THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCHOLARS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A KALEIDOSCOPIC VIEW OF SHEIKH JA'AFAR MAHMUD ADAM IN KANO 1988-2007

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Abstract

The importance of education in Islam cannot be quantified. It is for much the same reason that the first revelation sent to the noble Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him [P.B.U.H]) when he was at the cave of Hirah was strictly on the preponderance of learning and scholarship which form the co-values of education in the shape of filobiblia (love for books) and filoscience (love for knowledge). The purpose of education in Islam is to produce a good human being (al-insān al-āli), who is capable of delivering his duties as a servant of Allāh (abdullāh) and His vicegerent (khalīfah) on earth. For this simple reason, this paper systematically assesses the major contribution of Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam in the development and dissemination of the light of Islamic education in Kano. This includes his giant stand as Da'i and as a community educator in his attempt to create a morally sound community capable of differentiating between good and bad, right and wrong, accepted and the condemned. The paper uses historical, qualitative and quantitative approaches so as to achieve a sense of originality.

Keywords: Scholars, Islam, Education, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

THE TERMS EDUCATION STANDS FOR a wide range of methods, processes, techniques and beliefs that are set aside to develop human mental capacity in the name of knowledge. In Islam, education is broadly classified into two; spiritual and material. While the former deals with the

hereafter, the latter, appears to promote the theories of dialectical idealism and materialism. Hence, Islamic education refers to that type of knowledge acquired to give shape to human life in this material world and the hereafter. On the other hand, 'Islam' is an Arabic word which means 'A total submission to the will of Allah'1. Others argue that it is derived from the word 'Salām', (peace), not 'Taslīm'
(Submission). Hogben while talking about the propensity of Islam has this to say:

> Islam started as a religion, but later became a state, and finally a culture. The word means 'submission' the will of Allah, the only God, as revealed by His Prophet Muhammad in the book, or Koran. In its simplicity lies its strength. There is nothing complicated to understand, there are no priests. There is a feeling of brotherhood in the faith, expressed in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca2.

Therefore, this paper explores on the unique and charming contributions of late Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam in the development and dissemination of Islamic education in the ancient City of Kano from 1988 to 2007 the very year he was assassinated.

THE GOAL OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The major goal of Islamic education according to Raudlotul Firdaus and Mohd Shah;

> ...is to produce a good man. It aims at the "balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses." It caters for the growth in all aspects including spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively, and incorporate all these aspects in a holistic system of education towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim lies in the realisation of complete submission to Allah as the Creator, on the level of individual, community and humanity at large3.

However, it was Syed Naquib al-Attas who argues that, producing a good man can be achieved through the inculcation of *adab* (good conduct), because it encompasses both the "spiritual and material life of a man that instills the quality of goodness that it sought after."4 Before al-Attas, Imam al-Ghazali relates the aim of education with the purpose of life that is geared towards the attainment of happiness by being close to God. Therefore, the aim of education is "to cultivate in man a personality that abides by the teachings of religion, and is hence assured of salvation and happiness in the eternal life of the Hereafter."5 The importance of the concept of knowledge in Islam cannot be over emphasized especially deriving inspiration from the noble Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah* (P.B.U.H)6.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KANO AND THE INTRODUCTION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Kano lies between latitude 10-30 N and between longitude 740 E and 10-35 E. It has an area of about 20,760 sq kilometers. The city and its environs are officially referred to as metropolitan Kano, at a mean height of 472-45 feet above sea level and is one of the largest cities in Nigeria in terms of population and resources. Kano also lies to the north of the Jos Plateau, located in the Sudanian Savanna region which stretches across the south of the Sahel. The region is endowed with Savanna vegetation and a hot, semi-arid climate. It sees on average about 690mm (27.2in) of precipitation per year, the bulk of which falls from June through September. Kano is typically very hot throughout the year, though from December through February, the city is noticeably cooler. Night time temperatures are cool during the month of December, January and February, with average low temperatures ranging from 110-140c.

