



Original Research Article

Analytical Study of Jurisprudential Innovations in Prayer among Muslims of Hausaland in the Light of Kitab Bayān al-Bida'i of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study jurisprudential innovations in prayer that are common among the practices of the Muslims in Hausaland in the Light of Kitab Bayān al-Bida'i of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye. The Kitab Bayān al-Bida'i is one of the major treatises bearing one of the major themes that constituted the aim of the 19th-century Jihad in Hausaland that aimed at purifying the religion of Islam from the cultural and traditional syncretic practices. The paper adopts an analytical method in analyzing the discussions of the Shaykh on the essence and philosophy of religious rites in Islam and how Muslims can achieve it. But, considering the contemporary Muslims of Hausaland and the way and manner they observed prayers, one must agree that there are certainly remnants of improper ways of performing prayer that had hitherto been condemned by the Shaykh in the book. Thus, the paper highlights, first, the impropriety of those innovations in Islam and the necessity of avoiding them to allow one's prayer acceptable in the sight of Allah. Second, emphasizes the relevance of the book to all Muslims irrespective of time and space, and third, gives the proper jurisprudential perspective of prayer in Islam.

Keywords: Innovation, Prayer, Hausaland, Bayan al-Bida'i, 'Uthman bn Foduye.

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is the second most important pillar of Islam and is the most regular compulsory action in the life of a Muslim. It is one of the religious acts that must be performed at least five times a day, regardless of the circumstance. Allah did not even exempt the Muslims from praying during the battle. The primary purpose of prayer is to serve as a means through which *al-'Abd* (a servant) communicates with his Lord in the purification of his soul. Purification of the heart is the ultimate religious objective of *Salah*, to draw closer to Allah and in turn, strengthen their faith. However, before one's prayer can draw him closer to Allah, cleanse his soul, and enjoy the protection of Allah in this world and salvation in the hereafter, it must be performed following the modalities it was revealed without addition and omission.

Consequently, *Shari'ah* vis-à-vis Muslim jurists across generations have amplified the principles of prayer to ensure Muslims maintain their faith and devotion to Allah (SWT). By that, it increases *Taqwa* (piety) and helps one to remain conscious of the importance of his faith and submission to the Creator. To bring this importance to the limelight, *Shaykh* 'Uthman bn Fodio, an erudite scholar and the light of his time, observed during his *Tajdid* (Revival struggle) that the Muslims in Hausaland have crept into prayer innovations that were not revealed by the Qur'an or practiced by the Prophet (SAW), and to contain such innovation and return people to pure teachings of Islam. On that, the *Shaykh* wrote treatises on various religious issues, prayer inclusive. The *Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i*, among other writings, has extensively explored and discussed innovations associated with prayer. Thus, this paper examines such juristic discussions with the view of emphasizing the relevance of the discussion in contemporary times. To analyze the value of the content of the literature in its discussion of the practices of the Muslims not just in the 19th century Hausaland, but also in the 21st century and beyond. The analytical method used in writing this paper underscores the extent of the manifestation of belief in both the practice and civilization of the Muslims in the Hausaland as relates to prayer. Finally, the paper suggests the need for re-examination of the contents of the literature of the triumvirate in finding solutions to socio-religious problems bedeviling the region in modern times.

Definition of Concepts

Contextual clarifications of the key terms of this paper are not only vital but very paramount to the understanding of its objectives and scope. The terms are:

