

**THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP AND ITS  
APPLICATION IN THE SAKKWATO CALIPHATE**

**BY**

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**BEING PAPER PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE OF  
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## THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE SAKKWATO CALIPHATE

The Sakkwato Caliphate, as it is popularly called, is that Islamic government which was based on the pattern of the orthodox Caliphal system founded by the Prophet of Allah Muhammad, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and which he bequeathed to Islamic communities all over the world as a *modus operandi* for every Muslim *Ummah* to emulate and be governed by. The major sources of jurisdiction for this caliphal system of government are the Qur'an, the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) (SAW) and the *Ijma'* (consensus of *Ulama* and *Qiyas* (analogy) deduced by scholars of every epoch.

The orthodox caliphs from which the Sakkwato leaders derived their inspirations are those four caliphs, namely, Abubakar, Umar, Usman and Ali who governed the entire Muslim world of their time under strict compliance with Shariah as explained to them by the Qur'an and the sayings, acts and approvals of the Prophet (SAW).

The Sokoto caliphate was founded by the renowned scholar and *Mujaddid* Shaikh Uthman b. Fodiyo. He initially started his career as a preacher with the sole purpose of cleansing the society of its social, political and religious ills. He began by educating the society on proper ways of worship, separating them from the un-Islamic practices interwoven with Islam but which are diametrical with Islam and border to unbelief. He then criticized the venal *Ulama'* (scholars) who encouraged rulers to misrule by overburdening the subjects with heavy taxes fines and confiscation of their properties without any

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just cause. He undertook preaching tours within Gobir and Zamfara areas. Within a couple of years, Shaikh Uthman raised a community of dedicated Muslims. The growing number of serious Muslims around him aroused the anger of Hausa rulers. Particularly the Gobir ruler. Shaikh Uthman was able to obtain for and on behalf of his followers some concessions.

The kings especially, the tyrant king of Gobir stepped-up his hostilities against the Shaikh's community, miming them, killing them, capturing them and selling them as slaves (Muhammad Bello, Infaq al-Maisur).

At a time the Shaikh had called on the king with the aim of finding solutions to hostilities meted against the Shaikh's community. No sooner was some amicable solution reached when the king of Gobir, Nafata, after assuming office made contradictory declarations against the concessions given to Jama'ah. He declared that:

1. No one except the Shaikh should preach,
2. No one whose parents or grandparents were not originally Muslims should convert to Islam, and those converted should revert to their former religion,
3. No man should wear a turban henceforth,
4. No woman should henceforth wear a veil.

These and many other provocations made the Shaikh's community start thinking for a leader to defend themselves under him. The Jama'ah unanimously chose the Shaikh to be their first Amirul Muminin in 1804 after they migrated to Gudu. They fought many battles, some of which they won

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and lost some. With the capture of Alkalawa, a solid foundation for the establishment of a Caliphate with all its organs and offices was laid down. The Caliphate waxed stronger with vast territories covering most of the Northern States of the present-day Nigeria and extending its borders to some parts of the present-day Republics of Niger, Chad, Cameroun and Mali. Even the powerful kingdom of Borno lost some part of its territories to the Caliphate.

The leaders of this growing Caliphate were scholars of repute and they wrote a number of books to serve as guidelines in the administration of the Caliphate. The first Amirul Muminin Shaikh Uthman, his full-brother Abdullahi and their son, Muhammad Bello became the nucleus of the Caliphate and they wrote extensively on religious, social, political and economic aspects of an Islamic government whose constitution was the embodiment of the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* and the consensus of *Ulama'*.

#### **The Islamic Concept of Leadership:**

Vicegerency, the Islamic concept of leadership first emerged from the Qur'anic verse that expressed Allah's wish to appoint His vicegerent on earth soil as to maintain justice among the creations both human beings and jinns that would worship Him. On hearing this, the angels were surprised that the human being who was not to be trusted was assigned this onerous responsibility of being Allah's representative on earth. They politely inquired:

"Do thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify thee...?" (Surah II, Verse 30).

