

Some Aspects of Islamic Revivalism Made by Sheikh ‘Uthman Dan Fodio (1754-1817)

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ABSTRACT

Africa witnessed several reformers and revivalists in Islam before the advent of the European colonists, who succeeded in the partition of Africa. Among them was Sheikh ‘Uthman Dan Fodio, who is supposed by some historians and scholars in civilization to be the most prominent revivalist since he managed to revive Islam in Hausaland and was able, with his followers, to found the Sokoto Caliphate. The present study deals with this eminent revivalist in Islam in Hausaland. The paper begins with a brief biography of this reformer. Then, it explores some aspects of Islamic revivalism made by this outstanding figure. Last but not least, it seeks to reveal whether his revivalist aspects were a success or a failure. This research is considered to be significant since it deals with some aspects of Islamic Revivalism carried by the Shehu ‘Uthman Dan Fodio during his era which was characterized by mingling heretical practices with Islamic beliefs. Thanks to his deep knowledge in Islamic Sciences and his high skills as well as his good morals, he managed to carry out some aspects of Islamic Revivalism mainly those related to women.

Keywords: Sheikh ‘Uthman Dan Fodio, reformer, revivalist, Islamic, Hausaland, Sokoto Caliphate.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has witnessed several great reformers and outstanding revivalists throughout history, such as: Abdelkarim Al-Maghili, Ibrahim Musa, Ibrahim Sori, Sulaiman Bal and others in Western Sudan and ‘Uthman Dan Fodio and others in Central Sudan. Those famous figures did all their utmost in awakening their people from their long deep sleep and teaching and preaching as well as fighting illiteracy, ignorance as well as the darkness which reigned for years among their communities. Through their movements, they managed to carry out reformation, revivalism, and enlightenment, as well as succeeded in founding caliphates, sultanates or emirates. The research paper under study tackles the reformer and revivalist ‘Uthman Dan Fodio, who led a reforming and revivalist movement in Hausaland where people were drowning to their ears in illiteracy, ignorance, darkness, injustice and exploitation. This paper first deals with a short biography of ‘Uthman Dan Fodio. Second, it explores some aspects of Islamic revivalism made by this reputed figure. Third, it tries to reveal whether his revivalist aspects were a success or a failure.

Uthman Dan Fodio

‘Uthman Dan Fodio’s Early Life

Shaihu¹Usman Dan²Fodio³, born Usman bii Foduye, was born at Maratta on December 15th, 1754 C.E. At the time of his birth, messianic prophecies were made and it was also stated that he himself was aware from a

¹ Also referred to as Shaikh Usman Ibn Fodio, Shehu Uthman Fuduye, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, or Shaikh Uthman Ibn Fodio, etc...The Shehu married to four women who were Maimuna, Aisha, Hawa'u (Hawa) and Hadiza (Khadidja) From whom he had 23 children, including:Muhammed Bello, Nana Asmau, Abu Bakr Atiku,etc..

² Dan means son in Fulfulde- the Fulani language.

³The name is a Hausaised form of a Fulfulde word meaning ‘learned man’ or ‘jurist’.

very earlier age that a great destiny awaited him.⁴ His father Muhammad Fodio was a pious and learned man. Besides, he was a teacher, a scribe, and the Imam⁵ of his community. Moreover, he was a Sunni and belonged to the Maliki⁶ School of Jurisprudence. Besides, he used to follow the Qadiriyya fraternity⁷. Thanks to their father, ‘Uthman and his brother ‘Abdullah were taught reading, writing, the Quran and how to recite it. His mother, Hawa, also contributed too much to his first education. For instance, when he was still a child, she used to teach him through telling him the stories of the Prophets, the stories of the Prophet Muhammad’s wives and his companions, mainly the four rightly-guided companions⁸ who became the caliphs after the Prophet Muhammad’s death. Such stories were able to feed his imagination and prepared him for the instruction that his father had provided him with.

‘Uthman Dan Fodio’s Youth

Though the Shehu’s biographers tell little about his physical appearance, the oral tradition says that he was of average height, with a light complexion; but one account at least says that he was a black man, with a thin beard. He was also slender. When he reached early manhood, his piety, exceptional intellectual ability and charismatic personality began to attract some disciples, chiefly from among members of his clan. Gradually, he emerged as the leader of the group of young Muslim scholars with idealistic and reforming ideas as will be seen later. His relations with members of his household and companions were so warm and so friendly that he inspired them with affection and confidence. He used to have a keen practical understanding of human psychology. He was always ready to use his religious authority to maintain conformity to what he considered to be proper standards.

