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The Illusion of Innovators: An Appraisal of Malam Sa'adu Zungur's Poem Against *Bid'Ah*

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent and the Merciful

Abstract

The paper highlights the contributions of a great Northern reformist, Malam Sa'adu Zungur, to Islamic knowledge. It has deals extensively with his famous poem against innovation in Islam. The main purpose of Sa'adu's poem is to make people stick stubbornly to the Sunnah and shun any innovation, more especially in the supplications and swearing realms.

1.0 Introduction

Thriving against innovations in the religion of Islam is one among many aspects that Sheikh Usman bn Fodiyo put his efforts in his writings and actions in order to regain the purity of Islam, which had been distorted in Hausaland before his advent.

For this purpose, Shehu himself wrote four books of paramount importance. The books are: *Ihya'us Sunnah Wa Ikhmadu al Bid'ah*, *Bayan al Bid'a As-Shaitaniyyah*, *Hisnul Afham Min Juyushi al Auham* and *Nurul al-Albab*.

The closest cohorts of Shehu like Ustaz Abdallah, Sultan Muhammad Bello and Nana Asma' were also vehement against Bid'ah. They supported Shehu's effort in writing and waging Jihad against any evil. Their presence in the battlefield did not, surprisingly, prevent them from writing and setting the Muslims' society the right direction.

Two things had marked the aftermath of the demise of Sheikh Usman and his cohorts. One is colonial invasion. Not far away after the death of Sheikh Muhammad Bello bn Usman bn Fodiyo and his immediate Caliphs, the British colonialists invaded the

entire Hausaland. Two, the literary legacy of Sheikh Usman educating people was slowly diminished and abandoned and totally with the exception of some books being taught by a handful of scholars in Sokoto city and its environs.

This put some locations which were previously enlightened by Jihadists back (almost entirely), to square one; full of ignorance. The issue of Bori and visiting shamans (Bokaye) are but a few examples¹ which the Jihadist had tirelessly fought against, but people with the encouragement of colonials continued grabbing with full effort².

It was unfortunate that after the colonials had comfortably settled, very few people who became mindful of the Dan Fodiyo's legacy kept up his teachings. Sa'ad Zungur, who was born and died during colonial rule, was, of course, among the rare ones who were concisely aware of the decay of values and the collapsing of morality throughout Hausaland because of colonial invention. This paper studies one of Malam Sa'ad's contributions in thrashing against innovations that overrode Hausaland after Shehu's Jihad.

Three important works were conducted on the contributions of Malam Sa'adu Zungur:

One is a tribute to him by Malam Aminu Kano (who was an adjacent disciple of Zungur) in a book titled "*Rayuwar Ahm Mahmud Zungur*", which gives a biographical sketch of Sa'ad though it contains no single verse among his numerous poems. Two is a valuable and useful work of Prof. Dandatti Abdulkarim entitled "*The Poetry, Life and Opinions of Sa'adu Zungur*". It analyzes the Poem of Bid'ah though doesn't touch upon the

¹-Uji above Anderson, Working with Spirits Among Muslim Hausa in Nigeria: A Study of Bori in Jos, Working papers in Cultural Anthropology, No. 11 (Report from a minor field study), Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, 2002, pp.28-

²-See Tremearne, Major A. J. N., *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*, Heath, Cranton & Ouseley LTD., Fleet Lane, London, E.G., 1914,

Islamic issues contained therein at length. Three is the work of A. M. Yakubu entitled "An Anthology of the Social and Political Writings of a Nigerian Nationalist".

These works are the largest collection of the legacy of Sa'adu Zungur, though the analysis of each poem was not given, but it contains a great deal of information about Sa'adu's struggle, which could not apparently be available elsewhere.

This paper has drawn a lot of information from the aforementioned works and went further supporting views with the scriptural texts from the Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah.

2.0 A Brief Biography of Sa'ad Zungur

Sa'adu's grandfather, Malam Idris, was among the protagonists of Sheikh Usman bn Fodiyo's preaching. He was even in the Dand Fodio's circle. Shehu sent him together with Malam Yakubu back to Bauchi for the propagation of Islam in their area. Malam Idris chose to settle at the foot of Zungur Mountain in Bauchi with the intention to guide Bankalwa, the mountain inhabitants. He eventually died in the *ribat*-frontier at Tabula, a few miles from Zungur.

Malam Muhammad Bello was the father of Sa'adu. He was learned and a fluent Arabic scholar, besides being conversant in Hausa and Fulfulde. The actual name of Sa'adu Zungur is Ahmad Muhammad Sa'ad, but he was known as Sa'adu Zungur.

He was born on Tuesday 24th November, 1914 or 1915 C.E in the Ganjuwa ward of now Bauchi metropolis³. He grew up in the midst of scholars, for their home was then among the castles of traditional Islamic knowledge.

³-Yakubu, A.M., Sa'adu Zungur: An Anthology of the Social and Political Writings of a Nigerian Nationalist, Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy Press, p.8

Sa'adu went through the preparatory curriculum of Islamic knowledge with his father, 'who always took Sa'adu with him whenever he went out to teach in the Central Mosque.'

As a youth, Sa'adu memorized the Qur'an at the age of fifteen⁴, and was much interested in reading Arabian and translated Indian folktales. Besides that, he busied himself with Hausaland Jihad scholars' writings, the books, which greatly influenced him, and became the blueprint or guiding-books to him for the rest of his life.

At the age of six in 1920, it became easy for Sa'adu to join Western education, because his father was a teacher of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Bauchi Provincial Primary School. Therefore, he joined Bauchi Elementary school. He was ahead of his classmates for being literally equipped from home and was much able to comprehend the lessons, a situation that warranted assigning him to teach his seniors of class three some aspects of Arabic and Islamic Studies. On his mastery of almost all the courses, he was also able to join senior classes for entrance examinations into Katsina Higher College, the then highest institution of learning in Northern Nigeria.

