

THE LESSON OF ADMINISTRATIVE TEACHING OF THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE IN THE QUEST FOR GENUINE NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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It's been 50 years now since we began the desperate search for a genuine all round development as a nation. Painfully though, like a wild goose chase, the search for that promised land had remain illusive. In this piece, recourse is made to the sound administrative qualities of the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate leaders. It enabled them to administer the vast entity on the basis of mutual peace and justice. It also guaranteed a just political order built on a sound and viable economy. The paper is of the view that if the Nigerian society can allow for a replication of such moral virtues as exemplified by the founding fathers of the Caliphate, Nigeria could transform into a politically coherent and economically viable nation aspired by all.

INTRODUCTION

It can be stated without fear of contradiction that the 19th century Jihad in Hausaland led by Usmanu Danfodiyo had come to pass as one of the most discussed historical themes among scholars of history and politics from far and near. Even as we approach the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, it still attracts tremendous attention among scholars of West African History. Its causes, significance and impact have equally commanded profound attention. Certainly, the vigour with which the theme is discussed has triggered off a host of micro and macro analyses on the political, administrative, economic, social and intellectual significance of the Caliphate (1).

As one of the most studied themes in contemporary discipline of arts and social sciences, scholars have differed in their divergent interpretations of the 19th century Jihad in Hausaland. In their narrow conceptualization, some have diminished its significance as to put it in the context of a purely racial struggle between Hausas and Fulanis. Others have discoloured it as a struggle precipitated primarily by economic motives, citing the collection of booty by the victorious Fulanis as their reason for this narrow-minded view. Whatever myopic interpretation is given to ridicule the significance of the Jihad, it

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can be argued in unambiguous terms that the galaxy of authoritative works (published and unpublished) produced by the Jihad leaders suffices to expose the fallacy in those earlier biased positions rooted in eurocentricism (2).

Equally important, it is pertinent to state boldly that the array of literature written so far on the theme, its significance and relevance to contemporary situations is far from being exhausted. Being a conference paper therefore, this piece specifically dwell on only some micro aspects of the Caliphate. Notable among these include moral teachings of the leaders e.g. policy making, service to the people intellectualism, piety, humility etc. The underlying idea is premised on the belief that the lack of above moral qualities in both the rulers and the ruled are the bane of our present day goose chase for a genuine programme of nation-building in Nigeria.

For the fundamental ideological thrust of the paper to come to surface however, it seems pertinent to however briefly explain what constitutes the concept of nation-building with particular emphasis on its features and manifestations in a developing country like Nigeria. Thereafter, a brief historical survey on the pre-jihad social conditions in Hausaland will be constructed. If the final analysis a theoretical exposition will be made on the moral virtues of the Sokoto Caliphate leaders with a view to applying them to the present situation in Nigeria

National Development

This is a concept in the academia mainly in the social sciences which has been defined differently by scholars. For simplistic definition of the concept however, the paper will adopt the view which sees national development as the ability of a country/countries to improve the social welfare of the people e.g. by providing social amenities like good roads, functional education, pipe borne water, etc. It is surmisable from the above overview therefore, that any attempt at true national development must be situated within the purview of the ability of a country to meet the basic needs and aspirations of its people both quantity wise and quality wise. As the provision of those basic necessities of life such as functioning electricity, quality education and Medicare, ample security of lives and properties of the citizenry, continue to elude us even as we clock 50 years of our political independence, can we in all sincerity, boldly call Nigeria a truly

developed nation? In other words, have we yet attained true national development as a nation?

Pre-19th Century Social Order in Hausaland

The quest for the 19th century Jihad in Hausaland was precipitated by a number of factors. These ranged among others, from political to economic social and religious. It was an interwoven course of these factors that equally gave the Jihadists a tremendous success. Indeed, the social order in Hausaland towards the end of the 18th century was to say the least, debase (3). So morally repugnant had been the administrative structure that Usmanu Danfodiyo ably assisted by his son Muhammad Bello, and his brother Abdullahi, had to pounce on the centuries old dynasties of the Habe rulers and replacing it with a more humane political order based on the principles of equity and justice as ordained by the Qur'an (4).

