

# An Examination into the Impact of Sufism on Muslim Elites and the Development of Islam in Nigeria

Kamal-deen Olawale Sulaiman (PhD)<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Sufism is a living and dynamic esoteric institution in Islam, as demonstrated by the ever increasing number of its adherents, especially in Nigeria. This article therefore, examines the impact that the Sufi movement orders have made on the Muslims elites and the growth and spread of Islam in Nigeria. In doing so, the concept of Sufism, its place in Islam, and its impact in the world of Islam will be examined. The articles reveals that the Sufis play an important role in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria. Even today, the Sufi orders are still involved in the promotion of Islamic education and the propagation of Islam. This is so because, through the efficacy of prayers derived from it, Sufis were able to solve some personal problems of Muslims in Nigeria. The article concludes that the orders have led many of their members to acquire the necessary discipline before they can acquire deeper knowledge of the true existence of Allah and his relation to Him and the universe.

**Key Words:** impact, Sufism, elites, orders, meditate, obedience, supplication, mysticism, luxuries, devoted

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sufism plays an important role in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria. Sufis are associated primarily with those who withdraw from worldly enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> They prefer to live a retired life to meditate on the Qur'an by seeking to draw nearer to Allah in supplication (*dua'a*). They laid down four principles:<sup>3</sup> the study of the Holy Qur'an, the *Hadith*, the lives of saints, and leading the life of sincere obedience to the will of Allah. The ultimate goal is that these principles serve as a link with the present day. Sufis live a life of sincere obedience to the will of Allah. Thus, in Sufism the soul is led stage by stage until it reaches the desired goal, which is a perfect

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Religious Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. E-mail: drsulaimanko@yahoo.com.

<sup>2</sup> A.F. Ahmad, *The Qadriyyah and its Impact in Nigeria*, PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan (1986), 34. See also, M.A. Numani: "History of the Qadiri Order in India (During the 16th and 18th Centuries)," *International Journal of Humanities & Religion* 1/2 (2012): 90-92.

<sup>3</sup> L.O. Jimoh, "The Contributions of Shaykin Kabara to the Development of Ouadiryah Order in Nigeria", PhD Thesis, University of Ilorin (2006), p. 45. See also, A.A. Tabari, *The Other Side of Sufism*, (Kuwait: Al-Faisal Press, 1988), pp. 20-22.

union with Allah.<sup>4</sup> In the light of all that has said above, the focus of this article is to examine two Sufi orders in Nigeria, the Tijaniyyah and the Qadriyyah. It will also be relevant to discuss their influence on the Nigerian Muslim elites.

## 1.2 THE CONCEPT OF SUFISM

The terms *tasawwuf* and *sufiyyah* are Arabic words used described the esoteric dimension of Islam. To orientalists, Islamic mysticism is, however, popularly known as Sufism or the system of becoming a Sufi.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the term Sufism comes from *suf* or the Arabic word for wool.<sup>6</sup> Sufis also traced their practices to the *Ahl as-Suffah* (the Companions of the Prophet who lived on a platform in the mosque) whom they claimed to their mentors.<sup>7</sup>

Sufism could also have been derived from two Arabic words: *safa* and *saff*, which mean purity, sincerity, honesty, grade, class, and row, among other things.<sup>8</sup> This implies that sufis are expected to be pure in their conduct and character as well as attain the highest degree in the spiritual journey to Allah.

All the above definitions reveal that Sufism deals with the personal and esoteric relationship of a Muslim with Allah. It therefore owes its origin to the teachings contained in the Glorious Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet. Such teachings include 2:186, 3:14-15, 9:38, 51:50, 87:16-17 in the Glorious Qur'an and many *Hadiths* such as *Hadiths* 38 and 40 of Al-Nawawi.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Ibn 'Umar, who narrated the second *Hadith* mentioned above, said: "When evening comes on you, do not expect morning, and when morning comes do not expect evening. Take from your

<sup>4</sup> F.O. Lawal, *The Concept, Origin and Importance off Mawlid AnNabiyy Celebration* (Ilorin: Tawfiqullahi Publishing House, 1996), pp. 54-57. See also I. Taofiq and S. Arthur. *Classical Islamic Philosophy*, (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1992), pp. 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Cowan, *Hans Wehr's Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (India New Delhi): Modern Language Services, 1960), p. 531. See also Lawal, *The Concept, Origin and Importance*, pp. 54-57.

<sup>6</sup> M. Hisket, *Abdullah.Ibn Muhammad's Tazyin Al-Waraqat* (Ibadan: University Press, 1963), p. 268, See also Taofiq and Arthur. *Classical Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kilani, *Islamology* (Lagos: Ietin's International Limited, 1997), p. 70. See also Lawal, *The Concept, Origin and Importance*, pp. 54-57.

<sup>8</sup> Cowan, *Hans Wehr's Dictionary*, p. .515.

