

The Struggle of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman Bin Foduye in Re-formation of Faith and Social Vices among the People of Gobir Kingdom: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye (1754-1817) was born and raised in Hausaland (presently Northern Nigeria) where the inhabitants lived in a darkness of ignorance about Islam. The aim of writing this paper is to analyse the struggle of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in Hausaland when he wanted to reform people’s attitude towards Islamic Faith. Firstly it starts by briefing the biography of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye, it also discusses the situation and activities of people in Gobir Kingdom before and after the reformation of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye. Then the paper underlines the approaches of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in reforming the Faith and Social Vices among the people in Gobir Kingdom. The method used in this research is analytical method. The paper ends by conclusion and some recommendations which if well used Hausaland will be turn to a land of peace and prosperity.

Keywords: Struggle, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye, Re-formation, Faith, Social Vices, and Gobir Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. In the early 19th century in Hausaland, a reform and Jihad movement was organized and led by one of the prominent Islamic scholar of the century, in the person of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye (1754–1817). This reform movement led to the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate in the present day Northern Nigeria.

This paper discusses the role of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in reviving and re-forming the Islamic faith and social vices of the people in Gobir Kingdom. The paper analyses his career, thoughts and intellectual activities.

Learning is the most important thing that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye devoted his entire life on. He spent twenty years acquiring different sciences of Islamic knowledge under the distinguished scholars of his time. Among his teachers, apart from his father who taught him the knowledge of Qur’an, others are his paternal and maternal uncles. Out of his relations, the most influential among his teachers is Jibril Umar of Agadez, who was said, invigorated and issued a license to *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye to impart what he learnt accordingly in order to change the traditional society of Hausaland to a well-organized Islamic society. It has been stated that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye received various licenses of academic excellence from his teachers. This was the reasons why he excelled and produced various literatures on different fields of Islamic knowledge.

Brief Biography and Education of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman Bin Foduye

Shaykh ‘Uthman bin Foduye, the founder of Sokoto Caliphate, a religious leader, writer and Islamic promoter was from an urbanized ethnic Fulani living in Hausaland in what is today Northern Nigeria. He was born in *Maratta*, a town in the Hausa State of *Gobir* on Sunday 15th December, 1754 [1]. Not long after his birth, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s family moved to *Degel*, a town of reasonable distance, still within the State of *Gobir*, where *Shaykh* ‘Uthman spent his childhood. The traditional Muslim educational system in this society demanded children at very early age to learn the Qur’an in addition to reading and writing [2].

Shaykh started his education very early where he memorized the Glorious Qur’an under the supervision of his father, who was himself a renowned scholar. He later studied many Islamic books in the Hausaland from various scholars such as Sheikh Jibril bin Umar in Agades [2].

Subsequently, he moved to other scholars in search of knowledge traveling from one teacher to another in a traditional way of learning that was

dominant in the region, reading extensively in the Islamic sciences [1].

The Situation and Activities of People in Gobir Kingdom before the Reformation of Shaykh ‘Uthman Bin Foduye

Before going any further to understand and appreciate the role of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye and his concerns regarding the ignorance of the masses about Islam, though, to understand the wisdom behind his being a resident teacher, it is important to note that his son, Muhammad Bello describes the nature of ignorance of people concerning Islam. In so doing, Bello said that it is so hard to find anyone among people of the Hausaland who’s *Tauheed* (faith) was pure and *Ibadah* (worship) properly at the time of his father’s appearance. Most of them were ignorant about Islam and its rituals. Thus, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye categorises them into different categories, in which among them there were those who were pure believers at the same time worshipped stones. And there were those who pronounced *Tawheed* while at the same time mixed up Islam with blameworthy acts, like worshipping trees and stones which said to have inherited from their predecessors, and the pagan who had never accepted Islam. It was in this situation *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye started inviting them to the way of Allah [3].

