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Maryam Jameelah

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Foreword

SHEHU UTHMAN DAN FODIO

A GREAT MUJADDID OF WEST AFRICA

MARYAM JAMEELAH

Publisher: MOHAMMAD YUSUF KHAN & SONS SUNNAT NAGAR, LAHORE - PAKISTAN

SHEHU UTHMAN DAN FODIO

A GREAT MUJADDID OF WEST AFRICA

By

MARYAM JAMEELAH

Publisher:

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INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

[3] INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

Maryam Jameelah was born in 1934 in New York at the height of the Great Depression—a fourth-generation American of German-Jewish origin. She was reared in Westchester, one of the most prosperous and populated suburbs of New York and received a thoroughly secular American education at the local public schools. Always an above-average student, she soon became a passionate intellectual and insatiable bibliophile, hardly ever without a book in hand, her readings extending far beyond the requirements of the school curriculum. As she entered adolescence, she became intensely serious-minded, scorning all frivolities, which is very rare for an otherwise attractive young girl. Her main interests were religion, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology and biology. The school and local community public libraries and later, the New York Public Library, became "her second home."

After her graduation from secondary school in the summer of 1952, she was admitted to New York University where she studied a general liberal arts programme. While at the university, she became severely ill in 1953, grew steadily worse and had to discontinue college two years later without earning any diploma. She was confined to private and public hospitals for two years (1957-1959) and only after her discharge, did she discover her facility for writing. Marmaduke Pickthall's translation of the Quran and Allama Muhammad Asad's two books—his autobiographical *Road to Mecca* and *Islam at the Crossroads*—ignited her interest in Islam and after correspondence with some prominent Muslims in Muslim lands and making intimate friends with some Muslim converts in New York, she embraced Islam at the Islamic Mission in Brooklyn, New York at the hand of Shaikh Daoud Ahmad Faisal, who then changed her name from Margaret Marcus to Maryam Jameelah.

[4] During extensive correspondence with Muslims throughout the world and reading and making literary contributions to whatever Muslim periodicals were available in English, Maryam Jameelah became acquainted with the writings of Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maudoodi and so, beginning in December 1960, they exchanged letters regularly. In the spring of 1962, Maulana Maudoodi invited Maryam Jameelah to migrate to Pakistan and live as a member of his family in Lahore. Maryam Jameelah accepted the offer and a year later, married Mohammad Yusuf Khan, who later became the publisher of all her books. She subsequently became the mother of four children, living with her co-wife and her children in a large extended household of in-laws. Most unusual for a woman after marriage, she continued all her intellectual interests and literary activities; in fact, her most important writings were done during and in-between pregnancies. She observes *Purdah* strictly.

Her hatred of atheism and materialism in all its varied manifestations—past and present—is intense and in her restless quest for absolute, transcendental ideals, she upholds Islam as the most emotionally and intellectually satisfying explanation to the Ultimate Truth which alone gives life (and death) meaning, direction, purpose and value.

UMAR FARUQ KHAN

SHEHU UTHMAN DAN FODIO : A GREAT MUJADDID OF WEST AFRICA

[6]

SHEHU UTHMAN DAN FODIO: A GREAT MUJADDID OF WEST AFRICA

Great men appear at critical times in history to shape its course. Although the story of their lives does not of itself amount to the totality of history, they nevertheless illuminate it and determine the course of events. The story of Shehu Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817) is crucial to the understanding of the Hausa-Fulani as the founders of the 19th century empire of the Sokoto Khalifate in what is today northern Nigeria and surrounding areas. In Islamic history, some of our great *Mujaddidin* are universally known among Muslims while others are known only in their localities. One of the important *Mujaddidin* of the recent past who had local rather than universal impact is Shehu Uthman dan Fodio. He worked among the Muslims in what is today northern Nigeria and his influence was felt throughout West Africa.

Born at Maratta in December 1754, Uthman belonged to the Fulani tribe which had migrated from Senegal and settled in Kwani in the Hausa city-state of Gobir. Very little is known about Uthman dan Fodio's childhood except a few legends. He received a traditional education which consisted of memorization of the Quran, reading and writing in Arabic, followed by translation of Quran into his native tongue, some knowledge of Hadith, and progressing on to a study of law, grammar, rhetoric, and arithmetic. In those days, a student [6] was often apprenticed to his teacher and would go from one professor to another for the acquisition of specific branches of knowledge at the end of which he would collect certificates of licence (*ijazah*) from the professors. These diplomas served as authorities for him to impart those branches of knowledge to others.

