

A SURVEY ON THE JIHADISTS VIEW ON
THE ORIGIN OF SOKOTO JIHAD AS DEPICTED
IN THEIR LITERATURE

BY

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INTRODUCTION:

A lot has been said about the relationale behind the Jihad that took place in Hausaland in the 19th century. In view of the colonialists and their cohorts, the movement was no more than a struggle between a superior race (*Fulani*) and the inferior race (*Hausa*). According to the Islam was just to achieve or satisfy political and racial ambitions. S. J. Hoghena colonial Administrator once wrote that:

Religion was often made the pretext for the acquisition of worldly power.... (the Jihad) had as its confessed object the purification of the Muslim religion, and it was directed against the corrupt rulers of Hausaland, who had been supposedly, oppressing or ignoring their Muslim subjects. In reality, it was originally a national fight of the Fulani, both Muslim and pagan, against the forces of Yunfa the king of Gobir, who had decreed their extermination... the Malams who had been the leaders, exploit the opportunity under the cloak of religion to overt the native rulers and put themselves into their places, with Usman Dan Fodio at their head¹. (emphasis mine).

Lugard himself, maintained same view about the Jihad. According to him the Fulani overthrew the Hausa rulers because of their racial superiority and so in turn they (the *Europeans*) overthrew the Fulani and established their power over them as they did to the Hausas. He says:

The Fulani in old times under Dan Fodio conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings and to create kings. They in turn have by defeat lost their rule which has come to the hands of the British. All these things which I have said, the Fulani by conquest took the right like to do now pass to the British.²

This is also the view of many racially conscious European writers like Arnett, E. J. Johnston, Bath etc. The above theory and perception about the Jihad as Fulani against the Hausas is very erroneous and fallacious as no where in the writings of the Jihadists, Fulani racial appeal is made. Their sole emphasis has been on the '*Jama'a*', i.e. the community of Muslim.

Similarly, to others like Adu Boahen the Jihad is nothing but a Fulani 'revolt' against the Hausa ruling class due to their marginalisation and lack of access to the power streams. After all, they were the most qualified to rule. However, to some, the Jihad was fought primarily to free the Fulani cattle rearers from the bondage of over taxation and Jangali tax they paid for their cattle and grazing lands. While others view it as purely political, having nothing to do with religion but to cover up. Thus

it was but a struggle for power between the dominant and dominated class of people.

On the other hand, in many places the Jihadist themselves spelt out in clear terms objectives and wisdom for Jihad. They have had documented most of their actions with their proofs in various literature. Sheikh Usman himself once instructed his brother Abdullahi, that:

*Write for us the reason for our fight from Gobir and our Jihad with Hausa Sultans so that every one who reads it may justify our action if he is fair minded.*³

The movement was led by a group of intellectuals and ardent scholars, who were religiously conscious and were trying to justify any course of their action. Certainly it is a great blunder for any one to throw away their main writings about any section of their movement for speculations and assumptions, which are mostly full of prejudice and bias. Well, according to Shehu, only fair minded people would give heed to their writings when seeking the justification for the Jihad.

According to Professor Abdullahi Smith, the Jihad was an intellectual movement, which left every thing of its programs of action well documented, thus involving in the minds of the leaders a conception of the ideal society and philosophy of revolution. The real significance of the movement Smith states 'cannot be understood unless emphasis is laid on this aspect'.⁴ Therefore, the intention of this paper, is to study the cases filed against the political, religious, economic, and traditional institutions by the Jihadist from their own view points in particular, which made it necessary and obligatory upon them to carry out the Jihad in Hausaland and restructure the institutions in conformity with the Shariah.

CASE AGAINST THE HAUSA KINGS:

According to Abdullahi Ibn Fodio Sheikh Usman in the beginning did not address himself to the kings. And he did not interfere at all in the affairs of the kings and their subjects he only taught and preached. The Sheikh said:

*"I will not interfere between anyone and his chief. I will not be a cause of parting"*⁵.

But, when Shehu acquired the necessary support, from his followers, and his message reached all nooks and corners of Hausaland, he started alerting the Muslim community of the injustices of the Hausa rulers, and prepared for a total break with the authority. Thus he followed the best strategy and methods otherwise he and his community would have been exterminated before carrying out the Islamic reform and reviving the spirit of pure Islam in the society.