Historically, the people of Kano were engaged in ancestral worship under a man called Barbushe, who inherited it from his fore-fathers. According Kano chronicler, Barbushe, once its chief, was of the stock of Dala, a black man of great status and might and hunter, who slew elephants with his stick and carried them on his head about nine miles. Dala as the progenitor of the Kano people, was from an unknown race, but came to the

land and build a house on Dala hill.7

The age long trading links between West and North Africans had made the penetration of Islam into West Africa much easier.8 Among others, two important caravan routes linked North Africa and West Africa. To the West was the Siljilmasa to Awdaghast route through Taghaza, which linked the area of Morocco with the ancient Ghana; and to the East was the famous Tripoli to Kanem route which passed through Fezzan and Bilma. It was said that Islam reached West Africa through the Muslim merchants who frequently dominated these caravan routes. History has it that, by the end of the 7th century A.D, Muslim traders from the North African areas of Tunisia, Algiers, Cairo and Morocco were visiting Western Sudan markets.[9]

Among the areas of West Africa into which Islam was introduced early was Kanem Borno, a territory which now constituted some parts of the present day Nigeria.10 It is difficult if not impossible for one to assess the penetration of Islam into Kano without contextualizing it within the Hausaland. The introduction of Islam into this area was generally attributed to the coming of the *Wangarawa*-a group of Mande Dyula Muslim merchants and clerics, initially from Mali. The term "Wangarai" was said to have first been mentioned by the great Arab historian, al-Idrissy in the 12th century as a country "renowned on account of the quality and quantity of gold" that it produces.11 Modern scholars, however, have identified Wangara with the country formed by the Upper basins of the Senegal and the Niger, comprising Bambule, Manding, Boure and Sieke. The gold fields in these places are still regularly extracted by the local residents between the fall and rise of the floods, from January to May.12

According to the Kano chronicler, Islam was introduced by the Wangarawa during the reign of Sarkin Kano Yaji (1349-1385). According to this source, the Muslim immigrants preached the word of Allah to the *Sarki* (king) who later embraced the religion and even built a mosque for the observance of the Five Daily Prayers. The *Sarki* anointed greater parts of the immigrants into offices related to the Islamic religion. Some of these posts included the office of the Imam, *Mu'azzin* (caller to the prayers) and an official in charge of slaughtering animals. To promote the rapid growth of Islam, he encouraged the Islamisation of his subjects in an attempt to

help them enjoy the fruits of the newly introduced faith. The argument here is that, if Islam had become so consolidated during the reign of Yaji, how do we explain the non-profession of the faith by his son and second successor, Sarki Kanajeji (1390-1410) who is depicted in the Kano Chronicle as a "pagan"? Information from the 17th century A.D. Arabic document titled: *Asl al-Wangariyyin*,13 sheds more light on some of these questions. The document dated 1061 A.H, identifies Muhammad Rumfa as the Sarkin Kano when Wangarawa, led by Abd-al- Rahman Zagaite, arrived. According to Palmer's dating of the reigns of the rulers of Kano in his *Sudanese Memoires*, Rumfa assumed power (1463-99).14 Hence, if Islam came to Kano during the period of Sarki Yaji, it may have been through the assistance of agents other than the Wangarawa themselves in relation to *Asl al-Wangariyyin*.

It can then be argued that Islam penetrated into Kano in the 14th century, long before the arrival of the Wangara immigrants in the 15th century. It is important to note that, even though Islam came to Kano before them, yet they have contributed greatly towards the spread and dissemination of Islamic knowledge as history shows. On the basis of this, we agree with the views of Muhammad Al-Hajj and S. A. Balogun that Islam was known in Hausa land before the 15th century despite the fact that at that material time, it remained predominantly the religion of the elite while the masses were attached to their traditional and totemic beliefs15.

In Kano, the patronage given to Islam by those with blue-blood through rulers' generosity to Muslim scholars, mentors and propagators, ensured the emergence of strong and formidable *Ulama* (Islamic scholars). Islam reached different areas of the state through their indefatigable effort and the assistance of other Muslim traders. It was through this process that the *Allo* informal schools were introduced into Kano with centres at Madabo, Darma, Sharifai, and etcetera.