<sup>9</sup> Z.A. Al-Nawawi, *Riyadh Soihinamin Kalamal-mursaline (English-Arabic)*, (Ibadan, Iksan Islamic Publications, 1985), *Hadiths* No. 38 and 40.

health (a precaution) for your sickness and from your life for your death.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 SUFISM IN THE PROPHETIC ERA

Going by the above injunctions in the Qur'an and the Sunna as well as the statements by Ibn 'Umar and other companions, the *salaf* (early Muslims) devoted themselves to the training of their souls known as *tarbiyyah* and the mosque of the Prophet became the grand centre of this endeavour. Many companions lived permanently on a raised platform in the mosque known as Suffah and would gather around the Prophet to learn at his feet. Companions like 'Umar Ibn Khattab made arrangements to learn from people like Ansar like Abu Hurayrah who were the foremost inhabitants of the Suffah.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to learning, the companions of the Suffah also devoted their time to prayer, meditation, and the recitation of litanies. In short, they became mystics, engrossed both day and night in the lengthy recitation of the Qur'an and Litanies. In fact, they loved death the way people love life, and they shunned the luxuries of life, surviving only on the bare necessities and essentials of life.<sup>12</sup>

During this period, Sufis were known as *zuhhad* (hermits) and *'ubbad* (devoted worshippers of Allah) Such renowned ascetics in the early period of Islam include Abu Ad-Darda, Abu Dharral-Ghiffari, Hudhayfah Ibn al-Yaman, Said Ibn al-Musayyab, Hasan al-Basri, and Ibrahim Ibn Adham.<sup>13</sup>

In the ascetic journey, a prospective Sufi passes through some stages and stations known as *al-ahwal wal-maqamat*. The seven stages passed through are the stage of the Unregenerate Soul (*An-Nafs Al-mmarah bisu*, Q 12:53), the stage of the Blameworthy Soul (*An-Nafs al-Lawwamah* (Q 75:2), the stage of the Inspired Soul (*An-nafs al-mulhimah* Q 89:27), the stage of the Contented Soul (*An-nafs al-mut-mainah* (Q 89:27) the stage of the Pleased Soul or *An-na-fsar-radiyyah* (Q 89:28), the stage of the Chosen Soul or *An-nafs al-mardiyyah* (Q 89:28), as well as the stage

<sup>10</sup> M.O.A. Abdul, *The Selected Tradition of Al--Nawawi* (Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau, 1974), p. 87. See also Taofiq and Arthur, *Classical Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>11</sup> M.O.A. Abdul, *The Historical Origin of Islam* (Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, 1982), p. 11. See also Taofiq and Arthur, *Classical Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>12</sup> K.M, Raji, "Da'wah Activities of Shaykh Jamiu Larubawa Dandawi in Ado Ekiti," M.A. Thesis, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan (2001), pp. 58-61.

<sup>13</sup> K.O. Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority in Ado-Ekiti Kingdom, Southwestern Nigeria," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 30/2 (2013): 132-47.

of the Perfect Soul, or *An-nafs al Kamilah* Q 68:4).

#### 1.4 THE EMERGENCE OF TARIQAH

Abu Yazid al-Bistami was the first to hold that no one could be a Sufi without being under the tutelage of a *shaykh*.<sup>14</sup> With his famous declaration that *Shaytan* is the mentor of those who have no *shaykh*, al-Bistami went on to found the first Sufi order or *tariqah*.<sup>15</sup>

*Tariqah*, also known as *suluk*, simply means path (Q 46:30). It refers to the Sufi path that is undertaken to comprehend Allah and move closer to Him.<sup>16</sup> By the fifth and sixth centuries of Islam (twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Christian calendar), about two dozen Sufi orders had evolved, including the Junaydiyyah, Wilayatiyyah, Khafiyyah, Qadiriyyah, and Tijaniyyah orders.<sup>17</sup> These orders had their own rules and the processes through which the novice or the uninitiated (*al-murid*) can receive spiritual guidance or tutelage (*tarbiyyah* or *irshad*) from the spiritual guide or mentor (*al-murabi* or *al-murshid*). Two of these Sufi orders have played a very significant role in the spread of Islam in West Africa and are still very active in the spiritual awakening in that region today. They are the Qadiriyyah and Tijjaniyyah orders.<sup>18</sup>

##### 1.4.1 THE TIJANIYYAH ORDER

The Tijaniyyah order was founded by Ahmed at-Tijani about 1781 C.E.<sup>19</sup> He was born about 1737 C.E. in a place called 'Ain madi. His full name was Abu'l-Abbas Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn al-mukhtar at-Tijani al-Hassan, but he was popularly

<sup>14</sup> Hisket, *Abdullah.Ibn Muhammad's*, p. 61. See also Raji, "Da'wah Activities of Shaykh Jamiu Larubawa Dandawi in Ado Ekiti," pp. 58-61.

