

**THE CONTENTS, METHODS AND IMPACT
OF SHEHU USMAN DAN FODIO'S TEACHIINGS
(1774-1804)**

**BY
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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER ONE: THE SHEHU'S LIFE	
Background to his society.....	9
Usman's birth and childhood.....	14
Usman's youth and education.....	14
CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTENTS AND METHODS OF SHEHU'S TEACHINGS	
The situational problems.....	18
Travelling, Preaching, Teaching and Writing...	19
Ideology and strategy.....	31
CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPACT OF SHEHU'S TEACHINGS	
Early growth of <i>Jama'a</i>, 1774-1789	35
Beginning of involvement with the state 1789-1795.....	37
Conflict and Beginning of the clash with The state, 1795-1804.....	(39)
Some Implications and consequences of the Hijra.....	44
Beyond the Caliphate.....	45
CONCLUSION.....	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49

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ABSTRACT

The 18th and 19th Centuries saw a series of revolutionary movements in the Western Sudan; movements that brought radical social and political changes; changes which lasted until the European colonization and remain significant in the contemporary states of West Africa to this day. Of these revolutionary changes - that of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, in the then Hausa States, has been the greatest and with the most lasting effects. This study is about the teachings of this Shehu, the impact it had up to the *Hijra* which preceded his *Jihad* (1804-1810)

The study starts with a short introduction which gives an overview of the events before, during and after the *Jihad*, out of which emerged an Islamic state - the Sokoto Caliphate which lasted until the British invasion early this 20th. century (1903).

The main study is undertaken in three short chapters. The first chapter examines the life of the Shehu against the background of the state of affairs in his society at Gobir, which was a microcosm of the Hausa City-States. In the second chapter, Shehu's teaching (in both written and spoken words) is examined, the situational problem that led to it and hence its contents and his method of approach. In the third chapter, the impact of Shehu's teaching is discussed, up to the events that led to his *Hijra* in 1804.

The study is concluded by a brief over-all assessment of the impact of this Shehu's teachings on the life of the millions of people of the Sokoto caliphate, the marks of which are mistakably vivid in today's northern States of Nigeria despite decades of colonization.

INTRODUCTION

Until quite recently, West African history of the last two centuries, has more or less been that of European activity and influence in the region. As the treasure of the wealth of historical writings in this area is being discovered, the obscurities disappear and the significant forces of change during this period become much more clear. It is now evident that the theme of West African history in the last two centuries consists of a series of revolutionary movements which radically changed the social, political and economic complexion of the whole *Bilad al-Sudan*, for about 100 years before the fateful scramble for Africa led to the establishment of European rule in the region. The climax of these series of revolutionary movements, during the course of which the classical concept of *Jihad* found application to the local conditions, had been the *Jihad* of Shehu Usman dan Fodio in the Hausa city-states.

Shehu Usman dan Fodio was born to a renowned scholar Muhammad Fodio, in the Hausa State of Gobir where Islam had existed for at least four centuries. In the course of these four centuries, Islam has permeated through all sections of the society and by the 18th Century enjoyed supremacy over traditional (pagan) religion. Much of this Islamisation was achieved through the activities of Muslim traders and itinerant Ulama (scholars). But up till the 18th Century the traditional element was still persisting within the society, to the extent of supporting a number of syncretic practices. This apparently compelled the rulers to occupy the uneasy position of being the leaders of both Islamic and traditional faiths. The conflict between Islam which requires absolute devotion and traditional practices, (among other factors) developed in course of time to create grounds for revolts and uprisings so long as no powerful leader emerged. At a very early age Shehu Usman started his education in the traditional Muslim

pattern and by 1774 he had qualified as a teacher. Syncretism, corruption and charlatanism of the Ulama (all of which reflect the ignorance of the society) took Shehu's immediate attention.

He travelled far and wide to teach and preach and wrote extensively against these unislamic practices. In due course he emerged as the undisputed leader commanding large following drawn from all segments of the population, cutting across tribes and states. Shehu Usman and his following soon came into conflict with the rulers who saw them as obvious threat to their authority. This conflict deteriorated to open attack and hostility on the Shehu's following and initiated their *Hijra* in 1804, which preceded the *Jihad*.

Shehu's immigration (*Hijra*) which represented a final break with the rulers of Gobir (one of the Hausa City-States) did not eliminate completely the threat Shehu and his following posed to the rulers. In an apparent bid to put an end to this threat, the rulers attacked the Shehu and his people at their new found home. The defeat which the rulers suffered in the hand of this Immigrant Muslim Community (*Muhajirun*) was immediately followed by a chain of revolts under Muslim leadership against the Hausa Rulers not only in Gobir but throughout the Hausa City-states. One after the other the Hausa City-States fell into the hands of the fighting Muslims and by 1810 all the once warring Hausa City-States had been brought together into one administrative unit - the Sokoto Caliphate, with its headquarters at Sokoto.

Now that the war was over, the Shehu retired from public life to concentrate on the much more difficult task of establishing an administration based on the Islamic law and ideals, while his brother Abdullah and his son Bello shouldered the weight of administering the new Caliphate. Keeping his goal in mind Shehu Usman wrote extensively on a variety of fields until his death in 1817. It should

be noted that both his brother and his son (who succeeded him) wrote with similar competence and extent towards the same goal - the establishment of an Islamic State. This however did not make the task of these three leaders hitch-free the administration of the Caliphate was not without problems here and there. The legacy of the writing of this triumvirate continued to guide the legal and political affairs of this Caliphate until British colonization of this area in 1903. It is the teachings of the leader of this revolutionary movement in a traditional Muslim Hausa State that this study is concerned with.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SHEHU'S LIFE

A Background to His Society

The Shehu's society, the Hausa City-States was located in the Central Bilad al-Sudan, an extensive Savannah grassland area starting from the Nile valley in the East to the Atlantic Ocean in the West. Sandwiched between the Sahara and dense forest, enriched with fertile soil, the *Bilad al-Sudan* was particularly suitable for the development of complex civilizations. This land came to be made up of a variety of black peoples with a variety of languages and cultures. Chief among these were the Fulani, Wolof, Kanuri and Hausa.

The history of the Fulani (The Shehu's tribe) goes as far back as the Seventh Century when the Berbers, travelled down south to the Futa Toro plains. Here they inter-married with the sedentary Fulani cultivators producing a semi nomadic Fulani who grew prosperous and migrated to the East. By the Fourteenth Century these semi nomadic Fulani had reached Masina and by Fifteenth Century they appeared among the Hausas. Smaller groups moved into the Adamawa region now divided between Nigeria and Cameroon. Shehu's ancestors, the Torankawa Fulani, were part of this migration. By the Fifteenth Century they had settled in what later came to be Konni, part of Gobir, a leading Hausa City-State.

The emergence of the Hausa's dates back to the Tenth Century. According to the popular Kano chronicle they seemed to have migrated from the North, settled and mixed with the indigenous hunters and eventually established

mastery over them¹ The Hausas shared a common language and never formed a tribal group as such. By the first half of the Fifteenth Century the Hausas were controlled by the Borno empire. This lasted up to the end of that century. By the Sixteenth Century the seven Hausa states, some of which came under the conquest of the Songhay Empire had emerged. The fall of the Songhay in the same century was followed by upheavals in the Hausa States. These upheavals, which lasted up to the Eighteenth Century, saw the rise of independent Hausa City-states. Unlike their eastern neighbors (Kanem-Borno) the Hausa States never formed an empire and their history was characterized by inter-state conflicts and wars, which had adverse effects on security and commerce in the area.

Until the appearance of Islam in the early part of the Fourteenth Century the dominant religion in the Hausaland had been what is often called traditional religion. This seems to belong to a belief system, wide spread in a tropical Africa, involving belief in a high distant God not actively connected with everyday life of men, supplemented by a chain of supernatural forces directly in touch with men and controlling their destiny in everyday life. *Ubangiji* was the Hausa's high god while *Iskoki* (Singular - *Iska*) the variety of those near spirits, and it is the maintenance of good relationship with the latter which formed the object of the rituals. Communication with the *Iskoki* was achieved through sacrificial procedures or possession. The possession of a human being by any of the *Iskoki* is called Bori. The Bori-cult is still to be found among the few non-Muslim Hausas today. This belief system naturally supported a class of priests (called Bokaye) skilled in the mysteries of the *Iskoki* and in addition played a

¹ Historians are not yet agreed to the origins of the Hausas, such conclusions as has been reached, are therefore only tentative and subject to modifications as investigations proceed.

significant political role. The ruler (Sarki) seems also to have occupied a leadership position especially in public rituals².