The Sokoto Jihad of 1804 in Hausa land and to be specific in Kano contributed in no small measure to the expansion of Islam and Islamic education, especially in the cities.16 Although Islam came to Kano as early as the 15th century, its expansion both within the metropolis and the rural areas was to the credit of the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate. This is

because, before the Jihad, Islam was the concern of the individual and not of the state, and after the Jihad the early Fulani rulers not only established Islamic theocracy but also encouraged and promoted its spread. The necessary treatment that the Fulani accorded to the Malams (Islamic scholars), no doubt, enabled many people to become scholars and, in consequence of this, there was a complete intellectual awakening and revitalization throughout the Caliphate. The writings of the Jihadists are now part of the basic source for the understanding of the history of Northern Nigeria.[17]

It is important to note that the 1804 Jihad, had promoted the settlement of different people in the ancient city of Kano. Most of these people were scholars, carrying along knowledge and ideas even though, before the Jihad there exist some Wangarawa (people who came from Mali) in the present day Madabo18, who came to Kano as far back as the 15th century.19 The major aim of these people was the dissemination of knowledge and the spread of Islam. This therefore, led to the establishment of some Islamic centres at Madabo, Darma, Sharifai and Koki. The mosques built after the Jihad served as important areas for the spread of Islam and knowledge. Some of these mosques were; Yolawa, Wudilawa, Dambazawa, Jalli and Galadanci.[20]

All historical periods after the Jihad in Kano had been characterized by the existence of a specialized class of learned men who are considered to be repositories of religious knowledge.21 A Malam (Islamic scholar) was regarded as a person trained in Islamic knowledge as well as the Arabic language. In Kano, only about half of the well trained Malams teach. It is important to note that, when the chief Imam of Madina addressed the Malams (Islamic scholars) in Kano he stated, "The duty of a Malam is to preach, teach, reform, educate and enlighten the members of the public in all aspects of Islamic religion."[21]

In a community where religion permeates all aspects of life and morals, the functioning of the Malams class becomes vital. It has been a tradition however, for many Malams to support themselves through other businesses especially trade, tailoring and farming.22

The rise in number of mosques in the 1960s, and other centres of learning, the proliferation of *Tsangaya* (traditional Qur'anic school) and *Madrasat* (modern Islamic schools), and the sudden emergence of a new class of religious leaders and preachers, famous among whom were the graduates of School for Arabic Studies established in 1930s such as Hassan Gwarzo, Kuliya Alkali, Na'ibi Wali, Shehu Ahmad Sa'id Galadanci, Sani Zahraddeen and a host of others, established Kano as one of the centres of excellence in Islamic knowledge in West Africa.[23]

These *Madrasat*, *Tsangayoyi*, and mosques, no doubt served as both the nucleus of religious learning as well as the propagation of political ideas. This coupled with the emergence of *Islamiyyah* (an elementary school which gives formal training in Islamic studies), schools for the drilling of teachers and judges. These schools were mainly established to compete with the Western type of education.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SHEIKH JA'AFAR MAHMUD ADAM

Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam was born in 1961 at Daura (the present day Katsina State). He was from a learned and well respected family known for its history. His grandfather, Adam, was vey versed in Islam especially, in the fields of Arabic language, and *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence)24.

Among the Sheikh's uncles were great scholars with specialization in the Qur'anic studies. The Sheikh received his rudimentary knowledge of Islam from Malam Magaji who was said to have taught him the Arabic letters (*Huruf al-Hija'iyyah*). Malam Magaji was a Qur'anic memorizer and commanded a lot of respect amongst his people. Presently, he runs a seasonal school at Daura known as *"Daura"*, strictly meant for the memorization of the Holy Book. Other scholars from whom the Sheikh received undiluted knowledge were Malam Haruna (a husband to his eldest sister) and Baba Rabe who hailed from Kauza, an area located in northern Daura.

Sheikh Ja'afar came to Kano in 1971 where he lived and studied under a Tuareg scholar named Malam Abdullahi Dan Zarmo. The scholar

was said to have migrated from a rural area called Zarmo, in the present day Republic of Niger. To easily identify him, the people of Fagge in Kano named him after Zarmo, his hometown.25 He was also among the great memorizers and teachers of the Glorious Qur'an in Kano city. He died willing to witness Ja'afar's Qur'anic memorization. However, Ja'afar could not complete his Qur'anic studies by heart by the time of the sudden departure of Malam Zarmo in 1977. By 1978, he had put the whole Qur'an into his memory at a very tender age.26 It was said that he was unable to memorize the Qur'an during the life time of Dan Zarmo for his great passion for football which had really procrastinated his Qur'anic memorization27, a reason that made his grand-father, Malam Rabe to take him to a Sheikh called Malam Safyan at Hadeja in the present day Jigawa State where he completed his Qur'anic studies with the grand title of *Hafidth* (Memorizer).28

