



Between Biography and Hagiography: Reconstructing the Intellectual and Spiritual Life of Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma al-Dāghirī (1902–1975)

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Abstract. This study examines the intellectual and spiritual life of Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma al-Dāghirī (1902–1975), a prominent Tijānī scholar and spiritual leader in West Africa. It looks at his education, scholarly networks, initiation into the Tijānīyya, relationship with Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse, and his contributions as a teacher, writer, preacher, and spiritual guide. The study also considers the boundary between historical biography and hagiographical representation in accounts of his life.

1. Introduction: Between Biography and Hagiography

Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma al-Dāghirī (1902–1975) was one of the prominent Tijānī scholars and spiritual leaders of twentieth-century West Africa. His life was shaped by a strong tradition of Islamic learning, Sufi spirituality, teaching, and literary activity. Bluntly, the life history of al-Dāghirī attracted considerable analyses for different reasons and one should be extra careful in dealing with it. First, writing the life history of a saint may be a tempting task, but is fraught with difficulties. For a long time, the real and human figure of a saint is obscured by the legend, fiction, and hagiography, which grows round him. These legendary stories make it difficult to understand the saint himself or interpreting his teachings. The second, difficulty also arises out of the nature of the source materials, which are not only fragmentary and dearth, but also meagre, and not necessarily very reliable. Thirdly, the life history of al-Dāghirī, as told by the available sources is not free of obscurities and chronological inconsistencies. This study examines his intellectual and spiritual formation, his scholarly and Tijānī networks, and his emergence as an influential religious authority in Nguru and beyond. It also explores how accounts of his life move between historical biography and hagiographical representation.

1.1 Family Background

His full name was is Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma al-Dāghirī ibn Muḥammad Ganim ibn Ali al-Dāghirī al-Ghūrāwī al-Barnāwī al-Malikī al-Ash'arī al-Tijānī popularly known as Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma, affectionately referred to by his friends and associates by his most popular name “Mamman Dagera,” and by his disciples as *Dhul Ma'arif*. It was reliably transmitted that he was born in the small village of Girazu or Damargu on Wednesday, 19th of February 1902 A.D. corresponding to 15th Muharram 1323 A.H.). Reflecting a little on the year 1902 at the global setting, when Ghibrīma was born, the colonization of Nigeria was raging. The British colonial masters had succeeded in taking over Nigeria as their colony. Therefore, the year was of special significance to Nigeria and its neighbouring countries. Ghibrīma and his parents belong to *Dagera* extraction, a dialect of Kanuri language, but according to another account, Ghibrīma was a descendent of the Quraysh whose great grandparents migrated to the west, at about the middle of the eighteenth century, settled at Gazargamu. Nevertheless, with the destruction of the city by uninformed forces, they finally migrated to in the area of Ngurdo. They appear to have reached the area of Girazu or Damargu in the extreme western part of Damagaram city (which is now in the present-day Niger Republic), some hundred years later and become outstanding scholars and Sufi leaders in Niger Republic. At the time of his birth, little did his parents know that they were blessed with a son who was to become master of gnosis and one of the most respective Sufi leaders in West Africa.

According to the reliable account of the life of Ghibrīma, the highly respectable religious family in which Ghibrīma was born had have a very long-standing tradition of learning, scholarship and spiritual leadership. His mother was Fadimatu Abdur Rahman, but fondly called Maza was also said to be a woman of

high religious repute. There was no trace of why she referred to as such. She was reported to be great, zealous and religious woman and a member of Tijāniyya. She was equally reported to have shared ancestral link with paternal grandparents of Ghibrīma. His father, was Imam Goni Muḥammad Ganim, but popularly known as Malum (Kanuri: teacher) was said to be an ascetic who was venerated by many people due to his *Karāma* and personal charisma.