In the case of womenfolk, particularly, he did not hesitate to take advantage of their simple ingenuity to enforce observance of wearing the veil and avoiding mixing with men. But he used to impose his authority gently with humour and compassion. Sometimes, he used the fear of God (Allah) to serve his purpose. On the other hand, he deplored the state of ignorance to which women were normally abandoned and advocated that they should receive a basic education in literacy and in religious sciences. He kept on encouraging his daughter, Asm’u to acquire such an education.

From his early manhood, he used to live with cute modesty and to be disinterested in wealth and possessions, which he considered as corrupting. He used to earn his living by twisting ropes, a job he could exercise while reading and teaching.⁹ In this disciplined and austere way of life, he was trying to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad. From his early days, he was surrounded by books, or rather the manuscripts his father and others copied laboriously from the precious texts that came from North Africa and Egypt, or were brought back by some pilgrims from the Sacred Lands (Mecca and Medina). He was also given to meditation. After the day’s studies, he used to go alone to the bush where he would ponder on the life of the Prophet. He happened to have been so profoundly affected through this imagination that he started to compose long poems praising the Prophet. Some of these were written in Arabic and others in his mother tongue, Fulfulde. How, then, was this literary education achieved and what was his educational background and the intellectual milieu in his ideas developed? This is what the following point tackles.

The Educational Background of ‘Uthman Dan Fodio

As already mentioned, ‘Uthman began his education at home by learning the rudiments of Arabic during his reading and memorisation of the Quran that he accomplished at the feet of his father, Muhammad Ibn Salih, a well-known Torodbe scholar. Then, he learnt *Al- Ishniriniyyat* (the Twenties) and additional works from his

⁴ See the introduction to Tazyin Al- Waraqat, translated by Hiskett, Ibadan University Press, 1963, p. 5.

⁵ An Imam is someone who leads Muslims in prayers. It can also mean the community leader.

⁶ The Maliki School is one of the four most famous schools of Islamic Jurisprudence which are the Hahafi School, the Maliki School, the Shafi’i School and the Hanbali School.

⁷ It is a Sufi brotherhood named after Abdelkader Al Jilani. See Johnson, H.A.S., The Fulani Empire, London, Ibadan, Nairobi: O.U.P., 1967.

⁸ The four rightly guided companions are Abu Bakr, Umar, ‘Uthman and ‘Ali. See Hiskett, Mervyn, The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman dan Fodio, O.U.P., 1994.

⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

Shaykh, ‘Uthman, known as Biddu Al-Kabawi¹⁰. ‘Uthman learnt Arabic grammar and syntax from Al-Khulasa¹¹ and other works from Shaykh ‘Abdurrahman ibn Hamada. He read *Al- Mukhtasar*¹² from his uncle ‘Uthman known as Bidduri. The latter was so highly learned and pious that he succeeded in influencing him greatly by imbuing ‘Uthman with his own piety, character, and deeds as well as with his somewhat magisterial reforming zeal during his accompaniment for nearly two years. Hence, ‘Uthman was reported to have imitated him in both character and deeds¹³.

In a nutshell, ‘Uthman managed to learn (Tafsir) exegesis, Jurisprudence, Prophetic Hadith and other Islamic sciences. Throughout his career, ‘Uthman remained loyal to the basic teachings of Maliki Jurisprudence but he benefited a lot from the other Schools¹⁴ and a wide variety of scholars. For example, he was deeply influenced by Shaykh ‘Abd Al Wahhab Al Sha’rani (Died 937 A.H.), a reputed Muslim scholar who was a Shafi’i. ‘Uthman was famous for his flexible approach to the other schools. Besides, he profited widely from his ideas and writings, Shaykh Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti (1445-1505 C.E.), the prolific Egyptian scholar who was known to have taught countless African students and corresponded with the rulers and sultans of Western Sudan. He advised him how to rule his subjects and show to avoid un-Islamic practices. Shaykh ‘Abd Al-Karim Al-Maghili was to influence enormously on ‘Uthman through his writings, mainly what concerned enjoining right and forbidding evil.

By 1774, ‘Uthman had graduated from the formal phase of these advanced studies and was free to take a career of his own and pursue further advanced studies. The career opportunities opened to this promising young scholar were ample. In addition to the host of choices ranging from farming to trade, he was able to begin his own school. He could also join the lucrative court of the kings, but in that case, he would have to condone or even participate in the corruption and oppression the establishment was engaged in. Thanks to his efficient training, he preferred to pursue the career of teaching and preaching. This was a career that during his days involved public sessions along diverse itineraries. This fitted his literary and intellectual disposition for he could pursue his advanced studies while preaching.