- a. **Prayer:** is a direct translation of the Arabic word *Salah*, which means an act performed by the Muslims while facing *qiblah* (direction of the Ka'ba) in adoration to Allah (SWT). It means to pray or bless. *Salah* are the prescribed daily prayers which consist of repeating and refreshing five times a day. In other words, it is the act of offering prayers to Allah (SWT) which is mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an with a specific structure and variety of rules and guidelines surrounding it. *Salah* is the most fundamental and highly important obligation upon all Muslims. Thus, performing *Salah* is essential to ensure Muslims stay within the boundaries of *Din* (religion) and remain mindful of our faith (*Iman*).
- b. **Innovations:** is derived from the *Latin* word 'innovates', meaning 'introducing something new' or 'intransitive', which means 'to bring in new things', or to alter established practices within the realm of a science. In Arabic, the word that gives exactly that meaning is *bid'ah*. Still, the word *Ahdath*, lexically denotes something new that has been introduced or invented. In Islam, the term 'innovation' is generally defined as a belief or a practice for which there is no precedent in the Qur'an or *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). Though, '*bid'ah*', has only become prevalent after the demise of the Prophet (SAW) to refer to beliefs and practices that approved to counter what the Qur'an or *Sunnah* has endorsed, and despite the efforts of scholars to determine the various types of innovation, the concept has become largely understood to mean any modification to accepted religious belief and practices.
- c. **Hausaland:** Which is sometimes referred to Hausa Kingdoms, was a group of small independent city-states in northern central Africa between the Niger River and Lake Chad which flourished from the 15th to 18th century CE. The origins of the Hausa are not known, but one source suggests that they were a group of indigenous people joined by a common language – Hausa. While another theory explains their presence as a consequence of a migration of people from the southern Sahara Desert. The name Hausaland is derived from the Hausa term *Kasar hausa*, meaning the 'country of the Hausa language'. Although, the area also included other people such as the Tuareg, Fulbe, and Zabarmawa among others. The term 'Hausa' was in use only from the 16th century CE as the people called themselves according to which specific city-state or kingdom they belonged to.

Shaykh 'Uthman bn Foduye and his works on Religious Reformation

Shaykh 'Uthmān was born in 1754 CE at Maratta in the ancient Hausa State of Gobir. He was a descendant of the Torankawa Fulani who came from Futa Toro in Senegal. Musa Jakolo, the eleventh ancestor of the Shaykh, moved to settle in Birnin Konni, one town of the Gobir State in those days. The family later moved to Degel where Shaykh started his education. It was said that not much is authoritatively known about his childhood, but many records point that the Shaykh spent much of his youth learning various sciences of Islamic knowledge from different famous scholars of his time. Apart from the two of his teachers who were said to have laid a solid foundation for his intellectual prowess, which were 'Uthman Bidduri and his venerated scholar Shaykh Jibril bn 'Umar, the Shaykh also learnt from other reputable scholars of his time like Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman bn Hammadah, Muhammad Sambo and Muhammad bn Rajab. But his study under Shaykh Jibril was said to have given him the sense of Tajdid (revivalism) that later born in him the desire to launch his campaign for the revival of Islam in Hausaland.

The Shaykh who began his scholarly activities at the early age of twenty years was said to have combined teaching together with writing. He, at first began by composing simple but short poems that contain the rudimentary explanations about the religion in his own mother's tongue, Fulfulde. But, he later on continued writing books in the form of pamphlets in both Arabic and Fulfulde languages. The Shaykh through this effort was said to have authored a large number of books numbering to more than one hundred and fifteen. Through those literary writings, the Shaykh has discussed many issues that over fifty out of them is on scholasticism and a similar number is said to be of polemical nature responding to some quibbles of scholars of his time. Other works have extensively discussed the practical aspect of the religion in general and *Salah* (prayer) in particular. The Shaykh had done that by dedicating a book to a topic, or two or more issues to a piece and titled it accordingly. The treatise *Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i al-Shaytaniyyah* is a clear example, and it is not surprising that the work is considered as his magnum opus due to its systematic approach to myriad issues concerning the belief and practices of the Muslims of Hausaland.