Uthman read Quran with his father and studied other Islamic sciences from the most learned scholars available.

Among his teachers, he was particularly influenced by Jibril bin Umar and although they lived together scarcely more than a year, Jibril's influence on Uthman was very deep. Before he became Uthman's teacher, while on his first *Hajj*, he came into contact with the Wahhabi movement which had begun in Arabia in 1740 and took special note of its impact upon Arabian society. When Jibril went on his second *Hajj*, the Wahhabis were at the height of their first empire in Arabia. Jibril could hardly fail to notice that the Wahhabi movement strived to reform the Muslims and restore the pristine purity of Islam. When he returned from Arabia, he enthusiastically related his experience to Uthman which inspired him with the hope that his own efforts to reform his people could also be successful.

Jibril and Uthman now both realized that many pagan innovations were being practiced in Hausaland and they considered it their duty to eradicate them.

From his youth, Shehu Uthman dan Fodio combined an exceptionally strong character with outstanding intellectual gifts and grew into a man of vivid eloquence. Shehu Uthman dan Fodio began to teach and preach as a young man at the age of twenty.

[7] During the week-days he taught the students various Islamic sciences (Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, etc,) and on Friday evenings, he preached to the masses of common people in their native languages. The main problems which preoccupied the Shehu's mind at the early stage of his career was: 1) the rigidity and blind adherence of the Ulema to the Malikite school whereas he advocated *ijtihad* or re-interpretation of Islamic law by those qualified to perform it; 2) the abuses of Sufism and the emergence of a class of charlatans under the cloak of sainthood who claimed to be able to prophesize the future, perform miracles and extraordinary mystical powers for themselves and thus gained their livelihood by deceiving simple and ignorant people; 3) the lack of religious education among the poorer rural common people.

He never, like the more fanatical Wahabis, opposed the principles of Sufism in themselves—only the abuses and the tendencies to go to extremes. However, although he himself was a member of the Qadiriya order which had originally

converted the Hausa and Fulani tribes to Islam more than four centuries before, he never claimed any mystical powers for himself and all that he taught was much closer to the strict Orthodox Sunni practice rather than Sufism.

He fearlessly condemned and criticized the worldly seeking ulema who in their bid to maintain the established order and protect their own personal interests, justified political corruption and were willing to compromise and tolerate immorality, pagan practices and all kinds of other evils on the basis of local customs and traditions.

[8] Shehu Uthman dan Fodio wrote more than 50 books in his disputations with the local ulema. Although he always emerged victorious, he was subjected to severe persecution by them and unwarranted verbal attacks. They accused him of hypocrisy, sedition and heresy and claimed that he was misleading the people. Nevertheless, Shehu Uthman dan Fodio persevered in the propagation of his ideas and views until a strong group of these ulema was won over to his side and supported him.

The majority of the common people were ignorant of the basic tenets of the faith and very few of them could even perform the obligatory prayers and fasts in the proper way. In his preachings to the common people, the Shehu explained to his audience the proper performance of the basic obligations of Islam (Salah, Zakat, fasting, Hajj, Jihad) in the Fulani and Hausa vernaculars. Although Shehu Uthman dan Fodio used Arabic for his writings, scholarship and preachings to the ulema and scholars, he made extensive use of the local vernaculars, Hausa and Fulani in the sermons to the common people. In particular, his poems in Fulani seem to have been the most powerful vehicle for the dissemination of his ideas among the common people. Although much of this poetry has survived to the present day, unfortunately as yet it has not received the attention and study it deserves. Shehu's son and successor, Muhammad Bello, gives us a vivid description of his sermons in his book, *Infaqul Mansuri* as follows:

[9] Know that I saw him more than once standing in a corner of his house for a while uttering some words just before going to the people outside.

And when I asked him about what he said, he replied: "I revive my faith and make a vow to Almighty Allah that I shall be sincere in whatever I may say when I go out to preach. I also ask Allah to help those present to understand and appreciate whatever I may talk about." When he reached the audience, he greeted them in a loud voice which all could hear. And when he climbed on the pulpit he greeted them again three times politely, gracefully and courteously. Then he would ask them to listen and would never grow angry nor upset nor bored though he was destined to have a group of insolent commoners who would not listen and did not stop asking him questions when he asked them to stop and be quiet. Then he would give his sermon in a loud voice, never directing his speech to one person apart from the others and never frightened by his audience even though some were great Shaikhs or rival ulema hostile to him. He would only preach to the whole congregation of things that would benefit all of them irrespective of the consequences of expressing strong opinions and views. And whenever a question was raised in the course of his orations, he would stop and answer it. Verily he was resolute in matters of faith, never swayed in the path of Allah by the reproach of anyone, just and unaffected by the intransigence of ignorant people or his enemies, even in personal private matters which concerned his private life or his relatives, steadfast and uncompromising in the pursuit of the Truth.