The Approaches of Shaykh ‘Uthman Bin Foduye in Reforming the Faith and Social Vices among the People of Gobir Kingdom

To begin with, in what way *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye disseminating his teaching and preaching. Hence, as noted that to *Shaykh* ‘Uthman, through the perpetual acts of teaching and preaching one can uproot whatever that is against the real teachings of Islam. Thus, the approaches that he used in achieving his target are the chief concern of this section. Moreover, the systematic approaches that have been adopted by *Shaykh* ‘Uthman are in itinerant/mobile and resident way. That is to say, he was an itinerant/mobile teacher, at the same time a resident teacher. These are the two approaches that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman applied in spreading his teaching and as well reformed his People against social vices. It could be said that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman has done this just to provide a new face of Islamic reform movement and to avoid the failure of unsystematic ways that have been followed by his teacher [4].

From the foregoing, it is vividly suggested that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in his attempts to change the traditional society of Hausaland to an organized Islamic society has simultaneously followed all of those mentioned approaches. It could be said that he is a resident teacher and at the same time a mobile teacher. These methods are said to have great impacts in massive mobilization of his movement, while significantly it caused the rapid circulations of his

mission to every nook and crannies of in Hausaland within a limited period of time.

However, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman further went to the East and the West (everywhere), calling people to the religion of Allah by means of admonition and composing poems as well as reciting them in the local languages (Fulfulde and Hausa). He was also discussing traditions that were contrary to the religion of Islam. It was at this time that many people from near and distance places come to join his movement. Abdullahi bin Foduye in one occasion stated that they remained with *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in the town of Degel until later they went to the town of Kebbi (presently, a state in North-western part of Nigeria). Therein, he called people to adhere to the right paths and *Tauheed* (faith), Islam and kindness, he further instructed them to abandon the traditions that were contrary to the Islamic *Shari’ah* [5].

Philosophically, from the beginning, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman did not concern his preaching to the pagan who had never accepted Islam. Rather, he was concerned about the Muslims who have mixed Islamic practices with traditional pagan rituals. These in the views of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman were unacceptable in Islam.

This is the reason why his movement was considered as a revival of faith. Hence, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman himself was called a *Mujaddid* or a ‘Reformer of Faith [16]. It has been reported that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman made Degel his centre for mobilization of students; he hoped to be an exemplary town. Therefore, he stayed there for 20 years, teaching, preaching and writing [17]. This suggests that Degel can said to be the first learning centre in the early period of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s struggle to eradicate all the fabricated innovations and Superstitions beliefs in Hausaland and finally to establish an Islamic society.

Who are the Targeted People in Shaykh ‘Uthman’s Teaching and Preaching for reformation of faith and Social Vices?

The above discussion has clearly depicted the first category of people that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman directed his teaching and preaching to, nevertheless, it is significant to broadly categorise them in order to further understand his philosophy of employing two methods in delivering his teaching and preaching. As a matter of fact, by considering all the surrounding factor of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s struggle to establish an ideal society based on the dictate of *Shari’ah*, it may conclude that those concerned in his teaching and preaching activities would not go beyond the following categories.

Ignorance of the Masses Concerning Islam

While in his hometown, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman discovered that people were in a state of darkness and ignorance about what *Shari’ah* has prescribed

concerning one's belief. Therefore, in his attempts to overcome such problem which, he noted earlier in preparing ground for the manifestation of his mission, soon later, he encouraged the common people to study the basic knowledge for the necessary discharging of their religious obligations, after that, they should leave the explanations to the scholars [6]. It seems that people were convinced to study gradually, with this; they, however, inclined to receive the knowledge from *Shaykh* 'Uthman. Thus, he philosophically invited them to know the fundamental principles of Islam.

The aforementioned indicates that the first thing which *Shaykh* 'Uthman invited people to, is the Oneness of Allah, that is Islamic monotheism and ruling about rituals. Evidence in this regard is what *Shaykh* 'Uthman declared in his magnum opus, *Ihya; al-Sunnah wa Ikhmadal-Bid'a*. For example, in chapter four of this book, he (*Shaykh* 'Uthman) has clearly explained the principles of *Iman*, in which he emphasized that every believer must take his faith from the Glorious Qur'an since Almighty Allah has prescribed all the principles of *Iman* [7]. In supporting this argument, he made reference to the saying of Almighty Allah:

It is not Al-Birr (piety, righteousness, and each and every act of obedience to Allah, etc) that you turn your faces towards east and (or) west (in prayers); but Al-Birr is (the quality of) the one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, the Prophets... (Qur'an, 2:177).