At Katsina, Sa'adu showed extreme comprehension of his studies, the matter that elevated him to graduate after spending only three years instead of five (1929-1932). Sa'adu as an extra-ordinary student had used his spare time during his stay at this school to advance his Islamic studies, more especially in Maliki jurisprudence. He read *Mukhtasar al-Khalil* and other books under some learned scholars in Katsina. After finishing the school, he joined Yaba Higher College in Lagos in 1934. It is of interest to know that he was the first Northern Nigerian to study there⁵. He spent one year specializing in Chemistry and Biology. Unfortunately, after coming home for a holiday, he refused to go back on the ground that the whole curriculum taught in Yaba was

⁴- Dandatti, A., *The Poetry, Life and Opinions of Sa'adu Zungur*, Zaria: NNPC, Reprinted 2007, p.9

⁵- *Ibid*, p.10

too elementary and his conscience was not clear as to the value of the Yaba courses⁶. It was said in some accounts that he actually abandoned returning for some familial troubles and by the influence of some religious understanding; he developed when he was there⁷.

After a long contention about Sa'adu's refusal to continue his education at Yaba, it was decided in 1935 by the then Colonial masters that he should be posted to the Kano School of Hygiene to receive training as a Third Class Sanitary Inspector. But fortunately enough, it was discovered by the then Senior Health Officer that Sa'adu was far better than his mates. Therefore, he requested a prompt promotion for Sa'adu to the rank of Instructor. Passing the courses with distinction gave Sa'adu an opportunity of instantly becoming a teacher at that very school, where he was initially sent to learn. He remained there for three years, after which he transferred to the School of Hygiene in Zaria, where he stayed for five years until he was sent home for a chronic illness.

Sa'adu started trying to compose his idea in writing since when he was about twenty. According to some researchers, he began writing in 1934 during his stay at Yaba, where he composed a poem in Hausa, entitled "*Yaki da Shaidan*"⁸. It begins:

O, My Lord, the Beneficent, the Bounteous
Help me as I intend to fight calamities
But I have no sword, no spear, no knife
Neither do I have a shield so that I can shiver not
I have no armour; no helmet
Neither do I have a gun or a modern weapon
I found myself amidst calamities
I have no weapon but prayers and the Qur'an

Though this poem could be Sa'adu's first attempt in writing, the actual time suggested by some researchers for its composition is

⁶- Yakubu, Sa'adu Zungur, p.20

⁷- Ibid, p.402

⁸- Ibid, pp. 25; 292-297

not clear, because the writer himself had stated that it was when he was in one of the Western formal schools. He said:

The composer is Sa'adu, a teacher
Among the teachers in European schools⁹

During his stay at Yaba, Sa'adu had joined the Ahmadiyya Movement¹⁰. As an active member, he brought the sect to Nigeria and formed a branch in Kano for its activities¹¹. It seems he later understood the deviation of the Movement from the Sunni right path. Thereupon, he rejected them and resumed orthodoxy. Besides this, there is no report, which can assert that Sa'adu was deeply influenced by Ahmadiyya teaching or even that he adopted some of their core tenets.

Sa'adu was courageous and had possessed extra-ordinary personality with which he was able to gather round him wherever he situated. He was a typical social man with religious teaching at his sight always. Searching in the Qur'an was said, and grasping its message dominated the last segment of his life.

⁹- Yakubu, Sa'adu p.297

¹⁰-The Ahmadiyya is named after the name of its founder Mirza Asadullah Khan (1835-1908). The Movement, which sometimes is referred to as Qadyania, was established in 1885. Before its establishment, its founder had claimed to be a revivalist in 1885. He then promoted himself to be a Promised Mahdi and Messiah. He became a full-flagged prophet in 1901 receiving prophecies and revelation from God. In one revelation, he declared Jihad against oppressors as un-Islamic. But he later discovered that Ahmad Ghulam was an agent of British colonials. Many scholars, since the advent of the movement, have been mounting vehement attacks on it and exposing its entire hidden agenda. In December 1973 that the Muslim World League resolved that the Ahmadiyya/Qadyani Movement is heretical and its leadership is outside the fold of Islam. On 9th March, the resolution on the Ahmadiyya Movement was adopted by the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and Islamic Education, which declared that the movement is un-Islamic and a threat to the peace and stability of the Islamic world.

¹¹- Ibid, Sa'adu Zungur, p.26

Sa'adu was vocal, very determinant and ever ready to defend his religion at all costs. That made him engaged in so many religious debates and gave him the courage of composing write-ups for that purpose in the popular national and international newspapers. He used "Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo", a regional and Hausa language-based newspaper, for religious arguments, while the "West African Pilot," an English Language and national newspaper, served as his platform for political discussions. He also spread his wisdom in the "Eastern Nigeria Guardian", "Nigerian Spokesman", "Southern Nigerian Defender", the "Daily Comet"¹² among others.

He was able to write over 120 pieces most of which are in the Hausa and English languages. Mallam Aminu Kano had also credited to him using Arabic, the language that most Islamic learned people understood by then, to write a pamphlet against prohibited innovations¹³. The astonishing thing with regard to Sa'adu's writing is his enthusiasm to develop and introduce new knowledge to Hausa people.

In this respect, Sa'adu could be regarded as the first to write on *Ilm al Tajweed* (Science of Recantilation of the Qur'an) by translating the book "*Hirzul Amani*", which is a magnum opus in the science of Tajweed and various Qur'anic recitations. He also translated "*Kitab al Farq*" authored by Sheikh Usman bn Fodiyo into Hausa. The first idea of the translation of the Qur'an into Hausa could be credited to him because he believed that his people would not properly grasp the core of the message of the Qur'an if it was not translated into Hausa. He eventually started the work,¹⁴ but, seemingly, could not make significant progress because of the several works and ups and downs he suffered.

Sa'adu was behind the idea of initiating "Islamiyya Schools" in 1948¹⁵, in which, as he ear marked, the Islamic subjects like the

¹²- Ibid, p.45

¹³- Alhaji Aminu Kano, Rayuwar Ahmad Mahmud Sa'adu Zungur, Zaria: NNPC, 1973, p. 15

¹⁴- Dandatti, A., The Poetry, Life and Opinions of Sa'adu Zungur, p. 13

¹⁵- Alhaji Aminu Kano, Rayuwar Ahmad Mahmud Sa'adu Zungur, p.13

Qur'an, Hadith, Sirah and Nahwu would be taught with the students sitting on the chairs like that of the Western-style of schools. The arrangement was not successful, for it was turned down by the effort of some traditional Malams, who believed that the arrangement was meant primarily to deceive people to easily introduce the Boko system into the society. The effort was abortive until some ten years later, after the death of Sa'adu¹⁶.