In order to draw clearly the line of demarcation between the Islamic system of administration and the unislamic system, Sheikh wrote his famous politically inciting text, known as Kitab Al Farq, in the book, the Shehu write about thirty charges against the Hausa rulers each one under Islamic Shariah made them liable to be fought and over them from power. These charges included oppression of the common man, transparent injustice, moral laxity and degeneration, excess luxury and illegal acquisition of women (where one ruler can acquire as much as one thousand women for himself alone) over taxation not stipulated by the Shariah.⁶ e.t.c. At the end of the charges, Shehu concludes that:

All of them above (the charges) are (actions) according the (system) way of the unbelievers in their govt. and everyone who follows their way in his emirship then he has in truth followed the way of hell fire. God most High Has said: "Whoever makes a breach with the messenger after the guidance become clear to him and follows a way other than the believers, him we shall turn to what he has turned to and we shall roast him in Gehannama, evil homecoming". Therefore do not follow their way in their government." 7

Moreover, Muhammad Bello in *Infaqul-Maisur* said "among the chiefs of this land, their warriors and their venal Ulamas were the categories who mixed Islam with infidelity, though they confess Islam and proclaim Shahada, they also pray and fast, but they perform actions known only to unbelievers, like sacrifice to trees and mountains and rejection of the evident truth. To fight these people and to seize political power from their hands is among the necessary acts of Jihad, as stated by Almagili in his answer to Askia.⁸

Similarly, the kings of Hausaland became hostile to the Shehu and his Jama'a (community) when they realised that Shehu was getting supporters among the masses. Professor Kani cited that:

According to Muhammad Bello those kings and their associates began to persecute the community. They (the Jama'a) they stood in their ways and confiscated their property. They (the rulers) threatened the Jama'a with extermination if they did not abandon what they were doing. Then Nafata, the sultan of Gobir, decided to check the power of the Jama'a by declaring that nobody except the Shiekh was allowed to preach, and that there should not be anymore conversion to Islam and those who were not born Muslims should return to their former religion, lastly, men should not wear turbans nor women veils.⁹

These Decrees were not respected by the Jihadists. This heightened the tension that existed between the leadership and the Jihadists. Nafata resented the idea of wide spread preaching, new conversions and the use of turbans and veils which are prerequisite to the socio-moral reform of the Muslims. A fire of confrontation, was therefore ignited which had later led to the declaration of the war. Certainly, suffice are the reasons given by the Jihadist for fighting the Hausa rulers in their literature and also in the writings of fair minded writers and historians, not those of manipulators of historical facts.

In the Qur'an too there is a mention relating to this fact:

"Fight those who believe not in God nor the last Day, nor hold that forbidden by God and His apostle, nor acknowledge the religion to truth" (9:20) Fight them, and God will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you (to victory) over them heal the breasts of believers (9:14). And Fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together. But know that God is with who restrain themselves (9:36).

The Qur'an is very spectacular about the political leaders who turned faithless as the most recommended to be fought from the beginning. It says "Fight ye the chiefs of unfaith: for their oaths are nothing to them, that thus they may be restrained from unbelief and persecuting Muslims". All the above fitted the Hausa rulers in all respects. They did not establish the Shariah they persecuted Islam and Muslims, and established

not justice in their domains. In his famous book, on political break with Hausa authorities, Kitabu-Wujubul Hijrah, Shehu said about the Hausa rulers:

Their major break with Islam however was their stopping people from becoming Muslims, Nafata, Sarkin Gobir had issued a famous decree before the Jihad forbidding any more conversion to Islam and ordering that everybody should return to the religion of his father.¹⁰ They (also) imposed uncanonical taxes on their subject, they persisted in self-indulgence-and all appearance, they did not follow govt. as ordered by the shariah.¹¹

Shehu declared openly that the Hausa rulers were undoubtedly unbelievers. he said:

They are undoubtedly unbelievers, even though they profess the religion of Islam, because they are polytheists who turn away from the path of God and raise the flag of worldly kingdom above the banner of Islam.¹²

CASE AGAINST ULAMA:

Another category of people, declared by the Jihadists to be fought were the venal Ulamas, the friends of the devil and representatives of Iblis as Shaykh called them in his book Wasiqatul-Ikhwan. "They were compromisers or equivocators, they were the men of learning who betrayed their religion and shariah, stilled their conscience and supported the ruling classes in their transgression of the Islamic law thereby providing them with a mantle of false respectability"¹³

Shehu said:

Among their misconceptions is that some of them (i.e. Ulama) tolerated unworthy customs on the ground of the saying which is widespread in the land, that; the custom of a land is sunna. But this (Shehu stressed) is falsehood and confession according to the concession of opinion (Ijama) because a custom should not be tolerated if it contradicts sunnah (of the prophet). I was told by one of the brethren that he heard some of them say forbidding evil in the land of evil is the real evil.¹⁴

Shehu went into serious conflict with those Ulamas, especially on the fundamentals of Islam like tauhid. According to Muhammad Bello the Shehu wrote over fifty books in the course of his disputes with the Ulama and was involved in numerous debates with them over the question of tawhid. Although he always emerged victorious he was subjected to severe persecution and unwarranted attacks from their part. They accused him of hypocrisy, sedition and hearsay, and claimed that he was misleading the common people.¹⁵ Many charges were made by the Shehu against the Ulama, especially, in the Nurul-Albab and Wasikatul Ikhwan: for not teaching their wives, children, e. t. c. the religion of Islam.

On the other hand, the Shehu charged majority of the people of being nominal Muslims who professed Islam and performed some other actions or saying known only to unbelievers, or that can vitiate one's faith. Kani cited Shehu saying about the judgment of these people that:

These people are called Bori in the Sudanese language. His answer to this is that these people are unbelievers according to the consensus of the community. Muhammad B. Abdal-Karim Al-Maghili says in a

reply to the Amir Al-Hajj Askia's (question) that what is the judgment of some people who say there is no God but Allah, nevertheless they venerate some trees and sacrifices to them. They also have some houses which they venerate and called this Bori. They do not appoint a Sultan or take decision on minor or major issues without consulting one of the custodian of these venerated houses. The answer is that they are infidels without any doubt.¹⁶

So, the entire religious institutions needed reform during the Shehu's time from the Ulama to Talaba i.e. scholars to followers; since the majority of the people remained only Muslims by name but practiced one form of traditional religion of Iskoki or another. In Nurul-Albab, Shehu categorised the people of Hausaland into three categories. Those who were Muslims and nothing of unbelief was seen on them. The second category were those who mixed Islam with paganism though claimed Islam; these he said were unbelievers. The third category were pure unbelievers who did not even smell the scent of Islam. He stated that, the second category were the majority of Hausaland. Therefore, based on this fact, Shehu justified fighting these people in order to purify the religion of Islam from syncretism. Muhammad Bello made this categorically clear in Infaqul Maisur. Thus fighting them when they refused to accept the truth is a compulsory and meritorious act.

THEIR CASE AGAINST CULTURE AND TRADITIONS UNISLAMIC:

Shehu not only faced the Ulamas and the rulers in his campaigns but also turned against the total cultural and traditional settings in Hausaland, condemning every aspect of it as operating against Islamic Shariah. Among such customs were 'mixing' of the sexes at social gatherings, the practice of allowing women to go to market while men stay at home, the moral laxity at bridal festival where women in their finery danced before men, the custom of salutation by prostration and the various abuses and aberration in the administration of the law of inheritance¹⁷.

Another bad habit condemned by him was the innovation connected with trade transactions. He condemned the idea of authorizing the ignorant to sell or buy for himself because he does not know what is forbidden and what is permissible. Ibn Fudi goes on to say that one of their bad innovations is that their imitation of the Europeans.¹⁸ His books like Irshadul-Ikhwan Ila Ahkami Khuruji-Niswan, Irshad ahl al-Tafrit Wal-Ifrat, Nurul Albab, Bayanul Bida'ati Shaitaniyya, are full of warning against and condemnation of such evil culture and traditions in Hausaland.

Moreover, the Jihadists, particularly Shaykh Usman strove relentlessly for the liberation of women from the clutches of evil customs, which denied them the rights given and approved of them by the Shariah, like share of inheritance of their deceased kinsmen, access to knowledge and all sorts of sufferings. Thus he openly allowed women to attend his preaching and teaching grounds, and at the same time criticized the Ulama for being indifferent about the position of women in Islam.

