

ISLAMIC CENTERS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN JAPAN: ACTIVITIES AND PROBLEMS

Sher Ali^{*}

Muhammad Arif Mateen^{**}

Abstract: When someone thinks about Islam or the Muslim world, name of Japan does not come to mind immediately. There are neither clear records of any contact between Islam and Japan nor any historical traces of Islam's coming into Japan through religious propagation of any sort except for some isolated cases of contact between individual Japanese and Muslims of other countries before 1868. Islam was firstly known to Japanese people in 1877 as a part of Western religious thought. The real Muslim community life however did not start until the arrival of several hundred Turkoman, Uzbek, Tadjik, Kirghiz, Kazakh and other Turko-Tatar Muslim refugees from central Asia and Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution during World War I. During 1900-1920 some other Muslims also went to Japan and living in this country as a small Muslim community they started publishing Islamic magazines as well as managed to convert a large number of Japanese people into Islam. In addition to building the mosques, as a natural outcome of the activities of Islamic communities in Japan various Muslim organizations and Islamic centers were established in the various parts of the country. These organizations and centers have been, more or less, means and source of supporting and strengthening the Dawah work of Islam in Japan. This paper is an analytical survey of Islamic centers and organizations in Japan examining their activities, problems and challenges.

Keywords: Japan, Islam, organizations, centers, activities, challenges

1.1 A brief history of Islamic organizations in Japan

Once the Muslim communities in Japan were started settling dawn in Japan, it was felt necessary to develop and expand the social bonds within the community and outside the community as well.

^{*} Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies and Arabic, GC University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

^{**} Boston Islamic Centre, UK

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- ³ Jameelah, Maryam. *Memoirs of Childhood And Youth In America(1945-1962)*. 1st ed. Lahore: Muhammad Yusuf Khan & Sons, 1989. 159-164
- ⁴ Ibid, Jameelah. *Correspondence Between Maulana Maudoodi*, p.75 ,see.
- ⁵ See. Ibid. What others say about Maryam Jameelah's books. In *Catalogue*. Lahore: Muhammad Yusuf Khan & Sons. 4. See also. "Maryam Jameelah.": What Others Say about MARYAM JAMEELAH'S Books. Accessed May 22, 2015. <http://maryam--jameelah.blogspot.com/2009/01/what-others-say-about-maryam-jameelahs.html>.
- ⁶ Ibid., 5.
- ⁷ Ibid., 7.
- ⁸ Ibid., 8.
- ⁹ Ibid., 5-6.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 6-7.
- ¹¹ "Maryam Jameelah's Thoughts on Western Civilization." *The Companion* 07, no. 08. Accessed May 25, 2015. https://www.academia.edu/2304297/Maryam_Jameelah_s_Thoughts_on_Western_Civilization.
- ¹² Wasti, Munir. "Maryam Jameelah: A Pioneer Of Muslim Resurgence." *Ma'arif Research Journal* Jan. – June 2014 (2014): 55-57.
- ¹³ Yusuf, Aasia. "Maryam Jameelah's Traditional/Conservative Approach to Modernity." *Hamdard Islamicus* XXXVI, no. 1 (2013): 37-67.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., Ahmad. *Tajaman ul Quran*. 74.
- ¹⁵ Asad, Muhammad. *The Message of the Quran*. Dar Al-Andalus Gibraltar, 1980. 33:23
- ¹⁶ Wilfried Hofmann, Murad. "A Plea for Islamic Renewal." *Islamic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 304.
- ¹⁷ "Debating Orthodoxy, Contesting Tradition: Islam in Contemporary South Asia," in *Islam in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Feener (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004): 115. See.
- ¹⁸ Figueira, Daurius. *Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st Century*. IUniverse, 2011. 186-91.
- ¹⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a Persian Muslim, since he has settled permanently into America, therefore, he may be listed among the Western scholars.
- ²⁰ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Annotated Selected Bibliography." In *Ideal and Realities of Islam*, 182. New Revised Edition ed. Chicago: ABC International Group, 2000.