Unlike the time of Shehu Usman, when women (like Nana Asma'u and Khadija, Sheikh Usman's daughters) were taught all sorts of knowledge and had full time to acquire knowledge to high position. Sa'adu was deeply worried in his time about the deteriorating of women's situation concerning education. He even wrote a lengthy paper, 'On the Question of Women's Education in Northern Nigeria'¹⁷. Sa'adu patronized Ajami script, for he practically used it in writing most of his Hausa poems like the 60-line poem "*Yaki da Shaidani*", and was keen to encourage people to write in it¹⁸.

When talking about Nigerian politics, Sa'adu's name would, of course, be among the first named. His contributions to Northern Nigeria are profound. He was actually a symbol of dedication and patriotism to his nation and people. He suffered from a long illness after which he died at forty-three (43) years old in 1958, may his soul rest in peace, amin.

3.0 The Concept Of Bid'ah

Before further explanation on the concept of Bid'ah, it is pertinent here to give a thorough description of its counterpart that is the "Sunnah". This word has been generally defined as the sayings, the actions and the tacit approvals or disapproval of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

The Sunnah, being the bedrock of understanding the essence of the Qur'an becomes, without any doubt, the second pillar in the whole of Islamic teachings. Its functions are numerous, especially in

¹⁶- Dandatti, A., *The Poetry, Life and Opinions of Sa'adu Zungur*, p. 15

¹⁷- *Ibid*, p. 13

¹⁸- Yakubu, Sa'adu Zungur, p. 10

giving minute details on the rituals and doctrines of the Qur'an. Allah (SWT) had granted this position to the Prophet (pbuh) as He says:

“We have not revealed to you the Book, (O Muhammad), except for you to make clear to them that wherein they have differed and as guidance and mercy for a people who believe” (Q 16:64).

As for the definition of Bid'ah there have been numerous, which depict its concept, but two of them would be enough for our consideration here. Imam Ahmad Zuruq (R) has given a vivid definition that: “linguistically, is a newly invented thing whatsoever and legally is inventing a new thing in the religion, resembling its forms, but not totally belonging to it. The gist of Bid'ah revolves on considering what is not ritual as full ritual.”

He continued: “The completeness of ritual is attained at only by preserving, procuring and strictly adhering to the legally prescribed form of that ritual. This would be by performing it inwardly and outwardly, without exaggeration or omission. Because the one who reduces from the ritual diminishes its spiritual value, while the exaggerator is the typical innovator, more especially if he assumes getting closeness to Allah through his innovative excess workload”¹⁹.

The other definition is from Imam Abu Is'haq al-Shatibi (R), who is actively famous against innovations. He defined it as “a newly invented way (beliefs or action) in the religion, in imitation of the Shari'a, by which nearness to Allah is sought, but not being supported by any authentic proof - neither in its essence, nor in the manner in which it is performed”²⁰.

¹⁹- Al-Rahuni, *Al Hashiyah, al Sharh al Zurqani*, Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 1978, vol.1 pp.139, 227

²⁰- Shatibi, Ibrahim bn Musa, *Al-I'tisam*, vol.1 p.37

The presentation of Sa'adu shows his apparent inclination to the definition of Shatibi, though he has not indicated clearly that in his definition. But the book of *Ihya As-Sunnah* of Sheikh Usman was undoubtedly one of his primary sources. In that book, Sheikh Dan Fodiyo has given a number of explanations from different scholars. Among it was the definition of Abu'l-Hassan as-Saghir. He said, "It is that which deviates from the Book, the Sunna and the Concensus".

According to Fakihani: "Strictly speaking, it is invented matters in the Deen, which appear as though they are from the Deen, but are not in actuality from it". Sheikh Ahmad Zaruq said: "The reality of innovation according to the Shari'a are invented matters in the Deen that resemble the Deen and look like they are from it, but are actually not from it. This regardless of this resemblance to the Deen is by form (*Bi al Surah*) or by meaning (*Bi al Haqiqah*). This is in accordance with the words of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh), 'Every invented thing is an innovation, and every innovation is an error'²¹".

The hadith quoted by Zaruq is a straightforward warning to people against the danger of innovation. It also ascertains the importance and the place of Sunnah in Islam. The Hadith is reported in the authority of Irbad bn Sariyah that the Prophet said: "You must adhere to my Sunnah and the way of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs who come after me. Adhere to it and cling to it strongly, and beware of newly-invented matters, for every newly-invented matter is an innovation (*bid'ah*) and every innovation is a going astray."²²

It is not only in Irbad's hadith that the Prophet (pbuh) drew the attention of his Ummah to the danger of innovation in the religion. There are numerous hadiths to that effect. It is pertinent to add one more hadith here. Jabir bn Abdullah (R.A) also narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) delivered a sermon and said, "The best speech is that embodied in the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the

²¹-Dan Fodio, *Ihya'u As-Sunnah Wa Ikhmadu al-Bid'ah*, p.

²²-Abu Dawud, *Al Sunan*, vol. 2, p.610, No. 4607

guidance given by Muhammad (pbuh). The most evil affairs are their innovations; and every innovation is an error."²³

Bid'ah, of course, is the most dangerous attachment to the true religion. For this purpose, our ancestors' advice was to keep rapt attention to the activities of the innovator. Mu'adh bn Jabal has rightly given insightful words for one to ponder over in order to take heed. He said, "Soon a man will say: 'why don't the people follow men when I have read the Qur'an?' They will not follow me until I innovate something else for them. So beware of that which is innovated, for that which is innovated is misguidance. And beware of the deviation of a man of wisdom, for the Devil may utter words of misguidance on the lips of a man of wisdom, and a hypocrite may speak a word of truth."