1.2 His Early Life and Training

Of Ghibrīma's early life we know little, except what some scholars recorded in fragmented sources. As a child, therefore Ghibrīma, grew up under the watchful eyes of his parents. He was denied some pleasures so that he could be self-supporting and be good ambassador of his family. He was brought up with modesty and was never treated as special child. Ghibrīma's journey in the acquisition of knowledge under the care of his parents. He was thus introduced to Islamic learning at tender age of three at his birth place, Girazu. He started learning the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an from his parents. His parents also taught him the basic tenets of Islam from the onset, and during this course, they never taught Shaykh anything twice. He was really endowed with an eidetic brain. Within a short duration, Ghibrīma had memorized some portions of the Qur'an; and a little of *fiqh* and *tawhid*. Under them, he also developed a character that was always adhering to the teachings and dictates of Islamic religion. This early theological philosophy had a lasting impact on the life of the young boy.

At the age of seven, based on the suggestion of his mother, his father sent him out of their village and he was put in the hands of his uncle, Malam Muḥammad Nuzu in Duguro to study in his *makaranta* (school). The school is conducted twice in a day at the instance of the teacher. Classes which are in the *zaure* (house reception) are conducted in the mornings and late in the afternoons. The traditional method of teaching in this was in vogue then, whereby, a student will start by oral chanting and memorizing the vocalized writings of the Qur'anic verses. It was reported that soon young Ghibrīma adapted himself to the school schedule and the environment and within a short time he proved to be a good pupil. He had benefitted from the vast knowledge of his uncle under him he studied substantial parts of the Qur'an. He was a prodigy, thus, within a short duration, Ghibrīma had quickly excelled in the memorization and the study of the Qur'an. In fact, by the age of nine he had memorised forty *hizbs* (parts) of the Glorious Qur'an which earned him more respect from his mates and this became a source of

pride to both his parents and his uncle cum teacher, Malam Muḥammad Nuzu. In addition to the Qur'anic learning, other areas of Islamic religious knowledge were taught in the school. He also studied Qur'anic calligraphy from Malam Muḥammad Nuzu for two years. It was narrated that because of his good performance in all areas of learning, Ghibrīma became a friend to and liked by his teacher and his mates.

1.3 His Educational Pursuit

In quest of his yearning to quench his thirst of knowledge, Ghibrīma continued his advanced educational career by enrolling himself in another *Makaranta* (school) of Shaykh Muḥammad Abba Chulum (d.1944), a Tijāniyya *muqaddam* who was highly recognised and respected by Borno scholars. He resided in a town called Kolori to the north of Nguru. He completed the learning and reading the Qur'an when he was only fourteen (14) years old, which was a remarkable thing for a boy of that age. It was during this time, Ghibrīma had written down his first complete one copy of the Qur'an in manuscript. No sooner had he completed the learning of the Qur'an then his teacher, Chulum, assigned to him the duty of teaching the Qur'an to some youths and children after three years. Thus, the year marked the beginning of Ghibrīma's career as a teacher with a fairly large number of pupils under the general supervision of his teacher. Ghibrīma was then sent back to his father with a letter from his teacher, Chulum. His attributes his lasting interest in religious studies to the influence of Chulum, and he appears at this time to have conceived a deep devotion for his teacher which remained constant throughout his life. It is pertinent to stress that after spending three years under Chulum, Shaykh displayed a high level of brilliancy during this journey in the acquisition of knowledge. His teachers, Chulum, attested to this, in a letter sent to Ghibrīma's, the letter reads inter alia: "...your child has been trained beyond understanding. He is now a teacher himself. Give him all the kind of assignments or questions ranging from the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh ... all ramifications of Islamic knowledge."