In 1978, the *Izala* movement was born, a struggle that had subsumed the young Ja'afar.29 This is because; the movement had educated him about the dangers of innovations (*bid'ah*) which the Hausa community regarded part and parcel of the religion as they were taught30. Some of these things include, mysticism, the gathering of people in the third day of a diseased person, some forms of worship conducted at some burial grounds, to mention but just a few. The movement served as a milestone in the life of Abu Salim because he was encouraged to seek for the true knowledge of the *Shari'a* pertaining acts mentioned above. It was for much the same reason that he got enrolled into Markaz al-Thaqafy-al-Misry (Egyptian Cultural Centre), located at Bello Dandago but now relocated to Lamido Crescent, and Madrasatu Makafahat al-Ammiyyah at Fagge with the intension of increasing his knowledge accumulation in relation to the true message of Allah (S.W.T.).31 He studied there for three consecutive years (1980-1983).

While pursuing education, Ja'afar did not take occupation no matter how small it was for granted. He excelled in embroidery, a craft he learned from Daura and therefore established it in Kano, where he taught his two

brothers that came to Fagge and even other apprentices32. This economic institution is still graduating people.

While he was at Markaz, he was lucky to have met Sheikh Abdul'aziz Mustapha, one of the few Egyptian teachers sent to the school.33 He loved Ja'afar so dearly and for that reason, he personally taught him *Ilm al-Tajweed* (knowledge of Qur'anic recitation) as he noticed his lapses vis-à-vis the pronunciation of the Arabic letters and the proper way of recitation. However, an agreement was reached between Sheikh Abdul'aziz and his new student before the lesson kicked off. As part of the agreement, he was to come to Abdul'aziz's house very early, to tidy it up and shopping on timely basis from the market for domestic usage.34 Ja'afar agreed and through that process, the door of knowledge was opened for him. The knowledge he received later earned him first position in the interstate Qur'anic competition held at Maiduguri in 1986, representing Kano State during which period he was a student at Government Arabic College, Gwale. His victory prepared him for the International Qur'anic Competition held in Saudi Arabia in 1988 where he won the third position.35 That was his first visit to the Holy Land where he also performed his lesser Hajj before coming back to Nigeria. He had been blessed with a very sound memory which enabled him to memorize whatever comes his way either in the Glorious Qur'an, poetry (in Arabic), and the traditions of the noble Prophet (P.B.U.H.).36 He was an orator more especially in the Hausa and Arabic languages, and his soothing speech was cherished by both the academicians and the commoners.37

He had been teaching people the true knowledge of Islam in his attempt to save them from the darkness of *Bidi'a* (innovation). He exposed the dangers involved in anything that goes contrary to the teachings of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). With the establishment of *Ihya'u Assunnah*, a school at Ajasa in 1986, some of his friends invited him to teach as one of their staff38. Married women, children, and even adults, were taught there. The marvelous effort put forward by him and his colleagues later attracted philanthropists who were willing to uplift the religion of God financially.

One of these people is Malam Yusuf Fantiya who gave them land to build a mosque at Gadon Kaya.39 This mosque has become one of the major centres for the spread of the Prophetic *Sunnah* in line with the straight path of the *Salaf* (The people of the three generations mentioned by the Prophet and those that followed them with righteousness till the last day).

For his intelligence, he was given a scholarship in 1988 to study at the Islamic University at Madina (*Jami'at al-Islamiyyah*)40, where he studied at the school of Qur'an. After his first year at the University, some of his friends from Nigeria also followed suit. Some of them include Dr Sani Rijiyar Lemo, Dr Ibrahim Jalo, Sheikh Muhammad Sulaiman, Sheikh Muhammad Inuwa, Dr Muhammad Mansur Ibrahim and Dr Ibrahim41. Together, they initiated some extra mural classes for themselves so as to be among the bandwagons. They also taught their juniors more especially the problematic courses in the University. Some of the books Ja'afar studied together with his friends in their extra mural classes were: *Raf'u al-Malam an A'immati al-A'alam, Usool al-Tafsir, Kitab I'itiqadi al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*, all of which are the works of Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah42. This continued till their graduation, while the tutorial class they introduced became very much important more especially to the Nigerian students there43.