As ‘Uthman’s mind matured under the counsel of many of his teachers and scholars, his knowledge and perception increased and his thoughts developed correspondingly. He soon came to see the issue of preaching and solution to the problem of his society in the context of revival. The following point will deal with his teaching and preaching.

‘Uthman’s Teaching and Preaching (1774-1793)

At the age of twenty, Shaykh ‘Uthman began teaching and preaching. During weekdays, he taught his learners Islamic sciences such as Exegesis, Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic mysticism, astrology etc. At weekends, he lectured to the general public. His brother, Abdullahi, studied with him during that period and later became his trusted assistant. His teaching seems to have been the expounding of the fundamentals of Islam and correcting the bad practices that had developed throughout centuries in Hausaland. He faced with rigidity and extremism among the scholars and false claims made by pseudo mystics.¹⁵ From the outset, he distinguished himself from many of the traditional scholars by his concern and interaction with the common people.

1). The Nature of His Preaching: The Shehu started holding admonishing sessions in and around his hometown, Degel. These open sessions were soon to be extended beyond Degel and its surroundings to cover the whole region of Gobir and, later Kebbi, and even Zamfara states. In Zamfara, ‘a land over whose people ignorance

¹⁰ Tapiero, N. ‘Le Grand Sheykh Peul ‘Uthman ibn Fudi’ *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1963, Paris, p. 54.

¹¹ This work called *Alfiyyat Ibn Malik* was an abridgement of *Al Kafiyah* written by Ibn Malik al- Dimashqi (d. 672 A.H., 1273 C.E.)

¹² It is a well-known legal text.

¹³ Ibn Fudi ‘Abdullahi, *Ida al- Nusukh man akhdthu anhu min al-Shuyukh* (the Repository of Texts –those of the Shaykhs from whom I Took Knowledge) , translated by Hiskett in ‘Material relating to the state of Learning among the Fulani before the Jihad, ‘B.S.O.A.S., Volume 19, N° 3, 1957., p. 563; El- Masri, F.H., ‘Life of Shehu Usman b.Fodio before the Jihad’, J.H.S.N., 2, N°4, 1963.

¹⁴ Kani, *The Intellectual Origin of Sokoto Jihad*, Ibadan, Iman Publications, 1405 A.H./1984/1985, p. 53.

¹⁵ Al-Hajj, M.A., ‘The Writing of Shehu Usman’, *Kano Studies*, 1, 2 (1974/1977.); Kani, *Intellectual Origin*, op.cit.

was supreme and the majority of those people had not smelt the scent of Islam',¹⁶ the Shehu and his team, including his brother and his son Muhammad Bello, had to spend about five years. His audience there 'used to come gathering and mingling with their women' and segregated them, teaching them that mixing together was forbidden, after he had taught them the laws of Islam.¹⁷ Although the attendants were men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, Hausa people, the Fulani, and the Tuaregs, the Shehu did not face any communication difficulties since Hausa was the most common language of instruction. He took their level into consideration and used to use gradation in teaching them about Islam (belief, faith, the pillars of Islam and so on).

His style was simple and within their reach, using didactic poems¹⁸ in non-Arabic languages such as Fulfulde and Hausa in order to ease understanding and facilitate memorisation. Typical of these is Boneji Hausa (The Trouble of Hausaland), which seems to be targeted at the moral decadence, corruption, and injustices in the society.¹⁹ The Shehu stated:

'Thanks be to Allah; and I salute the one who is the best among the creatures....

Let us pray Allah to lead Hausa land to the right way, that its religion may become stronger and its infidelity become weak.....

He always used to call his listeners to follow the True Sunnah and avert Innovation (Bid'ah).

2). *The Shehu's Style of Writing*: Unlike most of the Islamic scholars and authors of nineteenth-century Sudan, the Shehu's writings were known for their simplicity and clarity of thought. Besides his works in Arabic, he was also known to have produced works in Fulfulde and Hausa. Most of these writings, which number about four hundred and eighty on issues relating to teaching and the destruction of bad customs alone, were done in poetry. Unlike his brother and his son, he confined himself to the pure Islamic sciences. He wrote in simple standard Arabic. His books were filled with quotations from the sources of Islamic sciences, such as: the Quran, the Sunnah, and the opinions of reputed scholars.

Some Aspects of Islamic Revivalism Made by the Shehu

The Shehu backed up by a coterie of his disciples such as his brother and son who had written hundreds of books and poems managed to carry out some aspects of Islamic revivalism and did their best to make their followers to return to the true Sunnah and forsake innovation as well to enjoin the good and forbid the evil.

