



**Journal of**

**THE NIGERIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF  
ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES**

*Kano State Branch*

**NATAIS**

**Volume 4, June 2016/Ramadhan 1437 AH**

ISSN 2536-6092



9 772536 609002



والصلاة والسلام على أشرف المرسلين سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم

All Rights reserved. No part or whole of this journal is allowed to be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior permission of the Copyright owner.

**ISSN: 2536-6092**

ISSN 2536-6092



**© All Rights Reserved**

**NATAIS Journal for Arabic and Islamic Studies  
Volume [4] June, 2016 = Ramadhan, 1437 AH**

**NATAIS**

**Kano Branch - Nigeria**

**CORRESPONDENCES**

Email : [saniayagi@hotmail.com](mailto:saniayagi@hotmail.com); [saniayagi@gmail.com](mailto:saniayagi@gmail.com)  
GSM : +234 8027371117, 08037036172, 08066989432



Printed & Published by:

**NATAIS, Kano State Branch**

Kano Nigeria. Tel: +234 8027371117, 08037036172

E-mail: [saniayagi@gmail.com](mailto:saniayagi@gmail.com)

Kano State, Nigeria



**SHAYKH ISA WAZIRI (1925-2013): A RESPECTED SCHOLAR AND A *MUFASSIR* PER EXCELLENCE**

By

**Dr. Usman Sani Abbas**

Department Of Islamic Studies And Shariah

AND

Centre For Qur'anic Studies

Bayero University, Kano

**Abstract**

*The essence of tafsir is to convey the message of the Qur'an to the whole mankind. The teachings of tafsir are meant to guide the general affairs of mankind in consonance with the commandments of Allah. In Northern Nigeria, a great number of mufassirun do not concentrate to convey Qur'anic message properly; but instead they focus attention to interpret the Qur'an to suit their own ideologies. Hence, to attract the attention of their students and followers. This has in fact, made some mufassirun to make use of tafsir as the expansion drive for their ideologies; and this worsened the level of disunity among Muslims in Northern Nigeria. However, there are few mufassirun whose main concern is not to try to justify their ideologies on the platform of tafsir, but only to interpret the Qur'an. Among these mufassirun was late Grand Imam and later the Waziri of Kano, Shaykh Isa Waziri. This paper presents his biography, methodology and focus of his tafsir.*

**Introduction**

This paper presents Shaykh Isa Waziri's biography and his contributions to Islam. It then shows how his *tafsir* circle was established, the methodology of his *tafsir*, and the area of emphasis of his *tafsir*. It was his approach to *tafsir* more especially those aspects or areas which he strongly emphasized while conducting the Ramadan *tafsir* which made him a respected scholar and a *Mufassir* per excellence.

**His Birth and Education**

He was Isa Ibn Muhammad Gidado Ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Mustafa Ibn Abu Bakr Ibn al-Mustafa, a descendant of Goni Mukhtar, a disciple of Shaykh Uthman Ibn Fudi and the *jihad* flag bearer to Misau. He was born at Tudun Wuzurci in Kano City in 1925. He studied elementary Islamic and Arabic from his father. Later, he studied at different Qur'anic and *Zaure* schools.<sup>1</sup>

In 1936, he was admitted into Judicial School Shahuci, Kano. His classmates include Abu Bakr Jakada and Nasir Mustafa. On the completion of studies at the Judicial school, he was admitted into Kano Law School in 1940. Some of his mates again in the school also include Abu Bakr Jakada and Nasir Mustafa. He graduated from Kano Law School in 1944 with an excellent result.<sup>2</sup>

In 1962, Shaykh Isa with some Northern Nigeria students secured admission into the famous al-Azhar University, Cairo. They graduated in 1967. The other students were: Abu Bakr Jakada, Imam al-Din Bello, Abdurrazaq Ilorin, Balarabe Dawud (Plateau Province), Muhammad Dan Yalwa and Nasir Mu'adh (Kano). These were admitted into the College of Islamic Legal Studies under the university. There were others who were absorbed into different colleges within the university. They include Suwaid Ahmad, Hussain Sufi, Ali Na'ibi Suwaid, and Idris Kuliya Alkali. Shaykh Isa Waziri studied Islamic Law with reference to the Maliki school of Law.<sup>3</sup>



### **His Working Career**

Immediately he graduated from Kano Law School in 1944, he taught some Arab children at Dahdou Yusuf School, Kantin Kwari. Later on, he moved to Sa'id Shor School established mainly for the children of the latter and those of his brother Ali Shor. <sup>4</sup>