The coming of Islam to Hausaland dates back to the second half of the Fourteenth Century, traditionally associated with the east-ward migration of the Wangara people of the Western Sudan. Until the later part of the Fifteenth century Islam did not assume any political dimension although some ulama could have been involved in administration. Associated with the emergence of Islam as a political force in the Hausaland were governmental changes which brought a new crop of leadership to power. This leadership especially in Zaria, Kano and Katsina affected a number of reforms that were to further Islamise Hausaland . Notable among these leaders was Muhammad Rumfa of Kano, who went as far as inviting a jurist of international repute, Muhammad Al-Magili, to advice him. As Islam spread and gained more following in Hausaland, the traditional belief system also became affected. The *Ubangiji* became progressively of greater significance in the daily affairs of men while the *Iskoki* became progressively relegated to the rather harmless position of the Jinn. As Islam gained more foot-hold in the Hausa states, its significance as pilgrimage route and centre of learning increased. By the Sixteenth Century reputation of some Hausa state capitals as Muslim metropolises was already high enough to attract scholars of international repute. This coupled with the pilgrimage tradition provided a continual source of refreshment for Islam in this society. By this time, Hausaland, along with Mali, Songhay and Borno can be said to have constituted the Sudanese *Dar al-Islam* (Land of Islam) as distinct from the non-Muslim land where Islam was not prevalent.

² F. Smith, "The early states of the Western Sudan" in Ajayi & Crowder (Eds.), **History of West Africa**, London, Longman, 1976, pp. 190.

By the Eighteenth Century Islam's superiority over traditional religion in the Hausa States was evident. The community's daily-life revolved around the five daily prayers while throughout the year they celebrated the various Muslim festivals. In the Hausa state of Gobir (Shehu's home state) and indeed in others, the ruler (Sarki) was regarded primarily as a Muslim and the state a Muslim state. The Sarki by virtue of his position led or at least sanctioned all Muslim festivals. His court was made up of many Muslim scholars (Ulama), who not only served as advisers but often held important offices. Being literate the Ulama's services to the state's administration was indispensable. A great number of the Ulama however, shunned the court and occupied themselves with teaching and preaching. Naturally the Sarki, though not always happy with the consequences of these preaching, had to tolerate it. Despite the Islamic identity of the administration total application of Islam, which by its nature is a complete and perfect way of life with its system of law and morality governing the totality of human life, was not obtaining. This situation naturally attracted the attention of some of the Ulama and posed as potential area of conflict between the committed Muslim subjects and the nominal Muslim rulers. That the rulers often paid tribute to unIslamic traditional practices must have helped to make this conflict more probable. Worse perhaps was that the rulers often forced the Muslim subjects to also pay tribute to pagan practices or undertake such unIslamic obligations

Official corruption, heavy taxation, and slavery which instilled perpetual fear, was as much a source of discontent to the Muslim as to the non-Muslim subjects. This state of affairs naturally created tension and frustration especially to the Muslim subjects, as Smith observed:

“The position was frustrating for the Muslims were generally conscious of being culturally much superior to the pagans. Their religion of course, left them in no doubt about this and on the practical level they were likely to be superior citizens, knowing much more about the world than did the pagans, and conserving a vital monopoly of literacy”.³

Summarizing this state of affairs Smith further remarked:-

“Conscious of superiority and frustration on the one side, and distrust and fear on the other were not only common conditions of relationship between Muslims and pagans; they were also present in relations between learned Muslim subjects and less learned or nominal Muslim rulers”.⁴

In course of this state of affairs in the Hausa state, the Ulama were becoming deeply influenced by Islamic ideology through the growth of Islamic literature. As their concern for Islam grew so did their disapproval of paganism or mixed Islam. Their passive attitude was slowly but perceptibly changing such that by the later part of the eighteenth century a number of local Islamic literature, pointing accusing fingers at paganism and violation of Islamic law especially on food and drink, marriage and inheritance, promiscuity and excessive praise for rulers, were already in circulation. This tension and frustration which led to

³ H.F.C. Smith "A Neglected theme Of West African History: The Islamic Revolution of the 19th. Century", J. H. S. N., 2 (1961) 9, pp. 169-85.

⁴ Ibid

mounting dissatisfaction in Gobir as much as in other states, was to usher the movement or Shehu Usman Dan Fodio.

Usman's Birth and Childhood

Uthman b. Muhammad b. Uthman b. Salih was born in Maratta, a town in the Hausa State of Gobir on Sunday 15th. December, 1974. He later came to be known as Shehu Usman dan Fodio.⁵ The birth of Shehu Usman like that of most great men was not without stories of Karamat (miracle) more so when Mahdi (reformer) expectations characterized his society. His father Muhammad Fodio, a well known Muslim scholar, is a descendant of the Torankawa Fulani who migrated from the Futa Toro region in the fifteenth century under the leadership of one Musa Jakolo. The Fulanis had a history of scholarship and political sophistication and played a significant role in many historical events that characterized the Western Sudan.

Not long after his birth, Usman's family moved to Degel, a town of reasonable distance, still within the State of Gobir, where Uthman spent his childhood. Not much is known about his childhood but he can be assumed to have fitted into what obtained in his society at that time. The traditional Muslim Educational System in his society demanded children at very early age to learn the Qur'an in addition to reading and writing. Shehu Usman no doubt went through this system perhaps in a more strict manner for he was taught Qur'an by his very father who was himself a renowned scholar.

Usman's Youth and Education

Usman's youth like his childhood was totally given to learning. This time more advanced studies as the basics had been covered during childhood. This pattern

⁵ i.e Uthman the son of Fodio. Fodio is the Fulani word meaning "the learned".

of learning from childhood through youth and in fact the whole life time was what characterized Uthman's society, especially among Uthman's tribe, the Fulani. Thus Usman fitted like some youth of his time into an already institutionalized system of learning. Brief elucidation of this system is no doubt essential to the understanding of Shehu Usman's early life. In the words of El-Masri:

“After having attained a basic knowledge of the religion, reading and writing in boyhood, the aspirant scholar (*talib*) would then travel about to learned men and stay with them till he had perfected with each the particular science in which he had gained his fame; having completed his studies to the satisfaction of a master he would then be given a license (*ijaza*) to teach the subject he had been taught, on the authority of the master. In this way the *talib* would go round to collect *ijazas* and thus establish fame as a recognized scholar. This process would not normally cease at a certain stage or age, for whenever a scholar was to be found, who had excelled himself in a branch of knowledge no matter whether a local man or a foreigner others would go to study under him: this is why Dan Fodio continued going to study while he was himself teaching and preaching”.⁶

This system accommodated in its curriculum a large variety of subject not only in Islam as such but also in the grammar, syntax, etymology, and prosody of the Arabic language - which was often the media of learning. Featuring foremost in this curriculum is *tafsir* (explanation of the Qur'an) and Hadith (records of deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH⁷ of which the *sahih al-Bukhari* was the most used text. Immediate in prominence was the study of *Sira*

⁶ El-Masri, The life of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio before the *Jihad*, J. H. S. N. (II) 4, (1963), pp. 435-48.

⁷ Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon him.

- the biography of Prophet Muhammad from birth through prophet hood to death. Basically if not more prominent was *Fiqh* - the study of Islamic legal theory covering all aspects of law, from criminal, personal, constitutional etc to the rituals of *Ibadat*. Included also in this curriculum were Astrology - Islamic sciences of stars and planets, and Sufism - Islamic sciences through which spiritual purification and upliftment was sought.⁸ The sum total effect of this rich curriculum was to produce in Usman not only a pious scholar of the highest calibre at his time, but also a legal expert and a revolutionary, convinced of his role and clear in his goals and objectives.