<sup>15</sup> K. Khan, *Studies in Tasawwuf*, (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publications, 1973), p. 158. See also Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority," p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> B.G.Martins, *Muslim Brotherhood of 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 34-37.

<sup>17</sup> S. Shagari, and J. Boyd, *Uthman Dan Fodio: The Theory and Practice of his Leadership* (Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, 1978), pp. 24-26.

<sup>18</sup> I.O. Uthman, *Introduction to Sufism*, ed. M.A Kareem and M.A Abdul Raheem, Nigeria Certificate in Education Series (Islamic Studies) (Ikere: Ekiti, College of Education), pp. 228-35

<sup>19</sup> S.A.A. Maududi, *Towards Understanding of Islam* (Kuwait: I. I. F. S. O, 1989), p. 42. See also, Shagari and Boyd, *Uthman Dan Fodio*, pp. 24-26.

known as Ahmad at-Tijani.<sup>20</sup>

After founding his order, Ahmad at-Tijani took the title of *sharif* and then produced a pedigree that traced his ancestry to al-Hassan, son of Ali Abi-Talib, a cousin to Prophet Muhammad. This claim went via Mawlay Idris, who was the patron saint of Fez.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he called himself Ahmad Ibn Muhammad at-Tijani al-Hassan. The influx of the Tijaniyyah brotherhood into West African can be credited to the activities of Umar Futi,<sup>22</sup> who had been initiated into the brotherhood and appointed *khalifah* of the Sudan. Before leaving Mecca where he had been initiated, he received his *ijaza* (licence) in which, according to Martins, al-Ghali stated: "Umar was authorized to give instructions in the Tijaniyyah to whoever asked it among Muslims, young or old, obedient or rebellious, man or woman, slave or free."<sup>23</sup>

The *ijaza* also stressed that the order was the Muhammadiyyah (Muhammad order). In effect, this was not to be confused with the order or unreformed orders like the Qadiriyyah order. This again made the Tijaniyyah order a universal one in that it admitted slaves and woman. This actually increased the number of Tijaniyyah adherents a great deal.

*Tijaniyyah* adherents could be found mostly in Senegal among the Tokolor, Wolof, Laghlah, and other groups. It was from there that the order penetrated into Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> The actual date that the order entered Nigeria is not known. Many scholars think that it arrived in Nigeria during the lifetime of its founder, Ahmad at-Tijani.<sup>25</sup> Others say that the brotherhood entered Nigeria during the lifetime of Muhammad Bello.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Qadir (1981) held that many scholars in Zaria were said to have been active members of the Tijaniyyah order during the *khalifah*

<sup>20</sup> A.A.A. al-Isbaham, *Hilyat al-Awliya `wattabagat al-Asfiya*, vol. II (Cairo, Daral-Kitab, 1933), p. 46. See also Martins, *Muslim Brotherhood of 19th Century in Africa*, pp. 34-37.

<sup>21</sup> P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 65. See also Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority," p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> U. Ibn Fudi, *Ihya'as-Sunnah*, (Cairo: Sankore, 1962), pp. 23-25. See also Uthman, *Introduction to Sufism*, pp. 229-30.

<sup>23</sup> J.N. Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977), pp. 15-20.

<sup>24</sup> R.A. Nicholas: *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Cambridge University, 1914), pp. 23-26. See also, Taofiq and Arthur, *Classical Islamic Philosophy* pp. 20-22.

<sup>25</sup> A.R.I. Doi, *Islam in Nigeria* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation Limited, 1984), pp. 23-25. See also R.A. Adeleye., *The Overview of the Sokoto Caliphate 1879 - 1903* (London, Longman Group Limited, 1981), pp. 30-33.

<sup>26</sup> Khan, *Studies in Tasawwuf*, pp. 30-33

of *Malam Hajj*. One such scholar was Umar-al-Wali Ibn Ahmad (1831-1894)<sup>27</sup> who contributed to the spread of the *tariqah* by writing some works on it.

Although any of these accounts may be correct, at the same time, we need to note that the Tijaniyyah came to Nigeria a long time ago through the activities of those who had been initiated into it earlier. The order spread to different parts of Nigeria.

#### 1.4.2 ITS BASIC DOCTRINES

A major doctrine of the order that has been the subject of serious condemnation is the possibility of the Prophet visiting a human being in broad daylight. In fact, the doctrine serves as the basis of the Tijaniyyah order as contained in its *magnus opus*, *Jawair al-ma'ani*, a book believed to have been dictated by the founder himself to his foremost disciple, Sayyid al-Hajj Ali Harazim.