In 1967, he was posted to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies at Bichi Teachers' Training College. In 1969, he was transferred to the School for Arabic Studies, Kano. In 1971, he transferred to the Judiciary as *Alkali*. In 1974, he was transferred to Sumaila and later to Gezawa and then to Shahuci in Kano City. He came to Shahuci from Gezawa during working days. It was on his way from Gezawa to Shahuci that he had an accident and was admitted to the Dala Orthopaedic Hospital for two months. <sup>5</sup> In 1980, after he was discharged from the hospital, he decided to leave the services of the judiciary and transferred to his earlier teaching profession. Shaykh Isa was posted to Government Arabic Teachers' College, Gwale, Kano as the vice Principal. He was there up to 1989 when he retired from the civil service. <sup>6</sup>

### **His Da'awah Activities**

The name of Shaykh Isa Waziri is known in Nigeria and beyond. He started preaching since 1960's. He presented numerous lectures in post-primary schools, tertiary institutions and universities, and on the request of some Islamic Organizations in Kano and Nigeria in general. In fact, I do not know of any Islamic Scholar in Nigeria who has presented as many lectures as Shaykh Isa Waziri. He told me while interviewing him in 2002 for my Ph.D research that as at those years, he had presented over one thousand lectures, and they were all available with him. The examples of the areas covered by his lectures include: obedience to Allah and His Prophet (SAW), obedience to parents, respect for teachers and elders, patience, honesty, sincerity, hardworking and tolerance. <sup>7</sup>

### **Shaykh Isa Waziri as an Imam**

The late Head of State General Murtala Muhammad (1938-1976) was assassinated on 13<sup>th</sup> of February, 1976. He was buried at Hausawa quarters along Zoo Road, Kano. In order to immortalize his good name, a new Friday mosque was erected very close to this grave. The mosque was officially opened by the first civilian Governor of Kano State, Alhaji Muhammad Abubakar Rimi (1940-2011) and His Highness, the Emir of Kano Alhaji Ado Bayero (b. 1930) led the first Friday prayer. Immediately after the Friday prayer, the Emir of Kano appointed Shaykh Isa Waziri as the *Imam* of the mosque which is popularly called *Masallacin Murtala* in Hausa. <sup>8</sup>

As the *Imam*, Shaykh Isa Waziri; was one of the most intelligent *Imams* in Kano. This is because he delivered his Friday *Khutbah* (sermon) based on the current conditions of people. His Friday sermon covered all areas of human endeavour. <sup>9</sup>

### **Shaykh Isa as The Waziri of Kano**

Shaykh Isa Waziri was a scholar in the real sense of the word scholarship. He was very sincere, morally upright, straight forward, hard working, well focused, well determined, very eloquent and well respected by all and sundry.

It was in view of Shaykh Isa Waziri's competence and stirring qualities that the Emir of Kano Alhaji Ado Bayero appointed him after the death of his senior brother Waziri Shehu Gidado. As a disciplinarian, a teacher and a scholar with wealth of experience and versatility of Islamic education, Shaykh Isa Waziri was appointed in some committees at different times during his lifetime.<sup>10</sup> For example, a member, Kano State Societal Re-



orientation Committee (1986-87), a member, Bayero University Disciplinary Committee (1988-89), Chairman, Kano State Pilgrims Board (1981), Chairman of the *Da'wah* Committee of Kano State Pilgrims Board (1983), Chairman, Kano State Students Disciplinary Committee (1986-88), Chairman, *Da'wah* Sub-Committee of Kano State Council of *Ulama* (1989) and member, Federal Government College Students' Ethical Committee (1987).<sup>11</sup>

### History of the Title of Waziri in Kano Sarauta

In 1903, after the appointment of Muhammad Abbas as the Emir of Kano, he appointed Muhammad Gidado to be In-charge of the judiciary. He later became the Chief *Alkali* of the whole Emirate (1903-1909). One of the servants of the Emir's palace Danrimi Allah bar Sarki was also appointed as the Waziri in 1903. This was also the instruction of the then newly arrived colonial administrators who showed considerable lack of insight of the traditional institution of Kano. Emir Abbas was, therefore, the first Emir during the British rule. So also Danrimi Allah bar Sarki was the first Waziri of Kano during the British rule. The method of Danrimi's appointment brought about serious drift between him the Emir Abbas. The relationship between Waziri Danrimi and Emir Abbas become sour. This situation was arrested when the then British Governor Lord Lugard visited Kano in 1909 and ordered the immediate removal of Danrimi as the Waziri of Kano.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the responsibility of appointing a new Waziri was vested on the Emir. Hence, the appointment of Muhammad Gidado as the Waziri of Kano in 1909. The Emir later came up with new criteria for selecting the Waziri of Kano. This criteria discouraged the appointment of Waziri either from the ruling house or its servants and that the Waziri must be a reputable Islamic scholar. He must also be morally upright and well accepted by all and sundry. Emir Abbas died in 1919 and was succeeded by Shehu Usman II (Dantsoho r. 1919-1926). He also ruled with Waziri Gidado up to his death in 1926. He was succeeded by Emir Abdullahi Bayero (r. 1926-1953). Bayero also ruled Kano hand to hand with Waziri Gidado. Waziri Gidado died in 1937 at the age of seventy eight.<sup>13</sup>