His teachers as his brother Abdullah reported, were too many to be recorded.⁹ This was not surprising for the Shehu never spared an opportunity to add more to his knowledge. Prominent however among many of his teachers, after his father, was a certain Shaikh Abd al-Rahman b. Hammada who taught him syntax and the science of grammar. Another pious and upright scholar, Uthman Binduri who was in fact Shehu's uncle not only taught him but influenced him remarkably. Yet another of his uncle was a man of reputable knowledge, Muhammad Sambo who taught him *al-Mukhtasar* of Khalil. Next in the list of his teachers was Jibril b. Umar, a Tuareg scholar of high learning and revolutionary zeal who had contact with the Middle Eastern Muslim world through his pilgrimage. Much of Shehu Usman's revolutionary zeal has been traced to this teacher who Shehu himself so respected. Hajj Muhammad b. Ra-ji and Ahmad b. Muhammad were yet others of the Shehu's uncles who taught him *Sahih* of al-Bukhari and *tafsir* of the Qur'an respectively. The Shehu also attended the classes of one Hashim al-Zamfari where he studied *tafsir* of the Qur'an again.

⁸ Details of what Shaikh Uthman studied can be found in Hisket; **The Sword of Truth**, London, O.U.P., 1973.

⁹ See *Ida al-Nusukh* of Abdullahi Dan Fodio taken from El-Masri – “The life of Uthman Dan Fodio before the *Jihad*”. J.H.S.N (II) 4, (1963), pp. 435-48.

Shehu Usman's teachers not only imparted knowledge, but as was usual in this system of education, influenced profoundly. Of these influence that of his uncle Uthman Binduri and Jibril b. Umar were the most vivid. Of course, most influential on Shehu Usman was Jibril, this however did not prevent disagreement on certain issues. What was interesting however was that this disagreement never affected in anyway the Shehu's respect for this teacher of his. As Shehu Usman advanced his knowledge and entered his early adulthood, his piety and extreme simplicity, exceptional intellectual ability and charismatic personality began to attract disciples from his immediate society. He gradually gained prominence among a group of young Muslim scholars sharing some revolutionary ideas.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTENTS AND METHOD OF SHEHUS TEACHINGS.

The Situational Problems

By the later half of the eighteenth century, Gobir and indeed other Hausa States, were characterized by tension arising from discontentment of different segments of the community. The contempt in the Muslim-Pagan relationship the mistrust and suspicion in the relationship of the Muslim scholars and the nominal Muslim rulers and the fear in the oppressed subjects of their tyrannical rulers, being the main areas of discontent. By 1774, Shehu Usman who has now qualified to teach and preach, was filled with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm for reforming his ailing society. Much of this zeal and enthusiasm has been attributed to the influence of his teacher Jibril b. Umar. Jibril who, being a severe critic of this state of affairs, had earlier attempted to carry out a *Jihad* but failed. That Shehu Usman saw his role more than just a teacher and preacher like others, but as a reformer with a clear sense of mission is explicit in his early writing, *l'fham al-Munkirin*, where he said:

“God the exalted, has ordained to send forth to the *Umma* at the end of every century a scholar (*Alim*) who would revive her religion for her. Such a scholar or *mujaddid*, would take upon himself the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. He would call for the regulation of the affairs of the people and the establishment of justice amongst them. He would support the truth against falsehood, revive the *Sunna*, suppress innovation, and denounce bad customs. As a result of his activities his conditions will be different from those of the Ulama of his age and he will

find himself a stranger amongst them, because his qualities, are different from their own and men like him are few....¹⁰

The main problems that took Shehu's immediate attention and preoccupied his time at the start of his mission were: one, the rigidity and venality of the *Ulama*; two, belief and unbelief; three, Local customs and tradition; and four, mass ignorance (of Islam). Convinced of his role in reforming his society Shehu Usman devoted most of his teaching and preaching up to the time of the *Hijra* to these main areas. The content and method of his preaching were thus geared towards achieving the desired result - reform. Of course during the course of this period, a number of events occurred which influenced Shehu's thinking and ultimately directed his course of action.

Traveling, Preaching, Teaching and Writings

At the early age of twenty (1774) Shehu Usman had already begun teaching and preaching at his centre at Degel. In the same year he started moving around Degel, accompanied by his brother Abdullah, teaching and preaching. Later in the company of Abdullah and other disciples he began to travel out of Degel, to the east and west, Kebbi (to the west) being his first station of call. With Degel as his base, Shehu Usman and his group travelled to other towns in Gobir, teaching and preaching with remarkable success. As Abdullah himself reported in his *Tazyin al- Waraqat*:

“Then we rose up with the Sheikh helping him in his 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 qasida as in other languages and destroying customs contrary to Muslim law. Some of the people from surrounding countries came

¹⁰ Othman b. Fadio: *Ifharri al-Munkirin*, quoted from M. A. Al-Hajj “The writings of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio” *Kano Studies*, (1) 2(1974/77)9 P.9.

to him, and entered his community while we were in his country which had become famous through him.”¹¹

The result, as Abdallah reported was that people started to respond to Shehu’s preaching in large numbers and some started coming to him in groups after his return to Degel, thus both the Shehu and his town Degel were becoming famous. Soon also he met with great opposition from some Ulama, not only on account of his insistence on Qur’an and *Sunna* but also, not unexpectedly, because of envy for the young preacher whose fame was spreading very fast. This opposition soon led to accusations. The Shehu was accused of hypocrisy, sedition, hearsay and misleading the common people. These accusations soon led to unwarranted attacks and even persecution of the Shehu.

The Shehu, fully aware of the problems his preaching would raise was not only teaching and preaching but also writing, arguing his points - where he excelled others and always emerged victorious - and attacking the rigid and venal Ulama. In this process alone the Shehu was reported by Bello (his son) to have written over fifty books.¹²

Foremost in Shehu’s attack were those venal Ulama (*Ulama al-Su*) most of whom were associated with the ruler’s court, who in their bid to maintain the established order and protect their own interest, justified political corruption, immorality and all sort of evil on the grounds Of local custom (*ada*) and tradition. Making his point clear the Shehu said:

¹¹ Abdallah Muhammad: *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, (Ed. and Trans. by M Hiskett) Ibadan, I. U P. 1963, p. 86.

¹² See M. A. Al-Hajj; “The writings of Shehu Usman”. *Kano Studies*, (1) 2 (1974 / 77).

“Among their misconceptions is that some of them (i.e. Ulama) tolerate unworthy Customs on the grounds of the saying, which is widespread in the lands that the custom of a land is *Sunnah*. But this is falsehood and confusion according to the consensus of opinion (*ijma*) because a custom should not be tolerated if it contradicts the *Sunna* (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’. And for this reason they do not chide each other for committing an evil. I take refuge with God the exalted; this is one of the characteristics of the Jews”.¹³

As to those Ulama who were rigidly adhering to the *Maliki Madhhab* and making fanatical interpretation and anathematizing the masses, the Shehu did not hesitate to condemn as ignorant misguided idiots.¹⁴ Yet another group of the Ulama who earned the Shehu’s attack and condemnation was the class of charlatans who posed as Saints or *Sufi* Sheikhs. Such people were in most cases of very low learning who made their living by divination and prophecy. Many of these Ulama claimed the power of *Kashf* (mystical experience of transcendental knowledge) and thus duped the common people. Not only did the Shehu attack and condemn these people but he denied in clear and unequivocal terms, such supernatural claims attributed to him by many people. Making this point clear in *Tahdhir al-Ikhwan*, the Shehu said:

“Know O’ my brethren that I have never claimed the *Qutbaniyyah* or the *Wilaya* though that it is heard from, the tongues of other men that I can fly in the air and walk on water, that the earth is folded

¹³ Quoted in *Ibid*.