Furthermore, while the Hausa rulers led a life of lavish expenditure purportedly from the public treasury, the teeming populace both from among the Hausa and the Fulani communities languished in utter extortion and persecution. The peasant cattle Fulani especially, were saddled with the burden of hefty charges in the form of Jangali taxes. Not surprisingly therefore, the superficially affluent lifestyle of the Hausa rulers angered the peasant to revolt. An the agitators came not only among the Fulani, but also from among the oppressed Hausa who collectively nursed a common grudge against their Hausa overlords (5).

Moreover, the social condition was no less better. Most of the Hausa rulers hardly possessed the least rudimentary political knowledge to rule in conjunction with the dictates of Islam. Perhaps if their lack of political experience had been their only unbecoming. Danfodiyo could have tolerated them. On the contrary however, they did mix Islamic practices with a host of other unIslamic innovations too obnoxious to pardon. Their over ambition at territorial expansion and other undue excesses seemed to have divided them apart. Thus, not only were the different Hausa chiefdoms politically unstable, they also lacked enough unity of purpose to have effectively dealt with the incursion of the Jihadists. Significantly, these anomalies arouse an overwhelming cloud of discontentment among the peasantry of Hausaland. By the end of the 18th century therefore, the stage seemed set for and

all manifestations of an impending tide of revolution had become visibly manifest.

The Actual campaign of the Jihad

By the end of the 18th century, Danfodio had embraced the difficult scholarly task of preaching and teaching. This, he took seriously that he traversed many parts of Hausaland. Certainly the rank of his supporters came both from among the Fulani and the Hausa and they were so fanatical in their resolve to support their spiritual mentor against the despotic Habe regime that Adeleye (1979), observes inter alia:

“The Sokoto Caliphate was a supra-ethnic altos which the Islamic ideology brought to the fore as the strongest agency for large scale political integration”(6)

From the above submission, suffice it to convince all doubting Thomases to jettison myopic misconception embedded in their Eurocentric writings that at any rate, they can not diminish the cosmopolitan character of the 19th century Jihad. Thus, the sooner they revisit the racial theories into which their historiography traditions were rooted, the better.

Moral Teachings of the Sokoto Caliphate

Indeed, Danfodiyo and his assistants had written a number of scholarly works which amount to at least 360 collections (7). In one of such works named Masail Muhimma, Shehu gave a thorough elucidation on the imperative of seizure of political power from the nominal Hausa rulers (Alhaji).

Self Reform

This was one of the fundamental values imbibed by the Jihad leaders soon after establishment of the Caliphate. By 1809, the actual military campaigns against the despotic Hausa rulers had virtually been completed. Maishanu (8), observes vividly that the “centuries old Hausa dynasties were destroyed and in their places new ones came into being. The various Hausa states metamorphosed into emirates paying allegiance to Sokoto. Having the pivotal motive of the Jihad in mind, a sustained effort was made by the leaders at both individual and community levels to institute and execute laudable reforms that had direct impact on official policy making in the running of the machinery of government. All the major manifestations of corruption, extortion of the masses and bribery in governmental circles had been decisively dealt with from the roots. This augured very positively

in the effort to establish a just, humane and egalitarian society within the confines of the moral teachings of the Qur'an. This way, the society of the Caliphate was effectively cleansed of the corrupt practices of Nigeria of the present. This moreso, if we put into account that such nasty corrupt practices of the preset party engaged off the first military coup of January 1966 in Nigeria. And much regrettably, it has continued to virtually smear every subsequent regime that the country has had since independence(9).

