

*Shaykh al-Islam* Uthman b. Muhammad Fudi (known as Shehu Usman Danfodio or simply the Shehu) was born in Maratta (Gobir Kingdom) on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> Safar 1168 (15<sup>th</sup> December, 1754). His father Muhammad, a descendant of Musa Jakolo, earned the name Fudi, 'the learned' in Fulfulde because of his knowledge.

The Shehu studied and memorised the Quran at an early age under the guidance of his father. His most influential teachers from whom he learnt the important Islamic subjects were the famous Shaykh Jibril b. Mar, Shaykh Uthman Bidder Ibn al-Amin, Shaykh Ahmad Ibn Muhammad and Shaykh al-Hajj Muhammad Raj. The Shehu started teaching and preaching at an early age of twenty years, this was in 1188 (1774 – 5).

He continued studying according to Islamic tradition of scholarship.

The Shehu became popular people from different parts of the Sudan came to him seeking for guidance in his hometown of Degel. He guided people in major sciences of Islam such as *fiqh* and *tasawwuf*

. The Shehu established a functional Muslim community.

A community of believers transformed by the life pattern of the best of mankind the Prophet of Allah (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

The Sultan of Gobir Bawa invited the Shehu and other scholars to Magami for *Id al-adha* prayers in 1202 A.H. (1788).

After the prayers, the Sultan gave the scholars gifts which, they accepted except the Shehu who demanded that he should be allowed the following: To call people to Allah without hindrance, nobody should be stopped from following him, anybody wearing turban should be treated with respect, all prisoners should be released and that citizens of Gobir should not be overburdened by tax. The Sultan agreed, but realised the implication and said “O people of Gobir have you seen this Fulani man?

There will be no sultanate after me except a local village head”.

The Shehu returned to Degel where he continued teaching, preaching and writing.

He wrote poems in Ajami, (Hausa and Fulfulde in Arabic script), which were understood by the common people.

The most important book he wrote during this period was

*Ihya'al-sunna wa Ikhmad al-bid'a*

completed before 1207 A.H. (1793).

Preparations for the Jihad began in (1208) 1794, the Shehu became a magnet for attracting people from all parts of the Sudan. The power of the Sultan of Gobir and other kings began to decline. The Shehu and his community were becoming more independent of the rulers. In 1211 (1797) according to

*Tazyin al-Waraqat*

the Shehu instructed members of the community to arm themselves because “to get arms ready is Sunna”.

The Sultan of Gobir Nafata made the following declaration against the Shehu’s community in 1216 (1802): “No man should become a Muslim unless a Muslim born. All converts should revert to their original faith. Men should no longer wear turban, women should not veil themselves. And that nobody except Uthman alone should preach Islam. This same year a section of the community under Abdussalam moved from Gobir to Gimbana in Kebbi. Yunfa Dan Nafata became the Sultan of Gobir C. 12116-17 (1803).

He attempted to kill the Shehu in 1217 but failed.

In Dhu'al Qada, 1217 the Shehu wrote the *Masa'il Muhimma* in which he stated the necessity of Jihad against unbelievers and Hijra from the land of Kufr.

The Shehu (may Allah have mercy on him) made the Hijra from Degel which was vulnerable (to attack by Yunfa) on 10<sup>th</sup> Dhul al'Qa'da 1217 (21 Feb. 1804) to Gudu.

Many Muslims made the Hijra and joined the Shehu, this alarmed the Tyrant Yunfa who harassed the Muhajirun and confiscated their property. It was at Gudu that the Muslims made the bay'a (swore allegiance) to the Shehu.

Shehu Abdullahi Danfodio was the first to make the bay'a then Shehu Muhammad Bello and others followed.

From that moment the Shehu became the *Imam*

or

*Amir al-Mu'minin*

(leader or commander of the faithful).

An expedition sent by the king of Gobir against the Shehu's followers (*Mujahidun* or Jihadists) was driven back.

The  
*Mujahidun*  
later liberated the strategic towns of Matankari and Konni.

The Badr of the Jama'a was Tabkin Kwatto in Rabi awwal 1219 (June 1804).

The  
*Mujahidun*  
under the command of Shehu Abdullahi were out-numbered by the Gobir army but Allah granted them victory.

Both sides were racially mixed.

Shehu Abdullahi described the composition of the  
*Mujahidun*

during this encounter in  
*Tazyin al-Waraqat*  
:

“We are an army victorious in  
Islam

And we are proud of  
nothing but that

Tribes of Islam and  
Turubi is our clan

Our Fulani and our  
Hausa all united

And among us  
other than these certain

Tribes bound  
together. For  
the help of

Allah's deen  
(life transaction) – made

Up the  
union” (Balogun)

The term Fulani Jihad  
is a misrepresentation

and a legacy of colonial  
education accepted by  
its products.