



The Legacy of Caliph Abubakar Atiku (*Sarkin Musulmi*): A Study of his Life, Contributions, and Impact on the Sokoto Caliphate

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Abstract:

This study examines the life, contributions, and impact of Caliph Abubakar Atiku, the second Caliph of the Sokoto Caliphate. Born in 1784, Abubakar Atiku was the child of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. Abubakar Atiku played a significant role in the Caliphate's administration, serving as a foreign affairs officer and minister. He also fought several wars and was appointed as the Caliph in 1837. This study highlights Abubakar Atiku's contributions to the Sokoto Caliphate, including his military campaigns, administrative reforms, and diplomatic efforts. It also explores his legacy and impact on the Caliphate and its people. Caliph Abubakar Atiku was a remarkable leader who played a significant role in shaping the Sokoto Caliphate. His legacy is characterized by his bravery, justice, and generosity. As a scholar, military leader, and statesman, he contributed immensely to the growth and stability of the Caliphate. His impact on the educational, moral, military, and socioeconomic development of the Caliphate is still felt today.

Keywords: Caliph Abubakar Atiku, Sokoto Caliphate, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, Islamic leadership, Hausaland, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praises belong to Allah (SWT). May Allah's peace and mercy be upon the Noble Prophet (SAW), his household,



companions, and those that follow their footsteps, up till the Day of Reckoning. This study explores the life, contributions, and legacy of Caliph Abubakar Atiku, a prominent figure in the Sokoto Caliphate. Born in 1784, Abubakar Atiku was the child of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. Abubakar Atiku played a significant role in the Caliphate's administration, serving as a foreign affairs officer and minister. He also fought several wars and was appointed as the Caliph in 1837 (Abba et al., 2017). This study highlights Abubakar Atiku's contributions to the Sokoto Caliphate, including his military campaigns, administrative reforms, and diplomatic efforts. It also explores his legacy and impact on the Caliphate and its people.

However, it is important to shade a little light about the father of Atiku. Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo was raised in Dagele (presently Gwadamawa local government Sokoto, Nigeria) in the olden Hausa states (particularly Gobir). He obtained his educational background from the family, before being enrolled into other schools. In sometimes like 1774-75 AC Shehu started his struggle for passing information about Islam to the citizens of the general Hausa states. He spent about 17 years of teaching, studying, and preaching in Gobir, Zamfara, and Kebbi, albeit his ideology and students traverse the whole of Hausaland (Bala, 2014; Labbo, 2016; Gidado & Sarkingobir, 2021; Bunza & Karim, 2021; Gidado et al., 2023). After series of encounter, teaching, and educational intervention in 1804, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo and his followers migrated to an area determined as Gudu (where they had a battle with the Congregation of Sarkingobir and allies), In 1804 there was successful taken over of the whole Hausa states by Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo by *Jamaa* (the people of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo) (Chafe, 1992). This culminated to what some scholars described as Sokoto Caliphate (with the major capital as Sokoto, Nigeria). The vast, and influential entity of Sokoto Caliphate had political, religious, educational social, and economic determination, among others. The legacies of the Sokoto Caliphate continued even after the colonial invasion in 1904 (Bala, 2018; Abdulqadir, 2020). The system of leadership known as *Sarauta* system adopted in the discharge of Sokoto Caliphate thrived through Islamic principles, and still Muslims (in northern Nigeria and other places like Niger republic) revered them as the root of Islam. They revered *Sarauta* because it emanates from Sokoto Caliphate which was laid by Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo under the tutelage of Islam (Chafe, 1992). The objective of this paper was to explore the life, contributions, and legacy of Caliph Abubakar Atiku, a prominent figure in the Sokoto Caliphate.

2. Caliph Abubakar's background and educational pursuit

Abubakar Atiku is the 4th child of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo (the founder and reformer of Sokoto Caliphate), Abubakar was equally born at Dagele (which is presently located at Gwadamawa local government, Sokoto state, Nigeria), his mother was Hauwau (along with Caliph Muhammad Bello), and his date of birth was 1784 or 1782, and died in 1842, after spending five years as Caliph or *Sarkin Musulmi* (SM). Abubakar Atiku was born when his

