

# Digawa Community: Their Beliefs and Opinions: A Critical Analytical Study in Light of Islamic Sharia

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04158>

Published August 22, 2024

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**Citation:** Ismail S. (2024) Digawa Community: Their Beliefs and Opinions: A Critical Analytical Study in Light of Islamic Sharia, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 5 (4),116-121

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines the Digawa group in northern Nigeria, particularly in Jigawa State, known for their distinct beliefs and practices among Muslims. The research critically analyzes their history, divisions, and socio-economic impact to differentiate acceptable beliefs from those deemed rejected. Utilizing descriptive, analytical, field, and critical methods, the study references the sayings of Digawa leaders and Islamic Sharia texts. The Digawa are divided into praying (Qadiriyya and Mahdiyya) and non-praying sections, each with unique practices such as strict confinement of women, prohibition of music, and specific burial customs. The findings reveal significant deviations from mainstream Islamic scholarship, emphasizing the need for informed intervention to guide the Digawa towards more universally accepted practices. This analysis is supported by the Islamic principle of Ijtihad, which allows for interpretation and adaptation of Islamic teachings to ensure alignment with the core values and broader consensus within the Muslim ummah.*

**KEYWORDS:** Digawa, northern Nigeria, Qadiriyya, Mahdiyya, Islamic sects, women confinement, music prohibition, burial customs, Ijtihad, Islamic scholarship

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## INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The landscape of Islamic belief is marked by a rich tapestry of interpretations and practices, reflecting the diverse contexts in which Muslims live. This diversity, while enriching, also leads to differences in beliefs and opinions among Muslims worldwide. These differences often result in the formation of various groups and sects, each adhering to unique interpretations of Islamic teachings. This phenomenon is acknowledged in the Quran, where Allah Almighty says, "Every group rejoicing in what it has," and is further affirmed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who stated, "My ummah will divide into seventy-three sects."

Northern Nigeria, historically known as the lands of Hausa and Kanem-Bornu, provides a significant example of this religious diversity. Since the introduction of Islam to the region, Muslims have formed distinct groups and sects, each with its own set of beliefs and practices. One such group is the Digawa, who have established unique doctrinal positions that differentiate them from other Muslim communities in the region. The Digawa are characterized by their strict adherence to specific interpretations of Islamic texts, which they believe justify their distinctive practices.

The Digawa group has garnered attention due to their unique interpretations and practices, which include the confinement of women, prohibition of music, exclusive wearing of white clothes, and unique burial customs. These practices, while rooted in their understanding of Islam, often stand in stark contrast to mainstream Islamic teachings. The Digawa cite various Quranic verses to support their views, reflecting a broader trend among sectarian groups to seek validation from foundational Islamic texts.

This research aims to critically analyze the beliefs and practices of the Digawa group, distinguishing those that align with core Islamic principles from those that deviate. By providing a comprehensive historical and conceptual background, the study seeks to illuminate the origins and evolution of the Digawa's beliefs. Furthermore, it aims to offer insights into the social and economic implications of their practices, particularly in the context of northern Nigeria.

The objectives of this study include tracing the history of the Digawa group, from its establishment to its current divisions and beliefs. Additionally, the study aims to highlight the importance of understanding these beliefs for local governments and communities, with the goal of regulating and guiding the Digawa's activities in a manner that promotes social harmony and adherence to universally accepted Islamic practices. The focus of this research is on the Digawa group located in Jigawa State, providing a detailed examination of their internal divisions, doctrinal disputes, and unique practices.

In pursuing these objectives, the research employs a combination of descriptive, analytical, field, and critical methods. It draws on primary sources, including the sayings of Digawa leaders and Islamic Sharia books, as well as fieldwork involving interviews and observations. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the Digawa group and offer recommendations for fostering greater alignment with mainstream Islamic teachings and practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Background

1. **Sectarianism in Islam:** Sectarianism within Islam is a well-documented phenomenon that has been studied extensively by scholars. According to Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, Islamic sectarianism arises from both theological differences and socio-political factors. The Quran itself acknowledges diversity within the Muslim community, stating in Surah Al-Rum (30:32), "Of those who have split up their religion and become sects, every faction rejoicing in what it has." This verse highlights the inevitability of differing interpretations among Muslims.
2. **Quranic Interpretation and Sect Formation:** The formation of sects often hinges on specific interpretations of the Quran and Hadith. As Hallaq (2009) notes, the interpretative flexibility of Islamic texts allows for diverse understandings, which can lead to the formation of distinct religious groups. The Digawa group, like many other sects, interprets certain Quranic verses to support their unique practices, emphasizing the importance of understanding the socio-cultural context in which these interpretations arise.