A. *The Shehu's Comments on Social and Religious Customs in Hausaland*

The Shehu found it necessary to comment on Social and Religious Customs in Hausaland. For example, he commented on reviving the Sunnah in religious beliefs, social affairs and customs, as well as on destroying innovation

1). *On Reviving the Sunnah in Religious Beliefs, Social Affairs and Customs, and Destroying Innovation*: Of the great number of books, poems, written by the Shehu during the first thirty year –era of his teaching and preaching career up to the Holy War (1774-1804 C.E.), *Ihya Al- Sunnah*²⁰ was the most important work in Arabic. The title of the book precisely states the Shehu's primary purpose, from which all else derived, for it was his constant endeavour to revive the Sunnah and banish Innovation (Bid'ah). This book provided a summary of key areas of Islamic life that covered the essence of Shehu's mission that needed to be stressed. It was so

¹⁶ Abdallah, Ibn Muhammad, *Tazyin Al-Waraqat (TW)*, translated and edited by Hiskett, Mervyn, Ibadan, 1963, pp. 85-86.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Aminu Hamajoda, 'The Instrumentality of Fulbe Admonitory Poems in the 19th Century Islamic Revival in Northern Nigeria (1790-1860)', *The Islamic Quarterly*, Volume XXXIX, N° 1, The Islamic Cultural Centre, London, 1995, pp. 18-35.

¹⁹ For more information about this poem refer to 'Uthman b. Fodio, *Boneji Hausa*, (translated) by M.A., Abu Manga quoted in Bugage, U.M.' A Comparative Study of the Movements of Uthman Dan Fodio in Early Nineteenth Century Hausa land and Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi in Late Nineteenth Century Sudan', an M.A. Diss. In African and Asian Studies, Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, 1971, p. 57.

²⁰ See Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth*, op.cit., pp. 51-53.

vital that chapters from it were later made into separate works to emphasize their importance. For example, the Shehu wrote *Wathiqat Al-Ikhwān*²¹ and *Sawq Al-Umma*²², to confirm and further explain the importance of establishing the traditions of the Prophet as the basis for the Islamic lifestyle. He also produced *Bayan Al-Bid'at Al-Shaytaniyya*²³ during this time to well expose and vilify the local customs and practices that were contrary to Islam.

From the outset, the Shehu in *Ihya Al-Sunnah*, made his intentions very clear:

'Let the critic of this book know that my intention in it is the revival of the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him and the destruction of Satanic innovation ...

*My intention is neither to bring shame upon the people nor engage in finding faults with them.*²⁴

B. The Shehu's Ideas on Fundamental Islamic Beliefs and Standards

Since the Shehu was well versed and highly learned in the Islamic Doctrine (Sharia), he managed to voice his ideas on fundamental Islamic beliefs and standards.

1). The Shehu's Confrontation with Extremist Scholars: Owing to the Shehu's tolerant and inclusive approach to Islamic theology and education, he was confronted with fierce opposition and bitter criticism from extremist elements among the scholars and students in Hausaland. This led him to write numerous works to defend his teachings and counteract his opponents.²⁵ According to M.A. Al-Hajj, that group of scholars was thought to be those who had vested interest in preserving the established order. They were denounced as venal scholars by the Shehu and were motivated by personal and opportunistic intentions.²⁶ As for Ahmad Kani, he divided the group into three categories: the fanatics who anathematised the laymen on the basis of scholastic theology, the venal scholars who were trying to justify political corruption, immorality, and all sorts of evil and those who placed themselves as the sole arbiters of religious practices and social behaviour.²⁷

The Shehu did not specify the language or identity of his opposition but divided them into categories and countered their ideas. In his work *Nasa'ih Al-Umma Al-Muhammadiyya*, the Shehu laid emphasis on the importance of the scholar's intention for entering into scholarly debate and discourse. He stressed that the correct intention was not to exploit the weaknesses of people or to expose their mistakes, but to give sincere pieces of advice. He warned both scholars and students against cursing with a solid basis.²⁸

The Shehu divided the extremist scholars and students into four major categories by declaring that there were four satanic factions that had appeared in Hausaland. The first was a faction that fundamentally denied the existence of disbelief. The second faction considered people to be disbelievers based on their beliefs. As for the third one, it considered people to be disbelievers based on committing sins. As far as the fourth, it was made up of the followers of blameworthy customs.²⁹ The Shehu emphasised that those who committed those acts were to be regarded as disobedient sinners.³⁰ In concluding his analysis of the weaknesses and deviations of the

the Religion of Islam, and the Obligation of Following the Book); Bashir Muhammad, Editing; Commentary, and translation of *wathiqat al-Ikhwān li-Tabyin Dalilāt Wujub lithia al-kitab wa al-Sunna wa al-Ijma'* (M.A. diss. Bayero University, 1988).