Someone asked Mu'adh: "How could I tell when the man of wisdom speaks a word of misguidance, and the hypocrite speaks a word of truth?" He said: "Rather, avoid the wise man's words that become well known and it is said about them: What is this? And that should not avert you from him, because he may retract it. And you should accept the truth when you hear it, for the truth has light."²⁴

A careful understanding of the nature of Bid'ah will give an impression that it is far more than reprehensible (Makruh only); it is, undoubtedly, prohibited with relation to the ritual acts, as Sa'adu indicates in line (44). This is conformant with the Shari'a, where it leaves an open window for developing creative thinking and providing constructive innovations within the worldly affairs realm.

This includes building, metal works, electronics, carpentry, etc. All the scriptural texts are particular about the addition to or subtraction from rituals (Ibadat), the area, which should be properly taken accordingly without approving an iota of innovation. But in worldly affairs there is no harm, Islamically speaking, in

²³-Muslim, Al Sahih, (vol. 10, p.511-Nawawi)

²⁴- Abu Dawud, Al Sunan, vol. 5, p.164, No. 4611

creating innovative activities and developing it in as much as people benefit from it.

The Prophet (pbuh) passed by some people who were busy with pollination and said: "If they would not do this, then it would still come out right!". The date crop that resulted was of a very poor quality. Then he passed by them and asked, "What is with your date palms?" They said, "You had told us such-and-such!" He said: "You know best the affairs of your worldly life!"²⁵

When viewed carefully, all the Ibadat revolves around a six-fold apothegm and people must observe their Ibadat within the prescription of the Shari'a without addition or subtraction. Thus, the six are Cause /Reason, Manner of performance, location, time, and quantity, species.

3.1 Cause/Reason

Most Ibadat are based on reasons that call for observing them. The only thing needed in the Shari'a is to do it for the reason is due. No need to create a reason for doing any Ibadah. Take an example of performing two Raka'ats immediately after entering a mosque (*Tahiyat al Masjid*). It is allowed according to some narratives to be done whenever one enters a mosque with no restriction. The two Eids are also a typical example of performing Ibadat for their duly reasons. If someone concocted a reason for conducting a certain rite or service without evidence from the Shari'a, it will be regarded as Bid'ah. Some people celebrate the nights of the 27th of Rajab and 15th Sha'aban as sacred nights, but with no textual evidence.

3.2 Manner of Performance

The manner and the way of observing every Ibadah is diametrically settled. The way of performing ablution, Salat, the Hajj, the daily adhkar and other forms of Ibadat are all specified by the Shari'a. Any attempt to have a new manner and mode of performing Ibadat should be turned away as an innovation.

²⁵- Muslim, Al Sahih, (vol. 15, p.166-Nawawi)

3.3 Location

The Shari'a has fixed certain locations for performing some Ibadat. Removing any should be viewed as innovation, nullifying the act totally. I'tikaf and Hajj rituals, as examples, are always observed in the Mosque and at the stipulated places in Makka, respectively, not at one's own home.

3.4 Time

The time for actualizing the Ibadat is also taken care of. The Shari'a has specified times for doing each Ibadah. Hence, no need to change the times or innovating new ones. Doing so is typically Bid'ah.

3.5 Quantity

If a specific number is required for a certain Ibadah, let the true believer observe it the way it is needed with no addition or subtraction. Whence the quantity is not fixed, the Ibadat is open; one can do all that he deems. Attaching limits to it or reducing from the amount will render the Ibadah meaningless.

3.6 Species

For the ultimate wisdom of the Lawgiver, he organized the Ibadat in such a way that every single Ibadah revolves within its type with no intermixing between genres. Slaughtering for sacrifice is confined only to the camel, the cow and the sheep; no other animal is allowed. That is why the opinion of Imam Ibn Hazm in allowing people to sacrifice a horse²⁶ during the Eid al Kabir festival is rejected. This is because it is not among the species legally allowed and for not having good further evidence in the Shari'a on that effect.

All innovations in religion, if crosschecked meticulously, are contrary to the one or more of the aforementioned specifications, which, in essence, serve as parameters of sifting innovative acts from Sunnah-assertive ones. One has to be careful and search persistently for a reason with regards to any new act introduced to

²⁶ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Muhalla*, vol.6, pp.29-30

him. It is not true that there are some "Good Bid'ah". Abdullah bn Umar had shut down such errant door by saying: "Every Bid'ah is an errant, even though people deemed it good"²⁷.

The above saying of Abdullah bn Umar, who was known for his stickiness to the prophetic Sunnah, is also a clear indication to the obliteration of the broader division of Bid'ah into five, namely, Wajibah (Compulsory), Mandubah (Recommended), Mubah (Reprehensible), Makruh (Permitted) and Haram (Forbidden).

Observing some Bid'ah, ironically, is considered compulsory, according to some scholars, for the evidences that grant it to be so. This is like compilation of the Qur'an, recording and documenting books on language, theology and other branches of knowledge. Bid'ah is considered "Mandubah" when it fits the characteristics of legal recommendation like offering Salat Taraweeh. And it is being "Haram" whenever it conforms with the features of forbidden. This is like the innovative sects such as anthropomists, Quranites, Ahmadiyyah, etc. Some Bid'ah are at the level of reprehensible and disliked according to the evidences. "Mubah" is the position, which encompasses permissibility when there is no clear-cut evidence of permission or forbidding, like eating delicious food and living in good houses, etc.

This is the summary of the idea. But it is built upon the linguistic aspect of the word "Bid'ah". Sheikh Izz al-Deen Ibn Abdussalam was the first one to classify the innovation to five and from him took the other scholars. Bid'ah, as he holds, is an abstract name that can take one of the five rulings²⁸. But, as it is clear, the view has included the worldly affairs among the Bid'ah, which, in essence, deserves not be included in the Bid'ah list, for the simple reason that Bid'ah is confined only to the religious matters.

²⁷- Al-Lalaka'i, *Sharh 'Usul 'Itiqad Ahl al-Sunnah*, vol.2, p.26

²⁸- Izz al Deen, *Qawa'id al Ahkam Fi Islah al Anam*. Beirut: Dar al Ma'arif, pp.172-3

4.0 The Poem's Message

According to one view, the poem was composed around 1943/1944 after a lengthy debate on the pages of *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*²⁹ about genuflection and bowing to human beings as a sign of honour and respect. Sa'adu had strongly supported the prohibition on the basis that no worthwhile scriptural evidence accounts positively for the act.