Later on Ghibrīma decided to strengthen and standardize his Qur'anic memorization, he proceeded to Kadhmaymari where he strengthened his memorization of the Qur'an under *Muqri* Malam Ibrāhīm Kori. Having attained that level of basic knowledge of the Qur'an, Ghibrīma proceeded to further to study elementary and advanced books of Islamic sciences such as *Fiqh*, (Islamic jurisprudence), *Nahw* (Arabic grammar), *Mantiq* (logic), *Bayān* (rhetoric) etc. which as a result he studied under famous scholars *Tafsir* in Borno, Muḥammad al-

Barkawī, the author of *Mir'at al-Sa'im fi ahkam al-Siyam*. Ghibrīma, therefore, left no stone unturned during the time in which he was studying the *Tafsīr*. As he continued to study the *Tafsīr* under him, he displayed insatiable desire in seeking Islamic knowledge. From al-Barkawī, he also studied a number of books among which was *Mukhtasar* of Shaykh Khalil which was a book on Islamic jurisprudence according to the Maliki School.

Shaykh travelled to Jajeri after the completion of the Qur'anic *Tafsīr* in order to obtain more knowledge on the Prophetic Hadith. Jajeri is a small village near present Nguru, where he met a venerable scholar, Goni Ahmad Abba who was a leading scholar in the area. With him, Ghibrīma studied Prophetic Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, *Adab* and *Nahw* under the man for eight months. On his own, Ghibrīma study a considerable number of books of Islamic sciences, jurisprudence, *Shari'ah* and Hadith. The vast studies he undertook with his teachers and on his own made him to become well equipped as far as Islamic education is concern and also ready to teach others. He therefore started to make *bita* (revision) to other students under Goni Ahmad Abba. As a result of this, some students started to follow him to his house for *bita* there that was how he started teaching. He later established his school in the area. He taught Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic sciences and jurisprudence. He therefore attracted many disciples because of his vast knowledge of analogical deduction on many difficult aspects of Islamic injunctions. Thus, the year marked the beginning of the Shaykh's career as a teacher. During this period, Goni Mustapha Ahmad, a Qur'anic teacher in the village, offered Ghibrīma a life partner, Hannatu when he was twenty-two years old. Similarly, reliable source believe that Ghibrīma spent a great deal of time teaching in Jajeri, thus, shortly after the marriage, Ghibrīma decided to migrated to Kano city, the most populous and industrial city as well as was an important trading, religious and learning centre in this part of the sub-Saharan Africa, where he was optimistic of meeting renowned Islamic scholars who were adepts in their chosen fields.

Often eulogized as the headquarters of Tijānīyya in West Africa, Kano, is a city renowned with prominent Tijānī Sufi scholars and *muqaddam*. Ghibrīma was in Kano with hope to meet Sufi masters whom he believed would lead him to achieve his spiritual goal. At the time there was no popular Islamic school in Kano as that of Shaykh Muḥammad Salga. Based on his interest, Ghibrīma was taken to Shaykh Muḥammad Salga (d. 1938) who had trained many people in spiritual development. Ghibrīma studied a considerable number of books with Salga until the

death of this scholar and he continued to study with his son, Abdullahi Salga. With Salga he studied *Risala*, *Mudawwama* and *Mukhtasar*. He was also said to have studied Arabic grammar and different branches of Islamic education under him. Shaykh leant and benefited a great deal from a coterie of scholars in Kano. This knowledge ranged from exoteric to esoteric. Another propminant among them was Sayyid Mu'allim Mahmood (d. 1943). He studied *Tasawwuf*, *Balaga* and *Mantiq* with him, in fact, under whom he achieved spiritual greatness in his life. It was reported that he lived with this cleric and from him he used to go to other scholars to learn. Other scholar was Mu'allim Inuwa Kurna (1937) from whom he learnt *hisab* (calculation).

Later on he felt strongly to continue learning and also to perform his first pilgrimage to Makkah. He and his wife therefore set out on the pilgrimage to Makkah in 1932, as was common practice among men of his religious culture. Ghibrīma embarked upon the pilgrimage to Makkah, accompanied by his wife. On their way to Makkah, he had contact with Shaykh Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Fasi who was said to be a renowned Tijānī *muqaddam*; he also had many intellectual discourses with him for three weeks. It was based on that discourse that Ghibrīma started writing his first book entitled "*Jihaazus Saarih*" and completed it before he got to Makkah.