Background and Contents of the Bayān al-Bida'i al-Shaytaniyyah

The complete title of the book is *Bayan al-Bida'i al-Shaytaniyyah al-lati Ahdathaha al-Nāss fī Abawab al-Millāh al-Muhammadiyyah* that aimed to address the satanic innovation attached to Islamic religious practices. The backdrop at which the book is written was to address the syncretic innovations crept into various practical aspects of the religion. The majority of the unlettered Hausa people blended local customs with various religious rites and perceived them as part of the religion. The most disturbing situation was the continued indifferent attitudes of the learned, whom the Shaykh described as venal scholars ('*Ulama'u al-Su'*). It is this aim that made the scope of the book to be encompassing to various topics of Islam. Though, the simple method employed in dealing with the issues helped in moderating the

quantity of the book. The Shaykh pinpointed the various religious practices affected by the Hausa local customs, explains why it is an innovation in Islam with reason(s) from the Qur'an, Sunnah or opinions of the Muslim Jurists, and attempts, sometimes to elaborate why, how or what led people to such innovation. The book identifies almost all aspects of religion that have been modified by innovation in the 19th century Hausaland, and on which the Shaykh did not leave undiscussed.

However, in the aspects of Salah, which is the main area of focus of this paper, the Shaykh observed that there were innovative practices brought into prayer, and performing them are tantamount to committing a sin, if not Shirk (polytheism). Consequent of which, the book has spelt out the position of such innovations and the reason(s) why Muslims must detest and desist from observing them. Thus, it became important that this paper asks the reason(s) why such innovative practices persisted among the Muslims of the contemporary Hausa people, and whether they are aware of the existence of the book or forgot its contents so that they could be reminded of it. This is among the reasons why the book is selected and made a subject of study for this paper with the view of extolling its relevance in addressing the existing innovations in prayers from the practices of the Muslims.

Modern Trends of Innovations in Prayer Analyzed by the Book

Salah (prayer) is generally required to be performed genuinely with humility and total submission to Allah (SWT) alone. It is a symbol of unlimited virtue and benefits, and the noblest way of expression of faith and thanking Allah. Salah, therefore, must be observed with pure and noble intention as ordained by the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet (SAW), and to be free from evil intention and wrong. Innovation, in all ramifications, contradicts those outlined objectives of prayer. The most disturbing of the situation, is the persistence of the Muslims on it without taking into cognizance the implications of their actions. To bring things to limelight, the following are the discussions of what constitute innovation from the Bayan al-Bida'i al-Shaytaniyyah on prayer, and explains why contemporary Muslim Hausaland must discontinue from performing them:

a) Innovations in the Prayer Time

The first important innovation that the Shaykh began to identify in the prayer aspect of the Muslims in Hausaland, which is still practiced by the contemporary Muslims, is neglecting the time of prayer, even though, it is declared in the Qur'an that Allah (SWT) has prescribed prayers upon Muslims, and allocated time for each prayer. Yet, Muslims do observe their prayers at a self-modified time, by either fasten in observing it before time or delaying it till after its appointed time. In the first instance, the prayer is null and avoid, and in the second, it is a heinous sin according to the consensus of Muslim jurists. The Shaykh gives emphasis on this to draw the attention of the Ummah of a very important obligation that they are taking for granted, and which if not properly corrected may lead to losing one's reward and being punished for committing sin.

b) Innovation in the Calling (Adhān) and opening (Iqamah) of a Prayer:

The Shaykh has equally observed that there were new things introduced by the Muslims in Hausaland in the manner of calling to prayer (Adhān), and Iqamah. These were in different forms and genres. Of which, two or more Mu'azzins co-joined to call to prayer or say the opening prayer using the same genre of voice, and used a rhythm to raise, lower or moderate their voices at the same time. This is a detested and condemnable act of innovations, and particularly if that could lead to a vulgarity act in prayer. He similarly, points certain things within the call to prayers and saying the Iqamah which also constitute innovation, such as repetition of the Iqamah for more than one in a mosque during the dawn (Subh) prayer, and calling to prayer with the words other than that of the Adhan, or for a Mu'azzin to say Astaghfirullah (Seeks Allah's forgiveness) three times before saying the Iqamah. All these are innovations condemned by the Shaykh in clear terms for his people to know and desist from observing them.