²²Sawq al-Umma ila ittiba al-Sunna (Mobilizing the Islamic Nation to follow the Sunna); Kamaldeen Abdul Azeez Balogun, A Critical edition of 'Uthman b. Fudi's *Sawa al-Umma ila itiba al-Sunna*, M.A. University of Ibadan, 1982.

²³Bayan al-Bid'a al-Shaytaniyya allati ahdathaha al-nas fi abwāb al-Milla al-Muhammadiyya (Exposing the Satanic Innovations that the People Have Perpetrated in the Domains of the Community of Muhammad); see quotations in *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXV,3, 1962 quoted in Hiskett, *The Sword*, XXXII; in Tapiero, op.cit., p. 72.

²⁴Shehu 'Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Ihya al-Suna wa Ikhamad al-Bid'a*, Beirut: Dar ul-Fikr, Third, Edition, 1981.

²⁵Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maisur*, pp. 68-69.

²⁶M.A. Al-Hajj, 'The Writings of Shehu 'Uthman Dan Fodio: A Plea for Dating and Chronology', *Kano Studies*, New Series, 1, N° 2, 1974/77, p. 8.

²⁷Kani, *Intellectual Origin*, op.cit., p. 62.

²⁸'Uthman ibn Fudi, *Nasa'ih Al-Umma Al-Muhammadiyya*, p. 3.

²⁹Ibid, p. 1.

³⁰Ibid, p. 51.

scholars, he affirmed that their greatest spiritual illness was the fact that they loved the life of this world and firmly believed that the only way to oppose these groups was to follow the Prophetic Sunnah.³¹

2). *The Shehu's Guidance to Scholars and Students*: By reforming the scholars and students, the Shehu did not only intend to eradicate the corrupt elements among them but also bring about the transformation of the whole society. Most of his writings in this era contained a section devoted to the methodology of change, notably from within the individual. According to the Shehu, real change had to come about initially within the scholars who, because of their position as interpreters of Islamic Law (Sharia) could quickly cause change in the masses of people. He wrote directly to his scholarly brethren, saying that the well-being of the community was connected to the well-being of its scholars and the corruption of the community was connected to the corruption of its scholars.³² In his treatise, *Manhaj Al- 'Abidin*, the Shehu attempted to outline some of the key factors that led to the corruption of the character of the scholars and the solution needed to effect a lasting change. He stressed key weaknesses in the human personality which would impede the development of a totally committed Islamic scholar, mystic or leader.

It seems that the Shehu was facing the injustices in society from the roots of the problem which if transformed would certainly affect the whole structure. He declared that because many scholars became so close to the wealthy and powerful who were actually parts of the ruling class of Hausaland in the eighteenth century, they benefited from the exploitation and taxation of the poor and either shielded the ruling class with religious rationalisations or turned their backs to injustice. The Shehu, whose religious training and family tradition placed him outside of the direct royal sphere of influence, was trying to foster independence of personality in the scholars and students and dependence on the Creator. Furthermore, he used to favour those scholars and students who were tolerant open-hearted and respect one another as well as to turn away from obstinacy.³³

C. Aspects of the Shehu's Concept of Islamic Society

The Shehu dealt with several aspects related to the concept of Islamic society but this paper will be limited to one aspect only which concerns women.

1). *The Issue of Women in Society*: In Zamfara, the Shehu found himself bitterly attacked. 'Abdullahi, in his *Tazyn Al- Waraqat*, described the events, saying:

*'They used to come to the Sheikh's gathering mingling with their women. He segregated them, teaching them that mingling together was forbidden; after that, he taught them the laws of Islam. Certain devils of men were in the habit of spreading it about that the sheikh's gathering was a place for the coming of men and women.'*³⁴

A certain scholar named Al-Mustapha Gwoni took the open offensive by composing a poem demanding the Shehu to prohibit women from attending his sessions for his free mixing is illicit in Islamic law. The Shehu asked his brother 'Abdullahi who responded to this veiled assault in verse saying:

'O you who have come to guide us aright we have heard what you said.

Listen to what we say. Indeed devils, if they come to our gathering,

Spread evil speech, exceeding all bounds!

We have not had promiscuous intercourse with women, how should that be!

We have warned others against this; on the contrary, I said we agreed.

³¹Ibid, p. 62.

³²Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Manhaj Al- 'Abidin*, translated by Professor M.S. El-Garh, C.A.D./Institute of African Studies: University of Ibadan, 7, N° 1, 2, December 1971, p. 29.