What these verses inferred is that 'Adam' is the representative of Allah on earth who is to live, worship and maintain justice among other human beings. The concept clearly shows that leadership in Islam is a trust from Allah. A leader should regard himself as representing Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who

in turn represents Allah the Creator. Allah is the All-knowing. He keeps records of all His Messenger's representative's activities on earth. A leader will be fully accountable to Allah on the Day of Judgment. If he commits any injustice among fellow human beings, among animal and plant kingdoms as a leader of his home, his ward, his village, his local government, his state, his nation, his planet, the neighbouring planets, the Creator of all beings is watching him. He may punish him right here on earth or may delay the punishment until the final Day of Judgment. This trust by Allah through His Prophets is an all-comprehensive one and must be maintained with all sincerity.

The quoted verse above has been explained by a number of traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasizing the trust and that man will be accountable to Allah. The first Hadith, which comes to mind, is that which says:

"Each one of you is a shepherd and each one of you would be asked about his shepherd. The leader is a shepherd and would be accountable to Allah about his shepherd."

In yet another *Hadith* the Prophet (SAW) said when his companions asked him. "What do you see if leaders were appointed and they asked for their rights from us as our leaders but they in turn refused to give us our rights as their subjects? The Prophet (SAW) replied, "Give them their rights and ask them for your right from Allah for He will certainly make them accountable to what they have been entrusted 'with.'" (Shaikh Uthman, Najm al-Ikhwan, p.8).

This leadership under whatever name it is called, the same principle of trust be applied. The leader may be called Mr. President as in American

democracy, the Prime Minister as in democracies of Westminster style, the Imam as in Iran, the King as in Saudi Arabian monarchy or the Khalifah as was severally used in the Glorious Qur'an,

In the Qur'an, Khalifah, Malik and Imam or their derivations have been used signifying leadership. Thus referring to Prophet Yusuf (A.S), the verse reads:

"O my Lord! Thou hast given me sovereignty." (Surah 12, Verse 101).

Also Prophet Sulaiman (A.S) said as reported in the Qur'an:

"He said, My Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me sovereignty such as shall not belong to all after me." (Surah 38, Verse 35).

In another verse referring to Imamate, it reads:

"And We made them chiefs who guide by our command..." (Surah 21, Verse 73),

In another verse referring to Prophet Ibrahim (A.S). It reads:

"He said, Lo! I have appointed thee a leader (Imam) for mankind." (Surah 2, Verse 124).

All these verses refer to various terms used for leadership role but they all point to one thing and that it is a trust which must be preserved by all types and scopes of leadership. It was with this trust in mind that Prophet Yusuf (A.S) requested Paroah to entrust him with the store-houses. He said:

"Set me over the store-houses of the land. Lo! I am a skilled custodian." (Surah 12, Verse 55).

After this trust is entrusted upon a leader, then he is expected to maintain that trust and treat everyone equitably without fear or favour. In another *Hadith*, the *Prophet of Allah (Muhammad) (SAW)* said:

"The Sultan is the shadow of Allah on earth!"

The leader, therefore, being the shadow of Allah's authority through the Prophets, should treat everyone equally. Vice such as nepotism, self aggrandizement, promotion of one's friends, egocentricism, blind-materialism, acquisition of ill-gotten wealth should all be avoided by a leader. In fact, the leader should be as the Prophet (SAW) described him saying:

The leader of a community is but their servant."

When this concept of trust which is an authority bestowed to you by Allah is digested the leader must be just in his dealing with all his subjects. He must be fair to all and sundry and the rule of the *Sharfah* must be supreme. Whoever tempers with the *Shariah* must be punished accordingly after full investigations. Justice must be carried out in all facets of human endeavours. It must include justice in relation to terrestrial and marine life as well as in connection with animal and plant kingdoms. He must do justice to the planet he lives in and the planets that he sees and utilises. To sum it all, a leader must uphold justice even against himself. He should not therefore claim immunity of the rule of the *Shariah*. Everyone, with high or low status, must be equal before the *Sharfah* (Shehu Umar Abdullah. On the Search for a Viable Political Culture p.47).