Finally, Ghibrīma reached Makkah the second year after left home. After he had performed the rites of the Hajj he came in contact with the famous Senegalese Islamic scholar, Shaykh Isma'il Abubakar, who was to become one of his influential teachers. Ghibrīma later went to Madinah to visit the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W) (S.A.W.). Ghibrīma stayed in Makkah for two years and returned home after receiving sad news of the death of his most respected teacher, Goni Abba Chillum. Having paid the condolence, Ghibrīma had therefore returned to Kano for the second time, and continued with his trading activities. He established a bookshop in his residence. He imports Islamic books from Middle East and North Africa, especially from India, Beirut, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia etc. to sell in Kano; and became famous book vendor. Among other great scholars who taught him were Shaykh Ibrāhīm Kano, Shaykh Ahmed Idris Zaria, Goni Mamman Damagaram, and the famous scholar Goni Liman Ainoma Njibulwa etc. In 1934, Ghibrīma fired by strong enthusiasm for knowledge, proceeded further to Katsina, a city renowned with different kinds of Islamic scholars with specialities in various disciplines, where he studied under a great Islamic scholar, Malam Aliyu Maradi. He studied Arabic grammar, Hadith, *Sira* (Prophetic

biography). Idris reported said that the intellectual performance of Ghibrīma made Malam Aliyu to offer him the post of his Khalifa, but Shaykh declined to accept it. Instead, he left for Kaburi, after spending two years with Maradi, in the present-day Niger Republic. In fact, Ghibrīma spent some time under the tutelage of many scholars, guiding and shaping his educational career. Though widely recognized for his intellectual depth in Sufism (*tasawwuf*) and law (*Shari'ah*), he was equally authoritative in almost all aspects of Arabic and Islamic Studies, such as law (*Shari'ah*), Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), science of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), exegesis (*tafsir*), prophetic tradition (*Hadith*), Arabic Grammar, syntax (*Nahw*), morphology (*Sarf*), literature (*Adab*), Arithmetic (*Hisab*), among many others. After this, he was said to have acquired further knowledge in Islamic studies which was available to him during his time while he, too, was teaching. He became learned to the extent of giving legal opinions (*fatwa*) on the issues brought to them. In view of the foregoing, it could be inferred that Ghibrīma was an Islamic scholar per excellence, thus, he was worthy of his title, Shaykh.

1.4 Relocation of Ghibrīma to Nguru

Nguru is a very important factor in the life history of Ghibrīma and his thought on mystical theology of Tijāniyya. The town had been part of Borno Province up to the creation of Yobe State on 27th August, 1991. Even though, it is situated in a far corner of extreme northern part of the state, its popularity and strategic position earned it a special place in the scheme of things in the whole area. Nguru through the known history had been haven of successful farmers, fishers and business people, myriad occupations that made them tread many places and finally became entrepot. According to historical account, even prior to the birth of Ghibrīma, Ganim had stayed in Nguru, in his search for learning as an itinerant student. Historical account had established that Nguru had, for long, been adherent of Tijāniyya. The Order had produced many Islamic scholars that had made significant contribution to Islam and the Order. According to report, Ghibrīma arrived in Nguru on Monday 5th of Rabi'ul Thani, 1359 A. H., which is equivalent to 13th May 1940. He met many scholars and students who warmly received him and finally established his *zawiya* at Dagirawa. He consequently chose to establish his settlement known as Dagirawa in Nguru and his decedents have been living in this area of the town ever since then. This is because Nguru had earned reputation for their involvement in pursuit of trade and education. Many people particularly Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, and Yoruba people came Nguru for business and in search of Ghibrīma's blessing and decide to stay there. In 1950,

there was a consensus that no single Islamic scholar more influential and prominent as Ghibrīma. In fact, the Islamic scholars had to concede to him the position of prominence and leadership in religious activities in Nguru.