It could be assumed that throughout the remaining period of Emir Abdullahi Bayero a new Waziri was never appointed probably out of respect for Gidado. It was after his death in 1953 that his son and successor Muhammad Sanusi appointed one of the sons of Waziri Gidado Malam Abu Bakr who was then the Dokaji of Kano as the new Waziri in 1958. With the death of Waziri Abu Bakr on 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1971, he was succeeded by his junior brother Waziri Shehu who, like his father, was a calm Islamic scholar and earned the respect of the people of Kano, Before his appointment as the Waziri, he was the Imam of Abdullahi Bayero mosque at Fagge, Kano.<sup>14</sup>

### Some Responsibilities Associated With the Title of Waziri in Kano

The main responsibilities of the Waziri in Kano *Sarauta* system is that of being Special Adviser to the Emir on Islamic and judicial affairs. For example, issues relating to conducting interviews to those Islamic scholars intending to start *da'awah* and *tafsir*, issues relating to moon sighting for the commencement of the fast of Ramadan, issues relating to mosques, Friday mosques, Imams, reconciliation between relatives, neighbours and associates. Apart from these, the Emir also assigns some other duties to the Waziri when the need arises.<sup>15</sup>

### Example in Which Shaykh Isa Waziri Made an Important Public Pronouncement in 1988 During the Kafancan Religion Crisis

In 1988, there was a Kafancan religious crisis, many lives and properties were lost. The main cause of that crisis was about to ignite another one in Kano. Throughout the two



weeks of that crisis, Shaykh Isa Waziri was constantly seen and heard in Kano State Government owned media such as CTV Kano and Radio Kano making a very sincere appeal to the people of Kano, especially the youth to be law abiding citizens. Hence, not to take law into their hands. In fact, the impact of that appeal by Shaykh Isa Waziri was very significant in controlling the riot and demonstration that were about to happen in Kano. <sup>16</sup>

### **The Establishment of His *Tafsir* Circle**

Shaykh Isa Waziri was a *tafsir* Specialist as far back as 1967, the year he graduated from al Azhar University. When he started teaching in the same year, *tafsir* was among his best subjects. Even when he was transferred to the School for Arabic Studies, Kano in 1969, *tafsir* was also among the best subjects he taught. <sup>17</sup>

The history of the establishment of his *tafsir* circle could be traced back to 1975. He was transferred from Minjibir to Zakirai in 1974 and 1975 he started conducting public *tafsir* during the month of Ramadan at Zakirai. He also conducted *tafsir* in those places he worked such as Birnin Kudu and Gezawa. <sup>18</sup> His popularity in public *tafsir* appeared to the people of Kano in 1980. It was the year he transferred from the judiciary to the Ministry of Education as the Vice Principal of Government Arabic Teachers' College, Gwale as pointed out earlier. Thus, he started conducting Ramadan *tafsir* in 1980 (1<sup>st</sup> Ramadan, 1410 AH) at *Masallacin* Murtala as a result of the request made to him by the late Grand Kadi of Kano State, Dr. Hassan Ibrahim Gwarzo. *Alaramma* Ya'u Hairan was reading the Qur'an (*Mai Janbaki*) since 1980, according to the *qira'ah* of Warsh. <sup>19</sup>

### **The Methodology of His *Tafsir***

Generally, *mufasssirun* read both the text of the Qur'an and then read the commentary from the side commentaries within the *tafsir* book they make use of. Shaykh Isa was not an exception from this method, but he adopted a simple method. He knew that his listeners included people with different levels of understanding. Hence, he used simple language in order to make his audience to comprehend the *tafsir*. <sup>20</sup>

He never focused his attention on one particular *tafsir* book. He consulted different books such as *Tafsir* al Jalalain, *Diya* al Ta'wil, *Tafsir* of al Qurtubi, *Tafsir* of al Nasafi, *Tafsir* of Fakhr al Din al Razi, *Tafsir* of al Baghawi and *Tafsir* of al Baidawi. The idea behind his consultation of many *tafsir* books is that what was found in one book might not necessarily be found in another. However, the major reference source for his *tafsir* was the *Commentary of the Jalalain* by Ahmad al Sawi. <sup>21</sup>

There are some special features in his method of *tafsir*. These are: his moderate approach of interpretation, clarifying some aspects of the Qur'anic verses, and expressing some linguistic aspects of the Qur'an.