The foregoing indicates that for a person to be complete Muslim, he must believe in all the above-mentioned principles of *Iman*, as clearly sets out in the Qur'an. This implies that *Shaykh* 'Uthman aims were only to reform his society in line with the teachings of Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (May the peace blessings of Allah be upon him) since they are sources of reference in his teaching and preaching.

Shaykh 'Uthman bin Foduye's reform movement was aimed at eliminating the religious and social corruptions imposed by the various rulers of city-states in Hausaland which culminated in bastardizing and diluting Islamic teachings with local cultures and traditions. His effort to establish a truly Islamic state invited several intellectual controversies particularly from the court 'Ulama whose interest is to defend the system and get their interest preserved [3].

Shaykh 'Uthman bin Foduye's reform was not just a *Jihad* movement aimed at eliminating religious and social vices alone, but it was also aimed at creating a peaceful, descent and egalitarian society solidly formed under effective administration. In view of that, he was able to attract enough students and followers in the wider community of Islam including Tuareg [8].

It should, however, be noted that, during *Shaykh* 'Uthman's struggle and tour for teaching and preaching, an important event occurred which needs to be mentioned here. Although the mission was still in Zamfara, the *Sarkin Gobir*, Bawa (who was said the most powerful King in Hausaland during his time), invited all the 'Ulama' of his state to his court at Magama, during 'Idul-Adha. (Sacrifice Festivity: the tenth of *Dhul Hijjah*) and gave them gifts. All of them accepted the Sultan's gifts except *Shaykh* 'Uthman who stood in front of him and demanded instead five things from the Sultan:

- To allow me to call people to Allah's Religion in your land.
- Not to stop anybody who intend to respond to my call.
- To treat with respect anyone with a turban.
- To free all the political prisoners.
- Not to burden the subjects with taxes [9].

Bawa agreed to these demands and among the prisoners freed was Abarshi the prince of *Zamfara*. This move by *Shaykh* was extremely significant as it displayed his active involvement in the affairs of the people to whom he was preaching to. Surely the freeing of a leading member of the *Zamafara* elite would endear him to the leadership of that region and spread the news of his authority. The demand for the removal of taxes from the people will bring reality of his presence and effectiveness of prohibiting evils into every home in the countryside [9].

Moreover, the *Shaykh* solidified his ability to preach openly and took pressure off his students and followers who were known for the wearing of turban. Sources also stated that all of the scholars present at Magami, who numbered over a thousand, joined the rank of *Shaykh* 'Uthman's followers [9].

Analytically, Hamza and Isa Maishanu have pointed out that *Shaykh* 'Uthman meeting with the *Sarkin Gobir* won the hearts of many people. Most of the scholars present during the 'Id al-Kabir celebration joined the rank and file of his supporters. This also enlarged his respect throughout the area and subsequently was to set the stage for future conflict with subsequent rulers of Gobir. According to them the privilege granted to the *Shaykh* 'Uthman by *Sarkin Gobir* Bawa were clear indications of the political dimension which the *Shaykh* 'Uthman's movement was gradually assuming. Added to that, the call for the release of political prisoners and the abolition of uncanonical taxes were both social and political matters, while the wearing of turbans and veils were suggestive of the uniqueness of *Shaykh* 'Uthman's followers: the *Jama'ah*, which gradually was developing into a separate, confident community [10].

Furthermore, in describing the methods of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye’s public preaching and his approach to the reforming of people’s faith and social vices, Muhammad Bello, a productive writer like his father, elucidates in a long quotation saying that his father:

Once he went to a place to deliver a lecture, he used to sit calmly and greeted people with the greetings of Islam three times in a laudable voice... While delivering his lecture, he never showed any anger to those who were sending questions; rather he would stop and answer their questions before proceeding. Shaykh ‘Uthman never afraid of the presence of scholars who attended his lecture, he used to speak to them on what is acceptable to him. This is nothing but a little among his distinctive characters in his mission of preaching. His main intention was to teach ignorant people and remind the neglectful scholars... [11]. Muhammad Bello, May Allah be pleased with has further described his father’s methods of teaching and preaching, whereupon he says “He used to go out every Thursday to give admonition to the people... Many people used to join his lectures... He would go out in some of the nights after ‘Isha prayer diligently conveying the knowledge of Islam and important wisdom. He used to go out after the ‘asr prayer to give instructions in the sciences of Tafsir of Qur’an Hadith, Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and Mysticism [3].