The leader must see his leadership role as both mundane and spiritual. In other words, the concept of secularism as professed by the so-called modern democracies, which separate religion from politics, is absolutely alien in Islam (Shehu Umar Abdullahi, Ibid, p.46).

It was reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Prophet (SAW) had said:

"Authority and Islam are twins, neither of both can improve without the other. Islam is the foundation while authority is the protector, Whatever lacks foundation will collapse and whatever lacks protector is lost."  
(Shaikh Uthman b. Fodiyo, Najm al-Ikhwan, p.68).

In other words, politics and religion are seen in Islam as just two faces of the same coin. The leader, therefore, must see his role as such and must, with all sincerity, carry out his responsibilities with justice irrespective of differences of religion, ethnic affiliations, geographical boundaries, etc. The religion of Islam enjoined him to be fair to all, The Glorious Qur'an says:

"O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is informed of what ye do." (Surah 5, Verse 8).

In another verse, the leader is enjoined to maintain justice even if it is against his relative. The Qur'an urges that, "And if you give your word, as justice thereunto, even though it be (against) a kinsman!" (Surah 6, Verse 152). In another verse, the leader is still being enjoined to uphold justice whenever he passes a judgement among his subjects. The Qur'an says: "And if ye judge between mankind that you judge justly." (Surah 4, Verse 58).

The next concept of leadership in Islam is the utilisation of *Shura* [consultation], The Qur'an enjoins the leader to look for advice before embarking on any serious issue affecting his subjects. The so-called modern models of State or National assemblies under the guise of Western democracies are mere caricatures of the Islamic principle of *Shura* revealed to the Prophet of Islam (SAW) more than one thousand, four hundred and eighteen years ago. *Shura* or Counsel is from the Arabic word *ashara Shura* to show or to consent or approve by nodding one's head.



The person seeking advice would want to know areas of truth and the benefit to be derived from the issue. *Shura* is sought for. Counsel is the search for an expert opinion from experienced persons to enable the leader arrive at what seems to be right. But before the right course or decision is arrived at, a body of experienced persons must come together and critically examine each other's opinion being guided by the principles of *jihad*.

Those issues which had already been legislated on in the Qur'an and/or by the Prophet (SAW) cannot be subjected to discussion or review.

The leader may however call for a discussion, presentation of opinions or debate on things that are either not yet clear or have multiple approaches. Matters of peace and war or signing treaties, for example, are issues that should not be taken lightly or rushed into without taking due cognisance of the implications involved.

Particular example which may be cited here where difficult decisions were taken by the Prophet (SAW) was the Hudaibiyah peace accord. Despite the opposition by some of his companions to the treaty, the Prophet (SAW) upheld it and it turned out to be the greatest conquest in the history of Islam.

Another example was the Battle of Uhud when some of his companions advised that he should remain in Madina while others opined that he should move out. Each opinion was trying to arrive at what would be the best option for the Muslims. But in the end, the Prophet (SAW) chose the decision to go out of Madina to meet the enemies (see Abdurrahman Abdul-Khaliq, *Al-Shura*, p.17).

For any issues to be tabled for discussion, the leader must be able to select experienced persons who are transparently sincere, honest, determined and have strong sense of responsibility who will stand firmly by the decisions taken and implement them as required. That body of decision-making must not be lobbied by the leadership but should let each one of them to be the master of his conscience and the protector of the trust reposed in him by Allah.

The importance of Counsel has been emphasised in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). A whole chapter of the Qur'an was named chapter of *Shura*. In one of the verses of the chapter, Muslim leaders are enjoined to seek for advice before taking any serious decisions.