c) Innovation in Straightening lines in Prayer

Straightening lines in prayer is considered as an essential part of the Salah that every member of the congregation must take care, in order not to cause disturbance to other worshippers, as the Qur'anic verses and Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) command. However, the Shaykh was able to observe that certain parts of the essentials were truncated and modified by some Muslims in Hausaland. This led them to introduce various innovations in prayer, such as lack of straighten lines (taswiyah al-Sufuf), praying on a rug or carpet designed with an image for pride, pronouncement of intention (Niyyah) at the point of starting prayer, or selection a particular verse or chapter of the Qur'an for recitation at all times. The shaykh did not only point out why the Shari'ah detested the underscored innovations, but precisely explained the arguments of the Jurists on why they must be avoided to allow one's prayer to be accepted.

Of more critical concern to the Shaykh, was the prayer (Du'a) observed at the end of each Salah to be led by the Imam while people repeat after him. That, he (the Shaykh) had to point to the fact that such an act is not valid according to Maliki school of law, and therefore suggests that sticking to the teachings and modalities of the prayers taught by the Prophet (SAW) and the four rightly Guided Caliphs is not only important but the safest path of being right. Thus, insists that it is the best part of one's religion to avoid anything which the Prophet (SAW) or any of his Companions did not perform. This has been a reason for the Shaykh to also warned against certain innovative acts performed in Hausaland,

such as shaking hands immediately after the Dawn prayer (Subh), the Friday congregational prayers, and at the end of each daily prayers, or the holding up of rosary (Musabbah), and the bracelet that women used to tie to their neck.

d) Innovations in Making up of Missed Prayers

The fact that human beings are weak and the command for prayer is continued, it is not out of reality that time-after-time, one may miss to observe a prayer within the stipulated time. In such a situation, one can make the missed prayer whenever he/she remembers. Despite this simple general rule and the magnanimity of Islam, the Shaykh accounts that some Muslims in Hausaland were not making up of their loss prayers based on the wrong notion that the voluntary prayers they made in form of Nawafil replaced the loss prayers. This according to the Shaykh is a condemnable innovation according to the majority of the Muslim jurists. And, as for the claim which says that the observance of the last Friday prayer of the month of Ramadan in congregation replaces missed obligatory prayers, the Shaykh objected, and instead, counts it as reprehensible innovations and lies.

In an addendum to that, the Shaykh hinted on acts of those who throw away a unit (Raka'ah) of a Salah in which occurs forgetfulness (Sahwu), that such an act constitutes bid'ah, and he equally maintained that those who refused to observe Kasr (shortening of prayer) while on a journey their attitude violates the general rule of Shari'ah, leading thus, to bid'ah. So also, the Shaykh criticized and condemned as bid'ah the practices of the Hausa Muslims who used to assemble at the house of the Imam before coming out for Salah al-Eid, and those who moved in crowd while shouting the Takbir to the extent their throat got sour. He then concludes as forbidden bid'ah that to delay the Eid prayer till the sun gets hot, or erecting buildings in the Eid ground, or conditioned that prayer must be observed whenever people converge for prayer in the Eid ground.

Nevertheless, the above innovations which the book is attacking, was widespread in the practices of the then Muslims in Hausaland to the extent that the Shaykh cannot ignore, instead, he deemed it necessary to identify the innovative practices, condemn them and explain their positions in Islam. But only few centuries away from that period to the present, incidences from the practices of the contemporary Muslims in the area, are indicating that such important teachings of the Shaykh were either ignored, neglected or pretend not to be existed. Thus, the book *Bayan al-Bida'i* need to be revisited and its teachings need to be amplified, to remind Muslims of the need to improve some of their religious practices to allow their acts of prayers to be accepted in the sight of Allah (SWT). The reasons for the revisitation of this important treatise have been highlighted in under the relevance of the book in the section below.