Another doctrine of the order is the pre-eminence of the *salatul-fath* above all other forms of *salat*, including *salatul Ibrahimiyah*. It is believed to have been presented to the founder by the Prophet when he appeared to him in broad daylight and is therefore considered more meritorious than the Glorious Qur'an.<sup>28</sup>

#### 1.4.3 THE QADIRIYYAH ORDER

The Qadiriyyah is one of the oldest *tariqhs* and derives its name from 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166), a native of the Iranian province of Jilan.<sup>29</sup> In 1134 he was made principal of a Hanabalite school in Baghdad. His most famous work, *sufficiency for the seekers of the Truth*, contains his sermons and gives accounts of various Muslim sects. Contemporary accounts of his life reveal him to have been responsible for the conversion of many Jews and Christians to Islam. Posthumous accounts of his life attribute miraculous powers to him.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crises of Islam* (London: Orion Books Ltd., 2003), p. 10. See also Taofiq and Arthur, *Classical Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt Of Islam: When Did the Conflict with the West Begin, and How Could it End?" *The New Yorker* (November 19, 2001): 18-21.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Islam: The Religion and the People* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2009), p. 156. See also Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority," p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, "Multiple Faces of Islam," In: *Islam in a Changing World*, ed. A. Jerichow and J. Simonsen, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), p. 3.

The early spread of the Qadiriyyah was very slow. It was only in the fifteenth century that the order spread significantly beyond Iraq and Syria. At this time it became established in India through the work of Muhammad Ghawth (d. 1517).<sup>31</sup> In the seventeenth century, it was established in Istanbul by Isma'il Rum (d. 1631) and in the nineteenth century reached as far as Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>32</sup>

The order also played an important role in Islamic religious and political life in North Africa. In the eighteenth century, under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), the order moved to impose Islam on those practicing traditional religious in the regions that are now Nigeria and Niger, and in the nineteenth century in Algeria the Qadiriyyah fought at length against the French colonialists. The order continues today in various parts of the Muslim world.<sup>33</sup>

The Qadiriyyah has not developed any distinctive doctrines or teachings outside mainstream Islam. They believe in the fundamental principles of Islam but interpret them through mystical experience. The movement's founder Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani emphasized the importance of humaneness and charity. The order's rituals are characterized by the loud recitation of verses in praise of Muhammad and the singing of sacred hymns. These are sometimes accompanied by various bodily movements designed to induce ecstasy. In some areas, local pilgrimages to *zawiyas* (shrines) of the saints who are believed to be descendants of 'Abd al-Qadir and festivals are celebrated in their honour. The followers of the Qadiriyyah wear a rose embroidered on their caps.

#### 1.4.4 ITS BASIC DOCTRINES

The Qadiriyyah order teaches absolute adherence to the Sunna and condemns all objectionable vices. This is a cardinal doctrine in Shaykh Abdul Qadir Ag-Ghunya *Li talib tariq al-haqa* (the indispensable manual for a student of the true path). Accordingly, a *murid* at the time of initiation into the Qadiriyyah order takes an oath to adhere strictly to Islamic teachings as well as to perform the rituals of the order.

<sup>31</sup> Mustapha Kamal Al-Seyyid, *Disaggregating the Islamist Movements* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 4. See also Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority," p. 138.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Abdul-Quasein, *The Ethics of Al-Ghazali - A Composite Ethics in Islam* (City: Central Printing Sendirian Berhad, 1976), pp. 20-22. See also Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam*; (Santa Monica: Partners, Resources and Strategies, Rand Corporation, 2003), 25-33.

<sup>33</sup> Kola Akindele, *Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Publishers, 1979), pp. 32-33. See also Lewis, "The Revolt Of Islam," pp. 22-25.

The members of the order are required to observe both a daily and weekly recitation of litanies. They also mark an annual anniversary of the birthday of the *shaykh* known as *mawkiḥ*.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.5 THE INFLUENCE OF SUFISM ON THE NIGERIAN MUSLIM ELITES

These two brotherhoods had influenced many Nigerians, in both the northern and southern part of the country. We should mention some of the elite figures in the both *tariqahs*. They are Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio and his son, Muhammad Ballo, Sheikh Adam Namojiy, Sheikh Muhammad Nasir Kabara and his son, Sheikh Qaribullah Kabara, and Sheikh Nda Salaty. All the aforementioned sheikhs are disciples of Sheikh Abd al-Qadir.

Meanwhile, the disciples of the Tijaniyyah in Nigeria include Sheikh Ahmad at-tijani Ibn Uthman al-Beribery, Sheikh Abubakr 'Atyagi, Sheikh Yusuf Lokoja, Sheikh Muhammad Ii Awwal, Sheikh Nurudeen Akeem, Sheikh Muhammad Robiu Adebayo, and Sheikh Abubakr Akeyede. We will look in detail the impact of Sufism on three prominent sheikhs among those whom we have just mentioned.