¹⁴ See K.A. Al-Hajj: "Meaning of the Sokoto *Jihad*", Sokoto Seminar, 1975, P.7.

up for me in such a way as to enable me to walk to Mecca and Medina, that the Jinns serve me as they serve the most perfect Saints (*al-awliya al-Kummal*) and that I can guide the people not only on the path of piety and righteousness but also on the path of *Kashf* . When all these had come to my notice, I composed numerous poems in Ajami to refute the aforementioned claims...”¹⁵

This, beside refuting charlatan’s claim under the cover of which they duped people, more than anything reveals the Shehu’s sincerity. For instead of capitalizing on such a widely accepted claim like some of the Ulama were doing, he labored to refute the whole claim. Nothing can be more sincere than this. Shehu’s attack on the Ulama was not restricted to the incidences cited above, as there were other burning issues which were crucial to any kind of reform. Given the situation in the Hausaland at that time where pure Muslims, non Muslims and syncretists live side by side the question of belief and unbelief was a burning subject of discussion and was crucial to any form of reform. This situation being similar to that of Askia Muhammad Ture’s Fifteenth Century Songhai, some Ulama in Gobir resorted to the view of Al-Maghili on this problem, in his advise to Askia who was very anxious to reform his state. In his definition of unbelief (in Songhai) Al-Maghili said:

“As for their being unbelievers or not, none of the people of the Qibla is to be branded as unbeliever through sin. Branding as an unbeliever is only through one of three things: the first – [professing] a tenet which is in itself unbelief such as disavowal of the Creator or an attribute of His without which He will not be a Creator; or the denial of prophecy. The second - the performance

¹⁵ Quoted in M.A. Al-Hajj "The meaning of the Sokoto *Jihad*", 1975, p.8.

of that which is only done by an unbeliever even though it is not in itself (an act of) unbelief, for example, allowing the drinking of wine, the forcible seizure of property, abandoning the obligatory religious practices, murder, adultery, idol worship, making light of the Messengers and the denial of anything that is in the Qur'an. The consensus of opinion about these two things is that whoever is ascertained to have done either of them we should judge as an unbeliever.

The third - that he should say something which it is known would not emanate except from one who does not know God Most High - even if the one who says it asserts that he does know God. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars as to whether this brands a man an unbeliever or not. It was on this point that they disputed over, the branding of the *mu'tazila* and other innovators (*ahl al-bida*) as unbelievers".¹⁶

This definition while useful in itself did not solve the problem of the Eighteenth century Hausaland , for it leaves open what specific practices constituted unbelief. This inconclusive state of affairs gave room for yet more definitions of unbelief. Foremost was that of the Shehu's most influential teacher, Jibril b. Umar, a leading scholar around Gobir, whose definition was very strict and rather extreme. For Jibril "Confession of faith" should be reinforced by works and the commitment of grave sins (*Khbair*) constituted unbelief. In his poem, quoted by Shehu Usman, the sins he classed as constituting unbelief are: (i) not keeping the Sharia law; (ii) nakedness in the presence of women;(iii) mixing with women (in public);(iv) depriving orphan his property;(v) having more than four wives;(vi) inheriting the widows of one's relations;(vii) changing the law

¹⁶ Quoted from D.P. Last and K A. Al-Hajj: "Attempts at defining Muslim in 19th. Century Hausa Land and Bornu, J. H. S. N. , iii, 2(1965), pp. 232-233.

without the interpretation of the scholars;(viii) following the pre-Islamic practices of ones ancestors.¹⁷ Shehu Usman here disagreed with his teacher Jibril. In refuting Jibril's definition, Shehu Usman argued that if a sinner recognized his sin, he thus proves he accepts the sharia¹⁸. Although it might be argued that to sin either intentionally or persistently implies denying the validity of the law, such an argument involves the intension and personal attitudes of the sinner. Since none but Allah can know what is in the heart of a man, any judgment is better left to the last Day.¹⁹

The Shehu's moderate position on this burning issue of unbelief is clearly expressed in his book *Ihya al-Sunna*, where he said:-

“Whosoever affirms the ‘confession of faith’ (*Shahadatain*) should be treated in accordance with the Islamic legal rules, he may intermarry with the Muslims, he may lead the prayer, the meat of animals slaughtered by him is lawful, the Muslims may inherit his property and he may inherit their own, and when he dies he should be buried in the Muslim grave yard”²⁰

Yet another group of Ulama claimed that before a person is accepted as a Muslim he should be able to explain the Unity of Allah and the Prophethood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in accordance with the catechism of rationalist theologians (*Ulama al-Kalam*). The Shehu had no patience with this group whom he denounced as ignorant and misguided idiots who were confused by

¹⁷ Ibid., P.233.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.233.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.233.

²⁰ Quoted in M. A. Al-Hajj “The writings of the Shehu”, *Kano Studies* (i),2(1974/77), P.7.

the sophistry of the science of Kalam.²¹ Refuting their claim and arguing his point the Shehu wrote in his *Hisn al-afham*:

“There are those who allege that nobody should be accepted as a believer or a Muslim before memorizing the creeds and their proofs, in accordance with the methods of the rationalist theologians (*mutakallimun*), and is able to express himself clearly; I say this is nothing but falsehood and confusion according to the consensus of opinion (*ijma*). Verily, the distinguished and erudite scholar Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Qunni rightly states in his commentary on *al-Umda* of al-Nasafi that such a stipulation has never been made by the Messenger of God at his time nor by al-Siddiq during his Caliphate when he fought the apostates (*ahl al-ridda*). Moreover Umar, during his Caliphate, did not demand such a thing from the Zatt and Anbat, when he conquered the Sawad al-Iraq, in spite of their lack of intelligence and their stupidity. In fact none of the companions of the messenger of God nor their successors up to the present day, has made such a stipulation.²²

It seems like M. A. Al-Hajj suggested, that this later group of Ulama, the advocate of the *Ilm al-Kalam*, were those who had vested interest in preserving the established order. Since the question of belief and unbelief at that time go beyond the theological polemic to determine the rights and obligations of the individual Muslim in that society. This was directly related to the institution of slavery which was apparently widespread. Since a Muslim cannot be enslaved the question of who is a Muslim and who is not was no doubt crucial. By

²¹ Ibid., P.7

²² Ibid., P.7

making it difficult for people to qualify as Muslims the *Ulama al-Kalam* will certainly help to sustain slavery and maintain the status quo. No wonder therefore they earned the outward condemnation of the Shehu who was determined to change the *status quo*.

Equally burning and intimately connected with issues raised above was the extent to which Muslims can bow to local customs and the traditional way of life. On this issue also there were the Ulama that condoned all customs and tradition on the grounds of there being *ada* and hence *Sunna*, this Shehu Usman immediately condemned as false. There was also the view of his teacher Jibril, who argued that indulgence in such customs tantamount to unbelief, here also the Shehu disagreed with his teacher and refuted his arguments. Shehu Usman's opposition to, local customs and tradition was not any less than that of his teacher Jibril, only that his stand was rather moderate. While he argued that such customs should not be condoned, Shehu's position was that those who persisted in them were sinners and not unbelievers.

Perhaps the most important problem which consumed the greatest part of Shehu Usman's attention was mass ignorance, apparently the root of the whole problems and the key to reform. The Shehu's commitment to mass education clearly evident in many of his writings which by their very titles are aimed at educating the masses - *Ikhwan* in Shehu's words. The Shehu lamented in many of his writings and preaching the ignorance of the masses who do not know even how to perform the basic Ibadats of Islam correctly. The Ulama once again came under the Shehu's attack for their negligence in instructing the common people, while devoting their time entirely to their usually few students. Most criticized by the Shehu were those Ulama who did not bother to teach their wives, daughters and slaves and yet posed as teachers of other people. Quoting a certain scholar the Shehu wrote:

“In the treatise of Muhammad b. Yusuf b. Salum.b. Ibrahim there is a chapter on what many scholars (Ulama) of the Sudan do to their wives, their daughters and their slaves...they leave them neglected like cattle without instructing them in what is obligatory upon them in connection with their creed, their ritual ablution, their fasting (of Ramadan) and other things which are incumbent upon them. Nor do they instruct them in what is permissible (*mubah*) for them like buying, selling and similar things. Indeed they regard them as nothing but a pot which they use and when it breaks to pieces they throw away in the place for dung and rubbish...One wonders at their custom of leaving their wives, their daughters and their slaves in the darkness of ignorance while at the same time they teach their students every morning and evening. Indeed, the only motive in teaching their students is self-aggrandizement and nothing else...O Muslim women do not listen to the words of those misguided men who tell you about the duty of obedience to your husbands but they do not tell you anything about obedience to God and his messenger...”²³