Baker's critique of Jameelah is based upon her study of Jameelah's life that she examined through the letters, which Jameelah wrote before and after her emigration to Pakistan. Deborah's appraisal doesn't depend upon the profound study of Jameelah's literature. That's why Baker's appraisal of Jameelah's thought can't be conceived as an original appraisal.

Conclusion:

Maryam Jameelah started her literary career prior to formal embracing of Islam. She was reared in American society, and observed all the merits and demerits of the Western civilization through her own eyes. She got a strong disliking of western materialism, atheism, secularism and humanism in her adolescent. She laid out her literary aim at the early stage of her writings. She was resolved to support the "traditional" connotation of Islam in her compositions.

During the colonial rule in the Muslim world, the thought of Muslim intelligentsia could be categorized into two broad categories, i) modernist and ii) traditionalist. Maryam Jameelah adopted the traditionalist viewpoint of Islamic thought. She refuted the modernist version of Islam. She wrote emphatically and logically against the Muslim intelligentsia, who was abundantly affected by the scientific and technical progress of the Western civilization. She called such Islamic modernist scholars as the "west-worshippers". The Muslim contemporary intelligentsia appraised Jameelah's thought as conservative and traditionalist defense of Islam. She was also credited with the pioneers of Islamic resurgence in the post-colonial epoch. The impact of Jameelah's thought on the contemporary Muslim thought entitled her name among the "makers of contemporary Islam". Nasr considers Jameelah possessed an infrequent understanding of the true nature of the modern world. Thus, a picture of traditionalist, revivalist, and a critic of the modern West, a prolific and eminent writer, and a key spokesperson for the Islamic resurgence among the Muslim scholars emerges by the appraisal of the contemporary intelligentsia.

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against humanity, and shows his disagreement with Baker's thesis that inspiration of 9/11 attacks were derived by Jameelah's thought.

Comparative Analysis of the Appraisal

The comparative analysis of the appraisal of Maryam Jameelah's thought has been rendered categorically in this research study. The appraisal made by newspapers and journals falls into the category of journalism, where descriptive reviews of Jameelah's work have been presented for the benefit of the public at large. Whereas the research articles depicts the both sides of Jameelah's thought. The articles highlight Jameelah's contribution in refuting the modernist ideas in the Muslim world and her struggle to revoke the resurgence of Islam in the world. Likewise, the articles also criticize Jameelah's approach in mingling up the modernism and the westernization. As for Western scholars are concerned, Murad Wilfried Hofmann counts Jameelah among those Muslim scholars, who desire to keep their faith pure by restraining Muslims from the excessive indulgence into the modern technology and devices, since the techno-world keeps a complete package of the westernizations. On the other hand, Robert Rozhenal takes Jameelah as an arch figure of the Muslim traditionalist and revivalist thought. Daurius Figueira like other Western scholars sees a link between Jameelah's discourse and contemporary Jihadi movements. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll are among the few Western scholars, who studied Jameelah's thought in depth and considers her the defender of traditional Islam. They place her among the contemporary makers of Islam. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr; one of the eminent Western Muslim scholar sees Jameelah as the staunch defender of Islam at the face of modern world, and she was among the few Muslim scholars; who discerned the real nature of the modern world. He is of the view that Jameelah's critique of the modern world throws a shade of fundamentalist Muslim thinkers. Nasr assumes; Jameelah turned her course of writing and mode of thought towards the traditional Islam at the culmination of her literary career. On the contrary, Vali Nasr depicts Jameelah's understanding of the Western culture and civilization is not all-encompassing. Jameelah's criticism to the West is barely original, says Deborah Baker like Vali Nasr. Deborah's role is pivotal in portraying Jameelah's thought as an aide to the assailants of 9/11. Similarly, the reviewers of "The Convert" demonstrated Jameelah's thought as fundamentalist and revivalist. One thing needs to be kept in mind that