He and his son and successor, Muhammad Bello, were convinced that all men and women of all classes must be preached to and the audience made aware of the need for change in the existing political and social institutions. According to them, the preachers must possess three qualities; 1) they must be learned and knowledgeable [10] 2) their sermons eloquent and powerfully convincing; 3) they must have patience, be persevering and noble in character.

Finally one Eid day, the Sultan of Gobir invited the ulema of his realm to his court and distributed gifts and presents to them. All of the ulema accepted the gifts except Uthman who instead demanded from the Sultan:

1.

To allow me to call the people to Allah in your country.

2. Not to stop anyone who responds to my call.

3. To treat with respect any man wearing a turban.

4. To free all political prisoners.

5. Not to burden the people with heavy taxes.

Sultan Bawa accepted these demands and Uthman thus continued his missionary endeavours.

During his eighteen years of preaching, he won over a vast number of followers and supporters.

This success began to alarm the Government after Sultan Bawa died and Sultan Nafata succeeded him.

Sultan Nafata was bitterly opposed to Uthman and his mission and threatened his community with extermination. Sultan Nafata ruled that:

1. No man could remain a Muslim unless Muslim-born;

2. All converts should revert to paganism;

3.

> Men could no longer wear the turban nor could women veil themselves; [11]
> 4. Nobody except Uthman alone would be allowed to preach Islam to the people.

Until this stage, the Shehu had avoided direct confrontation with the rulers and did not appear to have ever contemplated the overthrow of the established political order.

But persecution completely changed his mind. His brother, Abdallah, wrote:

> And when our Shaikh Uthman saw a considerable increase in the numbers of his followers and supporters and a strong desire to break away completely from the unbelievers and declare a Jihad, he began to encourage them to arm themselves, saying "Verily the keeping of weapons in readiness is Sunnah." And so we began to acquire arms and he began to pray to Allah to show him the sovereignty of Islam in the lands of Africa.

The basic arguments which constitute the ideology of Shehu's Jihad are set out clearly in the *Masa'il Muhimma*, written exactly one year before his Hijra or migration to Gudu. In this book his most important arguments for the necessity of waging a Jihad are: 1) that the foundation of the faith of Islam is the application of the sacred Shariah laws; 2) that it is obligatory upon Muslims to follow an Imam or Khalif; 3) that the *Hijra* from the land of unbelief to Islamic territory is obligatory on all believers who are able to do so; 4) that those who support the unbelievers should be regarded as unbelievers themselves; 5) that the Jihad against the unbelievers as well as those who make compromises with paganism is obligatory.

Therefore, Uthman dan Fodio did not consider the existing Hausa states as Muslim because they did not [12] enforce the Shariah as the law of the land; the

rulers were not legitimate Imams or Khalifa; because they had not been duly elected by the Muslim community; that these territories are *Kufr* territories from which migration to Islamic territory is obligatory; that the Ulema have themselves become unbelievers because of their compromises for worldly considerations with paganism and their friendship with the pagans and that the Hausa rulers had to be classed with the unbelievers because they mixed Islam with paganism. In the book, *Tanbih al-Ikhwan*, he said:

> The Hausa Sultans are undoubtedly unbelievers in Islam, even though they profess to be Muslims because inwardly they are really polytheists who turn away from the path of Allah and raise the flag of worldly kingship above the banner of Islam.

Thus in 1804, after migration from Degel to Gudu, the Shehu began his preparations to wage Jihad. Sultan Yunfa, who had succeeded Nafata, then marched against Uthman only to be routed by Uthman's forces. Consequently all Hausaland was plunged into Jihad and by 1810, Uthman and his followers had gained control over almost all of the Hausa states. That same year Uthman moved to Sifawa where for the last years of his life, he devoted himself to scholarly pursuits. He had placed the eastern part of his empire under his brother, Abdallah and the western part with Sokoto as its Capital, under his son, Muhammad Bello. The dual administration continued under the descendants of Uthman until the whole of northern Nigeria was declared a British protectorate in 1900.