This clearly conveys Shehu Usman’s deep concern about the education of the society in general and women in particular, for after all women form the backbone of the family which in turn is the basis of any society. The stage of learning reached by Shehu Usman’s wives and his daughters, Asma’u in particular, which was not only comparable but in certain cases higher than that of their male colleagues was a clear testimony that the Shehu practiced what he preached. Indeed the state of learning reached by his sons and Muhammad Bello in particular, who qualified for the head of the Caliphate after the Shehu, is

²³ Ibid., p.8

indicative of the amount of time the Shehu devoted to his family, despite the demanding nature of his tremendous commitments. Describing Shehu's public preaching, Muhammad Bello, a prolific writer like his father, with at least seventy-eight works to his credit, who turned out to be the best historian of the *Jihad*, has this to say :

“...on arriving at the place where people were sitting he would give a general greeting audible to all those present. On sitting on the chair he politely and in a pleasant manner greet the people three times. Then the people would be silent. He was never to give to despondency anger or despair though he was burdened with a group of ill-mannered riff-raff who would not stop chattering or refrain from asking questions when they were told to do so. He would then speak to them in a loud voice addressing himself to everyone without distinction. He would never show any diffidence for those present even if they were a group of Shaykh, or a host of Ulama but undaunted he would speak to them all about what he deemed to be of use to them. Sometimes a question would be posed while he was talking and he would stop to answer it. He was fearless in matters of religion and nobody's blame would make him budge from the truth...”²⁴

As Shehu Usman's preaching tours in and around Degel and Kabbi continued, Degel attracted more people and news of his activities became more widespread. At this stage the Shehu decided to extend his preaching to his head of state Bawa Jangwarzo the Sarki of Gobir. This apparently successful visit consolidated further the Shehu's position so that, as his brother and companion.

²⁴ Muhammad Bello: *Infaq al-Maisur*, quoted in U. S. A. Ismail: “Towards an intellectual history: some reflections on the literature of the *Jihad* and the caliphate”, Sokoto Seminar 1975, P.4.

Abdullah put it, even those who did not fear Allah, were afraid to reject Shehu's preaching because of his contact with that ruler.²⁵

Shehu's next station of call was another city state of Zamfara where he preached for a period of five years. Describing Zamfara, Abdullah said :

“We remained there about five years and it was a land over whose people ignorance was supreme- the majority of its people had not smelt the scent of Islam. They used to come to the Sheikh' a gathering mingling with their women. He segregated them, teaching them that mixing together was forbidden, after he had taught them the laws of Islam”.²⁶

This suggests that the Shehu preached to both Muslims and pagans. Here also we see another expression of Shehu's concern for mass eradication of both men and the women, who until the coming of the Shehu had been abandoned in the depth of ignorance. But as it were, the Ulama never got tired of accusing the Shehu for his revolutionary approach to reform. One scholar, Al-Mustapha Gwoni from Daura attacked the Shehu on mixing men and women and urged him to stop the women attending his preaching.²⁷ Abdullah replying at Shehu's request, argued in a beautiful poem that education of women in Islam is compulsory and it was a far greater sin to leave women in ignorance than to allow them attend a mixed crowd, and after all the Shehu always separated them.²⁸

²⁵ Abdullah Muhammad: *Tazyin al-Waraqat*. (Ed. and Trans. by M. Hiskett), Ibadan, I.U.P., 1963, p.86.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid. p. 87

Another important event which must not escape mention occurred when the Shehu was preaching in Zamfara. Bawa the King of Gobir invited all scholars in Gobir and Shehu Usman in particular to celebrate the *Id al-Kabir* of 1788 (or 1789) at the town of Magami. Though this was said to have been a plan to get rid of Shehu Usman, at the and gifts were distributed to the scholars, with the Shehu having the lion's share of 500 *Mithqal* of gold. All accepted the King's gifts except Shehu Usman, who said he and his people were not in need of Bawa's wealth and in its stead he had five demands to make:

1. "to allow me to call people to God in your country.
2. Not to stop anybody who intend to respond to my call.
3. To treat with respect anyone with a turban.
4. To free all the (political) prisoners.
5. Not to burden the subjects with taxes".²⁹

After five years of successful preaching in Zamfara, the Shehu returned to Degel about the year 1791-2. Continuing his tour, the Shehu traveled West to Kebbi and further crossed the river Niger to Illo. Back to Degel he now moved eastwards reaching Zaumia where the ruler repented. By 1792-3 Shehu Usman found it necessary to settle down at his centre Degel to receive the people coming, in quest of learning and guidance. Settled at Degel the Shehu continued to teach the elements of Islamic Doctrine to the common people and to clarify their misconception, usually on every Friday evening. At the same time the Shehu maintained a separate class for his advanced students, covering various Arabic and Islamic sciences, in varying depth, every afternoon. All these are a part from the special days of the week in which he preached to the women only. His settling down at Degel must have been facilitated by the fact that his

²⁹ Quoted in F.H. El-Masri 'The life, of Usman Dan Fodio before the *Jihad*', J.H. S.F. ii,4(1963),p.44.

students and learned followers were by this time themselves preaching in many parts of the Hausaland , along his line of reform. It was also about this time at Degel he wrote his *Ihya al-Sunna wa-Ikhlad al-bida*, which was partly as a text book for the use of his disciples now engaged in teaching and preaching and partly for information of the general public. Thus Shehu Usman remained in Degel, preaching, teaching, writing and counseling until the eventful *Hijra* in 1804.

Ideology and strategy

Thus for nearly nineteen years Shehu Usman along with his brother Abdullah and his disciples amongst whom was his son and successor Muhammad Bello, traveled in and around Gobir, Keffi and Zamfara states, preaching and teaching.

Through this the Shehu built up a body of school students who he left behind to continue instructing his increasing number of followers in the basic tenets of Islam and his ideas of reform. The Shehu was not merely an itinerant preacher nor simply a teacher who imparted knowledge to his students but a scholar of superior learning committed to changing the deteriorating established order. “What distinguished him” writes Professor Al-Hajj, “from the Ulama of his time was not so much his superior learning as it was his deep sense of mission and strong commitment to the education of the common man. Thus while most of the contemporary Ulama were ‘academics’ living with their students in their ‘ivory towers’ the Sheikh was an activist concerned with the education of the masses”.³⁰ This is clearly evident from his *Ihya al-Sunna* where he said:

“It is incumbent on every scholar not to keep silent in the present times because innovations (*bida*) have appeared and are

³⁰ M. A. Al-Hajj, “The writings of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio”, *Kano Studies* (1)2,(1974/77), P.9. (22)

widespread. Verily the Hadith states: ‘Any scholar who keeps silent in the face of dissensions (*fitna*) may the curse of God fall upon him’. Verily, anyone who today keeps to his home cannot be absolved from responsibility of teaching the people and guiding them to the right path. And since the majority of people today are ignorant of the Sharia, it is necessary that there should be a jurist (*faqih*) available in every mosque and in every quarter in town to instruct the people in the tenets of their religion. Similarly in every village it is incumbent on every jurist who has completed the individual obligation (*fardain*) and is free to carry out the collective obligation (*fard kifaya*) to go out to the neighboring territories and teach the people there the tenets of their religion and the stipulations of the Sharia.³¹

Shehu Usman’s commitment to mass education seems to occupy a central position in his ideology of reform. The prolific nature of his writings (of which 115 are so far known) which were immediately hand copied and circulated, is indicative of his emphasis on mass education for as Professor Ismail noted, they were no doubt addressed to the masses through the literate group.³² At a time when newspapers as such did not exist Shehu’s writings, with their copyists constantly occupied, served as a very effective way of disseminating knowledge and ideas. Equally significant in mass education was the use of poetry, composed in both Arabic and vernacular (Hausa and Fulfulde). Ranging from those that are meant to simplify otherwise complicated instructions, through those that are meant to appeal or preach, to those of praising the Prophet

³¹ Ibid., P.9.

³² See U. S. A. Ismail: "Towards an intellectual History: some reflections on the literature of the *Jihad* and the Caliphate", Sokoto Seminar, 1975, P.10.

Muhammad (P. B. U. H.) “the poems”, in the words of Hiskett, “more than anything seems to arrest the imagination of Shehu’s followers, when reading or listening”.³³ Thus intellectually and psychologically the masses were prepared first to understand and then to accept Islam and Shehu’s ideas of reforming their ailing society.