#### 1.5.1 USMAN DAN FODIO

Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) was the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, a religious teacher, writer and Islamic reformer. He was one of urbanized ethnic Fulani living in the Hausa States in what is today northern Nigeria. A teacher of the Maliki law school and the Qadriyyah order of Sufism, he lived in the city of Gobir until 1802 when, motivated by his reformist ideas and under increased repression by local authorities, he led his followers into exile. This exile began as a political and social revolution that spread from Gobir throughout northern Nigeria and Cameroon and was echoed in a *jihad* (the holy war) movement across West Africa led by the Fulani. Dan Fodio rejected much of the pomp of rulership, and, while developing contacts with religious reformists and *jihad* leaders across Africa, he soon passed

---

<sup>34</sup> I.O. Uthman, *Introduction to Sufism*. See also, K. O Sulaiman, "A Study of *Da'wah* Activities of Selected Islamic Clerics and their Contributions to the Development of Islam in Ekitiland 1947-2000 C.E," PhD Thesis, the Department of Religions, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos (2011), pp. 45-47.

actual leadership of the Sokoto state to his son, Muhammad Bello.<sup>35</sup>

Dan Fodio wrote more than a hundred books on religion, government, culture and society. He developed a critique of the existing African Muslim elites for what he saw as their greed, irreligiosity, violation of the standards of *Sharia* law, and heavy taxation. He encouraged literacy and scholarship, for women as well – and several of his daughters became scholars and writers. His writings and saying continue to be much quoted today, and he is often affectionately referred to as *Shehu* in Nigeria. Some followers consider him to have been a *mujaddid*, a divinely inspired “reformer of Islam.” Among his work on the Qadiriyyah movement are *As-Salasila Al-Adabiyyah*, *As-Salasila Al-Qadiriyyah*, and *Tabushiru al-Ummat al-Ahmadiyyah bifadohil at-tarigat Al-Qadiriyyah*.

#### 1.5.2 SHEIKH QARIBULLAH ON NASIRU KABARA

Kibara’s family has been traced to Kabara, a scholarly town in Timbuktu in Mali. The immediate head of the family, Sheikh Umar, popularly known as Malam Kabara, settled in Kano in the late eighteenth century<sup>36</sup> after years of Sufi life in deserts and bushes around the West African State. Malam Kabara’s first assignment in Kano was the establishment of a school to teach Arabic and knowledge of Islam.<sup>37</sup> His students hailed from many parts of the region. He was also identified by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio and became active in the jihad led by the sheikh.

For his positive influence on the political, religious, and social life of the people around him, the Kano emirate dedicated the area they were occupying to him and named it after him. Among Malam Kabara’s grandchildren was Sheikh Nasiru Bn Muhammad Al-Mukhtar who occupied a prominent position in terms of scholarship and leadership in Sufism. He was the spiritual leader of the Qadriyyah and all its branches in the Africa region. Malam Kabara maintained a strong link with major

---

<sup>35</sup> Bruce Vaughn, *Islam in South and Southeast Asia*, CRS (Congressional Research Service) Report for Congress (February 2005), p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> M.A Kareem, “Advent and Spread of Islam in Ekiti-State, 1840-2000 C.E,” PhD Thesis, Department of Religions, University of Ado Ekiti (2009), pp.14-20.

<sup>37</sup> J.O. Oguntuase “*The Growth and Survival of Islam in Ekiti North Division of Ondo-State of Nigeria*,” B.A. Long Essay Submitted to the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (1976), pp. 22-25.

sources of the Qadiriyyah worldwide. These include Baghdad, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Mecca, and Medina.<sup>38</sup> His personal effort in promoting Islam in general and the Qadiriyyah in particular earned him great respect in Nigeria and abroad.

He crowned the Sarkin Yakin Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (War Commander of army of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio) by the sultan of Sokoto.<sup>39</sup> He also wrote well over 200 treatises and books on Islamic philosophy, history, and the Arabic language.<sup>40</sup> This great scholar was succeeded by his son in the person of Sheikh Qaribullah after his death on Friday October 4, 1996.<sup>41</sup>

Sheikh Qaribullah was born in 1961. He was the second surviving male child of over twenty children. In addition to being the descendant of Malam Kabara on his father's side, he was also descended from the same lineage on his mother's side. He therefore grew up in the courtyard of Malam Kabara.<sup>42</sup>

In line with the traditional Islamic system of education, the sheikh was enrolled in Malam Abbas Qur'anic School where he was taught recitation according to the rules of the Nafir School of Qira'a. He was able to complete this course within a short period of time. He then went ahead to learn about other branches of Islamic education under his late father, Sheikh Muhammad Nasiru Kabara, who taught him the science of *Hadith*, theology, Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, Arabic language and literature, to mention but a few subjects.<sup>43</sup> In addition, he attended following modern schools: Ma'ahad Sheikh Nasiru Kabara Primary School Gwale, Kano; School for Higher Islamic Studies, Shaluci, Kano; and Bayero University, Kano.

---

<sup>38</sup> S.A Balogun: *History of Islam up to 1800* Historical Society of Nigeria, Groundwork of Nigeria History (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, , 2001), 220

<sup>39</sup> Adeleye, *The Overthrow of the Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> Micheal Mason, *"The Nupe Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century A Political History,"* Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Birmingham (1970), p. 439.