Thus, intelligently and sympathetically the masses were ready first to comprehend and to accept Islam and *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s ideas of changing their ailing society. Despite that, from the above quotation, it is silently suggested that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s approach in teaching and preaching was in a polite manner, without any embracement to the ignorant people who were forcing silly questions while he is delivering a lecture. This indicates that whoever wants to invite people to practice Islam and abstain from evil acts, he must be tolerant and so kind otherwise people will go away from him and would never listen to him.

The Traditional Rulers of Hausaland

The Traditional Rulers were the second group that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman was worried about their ignorant about Islam. Therefore, the proceeding show how he gradually taught people of Hausaland and reformed them to differentiate what is Islam and what is not. To understand how important the role *Shaykh* ‘Uthman played in teaching and preaching ignorant people about Islam, it is pertinent to note that, he never confined himself only to the common people, but rather, he extended his missionary activities to the rulers of the Hausaland. In this regard, it is stated that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman is not used to going to the Kings, nor did he has any relationship with them. However, when his people became numerous and his affairs became famous in the palace of Kings and others, he found it

necessary to go to them. In consequence, he first went to Sarki Bawa, the King of Gobir, and explained the correct Islam to him, instructing him to keep to that, and to establish justice in his land. Then he (*Shaykh* ‘Uthman) returned to his homeland and was able to call (people) to religion on that account, in the sense that people who did not have the fear of Allah were afraid of rejecting *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s instruction. This is because of his connection with the Sarki Bawa...[12].

Additionally, to understand the nature of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman’s approach of preaching, it is significant to note that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman, while meeting with the *Sarkin Gobir*, Bawa, he showed wisdom and sensitivity in preaching Islam to the rulers of Hausaland. His approach was neither confrontational nor violent; it is clearly simple. He showed respect to them but advocated before them the tenets of Islam without any fear. He handled Bawa in such a manner that he granted all his requests, as categorically mentioned before [12].

The above indicates that *Shaykh* ‘Uthman was fearless about saying the truth. His contact with the then powerful ruler of Hausaland shows his good determination in order to let the words of Allah and His Messenger prevail Hausaland.

The Situation and Activities of People in Gobir Kingdom after the Reformation of *Shaykh* ‘Uthman Bin Foduye

The seeds of revivalism and reform planted by *Shaykh* ‘Uthman bin Foduye in the early 19th century in Hausaland resulted in the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate. The Sokoto triumvirate, as they came to be called, was not only imbued with the vision of the society they wanted to establish, but also had the patience and perseverance to struggle for the realization of many aspects of this vision [13].

Shaykh ‘Uthman’s reformation also resulted in the flowering of Islam in Hausaland and the consolidation of Muslim culture first in Hausaland and then in non-Hausa areas such as Nupe, Ilorin and parts of the Benue valley region. Prior to the movement and reformation, Islam was essentially a royal religion. However, the movement ensured its flowering among the Hausa peasantry who had little or no experience of Islam before [14].

Nevertheless, in his preaching, he (*Shaykh* ‘Uthman) used a sound philosophy which to some extent when he was invited by the *Sarkin Gobir*, he refused to accept his gifts, but instead, he demands five things. And yet, all the requested five things were not concerned him, rather they concerned his people. This caused people of Hausaland understood that his mission is for their survival. Then they considered him as their teacher and at the same time a leader. To support this

assertion, Olamide has opined that *Shaykh* 'Uthman's preaching must be considered not only for religious reform but also for the reformation of social life, economic and political aspects of the land. Therefore, it was because of this, the oppressed people of Hausaland "*Talakawas*" join him against the rulers of the said land. They wanted to have a new system of administration since they were economically oppressed. Equally, the Fulani who were said influential economically and politically supported the government of Hausa States in order to fight against the emergence of *Shaykh* 'Uthman's movement, so that they could maintain their financial position and influence [15].