1.5 Ghibrīma's Exposure to Mystical Engagements

A historical research conducted by almost all researchers who extensively written about him had established that his upbringing in an environment steeped in Sufi devotion shaped his lifelong attachment and later in life became one of the most important icon of the movement of Tijāniyya Brotherhood in West Africa. The exposure to Tijāniyya Brotherhood of Ghibrīma could be traced back to his father, Imam Goni Muḥammad Ganim, who bought him up and was also a member of Tijāniyya Brotherhood. The close relationship between him and his parents serves as the first impetus for his exposure to Tijāniyya Brotherhood. Added to this is the fact that his teachers, starting from his uncle Malam Muḥammad Nuzu through Shaykh Muḥammad Abba Chulum to Shaykh Muḥammad Salga, are all scholars and Sufi leaders and their contributions in their individual ways to the mystical and spiritual aspects of his life through exposure to, and training in Tijāniyya cannot be underrated.

This background alone cannot, as a matter of fact, account for making the Shaykh a Sufi. Ghibrīma was officially initiated into Tijāniyya Brotherhood by his teacher, Shaykh Muḥammad Abba Chulum. This Shaykh put him into *Khalwah* (spiritual retreat) for three days and later inform him that he would become one of the most prominent leaders of Tijāniyya Brotherhood in the world. Thereafter, he put him under *Tarbiyah* (spiritual training) and later appointed him a *muqaddam* (a group leader) of the Tijāniyya Brotherhood who would be responsible for the preaching of the Order as well as training people in its doctrines. It was also from Chulum, he received the *silsilāh* to continue the Tijāni Sufi tradition of the Tijāniyya Order, and six different Tijāniyya *silsilāh* (chains of authority) have been found out which were converge to him. Ghibrīma satisfied with his spiritual development, requested his spiritual mentor, Chulum, to issue him the *Ijazah* (certificate authority) being the first person to initiate him into Tijāniyya Order. These various factors must have contributed to the exposure of Ghibrīma to Tijāniyya. As a matter of fact, since the 1930s he had encountered many national and international scholars and the leaders of the leaders of the Tijāniyya like Shaykh Muḥammad al-Halawani and Shaykh Ahmad Muḥammad al-Futi among many others. He spent his whole life time in the development

and spreading of Tijānīyya. He was considered one of the learned and leading leaders of the Order not only in Nigeria but the whole of West Africa. He had a good relationship with other Tijānī scholars in the region.

1.6 His Relationship with Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse

A research of this nature on Ghibrīma is incomplete without mentioning something about his relationship with Niasse because according to historical account they competed with each other for the position of *Gawth al-Zaman* of the Tijānīyya. Due to his *ma'arifa*, Ghibrīma wanted to become *Gawth al-Zaman* of the Tijānīyya Brotherhood as predicted by the founder of the Order, that *Sahib Zaman* and *Sahib Fayda* (the bearers of the outpouring) would definitely emerged among his disciples and become the leader of Order. Unfortunately, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse declared himself as the *Gawth al-Zaman* and he was confirmed during his visit to Fez. According to some historical account, specifically Shaykh Abubakar Atiku of Kano, the leaders of the Tijānīyya in Fez went to Kaolack and submitted all the insignia of office of the *Khalifah* to Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, these were the walking stick, sandal and the books of mysteries of Shaykh Ahmad at-Tijānī, they did this as a symbol of their oath of allegiance to him as the successor and the *Sahib al-Faidah*. Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse therefore himself affirmed these claims and stated:

I congratulate myself for achieving what is difficult to obtain I (presently) possessed the walking stick of the (spiritual) leader at-Tijānī. And besides that, I obtained what I would not like to disclosed. But verily, I obtained mystery which is difficult to obtain.