³³Ibid, pp. 33-34.

³⁴Abdullah ibn Fudi, *Tazyn Al-Waraqat*, op.cit., pp. 86-87 quoted in Abdullah Hakim Quick, 'Aspects of Islamic Intellectual History in Hausaland: Uthman Ibn Fudi, 1774-1804 C.E.', Ph D Thesis, Toronto University, 1995.

That it was thus. But I do not agree that their being left alone to go free in ignorance is good,

For the committing of the lesser evil has been made obligatory.

Ignorance pardons, even though it were disobedience. We found the people of this country drowning in ignorance.

*Shall we prevent them from understanding religion?*³⁵

This exchange of words typifies the kind of circumstances the Shehu found himself in the course of this epoch. Lots of scholars were opposing the appearance of women at public education- oriented gatherings, while according to Tazyn Al- Waraqa, men and women freely mingled for a variety of reasons. This sort of reply and the apparent general lack of education in Hausaland in the 18th century must have acrimoniously angered the Shehu; therefore he wrote a good number of strong comments and works on the status and condition of women in particular.

2). *Indecent Exposure and Loose Mixing*: In a Fulfulde poem entitled Boneji Hausa (The Troubles of Hausaland), the Shehu stated: “Another trouble of it (Hausaland), is that women do not learn; Their body they never cover properly...”³⁶ One of the issues that greatly concerned the Shehu about Hausaland was the general indecency in clothing and the loose mingling of the sexes. This area was usually one of immediate need to the revivalists of Islam since Islamic Law requires that both men and women dress with extreme modesty and avoid sexual relations of any sort outside marriage or the relationship of a man to his ‘right hand possession’³⁷. The Shehu described the situation stating that and among the affairs that caused a general calamity in Hausaland was the loose mingling of men and women in the markets, and on the roads as well as the absence of seclusion of a woman from those who are not allowed by Islamic Law to see her in indecent garments. The Shehu was apparently laying stress on this not only to scholars and students, but also the entire society so as to keep it from any harm and evil and any Satan and Devil.

3). *Women in Education*: In his work *Kitab Nur ul- Albab The Book of the Light of the Intellectuals*, the Shehu attacked violently the bad treatment of women and the lack of education and guidance. He wrote:

*‘This is a chapter regarding the affairs that have caused a general calamity in these lands, I mean Hausaland, which are increasing, are a general crisis in other lands also. Among them is what many of the Scholars of this land are doing by leaving their wives, daughters, and slaves neglected like animals, without teaching them what Allah has required of them in their ablution, prayers, fasting, and other areas. And they have not taught them what has been permissible for them in questions such as business transactions and what is similar. This is a major and a prohibited innovation. They have dealt with them like a dish which they use until it is broken and then throw it into the garbage or some unclean places. How strange it is that they leave their wives, daughters, and slaves in the darkness of ignorance and teach their students morning and evening! This is nothing but their own error for they teach their students showing off and vanity. This is a grave mistake for the education of wives, daughters, and slaves for it is compulsory while the teaching of students is optional.’*³⁸

Criticising this miserable situation, the Shehu addressed to the Muslim women inciting them in one of his revolutionary statements saying:

‘O Muslim women do not listen to the words of the lost, misguides who deceive you by ordering you to obey Allah and his Messenger (May the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him). They say that the happiness of a woman lies in the obedience to her husband. This is nothing but the fulfillment of their desires and objectives by requiring what neither Allah nor his Messenger has made compulsory on you in the first place like cooking,

³⁵Ibid, p. 87.

³⁶For more information about this poem, refer to Al- Hajj Garba Saidu, ‘The Significance of the Shehu’s Sermons and Poems in Ajami, *Sokoto Seminar Papers*, pp. 203-205.

³⁷The term ‘right hand possession’ is the literal Arabic translation for the name of the war captive who comes into the possession of a Muslim.

³⁸ ‘Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Nurul-Albab*, pp.9-10.

washing clothes, and other things that are nothing but what they want. At the same time, they are not requiring of you that which Allah and his Messenger oblige for you in obedience to Allah and his Messenger.³⁹

This statement must have carried far reached implications since the Shehu was putting into question not only the general authority of the husband over his wife, but also the specific duties of the Muslim woman. He was really defying and potentially upsetting the very core of the relationship between men and women. His words, in a land that based its morality and daily life on injunctions originating from Islamic sources and interpreted by learned people, were really a type of empowerment for the women.