Administrative Machinery of the Caliphate

One of the basic administrative ingredients of the caliphate adopted from the onset was equity and fair-play in the arena of dispensation of justice for the smooth actualization of the basic tenet of Sharia. In pursuit of this, a coherent administrative machinery was put in place. A number of new offices among which were that of the Qadi, the scribes, the Imam, the vizier etc came into being for greater administrative convenience. As the chief head of the administration, the Caliph depended on the advice and wealth of experience of the viziers from whom he tapped maximally. Against the backdrop of the enormous importance attached to the interpretation and dispensation of justice, Qadis were appointed from among men of the highest intellectual background. Likewise, other sensible public sectors such as the chief of the police and the head of the treasury were headed by people of sound educational and moral background. At any rate, policies such as these guaranteed a gradual elimination of evil deeds within the community. It also ensured transparency in the management of public funds. Aside exercising his authority in the metropolitan administration, it was equally the duty of the Caliph to appoint emirs who took charge of the provincial administration. With the division of the Caliphate into two by Shehu in 1812, a new dimension was added in the administrative machinery of the polity. Sokoto as the capital of the Eastern Emirate was headed by Muhammad Bello, while Gwandu became the capital of the Western Emirates under Abdullahi (10). Letters of appointment of emirs bodily carried specific instructions on the do's and don'ts expected of them. They also bore code of conduct on the modus operandi for the emirs. This measure, coupled with the regular supervisory visits paid to the emirates ensured a large measure of success as the pioneer leaders of the Caliphate strove

to create a humane society based on equity, peace, security and justice.

The good virtues thus entrenched can be better appreciated when the contemporary social disorder in Nigeria notably kidnapping armed robbery, electoral rigging, looting, etc which are daily assuming proportional dimension are put into proper context. Suffice it to say that the lack of those qualitative administrative virtues reminiscent of the society of the caliphate in our contemporary context is largely responsible for most of the embarrassing woes that the nation is presently grappling with. Otherwise, it is quite amazingly embarrassing that nasty crimes such as kidnapping hitherto known only in the Niger Delta has become a daily occurrence in most of our major cities such as Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo, Kaduna and more recently, Sokoto (11).

Honesty, Transparency and God-Fearing leadership

For the greater part of their life, the caliphate leaders did eschew all major evil deeds. The ethical orientation in them gingered them to as much as possible, exercise restraints in matters pertaining to bribery, corruption, nepotism, favoritism and other embarrassing rascalities associated with ungodly attitude. Always mindful of the consequences of their deeds on the day of retribution when everyone shall stand naked before Allah, they exercised their power within the context of Qur'anic injunctions upon which the Caliphate was founded. To this, Adeleye (12), observes enthusiastically that any assessment of the success of the Jihad must be properly situated within the Islamic frame work of the revolution. This view is further espoused by Yandaki (13), when he theorizes that these kinds of rigorous practical ethical teaching endeared the imagination of the rulers and the ruled. Islam was thus used by the ruling elite to consolidate and legitimize power. It must be emphasized that as they strove to achieve this, they never refrained from putting God first in all their dealings.

Little wonder that the socio-economic realities of the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate contrasted sharply with what obtained presently in the 21st century Nigeria. Because the leaders of the glorious Caliphate feared God to the core, they allowed accountability, objectivity and probity to be their watchwords in all their private and official dealings. No wonder, their society was devoid of such wanton manifestations of primitive barbarities of the present day as robbery, area boyism, kidnapping, oil pipeline

vandalization, election rigging, examination malpractices, graft taking by the law enforcement agents, etc. How we wish, our present leaders can draw some inspiration from the exemplary moral rectitude of such renown leaders.

Vibrant Intellectual Pursuit

Not even the most ardent scholar of the colonial historiographical thought can deny that the 19th century Jihad leaders were persons of erudite intellectual endowment. The triumvirates alone, notably Danfodiyo, Bello and Abdullahi were prolific writers to the core. Danfodiyo's works numbered about 100, those of Abdullah almost totaled 60, while Bello's works were in the range of 78 (14). More appreciably, they were diverse in the languages with which they wrote their works. The many pamphlets, books and poems they produced were written in Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa. Ideally, the logic for this was informed by the need to cater for the intellectual needs of the community. The writings conveyed elucidations on the rights, limits and obligations of the rulers and the ruled. They also cautioned seriously against transgression in the exercise of one's civil obligations whether as the ruler or the ruled (15).