In another chapter, the importance of seeking for Counsel was also highlighted when the Prophet (SAW) was asked to consult his companions before taking a decision. The Qur'an verse reads:

So pardon them and ask for forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when thou art resolved, then put thy trust in Allah Lo! Allah loveth those who put their trust in Him." (Surah 3. Verse 1.59).

With the establishment of an Islamic State, the leader must not relent in his defence of the *Ummah* from internal and external enemies by establishing a strong force to defend the nation of Islam defends its territories as well as guarantee the application of the *Shariah* throughout his domain. The nation of Islam must be combat ready and the leadership must be alert and lead its army in defence of the State. The leadership must protect the religion and its values with all its 'juristical, administrative and military' capabilities. The leader

must adhere to the following ten conditions in discharging the affairs of the Islamic State. The conditions are:

- a) Preservation of faith in its established principles and in the form in which *al-Sa/af* (the predecessors) of the *Ummah* had unanimously agreed.
- b) Enforcement of judgments among contenders and resolving cases among disputants.
- c) Provision of security in the territory so that people may live in their homes safely and travel in security.
- d) Enforcement of punishments prescribed by the *Shariah* to safeguard the limits set by Allah and preserve the rights of people.
- e) Fortification of borders with preventive equipment and repelling of aggression.
- f) Jihad against those who oppose Islam after calling upon them to embrace it or to accept protection as non-Muslims, so that the light of Allah is upheld in proclamation of the religion in its entirety.
- g) Levying of taxes and collection of *Zakah* and charity from the treasury without being extravagant or stingy.
- h) Appointing the honest and competent to positions of trust in order to preserve (State) wealth to administer (government's) affairs.
- i) Personal supervision and examination of public affairs to be able to lead the nation and protect the religion.
- J) Personal supervision and examination of public affairs to be able to lead the nation the nation and protect the religion (See Muhammad S. El-Awa, on the *Political System of the Islamic State*, p.??).

Now we have through the previous pages seen the Islamic concept of leadership and what follows is the application of that concept in the Sokoto Caliphate.

### **Concept of Leadership and Its Application in the Sokoto Caliphate**

The leaders in the Sokoto Caliphate firmly believed that leadership is a trust from Allah through the Prophet (SAW) bestowed on them to rule according to *Shariah*. Thus, from the onset, the Muslims unanimously agreed to pay homage to Shaikh Uthman b. Fodiyo as the first Amirul-muminin of the newly established Muslim "*Ummah*, an *Ummah* which is to be governed by the *Shariah*. The leadership from the beginning applied *Shura* when they realised the danger they were exposed to by the enemy. After their Hijra to Gudu, the Muslim *Ummah* met and agreed to pay homage to Shaikh Uthman as Amirul Muuminin. The first to pay the homage was his full-brother Abdullah, followed by Muhammad Bello and then Umar Alkammu and the rest of the "*Ummah* (see Wazir Junaidu, *Tarihin Fulani*, pp.16-17).

The *Shariah* as the basis of Muslim constitution was implemented in full. Honest, pious and scholarly judges were appointed throughout the Caliphate. In fact, descendants of these judges like the Qadi-Qudat (Chief Judge) still retain the titles if not the functions. We also have other titles like the Sa'i who takes charge of the collection and distribution of *Zakah*. Other are the *Sarkin Yaki* (War Commander), the title still held by the descendants of Aliyu Jedo, the War Commander at the time of the Jihad and the Muhtasib (Censor of Morals). As for the Wazir, the Shaikh appointed four viziers, namely: Abdullah, Muhammad Bello, Umar Alkammu and Malam Sa'adare. When the Caliphate became stronger, the viziership positions were reduced to only two. The Western flank under the charge of Abdullah has its own vizier as was the case with the Eastern flank under Bello. However, as Muhammad Bello became the

second Caliph, the viziership position of the Caliphate held by Abdullahi shifted to 'Uthman Gidado.