father was about 28 years old, in a period characterized with the peak of the Shehu's struggle (involving learning, teaching, and preaching); thus, Abubakar Atiku was finely shaped by this critical period. Abubakar Atiku was initially educated by his mother, Hauwau (bn Mallam Adam) along with his brother, Caliph Bello (who was three years older than Atiku). Later, the teachers of Abubakar Atiku include, his father, Shehu Abdullahi (his uncle), and others (Abba et al., 2017). Thus, basically, Abubakar Atiku was able to traverse through the basic tiers of Islamic education in Hausaland, starting from home-learning (early childhood care and education), passing through the highest level of advanced studies (which was facilitated by the presence of advanced learning centre at Dagele). Abubakar Atiku had received significant training and coaching from his father, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo, in fact, Abubakar Atiku was the closest son of Shehu. Abubakar Atiku was among the famous students (graduates) of Dagele Centre of Advanced Studies, which made a lot of contributions in the jihad struggle, he was among the initial set of graduates of the centre (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017).

3. Contributions of Abubakar Atiku during the time (reign) of Caliph Muhammad Bello

Abubakar Atiku is qualified to be given assignments to fulfil in the Sokoto Caliphate based on his antecedents' participation at Dagele, being always with Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo at Dagele, Sifawa, Sokoto, and Gwandu for instance. He fought several wars along with the remaining Muslim army (together with Shehu and Bello) (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017). Abubakar Atiku was assigned by Caliph Bello to led *Ribat* at Bakura, and Gandi (Chafe, 1992). Allah SWT disclosed that:

"But as for those who strive hard (*juhud*) in Our cause-We shall must certainly guide them unto paths that lead unto Us: for behold, Allah is indeed with the doers of good." Quran, 29:69.

The scholars reiterated that striving in the cause of Allah is a multidimensional affair. That is why the Prophet SAW said:

"We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad." (Lemu, 2005).

In line with the following verse:

"You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind, you exhort what is good (*Al-Ma'ruf*) and forbid evil (*Al-Munkar*) and you believe in Allah. Had the people of the book believed, it could have been better for them, among them are believers, but most of them are *fasiqun* (transgressors)." Qur'an, 3:110.

Furthermore, Abubakar Atiku served as foreign affairs officer or minister to the Caliphate for his significant role in dealing with matters concerning the foreign dealings of the Caliphate. Abubakar Atiku specifically was responsible in resolving the relationship of the Caliphate and Western part of the Caliphate (Azawad, Kunta, Masina for instance). Abubakar Atiku had contributed hugely in making diplomatic efforts during his days (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017).

4. Emergence of Abubakar Atiku as Caliph (*Sarkin Musulmi*)

Prior to Caliph Muhammad Bello's death, needed tools of governance were ensured, including the regulations and policies of inception unto the throne. Bello made clear contributions that established guidelines for succession to the throne. In 1837, seven days after the passing of Caliph Muhammad Bello, Abubakar Atiku was selected as Caliph (*Sarkin Musulmi*) out of the other contenders (his brother Muhammad Buhari, and Aliyu Babba) (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017). Some of the features of the Abubakar Atiku as Caliph (*Sarkin Musulmi*) include:

- Learning (*ijtihad* and fatwa ability)
- Strong-mind in enforcing laws
- Properly experienced in war affairs
- Being a Muslim, and not a slave, and being a male (Abba et al., 2017).

5. Instances of major accomplishments made by Caliph Abubakar Atiku

The time (reign) of Caliph Abubakar Atiku was relevant to the period of Bello. They were both stumbling on the challenges of consolidation of the Caliphate, and the principal enemies (then) were Zamfara, Gobirawa, Katsina Maradi, Kabbawa, and Damagaram for instance, thus, the Caliph Abubakar Atiku had worked in order to prevent further reestablishment; consequently, devoted his five years term in preserving the borders of the Caliphate. Caliph Abubakar Atiku converted the Sokoto Town as the core (centre) of administration and spirituality instead of Wurno. To consolidate leadership and administration, Caliph Abubakar Atiku appointed his son Ahmad Zaruku (who later became *Sarkin Musulmi*) as Sarkin Zamfara (in-charge of Sokoto city), a post once occupied by Atiku himself (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017; Ayama, 2018). Other contributions of Abubakar Atiku are as follows:

- Caliph Abubakar Atiku made some political resolutions during his reign in order to consolidate on the past achievement. He proscribed every acts of clubbing, and other related sporting activities (such as traditional singing and dancing)
- He made it usual in his core activities by distributing public treasury to the poor and needy. He had always been for the poor trying to resolve their personal issues that are why he had enjoyed very cordial relationship with his subjects. Tradition avers that Atiku was the most charitable among the children of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo. He gives out as if he fears poverty not.
- He constituted a committee for checkmating the activities of judges with a view to correct any wrong judgement delivered. This indicates that he treats everyone equal to the law.
- His cabinet was full of good people, therewith, he shun the bad ones. This attracted the Ulama to be his ministers.
- He maintained the modernized Sokoto (principles) by rebuilding cities, and markets (one of his ideas is ensuring that corruption is prevented in Caliphate markets).
- He shuns slanders and backbiters because he does not accept that from any one.