Americans, which bore a strong hatred towards war sentiments.²⁷ Deborah is of the view that Jameelah's writings are startling as for the tone of the content is concerned. Deborah sees a touch of know-all in the writing style of Jameelah. While holding in mind the vested authority of Christian Church, Deborah sees the attitude of Jameelah unfathomable towards Islam, "Wasn't it just like an American to go marching off to a foreign country and tell them what was what. Who was Margret Marcus to tell anyone what being a Muslim was all about, as if it were just one thing?"²⁸ "The Convert" invoked a debate on the Jameelah's life and thought. Nowadays, it has become the one of the issue of international media to blab around the role of Jameelah's thought in the context of contemporary global events. On that point are numerous book reviews of "The Convert" available now, which bring about the life of Jameelah and her thought under consideration. Some of such reviews will be hashed out in the following lines.

Eric Herschthal wrote a review of "The Convert" with a title "From Jewish Westchester To Radical Islam". Herschthal is of the view that Muslim readers took interest in Jameelah's writings due to her strangeness to the fundamental Islam. After migration to Pakistan on the invitation of Abul Ala Mawdudi; Jameelah herself became one of the distinguished disseminator of the fundamental Islam.²⁹ Here, the writer examines Jameelah's thought through the lens of "The Convert".

The blog of "The Investigative Project on Terrorism" (IPT) says in an article, "Maryam Jameelah: Conversion, Exile, Extremism" which is based upon the review of "The Convert", that Jameelah got a lasting recognition in literary circles. Jameelah's western background provided a solid ground and attraction to the anti-western notions of radical Islam.³⁰ This article depicts Jameelah liken other reviews as an envoy of the radical Islam.

9/11 attacks proved prime mover for Deborah to compile Jameelah's biography, she believed that fundamentalist Muslims were urged on by the thought of Jameelah, which she gave in the course of her literature, conversely; David Halperin is of the view that Jameelah never presented any idea or craving for ferociousness. Halperin continues "Beheading, crucifying, burning the infidel would have had no appeal for her. It was a different era, one in which a rabbi could look benignly on Islam as an exotic yet intimate cousin to Judaism. Perhaps we've regressed since then."³¹ Halperin, clarifies the position of Jameelah regarding the acts of brutality

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“activist Muslim intellectual” role.²³ Esposito and Voll have appraised Jameelah’s thought in somewhat detail, they not only demonstrated a meaningful critique on her thought, but also admitted her eminent position in the realm of contemporary Muslim intellectuals.

Some critics of Jameelah’s thought say that she implies “isolated incidents of moral wrongdoing” to denounce the West, nevertheless, they make Jameelah’s thought responsible for the development of revivalist thought in some Islamic countries.²⁴

Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, the son of Seyyed Hossein Nasr; writes in the article of The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, entitled “Maryam Jameelah” that she was a revivalist ideologue. The subjects of Islam and the West were Jameelah’s focus of writing. She polished Muslim’ discourses against the Western thought in methodic style. Vali Nasr says Jameelah quotes the worst moral and ethical instances of the West to denounce the West. He is of the view that the importance of Jameelah lies in the methodology, she uses to articulate “an internally consistent paradigm for revivalism’s rejection of the West” and this proved crucial for the development of revivalist notions across the Muslim world. Vali Nasr believes that towards the later period of her literary career, she was no longer interested in the revivalist ideology and inclined towards traditional Islam.²⁵ This last point is the same what Vali’s father Hossein Nasr has already described about Jameelah’s thought.

Deborah Baker is one of the eminent Western biographer who found Jameelah’s letters in the archives of New York library. She commenced to examine the life of Jameelah and eventually produced a biography “The Convert: A Tale of Exile and Extremism” of Maryam Jameelah in 2011. Deborah began the venture of writing Jameelah’s biography in the wake of 9/11 events. The questions that were haunting her mind to seek the real motives behind the attacks of 9/11, got a way of answer, when she found Jameelah’s archive. Deborah thought that she would be able to present some concrete answers to the motives and reasons of the attacks, through the investigation of Jameelah’s life. Deborah became more confident to discover the answers, when she found that Jameelah migrated to Pakistan due to Mawlana Maududi, who was a central figure in issuing the call for global Jihad.²⁶ Deborah claims that Jameelah’s criticism of American culture is scarcely original, she thinks Jameelah belongs to the post-war generation of