[13] Muhammad Bello, the son of the Shehu, continued the work of his father, striving to make the territory under his rule a full-blooded Islamic state. In his major work, *Usul* he was in complete agreement with his celebrated father when he wrote:

One of the foundations of Islamic government is justice. The Imam should command his people with justice. There can be no development without justice and justice is the basis of all true progress . . .

The most abhorred and remote from Allah is the tyrannical ruler. Whoever commits oppression is cursed by God. The tyrannical ruler will not receive Muhammad's intercession . . . Authority given to those unfit to rule is oppression. Shehu Uthman dan Fodio wrote all his 115 books in Arabic. His brother, Abdallah wrote no less than 100 books in Arabic dealing with politics, law, Sufism, and eulogy.

He wrote the famous *Diyau't-Tawil* in a four-volume *Tafsir* of the Quran.

Muhammad Bello wrote no less than 80 books in Arabic including the *Infaqul Mansuri* which deals with the history of the Jihad movement of his father and of the western Sudan itself and *Usul al-Siyasa* (the Sources of Politics). This means that the rate of literacy and educational standards were much higher in West Africa than they are today for he could not have written in Arabic unless he had a large and appreciative audience of readers who could understand it. Uthman was accused by his critics of encouraging the mixing of the sexes because he allowed women to attend his preaching sessions. Uthman replied that he considered ignorance worse than the mixing of the sexes; furthermore, he pointed out that his female followers were always veiled and seated separately apart from the men.

In his work, *Masa'il al-Muhima,* The Shehu concludes with a provision specifically concerned with the position of the ulema or religious scholars in the Islamic state. He warned the ulema not to depend upon the powerful and wealthy men of the world. He said:

A learned man should have people come to his door and should not be seen at others' doors. For a scholar caters for his needs and those of the Muslim community by cutting himself off from the men of the world. The genuine scholar or *Alim* should not visit the wealthy and powerful men of the world under any pretext but should wholly devote themselves to the direct service

to the community in realisation that it is from Allah that everything is due and it is to Him that all will return.

Shehu Uthman dan Fodio's most important book was his *Ihya al-Sunnah wa Ikhmad al-Bida* which was entirely handwritten in his own elegant Arabic script.

Let the critic of this book know that my aim in it is the revival of the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and the removal of Satanic pagan innovations. My intention in it is neither to find fault with the people nor bring shame down upon them for whosoever pursues the weaknesses of his fellow men, Allah will expose his weaknesses until all know about them, even if he hides in the inner most recesses of his house. The true believer begs forgiveness from Allah for his sins while the hypocrite indulges in fault-finding and back-biting and Allah helps a man only [1]long as he helps his brethren.

Ihya al-Sunnah wa Ikhmad al-Bida was evidently not written for the ignorant, the illiterate or new converts.

The author takes for granted that his readers [15] are already familiar with the fundamentals of Islamic worship. For example, he did not feel the necessity to teach them how to pray nor the details of such religious duties as fasting, almsgiving, Hajj, etc. His purpose was rather to draw the attention of his readers to what practices they should adhere to and those pagan innovations they must avoid;

It is incumbent on every Muslim to begin with himself and to practice the obligatory duties and avoid forbidden things; he should then teach this to his family and relations. He should then proceed to his neighbours, then to the people of his quarter, the inhabitants of his town, the surrounding suburbs of his city and so on to the furthest part of the world. If a near person undertakes this duty, it falls off those who are further away; otherwise everyone who is able to do it should go out to preach and enforce the *Shar'iah* be he near or

[1] **1.** long as he helps his brethren.

far. This is the foremost concern of anyone who wishes to dedicate his life to the propagation of Islam.

Concludes the *Ihya al-Sunnah wa Ikhmad al-Bida*:

Adhere! Do not innovate!

Be humble! Do not become arrogant! Be cautious! Do not compromise!

The British colonialists first came as traders and pretended to the *Amirs* that they were only peaceful merchants who had come to trade and had no other motives. Meanwhile in southern Nigeria, which is predominately pagan, they established Christian mission schools and hospitals along with their trade. Then they consolidated their position and later usurped the whole southern territory. This was followed by their control over the north. The Muslim *Mujahidin* fought valiantly [16] against the British and thousands laid down their lives in defence of Islam and Islamic rule.

They faced British guns without fear and accepted death with joy.

After British subjugation, the Nigerian Muslims grew weak in their opposition to colonial domination but they continued to resist passively, refusing to adopt European culture and in their determination to preserve their way of life. Throughout the colonial period, they maintained their Quranic schools and *Shari'ah* courts and the *Amirs* of the tribes continued to wield considerable influence over the people.

