytical study*. A PhD dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, Montreal. 1989, Pp. 13-24.

²⁶ Ahmad Tahir, *The Social writings of Shaykh Uthman B. Fūdi: A Critical and analytical study*. A PhD dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, Montreal. 1989, Pp. 13-17.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 21

²⁸ Ibid. Pp. 29-30.