Shehu describes the condition and position of women before the Jihad as follows:

One of the habits of scholars of the Sudan is that they leave their wives, daughters and slaves neglected like a grazing livestock without teaching them what Allah made obligatory on them of their articles of faith, regulations, governing their purity, fasting and their like, i.e.

*buying and selling and similar things. They consider them like a container which they use when it breaks they throw it in dung and rubbish places.*¹⁹

Again, Shaykh clearly addressed the women in the strongest term that they should never condone such attitudes directed against them which are not sanctioned by the Shariah. He says:

"O Muslim women, do not listen to the speech of this misguided (group who misguide others and deceive you by making you to obey your husbands without ordering you to Allah and His messenger peace be upon him, they claim that the happiness of the women is in obeying her husband. they do this in order to get their selfish desire out of you

*..*²⁰

This shows that, the injustices meted against women folk by the Hausa culture was very extreme that they play no role in societal affairs, they were like a container which when loses its value would be thrown away. While Islamic Shariah, attached a special concern and care for women from the early time as daughters then wives and mothers. To correct this abnormality which the majority were not willing to give up required the use and application of force which came through the Jihad. In a famous tradition of the holy prophet, it is reported that 'whoever sees something unpleasant to the Shariah must change it with his hand i.e. by force, if he is not able, then by his tongue, i.e. to preach against it, and if he is not able, must hate it, with his heart and this is a least form of faith'. Therefore, the Jihadists used the first measure and with the help of Allah they succeeded in restructuring the Hausa society based on a sound moral, social, political, economic and religious life.

CONCLUSION:

The pioneers of the Jihad, Shaykh Usman, Abdullahi Bin Fodiyo and Muhammad Bello wrote extensively about the history of Sokoto Jihad from its beginning to the end. And even the lapses and weakness of Jihad, especially during the consolidation period, was very much enumerated especially in writing of Shaykh Abdullahi (c. g. Tazvinul Waraqat) who openly criticized the Jihad's dimensions after victory. Muhammad Bello's Infaqul Maisur, is another invaluable authority to who so ever needs to know something about the history of this Jihad. However, people are allowed to express their opinions and judgments upon every historical event. Then it should be cautious, in order to avoid malice, prejudices and bias which at the end will confuse the whole epoch. (especially to students who cannot have direct access to the Jihadists opinion about the Jihad). Already a great number of the students of history today depend largely on the sources either written by the imperialists or those in their tutelage. Thus they viewed the Jihad and its leaders with contempt and insincere mind. To remedy the situation, all the major works of the Jihad leaders should be translated into English and published for wider consumption.

END NOTES

- 1 Quoted by Al-Hajj, M A The meaning of Sokoto Jihad in Usman Y B (ed) studies in the History of Sokoto Caliphate, Nigeria (1979) p 4
- 2 See Adeleye, R. A power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1806-1906 London (1979) p 205
- 3 Cited by Hovakur, T. Nigerian perspectives: An historical anthology Oxford University Press (1975) p 245

- Al-Hajj, M. A. *op. cit.* p.6
- Cited by Hodgkins. *op. cit.* p. 246
- Shehu Usman Bin Fodio. *Katibul-Farq*. M. Hiskett (trans) in BSOAS, (1960) p4-5. The whole book contains such charges.
- *Ibid.* p.5
- 8 Muhammad Bello. *Infaqul-Maisur*. Sidi Suyuti et al (Trans) (1974) Sokoto pp 99-100
- 9 Kani A. M. *The Intellectual origin of Sokoto Jihad*. Ibadan (1985) p.37
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.13
- 12 Hodgkins. *op. cit.* p. 242.
13. Cited, by Bugaje U. M. *The Sakkwato model' paper presented at BUK (1980) p. 9.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 10
15. *Al-Hajj, M.A. op. cit.* p.8
- 16 *Kani, A.M. (1985) op. cit.* p.67.
- 17 Doi, I.A Islam in Nigeria. Zaria (1984) p.36
- 18 Kani, A.M. (1985) *op. cit.* p. 65 Quoting Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.69
- 20 *Ibid.* p.69

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