I ascended the apex of gnosis, passed through all the spiritual stages till I got to the highest platform and I possessed the spiritual flood.... (I achieved this) via my love for the messenger of Allah (S.W.T), Ahmad my master I got to the beloved and I got rewards.

Further research conducted by Taofiq documented that it was Ghibrīma who became responsible for Niasse initial acceptance because of the recognition accorded him by Ghibrīma. Ghibrīma was said to have accepted the claims of Shaykh Niasse after he had made a resort to *Istikharat* on the issue. His submission to Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse was considered significant because the *Ghawth* and was expecting to be appointed when he heard the news about the emergence of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse. As such, during the first of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse to Kano, Nigeria in 1937, as one of the prominent Tijānī scholars in Nigeria, Ghibrīma in company of Tijānī scholars in Nigeria paid homage to him and accepted his leadership of Tijānīyya Brotherhood. Consequently, having occupied such an esteem position, Kaolack in Senegal had been a centre

of the Tijānīyya Brotherhood and many Tijānī scholars from northern Nigeria visited Niasse and submitted to him. Thereafter, Ghibrīma was among the Tijānī scholars who went to Kaolack to meet Niasse and paid allegiance to him. Though Ghibrīma was initiated by a Traditional Tijānīyya, his regard and respect for Niasse made him adopt the Reformed Tijānīyya and enjoined his disciples to live by the teachings of the Reformed Tijānīs. Justifying Ghibrīma's view and acceptance of Niasse as the *ghawth az-zaman* and *Sahib al-Fayda*, he goes on to say:

لولا مخافة كاشح مترقب أظهرت سرا حازه الكرام

V19. If it were not for the fear of those secret revelers, I would have exposed the secrets embodied by this entertainer (Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse).

قال التجان الختم تاتي فيضة عم العوالم خيرها الجمام

V20. Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijānī-the seal of saint had said: "there will come to you a *Fayda* (overflow-that was Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse) whose abundant blessing will encompass the universe."

ملئت به في الأرض معموراتها وتعم من فيضانها الأكام

V21. Its development would overwhelm everywhere on the earth and, its abundant flow would be worldwide.

ادعاهما مرة زيد وذخ يرى غيره يحظى بها المقدم وقد

V22. Indeed, once, the Zaid had claimed to be one of the wrong thinking of his that a blockheaded can achieve it.

لم يقض إلا الذي بيمينه خط الشهادة شذها الأبرام

V23. Would not be appointed except one with certificate and confirmed with verification.

وبدا ثباتك في اتباعك سنة فكأنك الصفوان والأعلام

V24. And your qualification for the position conferred on you by your adherence to the path of the prophet (saw). And you are as firm as rock and mountain.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that Ghibrīma recognized the spiritual mastership of Niasse. The encounter with Niasse, *ghawth az-zaman* and *Sahib al-Fayda*, was quite engaging and interesting in the course of which extolled the virtues of his master. His stay with Niasse was very fruitful. There Ghibrīma renews his *silsilah* and underwent *Tarbiyah* process and received the *Fayda* form of Tijānīyya from Niasse. He also received permission to initiate people into Tijānīyya. He had a great respect for Ghibrīma and he also respected him. The epithet '*Zulma Arif*' was given to him by Niasse due to his mastery and vast erudition in *ma'arifa* (gnosticism). Later on in life, he was known to some as and referred to as *Sahib al-Fātiḥ* (Master of the *Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥ*). To the *Fayda* Tijānī, Ghibrīma stood distinct among his contemporaries especially in the hierarchy of sainthood. Most of the disciples of Niasse preferred to refer to him as '*Zulma Arif*.'

The relationship between Ghibrīma, and Niasse lasted until their death in 1975. This strong relationship marked Ghibrīma's integration into the trans-Saharan Tijānī network, through which he helped expand Niasse's influence in Nigeria. Therefore, after his return from Senegal, Ghibrīma becomes one of the leading advocates of *Fayda* Tijāniyya in Nigeria and considerable number of mass mobilisation have variously been presented on him in different parts of Nigeria and Niger Republic.