After Nigeria attained political independence, Ahmadu Bello, the great-grandson of Shehu Uthman, built many mosques and consolidated the position of Islam in politics and culture until he was assassinated in 1966 with the aid of the Zionists and Christian missionaries. Nigeria then fell into the hands of the enemies of Islam for the next nine years, suffering chaos, anarchy and civil war until General Murtala came to power by military coup in July 1976. In a short period of only seven months, General Murtala was able to repair some

of the damage done and improved the position of the *Shari'ah*, thus alleviating the plight of his people until his enemies, fearing that Nigeria would again become an Islamic state, assassinated him with British and American support.

General Murtala's death served as an eye-opener for all the Muslims of Nigeria who are daily growing more ardent in their love for Islam.

The Nigerian Muslims never accepted Western secular education [17] enthusiastically. Even the illiterate instinctively sensed its purely materialistic orientations and complete lack of higher spiritual values. Fortunately, even those who had Western education and attained high positions in the civil services, universities and politics, are not deceived by the glitter of modern Western civilization and for the most part, have remained loyal to Islam and its culture. The Nigerian Muslims continue to wear their native Islamic dress and refuse to apply Western laws to daily life.

That does not mean that all is well. Ignorance and illiteracy are widespread, as the colonialists did their best to impose their own system of education to the detriment of Islamic education. The Arabic books by the *Jihad* leaders were either destroyed by the colonialists or not translated into Hausa, Fulani or English. The harmful effects of enforced westernization of schools and political life have not been removed and opposition to Islam is growing powerful with the aid of the Christian missionaries and large sums of money spent for the purpose by Germany, France, Britain and America for Christian evangelism and the disruption of Islam. The native ulema have failed to meet these challenges effectively. At first, the Nigerian Muslims sought support from Arab countries, but are now thoroughly disillusioned from that quarter and are today ready to meet any eventuality entirely on their own.

In the struggle against British imperialism, the most mortal enemy of Islam and the Muslims, Uthman dan Fodio's Jihad influenced not only the Muslims of West Africa but also inspired the efforts of the Mahdi of the Sudan who held him and his work in esteem. Uthman dan Fodio's example thus had impact on the Jihad of Muhammad Ahmad. British imperialism and aggression in the Sudan lasted from 1885 to 1899.

Like the followers of Shehu Uthman dan Fodio, committed Muslims of Nigeria today are becoming convinced of the inevitability of waging another *Jihad* in the near or distant future because opposition to Islam in the land cannot be removed peacefully.

As ruler, administrator and statesman, the Shehu was wise, moderate, of balanced mind, far-sighted and humble. In the eyes of his followers, he was a *Mujaddid* and a *Mahdi* all in one and the same. Today, it is to the Shehu and the ideals embodied in the Sokoto Khalifate where all in Nigeria turn to for inspiration for Islamic revival.

MUSLIM AWAKE

[22] While the forces of materialism, supported by all the forces of modern technology, are working day and night to destroy us—spiritually, culturally and politically—rather than hold fast to faith in Allah, unite and combat our real enemies, we foolishly choose to tread the path of an alien civilization, hoping thereby in vain to attain social prestige and the comforts and pleasures of this transitory world in utter forgetfulness of the eternal Life Hereafter and thus totally neglect our duties as Muslims to Allah and our fellow-beings. This is not the way to "progress"[1] but can only result in our failure, degeneration and doom, both individually and collectively.

Muslim brothers and sisters! Follow the path of the Quran and Sunnah, not as a set of dead rituals but as a practical manual of guidance for our conduct in daily life in private and in public, put aside sectarian and political controversies and let us all cooperate and work together in harmony for the cause of Allah in Islamic movements in whichever country you happen to live, do not waste valuable time in useless things and *inshallah*, Allah shall crown your life with great achievements here and supreme success in the Hereafter.

MARYAM JAMEELAH

[1] **1.** "Progress"

Shehu Uthman dan Fodio: A Great Mujaddid of West Africa

Maryam Jameelah (1934–2012)

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The founder of the Sokoto Caliphate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born Margaret Marcus in Westchester County, New York, to a secular Jewish family of German descent, she was drawn to Islam by Pickthall's translation of the Qur'an and Muhammad Asad's The Road to Mecca . After corresponding with Abul Aʿlā Mawdūdī she embraced Islam in Brooklyn in 1961 and moved to Lahore in 1962, where she married Muhammad Yusuf Khan, who published her books for the rest of her life .

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