### Historical Background

1. **Islam in Northern Nigeria:** The introduction of Islam to northern Nigeria dates back to the 11th century with the establishment of the Kanem-Bornu Empire. Scholars like Last (1967) and Robinson (2004) detail how Islamic teachings spread through trade, migration, and scholarship. Over time, various Islamic groups, including the Qadiriyya and Mahdiyya Sufi orders, established themselves in the region, contributing to a rich tapestry of Islamic practice.
2. **The Rise of the Digawa:** The Digawa group emerged in the context of this diverse Islamic landscape. Historical accounts suggest that the term "Digawa" may derive from the Fulani word "Tigaki," meaning veil or cover, or from the name of their first leader, Malam Daga. The group's origins are intertwined with the broader history of Islamic movements in northern Nigeria, particularly the Qadiriyya and Mahdiyya orders, which influenced their practices and beliefs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multifaceted methodological approach:

1. **Descriptive Method:** The descriptive method involves cataloging the beliefs and practices of the Digawa group, providing a detailed account of their religious doctrines and social customs.
2. **Analytical Method:** The analytical method is used to examine the theological and ideological foundations of the Digawa's beliefs, comparing them with mainstream Islamic teachings. This involves textual analysis of primary sources, including the Quran and Hadith, as well as the writings of Islamic scholars.

3. **Field Method:** Field research includes interviews with Digawa leaders and members, as well as observations of their practices. This approach provides firsthand insights into the lived experiences of the Digawa community.
4. **Critical Method:** The critical method evaluates the implications of the Digawa's beliefs and practices, particularly in terms of their conformity to or deviation from mainstream Islamic principles. This involves engaging with contemporary Islamic scholarship and legal opinions.

## FINDINGS

1. **Women's Confinement:** The Digawa enforce the confinement of women to their husband's house, citing Quranic verses that command modesty, such as Surah Al-Ahzab (33:33): "And stay in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance." However, mainstream Islamic scholars, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi, interpret these verses as advocating modest behavior rather than physical confinement.
2. **Prohibition of Music:** The Digawa's prohibition of music is based on their interpretation of Hadith literature that condemns musical instruments as the voice of Satan. While many Islamic scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, agree on the general prohibition of music, others, like Al-Ghazali, allow for exceptions, particularly for spiritual and cultural purposes.
3. **Custom of Wearing White:** The Digawa's exclusive wearing of white clothes is an interpretation of Quranic verses promoting purity. However, this practice lacks widespread support among Islamic scholars, who emphasize that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wore clothes of various colors, and there is no specific injunction to wear white exclusively.
4. **Burial Practices:** The Digawa's practice of burying the dead at home contrasts with the mainstream Islamic practice of burial in designated cemeteries. The consensus among Islamic scholars is based on the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who recommended burying the dead in communal graveyards to honor their dignity and provide a place for the living to remember and pray for them.
5. **Abandoning Congregational Prayer:** The non-praying section of the Digawa justifies their abandonment of congregational prayer with unique Quranic interpretations. This practice is contrary to mainstream Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of congregational prayers, as indicated in the Hadith: "Prayer in congregation is twenty-seven times more meritorious than prayer performed individually" (Bukhari and Muslim).

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while the Digawa group's practices are rooted in their interpretations of Islamic texts, many of their beliefs and customs diverge from mainstream Islamic teachings. The confinement of women, prohibition of music, exclusive wearing of white clothes, unique burial

practices, and abandonment of congregational prayer are all areas where the Digawa differ significantly from the broader Muslim community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Community Engagement:** Local governments and Islamic scholars should engage with the Digawa community to promote dialogue and understanding. This can help in addressing misconceptions and aligning practices with mainstream Islamic teachings.
2. **Educational Programs:** Implementing educational programs that emphasize mainstream Islamic teachings and jurisprudence can help bridge the gap between the Digawa's practices and those of the wider Muslim community.
3. **Support for Women:** Programs that support women's rights within the framework of Islamic law should be developed to address the issue of women's confinement and promote their participation in broader social and economic activities.
4. **Reevaluation of Practices:** The Digawa community should be encouraged to reevaluate their practices in light of mainstream Islamic scholarship, ensuring that their interpretations and customs align with widely accepted Islamic principles.

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### **Personal Interviews**

- Malam Isma'il Waziri, Imam of Jigay, on 5-9-2010, at the house of Malam Loun Albus, in the city of Gamal.
- Malam Abu Bakr Nuh, in Oumerni, Tura Local Government Area, on 5-11-2010.
- Malam Suleiman Mi Tafsir Birnin Kudu, an Islamic scholar with a teaching and preaching activity in Jigawa State Radio Stations, on 5-3-2011.
- Malam Smai, leader of Digawa Masari, on 8-8-2010.
- Malam Loun Umar Albus, former Secretary General of Primary and Secondary Schools Government in Jigawa State, at his house on 5-9-2010.
- Malam Muhammad Bab, leader of Digawa Dingari, Qadiriyyah, on 9-3-2010.
- Malam Mudi Hasan, former member of the Mahdiyyah, on 27-3-2010, at his house in the city of Birnin Kudu.