<sup>41</sup> S.A. Ayilara, *Historical Events in Ekiti West, 1960-1961* (Aramoko-Ekiti: Owodunni Printing, 1967) p. 9. See also, Y.O. Balogun, "The Advent and Development of Islam in Irepodun/Ife-lodun Area Council of Ekiti State, Nigeria: 1840-2000A.D.," M.A. Thesis, University of Ado-Ekiti (2004), pp. 17-23.

<sup>42</sup> T.G.O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* (London, Longman Group Limited, 1978), pp. 32-84. See also Sulaiman, "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority," p. 138.

<sup>43</sup> K.O. Sulaiman and Y.O. Balogun, "The Islamic Perspective of Music and Music Making," *Journal of University Scholars in Religion*, 1 (2011): 202-22. See also Samuel Johnson, *The History of Yorubas* (Thetford: Lowe & Brydone Printers Limited, 1921), p. 26.

At university, he specialized in Arabic with a concentration in literature. In essence, his thesis, which was on the condition of Arabic and Islamic in the Hausa Land before the *jihad* of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio,<sup>44</sup> was an invaluable contribution and provided good material on the subject. The combination of traditional and modern methods enabled him to carry on the activities initiated by his late father. The Darul Qadiriyyah (the Court of Qadiriyyah) or Gidan Kabara (Kabara Court) is one of the busiest institutions in Kano since various activities take place daily, weekly, and annually, all under the sheikh's supervision.<sup>45</sup>

His publications include the following: *Al-Mir'atussafiya fi bayani hakikat at-tasawwuf wa ba adhi rijalihi Zawil Makamotil aliyyah*, *Dauru tariqatil Qadiriyyah fi rafl mustawa al-luggatil arabiyyah wattarbiyyatil Islamiyyah if garbi ifrigiyyah*, *Fathu Zil Jalali fi tarjamati Salasati rijal*, *Lam'atul anwarimin barakatil akhyari fi tagdimi Diwani Sub hatil Anwari* (A Crystal-Clear Mirror: A Treatise on Sufism). These publications, which are mostly in Arabic, constituted serious research into important topics that are very relevant to the everyday life of all Muslims.<sup>46</sup>

### 1.5.3 SHEIKH MUHAMMAD-L-AWWAL

Sheikh Muhammed-I-Awwal was born in 1926 in the family of Abdullah, which was a strong and highly devoted religious family at Omupo, in Kwara State, Nigeria.<sup>47</sup> He started his Qur'anic studies under tutelage of Sheikh Salahudeen (Ayalana) and went ahead to acquire more Islamic knowledge under the leadership of Sheikh Aminullahi (Babata). After the death of Sheikh Babata, he went on to Agbaji where he acquired advanced knowledge of *Sharia* under the guidance of Sheikh Umar

<sup>44</sup> I.A.B, Balogun, "The Penetration of Islam to Nigeria," *Nigeria Journal of Islam* 1/2 (1971): 40. See also Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba*, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> W.F. Adigun, "A Study of the Contributions of Selected Muslim Organizations to Islamic Education in Ekiti-State," M.A Thesis, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (2008): 43-46 See also P.B. Clark, *West Africa and Islam* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Group, 1982), p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> B.A Ajibade, "The Role and Contribution of Muslim Organization to the Development of Education in Ado Ekiti," B. Ed Long Essay, Department of History Ondo State University Ado Ekiti (1988) 25-30 See also J.S. Trimingham, *History of Islam in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 26-30.

<sup>47</sup> Balogun, "The Penetration of Islam to Nigeria," pp. 12-15. See also Trimingham, *History of Islam in West Africa*. pp. 26- 30.

Agbaji. He then went to Kano to study advanced Arabic grammar and literature under Sheikh Umar Abubakr Al-Faliky.<sup>48</sup> The sheikh embraced Tijaniyyah in 1941 under the supervision of Sheikh Balarabe Al-Kanuwwy and re-embraced it under the guidance of Sheikh Umar Faliky.<sup>49</sup> In 1945 he established Jam'iyatul Quddamul Li-Islam. In 1953 he met Sheikh Ibrahim Niyyass who was a renowned international leader of the Tijaniyyah order, and Sheikh Niyyass nicknamed him *Muqaddam*.<sup>50</sup>

In 1959 he went on a holy pilgrimage to perform *hajj* and *ummrah*. His holy pilgrimage continued without any break until 1979.<sup>51</sup> During this time he worked as a travel agent for Al-Hujjaj (Performers of *Hajj*), which was owned by him. This agency was registered and recognized by the Federal Pilgrimage Board and played a vital role in the successful completion of the *hajj* with respect to welfare, conducive atmosphere, etc.