Despite that, *Shaykh* 'Uthman has successfully defeated them in collaboration with majority of People who supported him, and finally organized a peaceful movement of change. With these, one cannot deny that *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye at the initial phase of his movement did not engage in any acts of fighting or conflict with the rulers of Hausa-States.

The Analysis of *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye's Struggle and Methodologies in reforming the faith and social vices of the people in Gobir Kingdom

The previous discussion outlines various methods used by *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye in reforming the people of Gobir Kingdom. Hence, the methods ought to be extracted in order to shed more lights on the rational wisdom behind implementing them. Therefore, the following is an attempt to understand some of the important methodologies that may be assumed the factors that persuaded the minds of the people of Hausaland towards joining *Shaykh* 'Uthman's movement. This may be unique methods or something else as can be seen in the following discussion.

1. In his teaching methodology and reform, he first started with teaching people about Islamic monotheism (oneness of Allah) and rituals. *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye did so in order to guide them how to purify their *Iman*, to perform prayers, fasting during Ramadan, giving alms and Pilgrimage. In a nutshell, to understand the clear teaching methodology of *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye, Muhammad Bello, his son, mentioned that he used to go out every Thursday to deliver sermons to the people. Also, he says that he (*Shaykh* 'Uthman) used to go out after '*Isha* prayer to deliver a lecture, yet he used to go out after '*Asr* prayer to instruct people on various sciences which include the science of Qur'an, Hadith, *Fiqh* and Tasawwuf [3]. Thus, these show that *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye excelled in systematic teaching methodology, in which, every day has its own themes for discussion.
2. From the side of his preaching, *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye was regarded as a resident and yet an itinerant scholar who was touring from one place to

another, but something surprisingly is his sound methodology in preaching. For example, it has been said that he is instructing the people with multiple languages, that is to say, he is preaching in his mother tongue, Fulfulde, and Hausa language respectively. This was so amazing to his people, because wherever he found Hausa people he talks to them in Hausa, likewise the Fulani of his tribe. Therefore, using a multiplicity of languages is no doubt guides *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye's acceptance in the eyes of the people of Hausaland. To substantiate this statement, it is important to refer to the Qur'an, in order to understand that Allah's Messengers were all sent not, except with the languages of their people. For example, Almighty Allah says:

And we sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And he is the All-Mighty, the all-Wise (Qur'an, 14: 4).

This suggests that for any instructor or reformer to be accepted by his people his teaching and preaching, he should talk to them in their own language, otherwise most of them will not understand him and accept or adhere to his teachings. Yet, it will take the time them to understand the message he wants to deliver.

3. Perseverance is another approach used by *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye in conveying his mission. Up to the end of his teaching and preaching, he never shows discourage in touring to a different part of Hausaland. It is understood that he instructs people in both town and villages. Therefore, for someone to achieve his aims, he must be perpetuated and sincere, it is not a matter of using force or any other means unless when it is warranted.

CONCLUSION

The *Jihad* and reform movement orchestrated and led by *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye is one of the most influential *Jihad* movements in Gobir Kingdom and Hausaland. His *Jihad* resulted in the re-formation and establishment of one of largest and most powerful empires in Africa. The reform movement of this great *Mujaddid* can be classified into four main phases: the phase of public and traditional rulers *Da'awah* and preaching (1774–1793), the phase of planning and organization of the reform movement (1793–1804), the phase of *Hijra*, *Jihad* and victory (1804–1810) and the phase of consolidation and the establishment of the Islamic order (1810–1817). The empire left a heritage of intellectual and scholarly activities that are yet to be uncovered by the researchers and general public.

The findings reveal that *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye has distinctive struggle and methods in

teachings and preaching towards Reformation of Gobir Kingdom. Also, it might be added that he, however, charged his disciples to base their lives according to the Islamic *Shari'ah*, where upon, Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are their main sources of reference. This research recommended that contemporary Islamic scholars should try to employ systematic methods in teaching people to understand the pure teachings of Islam, which forbids associating any partner with Almighty Allah. They should also have to have bravery, tolerance, and sincerity like that of *Shaykh* 'Uthman bin Foduye in discharging their missionary activities.

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