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Islahi, Abdul Azim

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh India

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Sule Ahmed Gusau

Economic Ideas of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, X, No.1

Comment: Abdul Azim Islahi, Department of Economics Aligarh Muslim University, India

The 18th Century produced three great Islamic reformers in three different regions of the Muslim world – Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) in India, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (d.1787) in the Arabian Peninsula, and Usman bin Muhammad (1754-1817) in West Africa. While the achievements of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab due to strategic and political factors became known. The efforts of Shah Waliullah, his sons and grandsons, and the struggles of Usman bin Muhammad and his son did not receive as much attention.

Sule Ahmed Gusau's paper makes an interesting and informative effort to make some amends. It is among the very few studies on the subject that the present reviewer has come across. The case of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab is even worse, almost no effort has been undertaken to explore if he had anything to say about economic issues of his times. In contrast, Shah Waliullah's idea on economic matters, it is gratifying to note, have been well investigated (See: M.N. Siddiqi, *Contemporary Literature on Islamic Economics*. Leicester (U.K.): 1978. p. 60). The history of economic thought in Islam is in fact one of the most neglected areas in the discipline of economics. There is a need to investigate the economic ideas of all outstanding Muslim scholars and thinkers in a systematic and rigorous manner.

Sule Ahmed Gusau's paper has the merit of drawing attention to the need for a detailed study of the economic ideas of Dan Fodio. The Shehu's career was similar to that of Ibn Taimyah and he was apparently much influenced by his predecessor. It is worthy of note that the economic ideas of Ibn Taimyah have recently been discussed in detail (see A. A. Islahi, *Economic Concepts of Ibn Taimyah*, Leicester (U.K.):1988. 286 pages). Ibn Taimyah discussed the concept of just price, market mechanism and prescribed a price regulation policy for the state. This may be considered as one of the most profound contributions in the history of economic thought. Nothing worth mention was found in the West until the middle of the 18th century on the theory of the mechanism of pricing (see J.A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*. London: 1972, p. 305). On the question of property, Ibn Taimyah had advocated a balanced stance, in sharp contrast to the extreme positions taken by capitalist and socialist thinkers of our time. He carefully analyzed the economic and moral reasons for the prohibition of interest and made brief but significant reflections on the nature and functions of money. The idea that "bad money drives out good money" known in economics as Gresham's Law was mentioned by Ibn Taimyah two and a half centuries before the birth of Gresham (d.1579) to whom the concept is attributed. The question of how joint ventures and different business organizations could be established in the absence of interest was also answered by Ibn Taimyah in detail. He charged the Islamic state with specific economic duties and argued in favour of wide ranging powers for the state in regulating the economy. His contribution in the field of public finance was also remarkable. As against many other economists, he paid greater attention to the question of public expenditure.

As is clear from the paper of Sule Ahmed Gusau, Shehu Usman Dan Fodio also touched upon similar issues which Ibn Taimyah had earlier discussed: fair price, market mechanism, price control, *muhtasib's* economic functions, the role of government in economic life, etc. There is need to critically examine Dan Fodio's economic thought and determine whether he was merely a follower and elaborator of his predecessor's ideas or a thinker in his own right an innovator who left an indelible imprint on his times.

While comparing Shehu Usman's ideas with his contemporaries, the paper points out that his son, Muhammad Bello was concerned with employment, training of labor, pension and earning surplus, etc. This is very significant as these issues generally escaped the attention of earlier writers.

However, Sule Ahmed's statement that it was Ibn Khaldun who expressly underscored the role of government, especially the importance of government spending is not very convincing and lack documentation. In my opinion Ibn Khaldun was an advocate of *laissez faire* economics and minimum government interference and control. He opposed state trading and tax increases (See: Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Tr. F. Rosenthal), Princeton University Press, 1967, Vol. 2. pp. 93-96).

I must point out that Sule Ahmed's otherwise good paper is marred by many errors in Arabic transliteration. Some words and terms are unclear or left unexplained. For example: *Kudin Kasa*, *hima*, *harim* are not explained. The difference and distinction between *kharaj* and *fay* as explained is not clear and conceptually incorrect. *Khums* should be *khumus* and *ganimah* (p.15) should be written as *ghanimah*. The name Juzai is not clear-who was he and what was his contribution? There is a need to take more care in transliteration; a uniform scheme should be followed throughout which is, unfortunately not the case in this paper.