In 1962 he set up an Islamic school called Ma'ahad ad-Dirasat Al-Isamiyyah, and in 1966 he founded Jam'iyatu Ithad-ansar Al-Faydat at-Tijaniyyah. Sheikh Ibrahim gave him permission to spread the order of Tijaniyyah. As a result, he was able to combine the knowledge of *Sharia* and Sufism. Sheikh Niyyass commanded him to give up the travel agency and submit and devote himself completely to *Al-Ibadah* (worship), teaching Arabic and Islamic knowledge and preaching. In 1966 he was honoured with the title Al-Ijaza al-Qubrah (total permission) by Sheikh Ibrahim.<sup>52</sup>

Sheikh Muhammed-al-Awwal preached from 1946 up until the present. Most of the media houses in Nigeria used to broadcast his preaching to Muslims, espe-

---

<sup>48</sup> Y. O Balogun, "The Place of Muslim Organizations in the Growth of Islam in Irepodun Ifelodun Local Government Area of Ekiti-State, Nigeria: 1846-2000 C.E," *Fountain Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (2007): 15-18.

<sup>49</sup> H.O. Danmole, "The Growth of Islāmic Learning in Ilorin in the Nineteenth Century." *Religions* 5-6 (1982): 23-25. See also A.R Mustapha, "The Position of Islam in Nigeria since Independence in 1960: The Experience in Ekiti-State," *Journal of University Scholars in Nigeria*, pp. 170-75.

<sup>50</sup> Abdul Lateef Adekilekun, *Selected Islamic Organisations in Nigeria (1916-1986)* (Ilorin: College of Education, 1989), pp. 18-21. See also Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> T.B., Yusuf, "The Impact of Muslim Organisations on the People of Ibarapa", B.A. Project, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (1991), pp. 13-15. See also Gbadamosi: *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba*, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> M.O. Adeniyi, "Islāmic Movements in Yorubaland: A Study of Muslim Response to Religious Interaction," PhD Thesis, University of Ilorin (1992), pp. 34-37.

cially during the month of Ramadan. The sheikh participated in many Islamic conferences in Arab and Islamic countries. In 1985, he took part in the conferences of Tariqatu-as-Sufiyyah, which was organized by the Moroccan government, where he delivered a lecture titled "The Activities of Tijaniyyah in Nigeria." He was invited back by the same government in 1989 and 1992. He is a member of the World Muslim League and has visited some Islamic countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Tunis, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>53</sup>

At present, he has a central mosque located at Oshodi in Lagos, where the *jumat* service is held every week. He has numerous students, including Sheikh Uthmar Ajo, Sheikh Abdur-Rauf Abubakr, Sheikh Yusuf Banji, Doctor Muritala Bused, Sheikh Muhammad Robiu Adebayo, Sheikh Muhammad Saheed Siddiq, etc.

We should mention some of the Islamic books the sheikh wrote in Arabic. These include: *Al-Mafaheem at-Tijaniyyah*, *Asbabu Wihdatul Ummat Islamiyyah*, *Kitabu Zakat*, *Kitabullrath*, *Al-Istigama*, *Taniwir Li Abusor*, and many others.

## 1.6 The Role of Sufism in the Spread of Islam in Nigeria

Islam owes its spread and expansion in West Africa largely to the activities of the above two Sufi orders. Great jihadists who founded Islamic empires were all eminent Sufis. Sheikh Uthman Ibn Fudi and his brother Abdullah who founded the Sokoto caliphate were, for instance, members of the Qadiriyyah order. They were initiated by their teacher, Jibril Ibn 'Umar, and they attained the level of *ash-shaykh al-murabbi*. During the Sokoto *jihad*, they were inspired by the Qadiriyyah, and they attributed their success to it.<sup>54</sup>

The order also played a major role in the spiritual reformation and purification of their members. At the time of initiation, a *murid* takes an oath to adhere strictly to Islamic teachings, perform the rituals of the order, and abstain from all *haram* and blameworthy practices such as back-biting, envy, and arrogance. They are also ordered to say their prayers together.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Adeleye, *The Overview of the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 21-23 See also Sulaiman, "A Critical Assessment of Da'wah Activities of Shaykh Jamiu Larubawa Dandawi," *Fountain Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (2007): 30-33.

<sup>54</sup> Hisket: *Abdullah Ibn Muhammad's*, pp. 80-130. See also Adeleye, *The Overview of the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 30-33.

<sup>55</sup> U. Ibn Fudi, *Ihya'as-Sunnah* (Cairo, Abdullah Yassar, 1962), pp. 99-232. See also Adigun, "A Study of the Contributions of Selected Muslim Organizations." pp. 32-36.