Relevance of the book to contemporary Muslims in Hausaland

The *Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i*, as it is popularly known, and demonstrated in the above section of this paper, is one of the few books with a rich content that addressed directly the religious practices of the Muslims in Hausaland. It is a century long masterpiece that its relevance and importance cannot be emphasized. To highlight on the relevance of the book from the time of the Shaykh to the present, the following salient points are important:

1. The Methodology: is one of the unique features of the *Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i* that made it distinct among other treatises written by the Shaykh among its contemporaries that were discussing delicate juristic issues. This is by maintaining a simple generic style that helps for its readers comprehend practical issues of religion without the need for further reference, despite the level of their education. This gives the book the advantages to hit the nail of issues one at a time through succinct but precise elaborations to give the position of the Shari'ah without mincing words. The method, makes the book to focus only on the innovations attached to religious practices and their implications to a Muslim and his/her practices as a believer, without delving to other issues that may affect understanding of the subject matter.
2. The Scope: the efforts of the book to discuss widely and comprehensively matters of practical religion on almost all the ramifications of the religious practices of the Hausaland, which has made it the most sought and read compendium of Islamic jurisprudence among the Muslims, students and scholars alike. This shows that the book as a major source that breathes into the minds of students the rudiments of the views of the classical Muslim jurists and their approach and positions on the practical teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). It is this that makes those who read, comprehend and put into practice what the book is teaching feel the wind of the Jihad of the shaykh and taste what the Jama'a (followers) of the Shaykh enjoyed of the correct practice of Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).
3. Accessibility to Shari'ah Precepts: this in the sense that the book contains various legal views on juristic practices in almost all aspects of the religion. Some of the views were directly or indirectly taken by the Shaykh from the classical books of Islamic jurisprudence, that some can be traced back to the time of Imams (leaders) of the four famous schools of law. This is why the book has simplified the practice of the various aspects of the religion that are complex in Hausaland, and particularly the Salah, for the reason that the book is not economical with views of scholars on a particular issue that attracts attention of the scholars. Another thing that adds to the relevance of book is its response to questions bordering certain practical aspect of the religion that were not often discussed by the scholars of the Hausaland, even though, one cannot say that the book does not give new legal verdicts on such

issues, but only attempts to make people understand the juristic regularities attached to those obligations of the religion. Thus, it is a light that beams on the hidden juristic facet of Islam.

4. Intellectualism: the Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i, based on its contents sparks Islamic educational prowess among students of learning across generations, and particularly in the area of jurisprudence (Fiqh) in the Hausaland and beyond. It has adopted similar methods of the classical jurists in using argument to address juristic issues at a time, which today became clear that the book speaks of areas of flows from among the religious practice of Salah. This is setting precedence to contemporary Muslims in Hausaland following the relics of the Shaykh in discussing religious issues in the contexts of the Hausaland. Thus, the book defines the nature and scope of such intellectualism.

CONCLUSION

Prayer is the first pillar in Islam, making it the foundation of faith. It is a means by which people can seek hope, solace and salvation. Prayer enables one to find refuge in a Power far greater than one can ever imagine. If a Muslim ardently performs prayer five times a day with true understanding, such a person will not bow to unlawful temptations. Yet, the perpetuality of the performance of prayer by a Muslim, made him to take so much advantages of the institution by bringing in new issues (bid'ah) to tempered with the modalities it was revealed. Moreover, a prayer which does not correspond with what was revealed, whether in its substance or form, is a null and void, and its actor is considered a great sinner. The fear for Muslims, and particularly in Hausaland, led Shaykh 'Uthman bn Foduye to write Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i that traced innovations that were attached to prayer along other practices of the religion, through pointing their invalid position in Islam. The ability of the book to address similar innovative practices proves beyond doubt the relevance of the Kitab Bayan al-Bida'i in its methods, scope, accessibility and intellectualism juristic discussions of the contemporary times.

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