The Shehu’s moderate position on many of the burning issues not only conforms to the Islamic principle of the middle course but, also gave a balanced interpretation of Islam easily understood and acceptable to the local population. This moderation coupled with the intrinsic simplicity of Islam which the Shehu labored to unveil must have been one among other factors that accounted for the Shehu’s large following. That the Shehu kept away from the court until after many years of successful preaching could not have been a coincidence. Shehu Usman’s revolutionary ideas were aimed at overthrowing the established order right from the onset of his preaching, his opposition to the Court Ulama who wanted to justify and therefore maintain the established order was therefore obvious. Shehu Usman, fully aware of this conflict, must have thought it unwise if not risky in terms of his precious goal (reform) to come in contact with the ruler any earlier than he did. Thus he did not miss the opportunity to visit the ruler when he thought it wise to do so. His apparent plan seemed to have worked out for his timely visit produced the desired effect as his brother Abdullah reported (Page 29) above. The approach, the moderation, the strategy, reflected Shehu Usman’s sagacity and diplomacy without which the story would have perhaps been different.

³³ M. Hiskett: *The Sword of Truth*, London, O.U.P.,1973, P.56

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPACT OF SHEHU'S TEACHING

The impact of Shehu's teaching in Hausaland is in fact a continuation of a process that had been initiated before him. As discussed in the preceding chapters, Hausaland has for centuries before the Shehu known preachers, some of whom were traders. Just before the emergence of the Shehu, many scholars most of whom like Sheikh Jibril b. Umar were his teachers, had been preaching and teaching Islam with an increasing zeal and enthusiasm. Sheikh Jibril's abortive attempt to carry out a *Jihad* is an indication of this increasing enthusiasm. Thus the Shehu through unique in his ideas and approach, was fueling a fire which had been lit by his predecessors.

Shehu in his approach started preaching Ibadat, but later his field of preaching widened as a result of the intellectual development within his community (*Jama'a*) and political development in Hausaland, both of which were in fact the impact of his initial preaching. Noteworthy is that, the contents of his preaching throughout these developments have been intimately related to the contents of his writings. The mood of his preaching and the tone of his writings also reflected these intellectual and political developments in his society. Thus we found the Shehu's mood of preaching and tone of writing relatively mild at the beginning of his career upto the 1790's when the *Jihad* became vividly inevitable. Thereafter the Shehu was less tolerant and uncompromising. After the success of the *Jihad* and the establishment of Islamic rule, Shehu regained his milder tone³⁴. The impact of Shehu's teaching before the *Hijra* might

³⁴ Uthman Ibn Fudi: *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra*. (Ed. Trans. by F. El-Masri), K. U. P. , 1978, P.15

therefore be best discussed under three headings which correspond to certain periods in the history of his *Jama'a*. The period 1774-1789 being that of the early growth of his *Jama'a*, the period 1789-1795 marking the beginning of involvement with the Gobir rulers to the point of conflict and 1795-1804 marking the preparation for an inevitable clash to the point of *Hijra* when the physical clash started.

Early Growth of the *Jama'at*, 1771-1789

Given the situation of mass ignorance and syncretic practices, Shehu's preaching which unlike that of his contemporaries, were concentrated at this stage on mass education, commanding of *Sunna* and attacking of *bid'a*, were certainly revolutionary and possess in themselves the tendency to change the old order. Shehu's moderation on the burning issue of *takfir* (anathema), his attack on the Ulama, especially the charlatans and the advocates of *Kalam*, his conspicuous but deliberate abstention from the mention of *Hijra* or *Jihad*, must have added to the uniqueness and efficacy of Shehu's preaching which put together produced the astonishing impact it did on his audience.

As soon as Shehu started his preaching in 1774-5 around his centre Degel, he was met with overwhelming success. Large number of people were converting to Islam and flocking to him for knowledge as if to say they were just waiting for him to emerge. As he expanded his tour to places outside Degel like Birnin Kebbi to the west and Zoma to the east, larger number of people began to flow into Degel in search of knowledge and some even settled. Thus not only was Shehu's fame growing but his town was also swelling with students. This glaring response unprecedented before the Shehu, is indicative of the impact of his early preaching. His responding audience must have seen in the Shehu not just knowledge, but also sincerity and commitment to changing the ailing

condition, to make them flock to his town in such numbers and for some to even settle.

This however is not to say that the Shehu found it easy and smooth to preach his teachings for those teachings were unmistakably out to change the status quo and as one might expect those with vested interest, in this status quo would naturally oppose his move. As implied in the preceding chapter, Shehu faced much opposition from as many directions as there were groups with vested interests in the status-quo which the Shehu was committed to change. The charlatans who were capitalizing on the mass ignorance the Shehu was out to eradicate; the venals who were exploiting the status quo which the Shehu was committed to change; the advocates of *Kalam* who were anathematizing ‘the masses and hence subjecting them to injustice and slavery which the Shehu sought to destroy; the Ulama who condoned syncretism which the Shehu strove to uproot- all these were out to put a stop to Shehu’s increasing influence on the masses and scholars alike. Though no opposition from the rulers was encountered by the Shehu at this stage, it couldn’t have been because they agreed with Shehu’s ideas, they must have been watching the developments with increasing concern and obviously a feeling of insecurity.

This opposition so far at an intellectual level, did not diminish Shehu’s growing fame and influence - if anything his fame and influence increased as he always emerged successful in the intellectual arguments, which were often hot. About this stage the Shehu, perhaps feeling that he has earned enough following to warrant him a good audience of the ruler, extended his preaching to Sarki Bawa the ruler of Gobir. Bawa fully aware of Shehu’s growing influence and its possible consequences, thought it wise to listen to the Shehu and afford a friendly relation. For after all Shehu was not just a charismatic preacher with a large growing following but, as has been credited to him, a possessor of mystic

power which Bawa could exploit. This contact with Bawa was to enhance Shehu's position and increase his following and fame. As Shehu widened his preaching tours, covering as far as Zamfara, his fame and influence was growing, his town Degel was growing to be a kind of university town of its time and, becoming Shehu's student was not only a prestige but one of the highest qualification a teacher could have. Meanwhile his growing *Jama'a* were beginning to be distinguished not only in manners but also in dress, with turban for the men and veil for the women.

Beginning of Involvement with the State, 1789-1795

Shehu's preaching was of course not restricted to his state Gobir, but extended up to Zamfara where he spent nearly five years. Shehu's visit, to Zamfara seem to have been a source of concern to the ruler of Gobir not only because of the large conversions to Islam which followed Shehu's preaching but perhaps more important, because of the strained relation which existed between the two Hausa states. The source of this strain was the rebellion of Zamfara against Gobir which had earlier conquered Zamfara and imprisoned its ruler, Abarshi. As the mass Islamisation in Zamfara was assuming a dimension which could no longer be ignored the feeling of safety in the Gobir court was decreasing. This increasing feeling of insecurity seem to have made Bawa reconsider his hitherto friendly relation with the Shehu. Bawa thought of putting a stop to this feeling of insecurity by killing Shehu who has been the main cause.

Thus in 1789 Shehu, who was then preaching in Zamfara was invited by Bawa to celebrate *Id al-Kabir* at Magami. Shehu Usman who was said to have attended the occasion with a following of nearly 1000 men was one among many other scholars who assembled at Magami for the Id.³⁵ Some scholars who had come with Bawa, apparently impressed, were reported to have joined

³⁵ See F.H. El-Masri, "The life of Shehu Usman Dan Fadio before the *Jihad*". J.H. S.F ii,4(1963), p.44

Shehu's company, making his following yet larger³⁶. Bawa, bewildered by the number of Shehu's following, which reflects his growing influence, was said to have abandoned his idea of killing the Shehu. At the end of this *Id* prayer, the Ulama were presented with gifts, the greatest of which went to the Shehu. All but the Shehu and his following accepted the gifts. Shehu, who told Bawa that he wasn't in need of his wealth, seized this opportunity to make five demands instead of the material gifts (See page 30). Bawa perhaps for lack of any alternative, granted these demands despite their far reaching consequences on his power and authority. That the Shehu made such demands and was granted all without alteration is a clear indication of Shehu's strong position in that society. One other thing which becomes clear is that Shehu was no longer going to continue compromising and seemed now prepared to put an end to that "live and let live" relationship which had existed between them for years.