In his treatise *Tanbih Al Ikhwan 'ala Jawaz*, the Shehu went so far as to show the permissibility in Islamic Law for women to come out for seeking knowledge, providing that their husband was unable to give them the suitable education, himself, on one hand, and the place of learning was free from intimate mixing of men and women. He also advocated the idea of setting aside a special time for women and children to be able to speak directly to the local scholar without the presence of men. This was the practice of the Prophet, who during his time, did not prevent women from coming to the Mosque and dedicated special time to their education.

Despite the fact that this kind of encouragement clearly aimed at changing the quality of the relationship between men and women should not be interpreted as a sort of revolutionary women's emancipation in the Western sense of the word. The Shehu was really very heedful to temper most of his treatises on this topic with a reminder that the woman should be basically obedient to her husband. Nevertheless, this obedience had conditions. The Shehu stated:

*'Yes, it is compulsory for the wife to obey her husband, both in secret and in the open, even if he is a lowly person; whether free or in bondage. It is prohibited for her to go against her husband, unless he orders her to disobey Allah, the Most High. Then, it becomes incumbent upon her to refuse him for there is no obedience to the created being that disobeys Allah.'*⁴⁰

4). *Seclusion of Women*: Concerning the movement of women in the society, the Shehu wrote his treatise entitled *Irshad Al-Ikhwan ila Ahkam khuruj Al-Niswan* that he found the people in Hausaland tending toward of two extremes. The first was not to put any restrictions on the movement of women whether they were fulfilling a legal need or not. This represented the majority of people. The second was the position of totally restricting all movements of women outside their houses regardless of whether their leaving was allowed by Islamic Law or not. This group was to represent only a tiny minority of the population.⁴¹ The Shehu was trying to adopt a balanced and moderate stand by first making obvious that whenever a woman had a religious or worldly necessity, she was allowed to leave the house. In case there was no necessity, he stressed that she should not leave her house apart from one of the twelve reasons which he stated in his treatise *Irshad Al-Ikhwan* mentioned earlier.⁴²

The Shehu's Successful Revivalist Aspects

In spite of the fact that the Shehu managed to accomplish various successful revivalist aspects throughout his life chiefly between 1774 and 1810, characterized in teaching and preaching his people and calling them to the true path and straight way which is Islam, waging a holy war against the pagans and the lukewarm rulers as well as their followers and the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate which lasted until the advent of the British at the beginning of the twentieth century, the one mentioned in this paper is about women.

A. The Importance of Women in Society

Since society stands on two feet one foot which represents men and the other that represents women; thence, women should be well treated and highly respected and should not be deprived of things such as understanding their religion and seeking every good thing which make from them efficient citizens who contribute to the

³⁹Ibid, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 11.

⁴¹Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Irshad Al-Ikhwan*, op.cit., pp. 30-31; 'Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Ihya Al-Sunna*, op.cit., p. 297.

⁴²Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Irshad Al-Ikhwan*, op.cit., pp. 30-31.

welfare as well as the prosperity of society. The Shehu emphasized a great deal on not depriving them from any of the rights offered to them by Islamic Sharia that considers both men and women are brothers and sisters. He reminded scholars and students as well as the whole society about what the Prophet Muhammad says in several of Hadiths such as:

‘Verily, the best of you are those who bear excellent morals.’

‘People are God’s family. Therefore, dearest to Allah is the person who is kind to his family.’

‘A Muslim is a brother to a Muslim. He should not be wronged, insulted, and belittled.’

‘The dearest and the nearest to me among you on the Resurrection Day shall be the best of you in morals.’⁴³.

B. Decent Exposure and Avoidance of Mixing with Men

The Shehu strongly advised women to wear decent clothes prescribed by Islamic Law and avoid any mingling with the opposite sex for indecent exposure and illicit contact between the sexes was the root causes of sexual immorality which is likely to lead help spread fornication and adultery on one hand and very dangerous diseases on the other. Besides, mixing between the two sexes can cause unfaithfulness which usually leads to divorce and the breaking of the family that will cause a lot of harm to both parents and children. Hence, the society will be full of social ills caused by the abandoned kids or will fall prey to them.⁴⁴

C. The Importance of Education for Women

The Shehu did not only hearten women to seek at least the fundamentals of Islamic religion such as belief, faith, the pillars of Islam and so forth but also urged them to learn how to carry out business according to Islamic precepts and how to behave in the market. He stated:

*‘If it were said, ‘Women do not have knowledge about theses affairs (business), and they cannot find learned people to take their place most of the time.’ The answer is that it is incumbent on a woman to strive to gain knowledge about these affairs, in the same way that it is incumbent upon her to know about her religious duties such as ablution, the ceremonial bath, prayer and fasting. She should also know how to purchase her necessary goods.’*⁴⁵

D. The Importance of the Seclusion of Women

The Shehu adopted a well-balanced and moderate stance between the two extremes. He made clear that whenever a woman had a religious or mundane necessity, she was permitted to leave her house. Nonetheless, if it was not necessary, she had to remain at home. He also insisted on using the veil, travelling in groups, or protected parties of women at Pilgrimage, which was not something new, but in complete conformity to the early practices of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula.