He further posed some question in an affirmation tone, which include "is there any evidence from Bukhari and Muslim or Kasdalanī's *Mawahibul Ladunniya* where Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) instructed any of his disciples to prostrate on the ground to greet him as mark of respect and affection? The Prophet (pbuh) had even stated that 'Genuflection and prostration are not permitted before anyone except God'."

However, such a view doesn't go well with other people. They wrote in contrary to Sa'adu asserting the legality of genuflection. After debating on the issue, the editor-in-chief closed the discussion and left the judgment to the discretion of the reader. But Sa'ad was not so satisfied, so he took his pen and went further!

It is not easy to connect the debate on genuflection to the penning of this poem. This is because Sa'adu did not mention or indicate a single word of that long-end discussion. I supposedly believed that the poem was written only to correct the incorrect notion about Bid'ah, more especially with regard to the reliance upon Allah, the habit of taking indiscriminate oaths and offering supplication in a bad manner. This is about the purpose that gave birth to the poem. As for its setup, it is a couplet, two lines with an ending of a letter "a" as "*Kafiyya*" in *al-Basit meter*³⁰.

The poem is opened with conventional doxology, which consists of six verses in which he sought Allah's refuge from Satan and made praises to the Prophet (pbuh), his Siblings, Companions and all those who followed their guidance until the day of resurrection. In

²⁹- Yakubu, Sa'adu Zungur, p.101

³⁰- Dandatti, A., *The Poetry, Life and Opinions of Sa'adu Zungur*, p.35

the end, the poem ends with a prayer to Allah to guide the innovators with the hope they cling to the rope of Allah and leave innovations.

The poem falls under Wa'azi Verse (Admonitory Poems), which is based on warning and drawing attention to the right path, using Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths³¹. This poem, in the main, is not like the common type of Wa'azi; rather Sa'adu talked about advanced issues. Though it is a common mistake in the society, the address was made directly to the elites. Sa'adu identified the realm of the poem in two lines:

15. O (you) brother who is enquiring about
Trust (upon Allah) and supplication devoid of innovation
16. The meaning of pre-destinations is stated
In the Book (Qur'an) and Sunnah free from innovation

Some researchers are of the opinion that Sa'adu based the poem on three things, reliance on Allah, supplication and oath³². But a careful scrutiny of the poem shows that the focus of Sa'adu was primarily on two things only, supplication and oath.

Reliance on Allah falls in the introductory part of the poem. Sa'adu, as is quite evident from the context, reminds the innovation-accuser to solicit Allah's support and relay upon Him alone.

4.1 The Danger of Pernicious Innovation

In the course of introduction, lines 7 to 14 were dedicated to setting the religious outlook about the innovations and the innovators. It contains one Qur'anic verse and three prophetic hadiths all used in a systematic way, which reconciles its meaning in order to explain the importance of sticking at the Sunnah and the danger of resorting to the Bid'ah.

³¹- Hiskett, Marvyn, *A History of Islamic Verse*, London: Redwood Burn Limited, 1975, pp.27-41

³²Ibrahim Y. and others, *Darussan Hausa*, Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2001, vol. 1, p.71

Sa'adu highlights the gist of innovation and views it as a splitting from the original mainstream of the religion, and it, of course, develops roadside cocoons. This has been the primal causal that led Jews and Christians astray. To support his view, Sa'adu referred to the popular hadith, which says: "The Jews split into seventy-one sects, all of which are in Hellfire except one; the Christians split into seventy-two sects, all of which are in Hellfire except one; and this Ummah will split into seventy-three sects, all of which are in Hellfire except one". In another narration, the Companions asked, "O Messenger of Allah! Who is the saved sect?" He (pbuh) said, "Those who follow the very same that I and my Companions follow today". In another narration, he said, "It is Al-Jama'ah (the group that remains adhering to that which the Prophet (pbuh) and his Companions followed); the Hand of Allah is over (the hands of) Al-Jama'ah"³³.

The saved people are also praised in the second hadith, which Sa'adu had also referred to. The hadith is reported in the authority of many companions from which were Mu'awiyah bn Abi Sufyan (R.A). He narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) had said, "There will always be a group from my Ummah that will be steadfast on the order of Allah, they will not be harmed by those who oppose them or abandon them, until the order of Allah comes and they will be triumphant over humankind"³⁴. The main purpose of their triumph is adhering to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah has called upon Muslims to do so. He says, "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided." (Q 3:103).

4.2 Reliance on Allah Against the Menace Of Innovators

It is also one of the main refrains of the poem to draw the attention of the innovation-accuser to be of a high degree of patience to challenges and hatred that might instantaneously face him. Sa'adu gave examples of about five to six kinds of character defamation awaiting the innovation-accuser in Hausaland. People may firstly show up as self-correcting advisers; that he should not indulge himself in such over-zealousness of religion, for it would not be

³³Tirmizi, *Al Sunan*, vol.4, p.466, No. 2166

³⁴Muslim, *Al Sahih*, (vol.13, p.65-Nawawi)

fitting to him as a man of integrity and will cause him an ill-ended landing. It is quite right if he chose to look away and shut his mouth. If he resisted, they will continue in tarnishing his image, threatening and insulting him given him bad names and ill descriptions. The following are some examples of these character defamation:

- i. Castigating the image of the innovation-accuser as an atheist and infidel.
- ii. Sometimes they may mention some great names but ungodly-scholars and innovation promoters so as to portray him as a loner in promulgating the "Sunnah", which they termed as "evil-deeds".
- iii. They may majestically ask about the progeny of the innovation-accuser just for bringing damage to his personality.
- iv. It is also simple to disagree with the knowledge-capacity of the innovator's accuser.
- v. In other cases, they may show sources of their innovations as inherited from their ancestors and grandfathers.
- vi. Sometimes, he can be ridiculed the innovation accuser's view as foolish and unguided.