### **His Use of a Moderate Kind of Interpretation**

Moderation means an approach of how to practise Islam, how to interpret and apply its teachings, how to relate to other people and how to go about calling other people to the truth. <sup>22</sup>

While interpreting the Qur'an, Shaykh Isa Waziri always inclined towards moderation. For instance, on the interpretation of verse 9 of *Surah al-Jumu'ah*: "O you who believe (Muslims)! When the call is proclaimed for the prayer on the day of Friday, come to the remembrance of Allah and leave off business ....", here, Shaykh Isa interpreted the verse and pointed out the obligation of going to the Friday prayer when the call is made. He



added nothing more than that, contrary to Shaykh Nasir Kabara and Shaykh Tahir Bauchi who explained in their *tafsir* to this verse that it is the basis for the Friday *dhikr* and *mi'ad*, respectively.<sup>23</sup>

### **His Clarification of Some Qur'anic Terms**

One of the characteristics of Shaykh Isa Waziri's method of *tafsir* was that he clarified some Qur'anic terms to enable his listeners grasp their meanings fully. In his *tafsir* of verse 9 of *Surah alKahf*, Shaykh Isa clarified an issue on the word *alRaqim* as it appears in the verse. He maintained that some *mufassirun* have interpreted it to mean *allo* (a slate) which was with *as'hab al Kahf*, while others opined that *alRaqim* is the name of the place *As'hab al Kahf* came from.<sup>24</sup>

### **Some Linguistic Aspects of the Qur'an in His Tafsir**

Shaykh Isa Waziri sparingly extracted some linguistic aspects of the Qur'an while interpreting some verses. In his *tafsir* of *Surah alHadid* verse 1 where Allah says: "All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifies Allah. And He is the All Mighty, the All Wise".

Here, Shaykh Isa stated that Allah opens some chapters of the Qur'an with some important words like *Sabbaha*. Such words appeared in the Qur'an in their different forms, such as *Subhana* (*Surah alIsra'il:1*) *Sabbaha* (*Surah alHadid:1, alHashr:1*), *Yusabbihu* (*Surah alJumu'ah:1, Surah alTaghabun:1*), *Sabbih* (*Surah alA'la:1*).<sup>25</sup>

According to Shaykh Isa Waziri, the appearance of these words in the Qur'an is not just a coincidence. He went further to state that Allah shows Muslims, with these words, the importance of *tasbih* (glorifying Allah). As such, Muslims are requested to be doing *tasbih* as many times as possible.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Area of Emphasis of Shaykh Isa Waziri's Tafsir**

Shaykh Isa Waziri's *tafsir* was attaching high priority to those Qur'anic verses dealing with some social issues, extraction of some *fiqh* aspects from the Qur'an, pointing out some aspects of comparative religion, and his narration of *asbab alNuzul* (causes of revelation) and some historical facts in the Qur'an.

### **His High Priority on the Interpretation of Verses Dealing With Some Social and Economic Issues**

Shaykh Isa Waziri accorded this aspect high priority in his *tafsir*. He dwelt at length whenever he came across verses dealing with some social issues. For example, verses on the fear of Allah, self-contentment, some moral values like: truth, simplicity, sympathy, patience, endurance, self-reliance, obedience to parents, respect for teachers and elders and accommodating people. He also condemned and warned people against social vices like theft, adultery, homosexuality, pride, extravagance, alcoholism, gambling, backbiting, laziness, some business malpractices like telling lies, swearing with Allah in order to attract customers, hoarding and *tatfif* in all its ramifications.<sup>27</sup>

### **His Extraction of Some Fiqh Aspects From The Qur'an**

Shaykh Isa Waziri discussed in his *tafsir* detailed aspects of some rituals like *taharah* (purification), *salat* (prayer), *sawm* (Fast), *hajj* (Pilgrimage) etc. He also discussed *nikah* (marriage), *talaq* (divorce), *hadanah* (custody of a child) *nafaqah* (maintenance), *tijarah* (trade and business) among others.<sup>28</sup>