The application of the *Shariah* was thorough and that some recorded incidents during the struggle to apply justice to all were evidenced in some traditions.

Sultan Bello's strict application of the *Shariah* is evidenced by his scrutinizing the judges, reversing their judgments dictated by their own interest and his refusal to give them free rein in their posts (Alhaji Shehu Malami, Sir Siddiq Abubakar III, p.25). Sultan Bello was also said to have told his brother Abubakar Atiku:

"If you judge according to the truth, I will not interfere with you."  
(Ibid, p.25).

Throughout the Caliphate, justice was done and every citizen was forced to comply with the *Shariah*. As a result of that, there was absolute peace. This peaceful momentum did not escape the eagle-eye of the Christian white explorer, Clapperton who observed that:

"The laws of the Qur'an were in his (Bello's) time so strictly put in force... That the whole country when not in a state of war, was so well-regulated that a woman might travel with a casket of gold upon her head from one end of the Fellata dominions to the other," (See Rashid, *Islamic Lava in Nigeria*, p.39)

The Sokoto leadership promoted learning and scholarship. This promotion was vigorously pursued by the Caliphate so much so that there was no Islamic revivalist movement in the whole of Africa during that time that had bequeathed to the generations of the Sakkwato Caliphate. Shehu Uthman had written not less than one hundred books and manuals in three languages, namely: Fulfulde, Hausa and Arabic. So was also done by his son Bello and

Abdullahi and Emirs who received flags from the Shehu. All the flag-bearers were at one time or another students of Shaikh Uthman b. Fodiyo who in turn encouraged scholarship in their own areas of jurisdiction.

With the combined efforts of the leaders and their subjects, within a short period, the massive educational and enlightenment programmes embarked upon by the Caliphate yielded fruitful results.

At this juncture, one can recall the unprecedented educational campaign mounted by Nana Asma'u, the Shaikh's daughter to educate the women-folk. Nana herself, a poetess in three languages, did not hesitate to compose poems which are still sung today to educate the women masses. She organised the *Yan-taru'* (Associates) system of knowledge dissemination whereby older women from rural areas converged to her home and received lessons from her and in turn disseminated such lessons to the wives in purdah in the rural areas.

The lessons usually imparted by Nana Asma'u included Islamic rituals like the five daily prayers, aspects of *Tauhid*, the *Zakah*, responsibilities of the wife to the family, etc. These rituals are composed in poems for easy memorization. (Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, pp.-51-52).

After the establishment of the Caliphate, the leaders built a strong army to defend and extend the territories of the nation of Islam. The leaders led many successful expeditions against the enemy. Abdullah, who was in charge of the Western flank of the Caliphate and his able lieutenants, ably extended the

areas of the Caliphate as far away as the Nupe and Yoruba lands. while Bello effectively controlled the whole of the Eastern flank which extended far beyond Adamawa. The Caliphate remained intact and the leaders successfully subdued to submission the attempted rebellion after the demise of Sultan Bello. Sultan Bello had, during his reign which spanned for over 20 years, led 17 military campaigns against the enemies of Islam.

The Caliphate became the Islamic umbrella under which the citizens of the nation of Islam, irrespective of language, colour or place of birth, converged to worship Allah alone and maintain justice among human' beings and became true representatives of Allah on earth.

### **Conclusion**

The paper traced the Islamic concept of leadership from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the two main sources of Islamic jurisprudence and constitution. It discussed the Islamic and secular concepts of leadership. It emphasized that the Sakkwato Caliphate believed in leadership being a trust from Allah and had left no stone unturned throughout its life-span which began in 1804 until it was rudely halted in the year 1903 by the British fire power.

The paper also expressed its nostalgia for the Islamic concept of leadership especially with regard to the general security of life and property, which followed the total application of the *Shariah*.

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