1.7 Ghibrīma's Ascetic Life

That Shaykh possessed some unique characteristics that make his lifestyle unique among his contemporaries is to state the obvious. His way of life has left many bewildered and hence, it is assumed, that no one can adequately describe him except his Creator. Looking at his life style, he shunned materialism to the core to the extent that many wondered why he adopted contempt for wealth, albeit his charisma to enrich himself. However, majority of sources had it that Ghibrīma's uniqueness was felt at a tender's age as he had started leading an ascetic life since then. Shaykh has never neglect the five daily prayers (*khamas as-salawat*) even when he was observing *khalwa*. He used to fast on Monday and Thursday and keeping vigil at night supplicating to Allah (S.W.T). It becomes part of his daily life that recite *Lailaha illAllah* (S.W.T), 70,000 times every night and recite the Qur'an from cover to cover between *Zuhr* prayer and *Isha'i* by heart until his last day on earth. This he did by occupying himself with supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*, Sing. *Ṣalāt al-Nāfilah*) and constant *dhikr*. Suffice is to say Ghibrīma, like any other Sufi scholar, considered his devotional exercise which is supererogatory as obligatory because, to them, the *dhikr* of Allah (S.W.T) gives them joy and peace of mind.

2. The Profession of Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma

Ghibrīma was a religious teacher, writer, Islamic preacher, book vendor, and a farmer. Naturally, these careers were however not pursued on equal basis; rather, he appeared to be more committed to one than the others. In fact, he was more committed to teaching and writing than preaching.

2.1 His Role as a Religious Teacher

Ghibrīma devoted his entire life time and energy in teaching and guiding people to the *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition) and fighting *bid'a* (innovation) in Islam. He, as earlier noted, began to teach when he was a student in Jajeri; and after graduation, he immediately

established his first *zāwiya* in Kuburi. Afterward, he established his school in Nguru in 1936 for the study of both Qur'an and *Ilm* which earned him a reputation as a teacher. During the week days he taught his students various Islamic sciences such as Hadith (Prophetic tradition), *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, *Taṣawwuf* (Sufism), *Tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) after *Subh* prayer. In the evening, he taught them *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) *Tawhid* (Science of Unity), *Adab al-Arab* (Arabic Literature), *Qawā'id al-Lughah* (Arabic Grammar) and other innumerable texts of prominent Islamic books. He had a sizeable number of students in his school and at the same time, scholars from various neighboring towns and countries flooded his residence daily to learn more from him. He always made his pupils and visitors utmost comfortable by providing them free meal and drinks. In the course of his teaching, either at home or in the mosque, students often asked him questions on Islam to which he always responded.

2.2 His Role as a Writer and Book trader

Ghibrīma was a prolific and erudite writer in Arabic. Shaykh was a good writer and poet who composed myriads of mystical works. Some of these works are mystical and philosophical in nature and content, as the man who was divinely inspired to write. The writings of Ghibrīma were noted for their clarity and simplicity. Whenever he writes, he carried along with him those that are deafly learners and also the laymen. His ideas can simply be grasped by all and sundry irrespective of the level of knowledge and understanding of the readers, his messages are well communicated. However, Ghibrīma always acknowledges sources by mentioning the title of the book and name of the author of whatever book he uses. Al-amin ascribed to him forty-seven (47) works and one handwritten Qur'an. Munir, Ghibrīma's son, claimed that his father has written over three hundred and sixty works while Hunwick ascribed seven works to him.