The Shehu's five demands go further to depict the picture of the impact of Shehu's teachings that far. The first two demands of the Shehu i.e. to allow him to continue preaching and not to stop people from responding, suggested that response to his preaching has reached an alarming proportion to make the rulers want to check it. It might as well be that the Shehu wants to create an atmosphere favourable to the growth and consolidation of his *Jama'a*. Whatever might have been the case, the fact that Shehu's *Jama'a* by their nature and size are posing a threat to Bawa's authority is indisputable. Shehu's demand that all those with turban (and by implication on women with veil) should be treated with respect indicated that by then this dressing had become characteristic of Shehu's *Jama'a*. It further suggests that these ways of dressing were producing a substantial visual impact on Shehu's increasing following. Fear must have been entertained that the rulers might discourage it, in a bid to check the

³⁶ Ibid.

influence of Shehu's teaching. The freeing of prisoners which Shehu demanded more than anything depicts Shehu's powerful position. Given the lucrative nature of inter-state wars which characterized the Hausa city-states, only a pressure capable of undermining the power of Gobir could make Bawa release prisoners captured after his defeat of Zamfara. This latter demand and that of tax reduction no doubt depicted the Shehu not only as a preacher through whose teaching salvation in the hereafter shall be attained but also a leader through whose leadership delivery from oppression and tyranny of the rulers can be achieved...

[Pg 55,56,57, 58 of original manuscript missing]

...reflected the impact of Shehu's teaching were gradually eroding the power of the rulers of Gobir as indeed of the other Hausa states. Nafata soon realised that the power base of his declining authority will soon disappear in a matter of time. In desperate effort therefore to save his authority and consolidate his power, he intensified his attacks on Shehu's *Jama'a*; robbing their properties and waylaying them in the way that they become disenchanted and revert to their former faith or indolence. The riff-raff, as Muhammad Bello reported were also encouraged to ambush the *Jama'a* who are now distinct by their attitudes manners and dress.³⁹ This increase hostility had the opposite result of making the *Jama'a* more firm and committed to changing the status quo.

As these persecutions continued, the *Jama'a*'s demand for a total break with the persecuting authorities intensified. The Shehu shrewd and far-sighted, was however able to avoid open confrontation upto this stage. About this time the Shehu,, in a poem apparently made in praise of Sheikh Abdulkadir Jaylani, urged his *Jama'a* to acquire arms, as it is *Sunna* to do so and prayed to Allah to establish Islamic rule in Hausaland . The message conveyed by this poem is

³⁹ Muhammad Bello, *Infuq al-Maisur* (Ed. W.E.J. Writting), p.66.

very clear and was to have serious consequence in the Hausa States. In the face of these hostilities the *Jama'a* now scattered all over the Hausa States cannot continue to just watch and suffer, it must protect itself. It is also clear that the Shehu was fully aware of an inevitable conflict in a matter of time. His poem must have therefore been aimed at preparing his *Jama'a* for the forthcoming conflict. The *Jama'a* quite naturally responded to Shehu's call to arms with the result that Nafata who must have been frightened felt more insecure than ever.

But Nafata apparently thought of the *Jama'a* to be weak and capable of being controlled before they got too strong. Thus in an attempt to contain this alarming threat, he issued his three famous edicts, announced, as was usual, in the market:

- a) "Nobody except Dan Fodio in person was allowed to preach.
- (b) No more conversions to Islam were to be allowed and those who were not born Muslims should return to their former religion,
- (c) Men should not wear turbans nor women veils."⁴⁰

These edicts beside suggesting a huge rate of conversion to Shehu's following, reflect the tremendous impact the turban and veil must have been making in the society. One can further infer that the turban and veil beside symbolizing *Jama'a*'s solidarity had also been attracting more people into the *Jama'a* even at this stage of hostilities. Though Nafata felt strong enough to issue these edicts in the face of growing *jama'a*, he did not seem to have the guts to stop the Shehu from calling people to Islam. But by stopping others from preaching he must have hoped to muzzle the mass conversion that the preaching were producing, since every conversion meant a shrink in his authority and accretion

⁴⁰ F. El-Masri, "The life of the Shehu before the Jihad" J.H.S.N., ii, 2(1961) p.445.

of Shehu's power. These Nafata's attempts not only failed to achieve his desired results but provoked the Muslims to greater militancy. With his failure evident Nafata made a desperate attempt to coerce the Shehu by force. Shehu's family were seized as hostages and Shehu was summoned to appear at Nafata's Palace, apparently to be forced to discontinue his activities. This again did not succeed because as was reported, a swelling on Nafata's neck burst not long after Shehu's arrival.⁴¹ Thus Nafata, now sick, was taken home not long after which he died. Yunfa, Nafata's son succeeded his father as Shehu had earlier predicted.

Until the death of Nafata (1802) Shehu seemed to have avoided discussions on *Hijra* or *Jihad* in his preaching and writing, not even in his work or *fiqh*. His first dated work on *hijra-jihad* theme (*Al-masa'il al-Mu-himma*) was in (March) 1803, about one year after Yunfa's installation to the throne of Gobir. Yunfa no doubt inherited a very tense situation. Though he initially displayed apparent rapprochement by visiting Shehu on foot, his plot to kill the Shehu which failed, revealed his real intention and took the situation back to square one. He must have made the situation further tense by proving to be more rigorous in the enforcement of Nafata's edicts than Nafata himself. By 1803 the situation could be described as explosive as clash was evidently inevitable. The *Masa'il* of the Shehu, which discussed 14 points on *Hijra-Jihad* theme must have been timely, coming at such an explosive point in time to guide the *Jama'a*. Some of the highlights of the *Masa'il*, in the words of El-Masri are:

“Muslims should not be left ‘neglected’ (*hummal*) without a *bay'a* sworn to an Imam. They should migrate from the land of unbelief as an obligation. They should rise against the unbelieving ruler

⁴¹ M. Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth*, London, 1973, p 48.

only if they have enough power to do so. Otherwise they should not. But if they find they cannot practice their religion or that their property or that their own safety is in danger, they have to migrate to where there is security. Again, if the Muslims see bloodshed or seizure of property in one area, they have to evacuate it for another where nothing like that occurs.⁴²

The need for an Imam, the need to migrate in the event of hostility, the necessity to rise against unbelieving rulers and such other points touched by the *Masa'il* were no doubt crucial at that point in time. Though the fighting of the unbelieving rulers, where situations permit, had been made necessary, the *Masa'il* was silent about formal declaration of *Jihad*. Despite this silence, the *Jama'a* were left in no doubt that they will soon have to migrate and fight the (Habe) rulers - a chance which some of his following had been nursing. The *Jama'a's* response to the message of the *Masa'il* frightened Yunfa who intensified his hostilities.

Yunfa went as far as attacking a certain Muslim community living in the town of Gimbana in Kebbi State, under their leader Abdussalam. This *Jama'a* migrated to Gimbana since the onset of Nafata's hostility. Abdussalam and his *Jama'a* were attacked, their property robbed, their men and women taken captives, with many left dead and the whole village destroyed. These captives on their way to Alkalawa, the capital of Gobir, where they were to be enslaved, passed through Degel the centre of the *Jama'a*. The *Jama'a* at Degel, moved by the agony of their brothers, ambushed the party, defeated Yunfa's army and released their brothers and sisters. This release of Muslim captures was said to

⁴² Uthman bn Fudi, *Bayan Wujub Al-Hijra*, (Ed. Trans. F. El-Masri, K.U. P. 1978), p. 24.

have been done without prior consultation of Shehu who saw it as a rush action which could have been avoided.