Not only did the works of the Jihad leaders provide later generations with a reservoir of valuable political education, it also ensured a great deal of restraint among the ruling elite which impacted positively on the reduction of tension and social dislocation among the Caliphal community. Thus naturally, the caliphate was defused of such types of violence, rancor and other social absurdities which have gradually but painfully become a manifest destiny in present day Nigeria. Certainly, such shambling state of affairs in contemporary Nigeria owe much to do with the ungodly attitude of the people from the apex to the top. To make matters worse, instead of playing the game of politics softly on the basis of fair-play, our politicians explore their vantage position to teleguide the youths to partake in unsavory attitude. By corrupting them to serve as robots, they systematically rig in general election to rule illegitimately, Chilee (16), observes carefully that the unemployed, frustrated, hungry youths become ready machines in the hands of unscrupulous politicians who are intent on ascending elective pinnacle by hook or crook.

Recommendations

It seems pertinent to make some point black clarifications that this is not in any way advocating for an imposition of any radical system of administration. Rather, it only try to demonstrate the extent to which the moral teachings of the Sokoto Caliphate can be a rich source of inspiration to our present effort in creating a politically coherent, economically viable nation. Such moral teachings from which we can tap therefore include the following:

(i) Vibrant Educational System

In as much as the Caliphate leaders could have time to devote to teaching, researching, writing and other scholarly works, one does not see any justification whatsoever for the present leaders to remain aloof, naïve and indifferent. The enormity of the contribution of the 19th century Caliphate leaders can be better appreciated if it is remembered that they were operating at a period devoid of electricity, air conditions, roads, tap water and other mundane luxuries of the present era.

(ii) Transparent Leadership

Leadership should be seen as an act of trust between God, rulers and the ruled. A situation whereby leaders see their privileged position as an opportunity to superficially enriching themselves at the expense of the masses should be detested and punished appropriately.

(iii) Probity and Accountability

A code of moral standard should be put in place on the basis of Islamic injunction and should be used as the guiding principle for selection of candidates for election. Equally important, appointment of persons into public offices should be based on merit. Only individuals with requisite educational background and possessive of moral rectitude should be so appointed.

(iv) Equal Educational Opportunities for All

Leaders of the Caliphate were never found wanting in giving equal access to education for the children of both rulers and the ruled. Education, being a potent weapon for the eradication of ignorance should be made qualitative and easily accessible to all. This was graciously exemplified by the caliphal society. Certainly, the current system of education portends danger for the future. Everything necessary should be done to improve it and make it more qualitative. Like the 18th century Hausaland, Nigeria indeed

needs a functional educational system that guarantees equity, justice and fair-play.

Conclusion

For quite sometimes, Nigeria has embarked upon a wild goose chase for a genuine national development. Resource is being constantly made to our glorious pre-colonial past. The moral teachings of the Sokoto Caliphate seems the ready-made therapy for our contemporary socio-political anomalies as a nation. Our value systems are being rapidly eroded. How was it possible for the caliphate to hold sway for about one century? This paper has gone down memory lane to historically unravel the mystery. In the man, the paper demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that the moral virtues of the caliphate are of supreme relevance to the unending quest for a genuine national development in Nigeria. A reasonable measure of the application of those moral virtues to the present circumstances could go a long way in eliminating the current afflictions of violence, corruption, injustice, election rigging, oil bunkering, oppression, etc in the polity.

Only when the citizenry accept to accommodate a culture of positive and peaceful change can the ruling elite and the followership be genuinely be evaluated within the purview of the ability to set realistic and achievable goals. The new social order accruing from such goals should create a society more humble and down to earth than the present one which is based on excessive materialist ethos. This could only come to light when it is predicated on the moral virtues of the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate. The paper vehemently suggest that Nigeria will prosper well in the present century if the ruling elite could muster enough inspiration from the vast humble posture of the Caliphate leaders who demonstrated so much fear of God as paramount to guide their official dealings. Abubakar was right when he observes that:

“...the Caliph and his emirs (know that they) were mere to enforce the Sharia. God was the ultimate source of all authority and all powers were exercised on his behalf..... the main functions of the (Rulers) were mainly to implement (good) policy...”(17)

How it is wished, our present leaders and followers alike can borrow a brief from this exemplary spirit of moral virtue and allow the fear of God to be our major source of inspiration at both out official, individual and community levels.

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