Another kind of profession in which Ghibrīma apparently engaged that shot him to fame was book trade. He was engaged in book trading immediately after his return to Kano from Nguru. According to another source, Ghibrīma was engaged in book trading before his relocation to Kano. His relocation to Kano coincided with the rise in book business and establishing indigenous printing presses in Kano. Even before he came to Kano, he was known to some people who patronized him and they were impressed with this business style. They encouraged him to establish business relationship with bookshops and book houses in the Islamic world. As soon as he took the advice, he was very serious in the business. Reports had it that he

had flourished business in books with many book houses and printing presses in Lebanon, India and Egypt. He had always introduced huge number of books and other book dealers were encouraged to copy the style. The story of book business in Nigeria would certainly be incomplete without mentioning Ghibrīma.

2.3 His Role as a Farmer

History had shown that Ghibrīma was a big-time and most devoted farmer in the entire Nguru Emirate. He is an exemplary farmer who is able not only to feed his family but many others. It was narrated that during his first visit to Niasse in Kaolack, Niasse asked him if he had a farm. His answer was in the negative and Niasse advised him to possess a farm. It was as a result of this advice, on his return, Ghibrīma became a prominent farmer. Since then, the products of his farms are not only sold but used by the Shaykh to help a considerable number of people in his domain. He encourages people to farm and is ever ready to spend any amount of money on his farms because of his belief that farming is the only way to stamp out hunger and starvation in the land. He produced various types of crops millet, guinea corn, groundnut, beans, cassava, etc. during the early stages of his educational and commercial careers. However, he obliged to revert to the old occupation of his ancestors on the advice of Ibrāhīm Niasse. Today, the families of Ghibrīma are still seasoned farmers. The whole family engages in farming, producing enough to feed themselves and for commercial purposes.

2.4 His Role as a Preacher

Preaching in Islamic point of view can be defined as calling or directing people's attention to a belief of an act that will benefit them. Ghibrīma adopted preaching as one of his method to convert people to the fold of Islam. This was due to his willingness to obey Qur'anic injunction that calls on believers to call people into the fold of Islam. He tried to explain the real meaning of Islam to the people in his lifetime. The main theme of his preaching was centered on the basic principles and doctrines of Islam and Islamic etiquettes. This covers teaching the pillars of Islam, moral conduct in Islam such as good manners and notable qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.) (S.A.W.) and his companions. Sometimes, the focus of his preaching is Sufism, especially the Tijānīyya. His preaching job was not as emphasized as his teaching and writing and unlike some Islamic scholars who embark on itinerant preaching or choose strategic spots conducting *Tafsīr*, especially during the month of Ramadan. However, the method his preaching took are many, they include the travelling, *Eid El-fitr* and *Eid Adha* sermons,

sending letters to mention a few. He used his house and *zāwiya* at Dāghirawa community as a venue for preaching. His audience were his students, disciples, members of his *zāwiya* and other callers.

2.5 Death and Burial

Like every mortal, Ghibrīma breathed his last on Wednesday, 19th March 1975 at Nguru after a brief illness at the age of seventy-two years (72). He left behind four wives and twenty-four children. He was buried at the Nguru graveyard with mammoth crowd partaking at his *Janazah* (funeral) prayer. Several dignitaries from all walks of life were present at the funeral. The event was an avenue for scholars to display their literacy prowess as several poems were composed on him. A befitting mausoleum has thereafter been built on his grave and his then bungalow has turned to an adorable edifice courtesy of a disciple, Shaykh Aliyu Harazimi (1919-2013) in 2004. This place is considered reverend as people especially proteges usually visit (*ziyara*). Albeit that act is being criticized, nevertheless, the Shariah enjoins Muslims to pray for the dead not to pray to the dead, thus, there is it is not anathema to the *Shariah*.

3. Conclusion

Shaykh Muḥammad Ghibrīma al-Dāghirī emerged as a prominent scholar and spiritual leader whose intellectual and religious formation was shaped by a long tradition of Islamic learning and Tijānī spirituality. His teaching, writings, preaching, and relationship with Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse contributed significantly to the expansion of Tijānī influence in Nguru and beyond. His life therefore occupies an important space between historical biography and hagiographical memory, reflecting both his documented scholarly achievements and the spiritual qualities attributed to him by his disciples.

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