In retrospect, it could be stated that the efforts made by the Shehu in changing the condition of women in Hausaland did cause a radical change and enlightenment among the women. Even though their freedom of movement must have been seriously curtailed by his call for controlled activity, the quality of life and the level of education among the women must have improved. A great number of highly educated women were developed through the Shehu’s educational system. Jean Boyd lists forty-eight known women scholars in the Shehu’s time. Six of these scholars have poetry that still survives. They include Nana Asma’u, the Shehu’s daughter, her sisters Khadidja, Hafsa, Safia, and Maryam, as well as their cousin ‘Aisha.⁴⁶

⁴³Refer to the Books of Prophetic Hadiths such as Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim and so on.

⁴⁴Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Irshad Al-Ikhwan*, op.cit.; ‘Uthman Ibn Fudi, *Ihya Al –Sunna*, op.cit..

⁴⁵Ibid, p. 208.

⁴⁶Jean, Boyd, *The Caliph’s Sister, Nana Asma’u (1793-1865) Teacher, Poet, and Islamic Leader*, London, Frank Cass, 1989, pp. 99, 116.

During this period, an upsurge of women's scholarship occurred for Nana Asma'u succeeded in establishing women's educational organisations on the level of the village level and helped to train women to spread Islamic teachings throughout Hausaland.⁴⁷ She was able to produce treatises and poetry in three languages: Arabic, Fulfulde, and Hausa.⁴⁸ Her works dealt with Islamic Sharia, theology, eschatology, history, politics, education, health, women and Bori⁴⁹ and the family.

CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned, the Shehu was a renowned teacher, well-known preacher, prolific, great reformer, reputed revivalist, prominent holy warrior, and the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. He was one of a class of urbanized ethnic Fulani living in the Hausa States in what is today northern Nigeria. He was a leader who followed the Sunni Maliki school of Jurisprudence and the Qadiri branch of Sufism. The Shehu wrote hundreds of books concerning Islamic religion, government, culture, and society. He also composed countless poems in Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa. All these works served him and his disciples in their reforming and revivalist movement.

In Hausaland, the Shehu discovered that the Hausas were either pagans or lukewarm Muslims who practiced Islam but mixed it with false beliefs and heretical practices. He also found that both men and women were mingling with one another on the roads, in the markets, and in other public places, with indecent clothes and improper behaviour. Besides, he came to know that both sexes were illiterate and uncivilized. Further, he revealed that there were students and scholars who were either too permissive or extremists. Some of them, mainly the scholars, were corrupt and strayed because they were attracted by the temptation of the rulers and the well-off people. In addition, he realized that the population was ill-treated and badly exploited by their king, the chiefs, and so on.

Thence, with his companions and followers, he decided to fight illiteracy, ignorance, heretical practices, enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil by following the Quranic injunctions and Prophetic traditions. He encouraged literacy and scholarship, for women as well as men, and several of his daughters rose as outstanding scholars and prolific writers. His writings and sayings continue to be much quoted even today. Some followers consider him to have been a great mujaddid (revivalist), a divinely inspired "reformer of Islam".

After years of sacrifice and seriousness, he managed to enlighten many people, to teach the illiterate, to guide the misguided, to make both men and women know their rights and duties, to follow the right way and straight path, as well as to combat the venal scholars and tried his best to correct those who needed to be corrected. He even attempted to call the rulers to the true path peacefully but because they refused and wanted to get rid of him by plotting to kill him and abort his movement, he was obliged to wage a holy war against the corrupt government in 1804, which ended up by the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1810, which survived until the arrival of the British. And thanks to him and his companions and followers, such as his brother 'Abdullahi and his son Muhammad Bello that Islam is still existent in Northern Nigeria.

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⁴⁷Aliyu Darma, 'The Contribution of Learned Women to Islamic Education in Hausaland', M.A., Bayero University, Kano, 1985, p. 55.

⁴⁸Jean Boyd in her report to the conference, Islam and Africa: The Changing Role of the 'Ulama, held at Northwestern University (March 29-30, listed fifty-two works of Nana Asma'u in Arabic, Fulfulde, and Hausa.

⁴⁹Bori is a Hausa word which means Spirit possession.

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