Despite all these, as Sa'adu advised, the innovation-accuser would not give up, but has to double his efforts and take heed from the Prophets and pious scholars, who, with all their strength, fought restlessly against Bid'ah.

A number of the Qur'anic verses depict the struggle of the Prophets in explaining the right-path to their people. Eventually after a long-suffering, the prophets were the triumphant. Sa'ad has referred to some verses to confirm the nature of people in casting the truth aside, such as "If they turn away, (O Muhammad), say, 'Sufficient for me is Allah; there is no deity except Him. On Him I have relied, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne'" (Q9:129). He also said: "If they turn away-then know that Allah is your protector. Excellent is the protector and Excellent is the helper" (Q8:40).

Understanding this is what Islamically, called 'Reliance upon Allah' (At-Tawakkul), for He is the Omnipotent and the Owner of everything. In addition to the aforementioned verse, there is a good deal of other verses talking much about the observance of Tawakkul and its fruitful consequences in this world and the Hereafter.

The effective *Tawakkul* strengthens the Muslim heart to strive at any costs for the defense of the truth, endure tribulations, and menace for spreading the right course. It also serves as a resourceful energy, which helps in resolving complications. In this regard, Sa'adu penned his view with the last three verses of the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an in which Allah says: "It is You we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path-The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked Your anger or those who are astray" (Q 1:5-7).

5.0 The Nature of True Du'a (Invocation)

As background for performing excellent supplication, Sa'adu drew peoples' attention to the two essential basics for getting true salvation, namely, sincerity and having pure intention towards actions and refraining oneself from attending places or seasonal sittings with witches, sorceries, diviners and fortune-tellers for the sake of getting their help and pieces of advice.

It is authentically narrated that "The invocation is purely Ibadah"³⁵. So by and large, a true Du'a needs a good intention for it is entirely directed to Allah, the Almighty, who has said: "And your Lord says, "Call upon Me; I will respond to you. Indeed, those who disdain My worship will enter Hell rendered contemptible" (Q40:60). This verse explains clearly the significance of Du'a and cannot be divinely accepted until it is sincerely observed; nothing was associated with Allah in it. For associating others with Him divinely nullifies its effect. Malam Zungur said:

³⁵- Abu Dawud, Al-Sun...

50. Just adhere firmly and cease consorting at fetish places
And the shrines of fortune-tellers and lot casters
51. If it is attention you need over all affairs
You only need purify your intention

With regards to the expressing of the Du'a, Sa'adu opens up some important issues. The most vital of them is about allowing the supplicant to utter his Du'a in a language that he/she is conversant with not necessarily Arabic. Of course, the scholars have different juristic views concerning the issue. Most of them are of the opinion that Arabic should be the language that all supplications should be uttered through. This is for the sacredness of the language and for the fear of using talismans and other obscure expressions, which will end up as Shirk! It is obvious in the Islamic tenets that whatever leads to polytheism would be immediately stained and people should be overwhelmingly turned away from.

However, this view has not been unanimous. Some other jurists viewed the essence of Du'a as invoking Allah to give something or taking refuge with Him from other undesirable things. Thus, the content can be expressed in any language easier to the supplicant. More especially there is, for certain, no clear-cut scriptural text, which prohibits using other languages. Despite the fact that the Qur'anic and prophetic supplications all are in Arabic, this would not be conclusive evidence. It just happened like that and deserved not to be taken as ultimate evidence that can hinder one from using his language!

Expressing the Du'a in the supplicant's language, both inside the Salat and outside, makes the supplicant, comfortably, more devoted and focused. But, it is quite right that there are some instances in which specific Arabic coinages are only suitable, except for those who excusably could not utter it³⁶. This includes the Qur'anic and

³⁶-Khalil bn Ishaq, *At Taudih Sharh Mukhtasar bn al Hajib*, Beirut: Dar Kutob Al-Ilmiyah, 1sted, 2011, vol. 1 pp.385-386; Al Dusuqi, *Al Hashiyah*, Beirut: Dar al Fikr, vol. 1 p.233; Al Adawi, *Al-Hashiyah Ala Sharh al-Kharshi Ala Mukhtasar al-Khalil*, vol.1 p.292; Al-Nawawi, *Al Majmu'*, vol.3 p.436

Prophetic supplications, such as saying Tashahhud, the Adhan, etc. Beside such specifics, it is allowed to do personal supplications in whatsoever language. Imam Malik was of this view. He, according to Sheikh Al Mawwaq, was asked about uttering supplication in languages other than Arabic and his reply was in the affirmative³⁷. Backing his view with a Qur'anic verse: "Allah does not charge a soul except with that within its capacity" (Q 2:286).

Sheikh al Islam Ibn Taimiyyah has rightly said, "It is permissible to make Du'a in Arabic and in language other than Arabic; Allah knows the intention of the supplicant and what he wants no matter what language he speaks, because He hears all the voices in all different languages, asking for all kinds of needs"³⁸.

For the sake of good observance, there are three conditions for expressing the Du'a in other languages. These are:

1. The supplication should be within the accepted realm of the Islamic teaching.
2. Selecting good, lucid and well-understood words. Sa'adu was particular about understanding the meaning. This is because most supplications being used by "*Bokaye*" and "*Malaman Tsibbu*" are meaningless, but ignorance together with whimsical desire prevents them and all those who follow them from realizing that.
3. Avoidance of vulgar language or containing illegal spell. Making Du'a, as is observed, is a part parcel of Hausa people's culture; they have extra-ordinary belief in its efficacy, though most of them are trapped by wrong supplications prescribed to them by the ungodly Malams.