- He empowered the Da'awah section for the sake of imploring people to good and avoids bad ones.
- He utilized reconciliation among conflicting subjects
- He opened his gates for hearing public complaints
- Abubakar Atiku is strict in punishing offenders, because he severely deal with them and abhors evils
- During the reign of Caliph Abubakar Atiku the task was to consolidate the aps. He therefore worked to put an end to any possible resurgence, that is why he fought battles or was including, *Yakin Burmi*, *Yakin Zamafara*, *Yakin Zauma*, *Yakin Tsibiri*, *Yakin Katsina Da Cikaji*, and *Yakin Gummi* among others (Ummaru, 1999; Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017; Gidadawa et al., 2022ab).

6. Descendants of Caliph Abubakar Atiku

It was established that Caliph Abubakar Atiku had about 37 children, therewith; they are enumerated as follows:

- Abdulkadir
- Sarkin Musulmi (Caliph) Ahmadu (Amadu Maichimmola)
- Ahmad Rufai
- Alhassan
- Alhussain
- Sarkin Musulmi Abdurrahman
- Isa Fari
- Nuhu
- Dalhatu
- Haliru
- Isa gajere
- Sulaimanu
- Umar Nagwamatse (the founder of Kontagora)
- Ibrahim
- Khalidu
- Mualledi
- Muhammad NaBakura
- Abdullahi Bayero
- Mu'allim Garko
- Abdullahi Maibodinga
- Mai tuta
- Abubkar Maikwato

- Hamidu
- Muhammad
- Dahiru
- Is'haka
- Basharu
- Ibrahimu (the last born)
- Jide
- Nana
- Hauwau
- Halimatu
- Aishatu
- Maryam
- Hafsatu
- Asmau
- Khadijatu

However, these children of Atiku had spread over the Caliphate and some of them became leaders or *hakimai* in various domains. Many among the children of Atiku or descendants formed towns and villages as *Rabats* and the mantle of leadership of these areas were still with their descendants (Gidadawa & Sarkingobir, 2021; Gidadawa et al., 2022ab; Bashar, 2025). Some of the areas where Atiku's descendants (*Atikawa*) are leading are mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Some of the areas where Atiku's descendants (*Atikawa*) are leading

S/N	Domain	Title of leadership
1	Sokoto	Sarkin Musulmi, they had some of them that clinched the Sultanate, such as Ahmadu, Abdurrahman, Maiturare, and Tambari
2	Maiurno (Sudan Republic)	Sultan of Maiurno, Sudan Republic
3	Kontagora	Sarkin Sudan Kontagora (Emir of Kontaogra)
4	Danchadi	Sarkin Zamfaran Danchadi (District Head of Danchadi, Bodinga local government, Sokoto State)
5	Gwadabawa	Sarkingobir Gwadabawa (District Head of

		Gwadabawa, Gwadabawa local government, Sokoto State
6	Tangaza	Marafan Tangaza (District Head of Tangaza, Tangaza local government, Sokoto State
7	Gada	Marafan Tangaza (District Head of Tangaza, Tangaza local government, Sokoto State
8	Illela	District Head of Illela, Illela local government, Sokoto State
9	Jabo	Sarkin Burmin Jabo (District Head of Jabo, Tambuwal local government, Sokoto State
10	Chimmola	Sarkin Gabas Chimmola (District Head of Chimmola, Gwadabawa local government, Sokoto State
11	Gongono	Bunun Gongono (District Head of Gongono, Tangaza local government, Sokoto State
12	Wauru	Bunun Wauru (District Head of Wauru, Gada local government, Sokoto State
13	Wushishi	Sarkin Wushishi, District head Wushishi, Niger state, Nigeria
14	Asara	District head of Asara, Gwadabawa
15	Fajaldu	Barayar Zakin fajaldu, Village head (Hakimi)
16	Dimbitso	Bunun Dimbiso (village

		head) in Wurno, Sokoto
17	Sabon Birni	Bunun Sabon Birnin Sokoto
18	Rijiyar Dorowa	Durunmbun Rijyar Dorowa, Sokoto city
19	Sabon Garin Darna	Galadiman Sabon Garin Darna (village head), Illela
20	Huchi	Dangaladiman Huchi (village head, Gwadabawa)
21	Mammande	Ardon Mammande (village head, Gwadabawa)