Yunfa now infuriated by this Degel incidence ordered Shehu to leave his *Jama'a* to go into exile. Shehu refused this order and in replying Yunfa said "I will not forsake my community, but I (and my *Jama'a*) will leave your country. For Allah's earth's is wide⁴³. Almost immediately Yunfa changed his mind and ordered Shehu and his *Jama'a* to remain at Degel and not to move. Shehu ignored Yunfa's orders and began preparation for immigration to Gudu a place west of Alkalawa at the distant borders of Gobir. Such mass immigration of the *Jama'a* now large and scattered all over Hausaland, necessarily involved a lot of planning and organization, more so when Yunfa, now determined to keep Shehu at Degel, had ordered his governors to attack and take capture all those who move with the Shehu. Many of Shehu's disciples like Abdullah (his brother), Aliyu Jedo and Abdussalam to mention but a few, were working 'round the clock' for the *Hijra*. Muhammad Bello, who had been away from Degel visiting Ali Agali (a Tuareg scholar) was dispatched to Kebbi for the organization of the *Hijra* and distribution of yet another of Shehu's pamphlets, this time calling people for *Hijra*. It is most probable like Last and Bivar suggested, this pamphlet was the famous *Wathiqat ahl al-Sudan wa-ila man Sha'Allah Min al-Ikhwan fi al-buldan* - an open letter to the people of the Sudan and to whom so Allah wills amongst the brethren. This pamphlet must have gained a very wide circulation within a short time. On the twelfth of *Dhul-Qa'da* A.H. 1218/Feb. A.D. 1804 the Shehu and a party of his *Jama'a* left Degel for Gudu. This marked Shehu's *Hijra*.

⁴³ Abdullahi Muhammad. *Tazyin Al-waraqat* (Ed. Tran. M. Hiskette, 1963)

Some Implications and Consequences of the *Hijra*

The pamphlet circulated just about the time of the *Hijra*, which was most likely the *Wathiqat ahl al-Sudan*, can be said to be a kind of declaration of the *Jihad*. The twenty seven points of the *Wathiqat*, which inter-alia includes the necessity of commanding righteousness and prohibition of evil, the necessity of *Hijra* and appointment and obedience to an Imam, the necessity of fighting the unbelievers, tally with the points which had featured prominently in Shehu's teachings. The *Wathiqat* unlike the *Masa'il*, made it clear that the status of a country is that of its ruler and that Muslims have to fight the unbelievers in the circumstances prevailing. The *Jama'a* in response to Shehu's call and despite Yunfa's threat, flocked to Gudu in large numbers. This mass movement of people and their families from distant lands with all the transportation difficulties in the face of intensified hostilities more than anything reflected the level of *Jama'a*'s commitment to Islam and further display the impact of the Shehu on his following. This mass movement - the *Hijra* - with all its accompanying difficulties and hazards, continued until the *Jihadists* captured Birmin Kebbi in April 1805.

This *Hijra* to Gudu, more than just a movement of people from the different parts of Hausaland, was a climax of the social and political crisis which had bedeviled the Hausa society for some years. It also represented a final and total break of the *Jama'a* from their former (Habe) rulers. At Gudu the Shehu in line with his teachings assembled his *Jama'a* and bade them, to elect an Imam to govern them and lead them in war, which was soon to follow. After initial nominations the Shehu who was then fifty years old, had to be persuaded to accept this post. The *Jama'a* in full support of Shehu's leadership offered him their allegiance as their *Amir al-Mu'minin* Commander of the faithful. This act of allegiance (*Bay'a*) at Gudu not only marked a formal declaration of *Jihad* but also the birth of a Caliphate, headed by Shehu Usman.

Soon after the *Hijra*, Yunfa and his forces attacked Gudu as if to put a final end to this menace. Yunfa and his forces suffered a heavy defeat at Tabkin Kwato. This victory of the Muslim forces at Tabkin Kwato was followed by series of similar victories upto 1808, when virtually the whole of Hausaland came under the *Jihadist*. Despite the hectic battle condition, Shehu Usman was still writing. One of his most elaborate works on *Hijra - Jihad* theme *Bayan Wajub-al-Hijra ala'l-ibad* was completed in November 1806. Shehu also wrote elaborate works on such issues as division of booty, administration of the Caliphate, appointment of Viziers, during, this period. As soon as the *Jihad* was over in about 1810, the Shehu withdrew to the town of Sifawa to continue with his intellectual endeavours, leaving his brother Abdullah and his son Bello to administer the Caliphate. In 1815 Shehu Usman moved to Sokoto where he stayed until his death in April 1817.

Beyond the Caliphate:

The administration of the Sokoto caliphate, even after the Shehu, his brother Abdullah, his son Bello, continued more or less under Islam as expounded in the writings of these three. The socio-economic, political and intellectual life of the Sokoto caliphate remained more or less intact until the Caliphate fell victim to the European scramble for Africa. Obsessed by acquisition of territories in Africa, which in a way reflected their greed for material wealth and power, the British army under Fredrick Luggard fought and conquered the Sokoto Caliphate and declared it British protectorate in 1903. The British in their administration could not dispense with the administrative structure they found, which until today form the framework of local administration in the Northern states of Nigeria. The British however did a lot to destroy this legacy especially in the educational and legal fields.

Foremost in the destruction of this legacy was the replacement of Arabic by Latin scripts in the writing of the local languages like Hausa and Fulfulde. The British later used this to justify their claim for mass illiteracy in a society where every child learnt to read and write in *Makarantar Allo* before twelve years of age. The British schools, far from what the name suggests, turned up to be Christianizing centers and where this was not possible deculturalization and deislamization was effectively ensured. This not only explain the initial refusal of Muslims to send their children to these institutions but perhaps also explains the acceptability which English institutions still enjoy in contemporary Nigeria. The dubious plans characteristic of British colonial administration, showed their mastery when the colonialist succeeded through a “gradual but sinister process, in limiting the scope of the Sharia and giving supremacy to English law - thus taking the Muslims back to 1774. Despite this sixty years of colonialism, which was supposed to have ceased by 1960, the traditional Muslim intellectual and social life still bears the mark of Shehu’s teachings. A recent government survey revealed 50,000 traditional Muslim schools (*Makarantar Allo*) with over one million total population and 100,000 traditional Muslim scholars (Ulama) between the age of 20-45 years, in the (former) North-Western State alone.⁴⁴ That Shehu’s books are readily available and form standard text books still used in the *Makaranta* represent yet another extended impact of Shehu’s teachings. Recent voices on the streets demanding the total application of the Sharia in the Nigerian Constitution are no doubt echoing Shehu’s teaching in the late Eighteenth Century as much as indicating a weakening in the colonial grip. One only hopes that Nigerian Independence will mean more than just a flag and national anthem.

⁴⁴ U. Faruk, “Education for Leadership” (Section 15) quoted in U. S.A. Ismail, "Towards an intellectual history: some reflections on the literature of the *Jihad* and Caliphate", Sokoto seminar, 1975, P.160

CONCLUSION.

Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was born in the Eighteenth Century in Hausaland, a predominantly Muslim society characterized by syncretism and laxity in the application of the Sharia with its masses labouring under oppressive feudal rulers. Educated to an exceptionally high level the Shehu soon became committed to reforming his ailing society. At an early age of twenty he began traveling, preaching, teaching and writing, coming to grips with the problems of mass ignorance, venal and charlatan Ulama, belief and unbelief and the ascendancy of local customs and beliefs. The development of his teachings tallied with the intellectual, social and political development in Hausaland.

The impact of his teachings in both spoken and written words were far reaching. Of immediate effect was the gradual but total erosion of the intellectual and cultural basis of the Habe socio-political order and the simultaneous rise of a mass movement committed to Islam in all its aspects. It was this Islamic movement, revolutionary in its ideology and organization that gave birth to the Islamic state - the Sokoto Caliphate. This Caliphate lasted up to the British colonization early this century.

The impact of Shehu's teaching has in fact gone far beyond the life of the Sokoto Caliphate. Although most of this Caliphate now encompassed in Northern States of Nigeria, had been subjected to sixty years of British colonialism, which by its very nature sought to destroy this legacy, the impact of Shehu's teachings survive to this day. The administrative set up of many towns and villages still bear the unmistakable marks of the Sokoto Caliphate - with the post of *Amir al-muminin* at Sokoto still prominent. The turban for men and veil for women still remain the common dress of the people, The literary legacy of which 115 books was Shehu's own contribution is readily available in

every village or town and form the subject of learning and teaching to this day. The *Makaranta* and its Ulama is to be found along almost every major street of village or town. Rather ironically, only about three years back, the Nigerian government saw the necessity of a universal primary education, something which the Muslims have practiced for centuries. It is to be hoped that in the years to follow, the gap between the aspirations and realities of this society and government plans would, at least narrow, if not closed completely.

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