Concerning these three points, Sa'adu said:

52. It (your prayer) must not be in Arabic with Allah
(That is) if you lack the knowledge of grammar of rafa'a
53. Praise Allah with the language you are conversant with
In as much as there is purity of faith devoid of innovation

³⁷- Al Mawwaq, al Taj Wa al Ikleel on Mukhtasar,

³⁸-Ibn Taimiyyah, Al Fatawa, vol.22 pp.488-489

54. The conditions for saying (proper) prayers in Arabic is difficult
But try and know its meaning to the best of your ability
55. If you do not understand the meaning, your words are mere chattering
An empty talk that is neither a request nor a prayer
56. And if the meaning is not known and there is no purity of faith. And there is no full intention, it is an innovation
.....
60. But any other form of prayer from whoever
It is obligatory to know its meaning to avoid innovation
61. All in all, say the prayer in your language
If there is no thorough knowledge of Arabic language
62. Only that regulations governing prayer are a bit difficult
We must splash away the traditions of innovators

Sa'adu believed that for every rule there shall be an exception, which is a quite popularly known maxim among the jurists, as "the exception proves the rule". He said:

57. Undoubtedly, for every rule there is an exception
Except the Qur'an which it unrivalled
58. The condition is only one provided there is diction
An impeccable Arabic, then it becomes prayer
59. However, their reward is not the same for recitation
He who understands the meaning of complete prayer

The du'a with the Qur'anic words is allowed for being in its pure Arabic sense even if the supplicant does not properly grasp the meaning. But there is a difference actually between the one who can understand what he recites and the one who is only uttering the words without catching its connotations. Sa'adu's reasoning is sound, for the Qur'an itself, generally, calls for the understanding of its meaning. Allah says: "Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?" (Q47:24; 4:82).

5.1 Taking Deceptive Oath

There are about 22 couplets, which Sa'ad dedicated solely to explaining the dangers of taking an illegal oath intentionally and the prohibition of much swearing randomly. Allah alone, as provided by Islam, is the only entity that a Muslim should take an oath and swear by; not any other dignified person, object or authority is legally allowed to be glorified by an oath except Him. 'Abdullah bn 'Umar reported that the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) met 'Umar bn al-Khattab while he was proceeding with a group of riders and swearing by his father! He said, 'Allah forbids you from swearing by your fathers. If someone swears, he should swear by Allah or be silent'³⁹. Sa'adu made reflections and said:

81. Whoever wants to swear if He is a Muslim
A true believer who is discerning and very submissive
82. Would swear by Allah or keep away completely
According to Islamic injunction free from innovation

Sa'adu observed the custom of Hausa people, where they simplify swearing by others than Allah. A typical Hausa man would not feel erroneous to swear by the tomb of his ancestors or by the dignified clerics, those who admire most, such as Sheikh Abdulkadir al-Jaylani, Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani or Sheikh Usman bn Fodio and others. They would prefer to swear by their Sheikhs and other deities against confession of the truth or denying whatever is not truth without swearing.

In Sa'adu's notion, doing all such things is but a sign of ignorance. An insightful and obedient Muslim would swear by Allah, His names or His attributes only. If not, he would prefer to refrain from doing the act; how good it will be to him. 'A'isha said that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "Whoever vows to obey Allah, should obey Him. Whoever vows to disobey Him, should not disobey Him."⁴⁰ Sa'adu resorted to the closer legal book to quote Ibn Abi Zayd al

³⁹- Bukhari, Al Sahih, vol. 11, p. 530, N. 6646

⁴⁰- Bukhari, Al Sahih, vol. 11, p.581, No. 6696

Qayrawani for ascertaining his claim: "Someone who swears should swear by the name of God or keep silent."⁴¹

Despite this textual evidence, there are some thoroughbred illiterate people, who would continue searching for any possible interpretation how weak it is to legalize their innovative oaths. Doing such a thing is not good and people who engage in it are heading towards their destruction. Malam Sa'adu draws the attention of some Hausa people, who misuse the excuses allowed by the Shari'a in an unintentional oath to set themselves free from *Kaffarat* of what they have intentionally uttered. The Qur'an says "Allah doesn't impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing".

On these issues, Sa'adu said:

65. You will never hear him swearing by Allah
In support of his argument-for he is an innovator
66. He would only swear by the tomb of his grandfather
Or by his aged father in the court of the innovators
67. Or he swear by the past Sheikhs (learned scholars)
To support his word, alas! The innovator
68. He even swear by Ahmad Sheikh Tijjani
Or sheikh Jailani, assuming that he has shown submission
69. Or by thunderbolt confirming his fetish worship
In the infidel mode of swearing during the age of the
innovators
70. Likewise our Shehu Dan Hodiyo and his tomb
Are among the swearing things of innovators
-
73. In short, any typical ignorant man
Swear by his gray hairs for innovation

⁴¹-Qayrawani, Abdullah Ibn-Abi-Zayd, *The Risala: Treatise on Maliki Law*, Annotated and translated by Joseph Kenny, Nigeria: Islamic Education Trust, 1st Ed., 1992, p.110

Sa'adu talked further about two complicated issues. One is about the instances in which others vow to the prophets and Angels. Two is swearing by the Qur'an. He said:

71. And if the matter aggravates to its peak
In order to intensify the word of the innovators' court
72. Then they swear by the Prophet or the Qur'an
And the Benefactor-Angels in the innovators' court

As for the first issue, Sa'adu is of the opinion that Prophets do not legally deserve to be uttered in an oath for the simple reason of being creatures. The issue is debatable among the scholars. Some great scholars of the Maliki School of Law like Al-Lakhmi and Al-Qarafi⁴² had declared swearing by the creations whatsoever even the great Prophets like Prophet Muhammd (pbuh) or Ka'aba as prohibited. And the view was supported by the majority of Maliki jurists like Imam Khalil bn Ishaq al-Jundy⁴³, though Imam Ibn Rushd, the grandfather, viewed it as detestable (*Makruh*) only⁴⁵.

Imam Abu Hanifa and the entire scholars of his school were of the opinion that involving others than Allah, such as Prophets and the Angels, in oath is not permissible at all for they are part of the creations, who are prohibited to be sworn by⁴⁶. Imam Shafi'i also was reported to declare swearing by Ka'aba or a Companion or any scholar as sinful⁴⁷.