He graduated *magna cum laude* in 1993 from the University of Madina, and that gave him the zeal to pursue his Masters degree.44 However, such a programme was not put in place by the University of Madina. For that reason, he came back to Nigeria. He got admitted as a Post Graduate student in the department of Islamic Studies at Bayero University, Kano. There, he tried greatly to introduce both students and lecturers to the prophetic *Sunnah* and abhorrence of *Bidi'a* (innovation). For this reason, some people in the department developed ill feeling towards him45. As the hatred became intense, he withdrew from the university.

In order to make his dream a reality, he left for the University of Africa, Sudan (*Jami'atu al-Ifriquyyah*) where he obtained a Masters degree in Arabic language. He wrote his thesis on the Prophetic *Hadith* in relation to Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim under the supersision of Dr Muhammad Bello Ahmad. There, he graduated *summa cum laude* in 2004. He later

applied for his doctorate degree at Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto. He had started his research when the cruel bullets of tyrants brought his life to an end in 2007, one of the assassinations never to be forgotten in the history of Kano.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SHEIKH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN KANO

Through his *Da'awah* activities in Kano, he was able to spread the tradition of learning among the youth. Uthman bin Affan, Gadon Kaya and Almuntada, at Dorayi, *ta'alim* classes were held at his mosques. Among the fields of Islamic religious knowledge taught are; *Tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), Hadith (The Prophetic Tradition, P.B.U.H) which include books like Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Nisa'i and Abu Dawood.

In relation to the Arabic language which becomes the major qualification in the attainment of an undiluted knowledge of Islam, arrangements were put in place. In this programme, an open class was created for whoever is interested, but with the condition that late coming or absenteeism would not be tolerated. Failure to fulfill these conditions was tantamount to suspension. In the field of *Nahw* (Arabic grammar) he taught books like *Al-Ajrumiyyah* and *Qatar al-Nadah wa Balh al-Sada* of Ibn Hisham al-Ansary. In *Sarf* (Syntax), *Shadhal Arf fi Fann al- Sarf* was read. *Balaghah* (Arabic Literature) was equally taught by him. In this, the charming and rich poems of the *Ashab al-Mu'allaqah* (The ten best poets of the *Jahiliyyah* period whose works for their qualities were hanged on the Ka'abah) like Imru'ul Qays, Antarah bn Shaddad, Zuwayr bn Abu Salama, Labib, etcetera, were properly studied.

In the field of theology, works like *Qasidat al-Ha'iyyah* (a poem on Islamic theology), *Muzhakkara fil Aqidah, Kitab Dahawiyyah, Mujmal Usul Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'a of Aqqal*, as well as the collection of Ibn Taymiyyah's works on theology among which were; *Al-Ubudiyyah, Minjaj al-Sunnah, Sarim al-Maslul ala Shatim al-Rasul*, to mention, but just a few. The classes were free *(fi sabilillah)* just ensure the circulation of knowledge among his people. Many cultivated the habit of reading and therefore enrolled themselves to most of his classes in the mosque and other schools.

Through this process, there was a revolutionized change in the history education in Kano State. Much later before his admission into the University of Madinah, he had taught people many aspects of the Islamic education when he was no less than twenty two years old. Upon his return in 1993, he continued from where he stopped. During his intellectual journey to Madina, he had to appoint Sheikh bn Uthman to take over his Qur'anic exegesis at Triumph, a mosque in Kano. He delivered series of lectures in different places within the city of Kano and beyond. In most of this tour, people mostly youth subscribed to the idea of learning by increasing their knowledge accumulation in Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam may be likened to a reformer and a scholar who carried the torch of learning and scholarship to the hearts of his people and others located at very distant locations through the help of media and development in modern *modus operandi*. The spread of Islamic education was his major concern and that was why he voluntarily established literary classes in his two mosques and other areas that normally invited him. Before his death, he was able to establish a school called Uthman bn Affan which was attached to his mosque at Gadon Kaya. However, his death on the other hand, meant a serious blow to the spread of Islamic education in the ancient city of Kano. Though many scholars teach, his approach and selfless service to education was no match to his contemporaries.

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