Even today, the Sufi orders are still involved in the promotion of Islamic education and propagation. In fact, almost every member of a *tariqah* is a teacher and preacher. Even those who are traders and artisans are always seeking adherents to their order and, by extension, Islam. They are usually seen championing the building of Qur'anic schools, mosques, and other Islamic foundations. Also, the successful missionary work of Sufism helped the propagation of Islam in many parts of Nigeria. It made a great impact on the life of the people by making them more devoted to the cause of Islam. This is so because Sufis were able to solve some personal problems of the Muslims in Nigeria through the efficacy of prayers derived from it.

In addition, their litany has spread to most of the mosques, and one can scarcely find a Muslim gathering without the recitation of *As-Salat al-fatih*. Many Muslims in Nigeria gather in their *zawiya* for the *wazifah* and *hailala* to develop the spiritual character of the *murid*.

### **1.7 Accretions and Heresies of Sufis in Nigeria Today**

With the passage of time and under the influence of alien and misguided doctrines, the pure concept of Sufism was polluted by non-Islamic accretions and heresies so much that some Sufis transgressed the *Shari'a* with impunity and proclaimed themselves immune from it.

For instance, Ibn 'Arabi defined a *waliyy* (saint) as an agnostic who has achieved union with the absolute reality (Allah) and proclaimed this union to be higher than prophethood. According to him, this is because prophethood is not eternal and could only be attained through the agency of an angel – a mediator – while *wilayah* is forever and requires no intermediary. Sainthood is also a form of general prophethood (*nubuwwah al 'amman*), whereas prophethood is partial and restricted to legislation (*nubuwwah at-tashri*).<sup>56</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi also declared that all is God and God is all. He argued that all finite objects are merely parts and aspects of God and, therefore, there is only one existence, Allah. He concludes that all creatures are aspects of God and whatever a person worships is only an aspect of God and therefore that person is still worshipping

---

<sup>56</sup> Mason, "The Nupe Kingdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," pp. 34-37. See also Adeleye, *The Overview of the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 30-33.

God.<sup>57</sup>

A natural consequence of the above pantheistic doctrine preached by Ibn 'Arabi and others like him is the worship of Sufi saints. It is no wonder that orders are the cults of saints where Sufi saints are venerated and also invoked for spiritual assistance, even after their demise. The tombs of many saints have become places of pilgrimage. Devotees direct prayers to them with the assurance that such prayers are certainly efficacious. These tombs include that of Ibn Fudi in Sokoto in Nigeria. Others are the tombs of Sayyid al-Badawi, al-Husain, and Sayyidah Zaynab in Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

In the same vein, many of the Qur'anic teachings are violated today among the Sufis. For instance some Sufis accompany their litanies with the beating of drums to achieve mystical ecstasy.<sup>59</sup> Many Sufi leaders also neglect the observance of *salah* (prayer) and *siyam* (fasting) while engaging in *haram* (forbidden acts) like drinking wine, as well as fornication and adultery. This, no doubt, is a complete disregard of the very essence of Islam, which is punishable both in this world and in the hereafter.

### 1.8 Conclusion

In this article, Sufism has been traced to the authentic teachings of the Glorious Qur'an, the *Sunna*, and the *salaf* (early Muslims). It has been shown that the early Muslims did indeed live a purely ascetic and mystic life devoid of all forms of ostentation and extravagance. Also, having explained the concept of Sufism, both the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah and their emergence in Nigeria, it will not be out of place to say categorically that the impact that the orders had on Muslims cannot be overemphasized. Many of their members have come to realize the essence of Islam and are engaged in prayer, forgetting worldly things. This article showed that the Sufis play an important role in the propagation of the Islamic religion in Nigeria.

---

<sup>57</sup> D.A.A. Tijani, "Al-mumayyizat al-ra isiyah'inda'Ulama bilad Naijiriyawa 'Udaba 'iha," In *Research Bulletin of Center for Arabic Documentation* (C. D. A) Institute of African Studies 20 (Dec, 1992): 32-36.

<sup>58</sup> A.R.I. Doi, "Islam in Yorubaland, Introduction and Expansion," *Journal of the Muslim World League* 2/8 (June, 1975), pp. 12-15. See also Kareem "Advent and Spread of Islam," pp. 14-20.

<sup>59</sup> Y.A. Quadri, "The Qadiriyyah and its impact in Nigeria," Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1986, pp. 23-27, See also Adeleye, *The Overview of the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 30-33.

They are associated primarily with those who withdraw from wordily pleasures. It is also evident that the Qadiriyyah is one of the oldest *tariqahs* and derives its name from 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166), a native of the Iranian province of Jilan, whereas the Tijaniyyah order was founded by Ahmed at-Tijani in about 1781 C.E. The orders have led many of their members to acquire the necessary discipline before acquiring more knowledge of the true existence of God and his relation to Allah and the universe. This article therefore recommended that all Muslims today are duty-bound to sift the chaff from the grains of modern Sufism by eschewing all *shatahat* or absurdities woven round the original Sufis. Any attempt to reject Sufism in its entirety is indeed an attempt to throw away the baby with the bath water or to reject a pristine Islamic institution.