Source: Ummaru (1999); Ayama (2018)

7. Some specific features of Atiku and legacy or impacts

Some specific features of Atiku are as follows:

- He is pioneer *Sarkin Musulmi* to die as *Shaheed*. Reports had it that he passed away with Zufan Goshi.
- He is the peak among the children of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo in terms of giving-out charity
- He is a brave man who always stay with his weapon
- He is a shy type
- He is justice, who fears no blasts in ensuring that justice prevails (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017). This is in-line with Quran that says:

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witness to Allah; even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be rich or poor, Allah is Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do.” Qur’an, 4:135.

However, the impacted legacies of Atiku are enumerated in this section. The efforts made by Atiku are huge, but scope of this paper will highlight a piecemeal of it below:

- Educational legacy- Islam pays much emphasis on education, therewith, Quran says:

“Read! In the name of the Lord Who has created (all that exists)

He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood)

Read! And your lord is the Most Generous

Who has taught (the writing) by the pen

He has taught man that which he knew not.” Quran, 96:1-5.

Atiku’s peculiar behaviour is taciturn, but his association with Shehu (for being the closest son, who always stay with Shehu) indicate that he is a good, obedient, and intellectual. According to the Socioecological model (SEM) family is the second factor that affects human behaviour

(Sarkingobir, 2025). In this vein, behaviours of Atiku indicated that he had been impacted by his father. Despite his taciturn nature, he had written some books namely, *Ajwibah* (solutions to political problems affecting Sheikh Ahmad bn Abubakar Masina), *Rasa'il* (reconciliation of Azbinawa, Kelgeres, Kelawi, Ateseyen, and wullumadum), *Kitab al-Asrar* (composed pertaining the secrets obtained from his father), and *Risalah al-Intikal* among others.

- Moral legacy-Atiku's features were justice, giver, taciturn, hater of worldly things and transgression, brave, and *murid* (student of his father).

- Military legacy- He had composed armies that fought severally for the deference of the Caliphate. His descendants follow suit by establishing *Ribats* to fortress the Caliphate (Chafe, 1992).

- Socioeconomic legacy- Qur'an says:

"You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind, you exhort what is good (*Al-Ma'ruf*) and forbid evil (*Al-Munkar*) and you believe in Allah. Had the people of the book believed, it could have been better for them, among them are believers, but most of them are *fasiqun* (transgressors)." Qur'an, 3:110

Thus, Atiku's social legacy was his political styles that impose ban on all unlawful sports (such as club), has beclouded his cabinet with good people and scholars. This indicates his clear ideology of hating wrongdoers and transgressors. Atiku's strong hate of corrupt activities in justice system and economics indicate a progress. His time was known for his ideologies intended to remodel cities and markets for the development of the Caliphate and its subjects (Shareef, 2005; Abba et al., 2017).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Caliph Abubakar Atiku was a remarkable leader who played a significant role in shaping the Sokoto Caliphate. His legacy is characterized by his bravery, justice, and generosity. As a scholar, military leader, and statesman, he contributed immensely to the growth and stability of the Caliphate. His impact on the educational, moral, military, and socioeconomic development of the Caliphate is still felt today. The descendants of Caliph Abubakar Atiku continue to play important roles in the region, and his legacy serves as an inspiration to many. This study highlights the importance of Caliph Abubakar Atiku's life and contributions, and it is hoped that it will contribute to a deeper understanding of the history and legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate. Accordingly, the recommendations are as follows:

- Preservation of Historical Records: Efforts should be made to preserve and document the historical records of Caliph Abubakar Atiku's life and reign, as well as the Sokoto Caliphate's history.

- Leadership Development: Leaders should emulate Caliph Abubakar Atiku's leadership qualities, such as justice, bravery, and generosity.

- Promotion of Islamic Values: The Sokoto Caliphate's Islamic heritage should be promoted and preserved, and its values should be integrated into modern society.
- Community Development: Communities should prioritize education, moral development, and socioeconomic growth, just like Caliph Abubakar Atiku did during his reign.
- Further Research: Further research should be conducted on the Sokoto Caliphate and Caliph Abubakar Atiku's life and legacy to uncover more about their contributions to Islamic history and culture.

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