It was Imam Ahmad bn Hanbal only who was reported to hold two different views. The first view is the prohibition of such swearing, like the view of other jurists. The second is allowing one to swear

⁴²- Al Qarafi, *Al Zakhirah*, vol.3 pp.24-29

⁴³-Al-Ubbiy, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol.4 pp.366-367; Al Hattab, *Mawahib Al Jalil Sharh Mukhtasar al-Khalil*, vol.4, p.404

⁴⁵-Ibn Rushd, the grandfather, *Al Fatawa*, vol. 3 p.1623; Al Washarisi, *Al Mi'yar al Mu'rib*, vol.12, p.315

⁴⁶- Ibn Nujaym al Hanafi, *Al Bahr Al Ra'iq Sharh Kanz Al Daqa'iq*, vol.4, p.481

⁴⁷- Ibn Qudamah, *Al Mugni*, vol.13 p.436

by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) only. Some great scholars who admire the Hanbalite School of Jurisprudence like Qadi Abu Ya'la and Ibn 'Aqil al Hanbali adopted this view. The view was also adhered to much the same by Sheikh Izzu al Din Ibn Abdussalam from outside the Hanbali School of Law⁴⁸.

The statement reported from Imam Ahmad, however, is not a clear-cut indication to the allowance. He said: "Whenever someone swears directly by the right of the Prophet, the oath is enacted, and the violation obligates expiation (*kaffara*)". The statement was given various interpretations. The most popular is prohibition. This is because, scholars argue, testimony with the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) is part and parcel of Kalimat al Shahadah. And this implies that when one swears by the Prophet (pbuh), it is as if he is swearing by Allah. But the interpretation is not solely accepted.

Majority of the prominent Hanbalite scholars, such as Ibn Qudama, Shams al-Din al-Maqdisi, Ibn Munajja, Ibn Taimiyyah and a host of others, all refuted the interpretation for opening a door to having associates with Allah in oath, which, in essence, does not oblige any *Kaffara*⁴⁹.

This, of course, is the most correct view. Adhering to other views is unwarranted for, at least, lacking solid ground from the Qur'an and authentic narrations. It might be for this reason and many others, when Ibn Qasim asked his master Imam Malik about swearing with creations, his answer was firmly prohibition. He even said, "Whoever wants to swear let him swear by Allah alone"⁵⁰. And Imam Ibn Bashir and Ibn al-'Arabi al-Maliki both from Maliki School of Law had asserted the view of prohibition⁵¹.

So, Malam Sa'adu was absolutely right with regard to the prohibition of swearing and taking oath with creations.

⁴⁸- Ibn Abdussalam, *Fatawa Sultan al 'Ulama*, p.82-3

⁴⁹- *Ibid*, vol. 13 pp.472; 436-8

⁵⁰- *Suhnun, Al-Mudawwanah al Kubra*, vol. p.581

⁵¹- Ibn Arabi al Maliki, *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol.2 p.149-150

Notwithstanding warning people about fake swearing, the poem touched at one of the most pitiful cultures in Hausaland, where a typical Hausa man, who lives an ignoramus life, could shamefully swear on lies and take oaths while laughing without due consideration to its danger. An oath, of course, is not a hilarious thing; it is truth that shall be taken as serious. Malam Zungur says:

74. But if you hear him swear by Allah know that he is lying
And begins to suspect you of cracking a joke
75. Or if he is laughing the statement is false
Even if he utters 'By Allah' he is joking
76. Just because there is an excuse for an unintended oath
(He thinks that) Allah does not punish on account of that.

As for the second issue, swearing by the Qur'an, Sa'adu had talked about it among the prohibited types of vowing. But, in fact, contrary to Sa'adu, this type of swearing is strongly permissible for the simple reason that the Qur'an is Allah's eternal word; a status that gives it credibility of taking oath by. This was the view of overwhelming jurists⁵².

Among all the jurists, it was only the early Hanafi scholars who deemed swearing by the Qur'an as prohibited on the ground that, according to Imam Al-Sarkhasi⁵³, the Qur'an had not been customarily used to swear by. However, when it becomes the custom of the people, the latter scholars of the same School like Sheikh Kamal al-Din Ibn Humam al-Hanafi⁵⁴ revised the Fatwa and allowed it. Henceforth, there is consensus on the issue.

After dwelling on all these crucial issues, Malam Sa'adu had never given up getting those who go astray back to the Sunnah. So, he concluded by praying better for them saying:

⁵²- Qurdubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Cairo: Dar Kutub al-Misriyya, 2nd ed., 1964, vol.6 p270; Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mugni*, Cairo, 1968, vol.9 0.504

⁵³- Al Sarkhasi, *Al-Mabsut*, Bayrut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1993, vol.5 p.49

⁵⁴- Ibn Humam, *Sharh Fat'hu al-Qadir*, vol.5 p.69

85. We pray to Allah the Almighty to guide them
(So that) they cling to the rope of Allah and leave
innovations

6.0 Conclusion

The Prophet (pbuh) had talked strongly against innovators. One of the narrations in which he described their danger is what Abu Sa'id al-Khudri reported from him (pbuh) saying: "Soon there will appear disagreement and dissension in my people; there will be people who will be good in speech and bad in work. They recite the Qur'an, but it does not pass their collar-bones. They will swerve from the religion as an arrow goes through the animal shot at. They will not return to it till the arrow comes back to its notch. They are worst of the people and animals. Happy is the one who kills them and they kill him. They call to the book of Allah, but they have nothing to do with it. He who fights against them will be nearer to Allah than them."⁵⁵ The article has briefly highlighted the contribution of Shehu Usman bn Fodiyo and his cohorts and their efforts against Bid'ah. A brief biography of Malam Sa'adu Zungur and his contributions to Islam and Northern Nigeria were given. The paper gives a concise explanation of the concept of Bid'ah and the prohibition and refutation of the idea of categorizing it into divisions. The full text of the poem was not provided in the paper, but it falls, of course, under the admonitory type of poems. Its main themes are making supplications in a language other than Arabic and warning people against deceptive swearing. The views of different jurists along with their legal evidence were tendered upon any issue discussed in the paper in order to have a balanced-sheet or a balanced portrayal, making the most correct view. The paper points out some issues contrary to Malam Zungur's and shed light on some of the views he touched upon briefly. All is a tribute to Sa'du's contribution against Bid'ah!

⁵⁵- Abu Dawud, *Al Sunan*, vol.2, p.657, No. 476

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