### **His Reference to Some Aspects of Comparative Religion**

As the word of Allah, the Qur'an contains all sources of knowledge. It has been one of the miraculous natures of the Qur'an that it contains all the teachings of the previous messengers of Allah who came prior to the Prophet (SAW). It was in the light of this that Shaykh Isa Waziri interpreted some verses of the Qur'an which have common links with the faith of some earlier messengers of Allah.<sup>29</sup>

In his *tafsir* of Surah al-Baqarah: 136 where Allah says:

Say (o Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which was sent down to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub, and to Al Asbat (the offspring of the twelve sons of Ya'qub), and that which has been given to Mosa and Isa, and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrender (to Islam). (Qur'an 2:136)

Here, Shaykh Isa Waziri deducted from the above verse that Muslims must believe in all the messengers and Prophets of Allah. That is a command to them from Allah, Muslims believe in the "Prophet of the Jews" that is Moses. They also believe in the "Prophet of Christians" that is Jesus, in addition to believing in all other Prophets and Messengers. On the contrary, the Jews believe in Moses only while the Christians believe in Jesus only.<sup>30</sup>

### **His Narration of *Asbab alNuzul* (Causes of Revelation) and Some Historical Facts in the Qur'an**

While interpreting some verses and chapters of the Qur'an which have some historical facts as their causes of revelation, Shaykh Isa Waziri pointed out briefly such historical information which is related to the revelation of the verse or chapter in question. For example, some historical facts in relation to the revelation of these chapters: Hud, Yusuf, Ibrahim, alIsra, alKahf, Maryam, alRum, Luqman, alMunafiqun, Nuh, alHumazah and alFil.<sup>31</sup>

However, he never narrated the detail of such information. He only mentioned those very relevant historical facts in order to make the message of such verse or chapter very clear to his listeners.<sup>32</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We have seen the life history of Shaykh Isa Waziri, his working career, his Imamship of Murtala Muhammad mosque, his appointment as the Grand *Imam* of Kano and then later the *Waziri* of Kano. The paper then examines the history of the title of *Waziri* in Kano *Sarauta*, some responsibilities associated with the title of *Waziri* in Kano and an example in which Shaykh Isa *Waziri* made an important public pronouncement in 1988 during the Kafancan religious crisis. The paper has also pointed out the historical evolution of Shaykh Isa *Waziri's* *tafsir* circle, the methodology of his *tafsir* and the areas of emphasis of his *tafsir*. It was the sum of all these and indeed, many more which the paper did not present which made Shaykh Isa Waziri a very respected Islamic Scholar and a *Mufasssir* per excellence.



**Notes and References**

1. H.H Fagge, *Tarihin Rayuwar Shaykh Isa Waziri*, (np), (1999), p.20 and Fieldnotes, Shaykh Isa Waziri, the late Waziri of Kano. Interviewed on September 27, 2002.
2. Ibid, interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri
3. A. M Zaharadeen, *The Gidado Family Library: A Case Study of a Scholarly Community in Kano* Unpublished Master of Library Science thesis Submitted to the Postgraduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, (1988), p.57
4. Ibid, p.57
5. Ibid, p.57
6. Ibid, p.58 and Fieldnotes, interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri
7. Interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri, 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2002
8. Ibid
9. Personal Observation of the Researcher
10. H.H Fagge, *Tarihin Rayuwar ....*, (1999), pp.70-71
11. Fieldnotes , Shaykh Idris Kuliya Alkali, the late Chief Imam of Kano. Interviewed on July 20, 2004.
12. U. S. Abbas, *Trends of Tafsir Among Selected Ulama in Northern Nigeria*, a Ph.D thesis Submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano,( 2005), p.251
13. Ibid, p. 251
14. Ibid, p. 251
15. Interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri
16. H.H Fagge, *Tarihin Rayuwar....* (1999), Pp 79-81
17. Interview with Shaykh Idris Kuliya Alkali
18. Fieldnotes, interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri on September 27, 2002
19. Fieldnotes. Interview with the late Kuliya Alkali
20. Fieldnotes, interview with Shaykh Isa Waziri
21. Ibid
22. Fieldnotes, interview with Shaykh Kuliya Alkali
23. U. S. Abbas, *Trends of Tafsir Among Selected Ulama in Northern Nigeria...*, p.256
24. Ibid, p. 257
25. Ibid, p. 259
26. Ibid, p. 259
27. Ibid, pp.261-262
28. Ibid, pp.266-267
29. Ibid, pp. 269-270
30. Ibid, p.271
31. Ibid, p.275
32. Ibid, p.275