Baker to form the nexus of modern Jihad with Jameelah's discourse regarding the West.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr¹⁹ deems Maryam Jameelah as an “uncompromising defense of Islam before the modern world”, and she possessed uncommon insight and savvy regarding the true nature of the modern world.²⁰ Nasr says, Jameelah's writings all the time carry emphatically an “anti-modern” tone, which makes a “fundamentalist” shade in various ways, transformed in the recent past into “traditional” viewpoint.²¹ Nasr is of the view that Jameelah's writings were the most relentless criticism of the West came forth of “the contemporary Islamic world”. Nasr demonstrates the distinction of Jameelah's criticism of the West as such: “They stand diametrically opposed to the facile comparisons and so-called syntheses of Eastern and Western thought which pollute the intellectual atmosphere of so much of the Islamic world”.²² Nasr describes the nature of Jameelah's thought, and the development of her thought from fundamentalist to traditional. Moreover, he appreciates the bizarre comprehension of the modern world and the West by Maryam Jameelah.

John L. Esposito and John O. Voll have assigned a full chapter on the discourse of Maryam Jameelah in their book “Makers of Contemporary Islam”. The writers give the credit to Jameelah for crossing the gender gap, as she was among the few Muslim female scholars of the modern era. They put her among the prominent defenders of traditional Islam. Jameelah believes in the entirety of Islamic tradition like a fabric that can't be altered. Jameelah adapted a critical point of view regarding the “pre-modern and modern” scholars. Jameelah aimed her criticism at both secular and Islamic modernist, who indulged abundantly in the “west-worshipping”. Jameelah believed that the cultural dominance of the West in Muslim lands and societies is more hazardous than actual political mastery. She considered cultural aping of the West, a sort of cultural slavery for Muslims. Jameelah was a firm defender of traditional *Ulama*, and upholds their position as the defenders of the faith, however, the writers of the “Makers of Contemporary Islam” consider it an ideal defense instead of based on reality. They are of the opinion that while Jameelah's conservative standpoint on the Islamic tradition won her a deal of admirers, on the other hand, her critique on the Islamic and secular reformers “diminished her impact”. They consider her one of the “maker of the contemporary Islam” due to her

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reformers, and her depiction of Islam as a universal religion has been discussed by various Western scholars. Murad Wilfried Hofmann in his article, "A Plea for Islamic Renewal" counts Jameelah among those scholars, who are afraid of losing their existence as a Muslim, if they would surrender as meager as a slightest bit of space to the Western technology. Hofmann is agreed with Jameelah's apprehensions that the possibility of the assimilation in the western civilization does exist, but he finds no alternative to it. Since, it is a matter of fact that western science and technology is predicated upon "secularism, scientism, and materialism" and consequently they are prone to transport these elements of Western civilization, wherever they are presented. He is of the view that the danger will persist unless, Muslims figure out how to command these and different devices, they will definitely be ruled by them.¹⁶ Hence, Hofmann is partially agreed with Jameelah's fright, but he attempts to present a way out for Muslims to cope with this critical situation.

Robert Rozhenal writes in "Debating Orthodoxy, Contesting Tradition Islam in Contemporary South Asia" that Jameelah's thought and journey to Islam was influenced by the Islamic scholars Mualana Mawdudi and Muhammad Asad. He presents Jameelah as an eminent Muslim scholar, whose corpus of writings poses a "conservative defense of Islamic tradition" and refutes sharply "materialism, secularization and the mores of Western modernity". Simultaneously, she is against Islamic modernism and considers it a deceiving on Islamic teachings. Rozhenal depicts Jameelah as an arch figure in the realm of Islamic revivalist thought.¹⁷ Thus, Rozhenal stands with the scholars, who consider Jameelah; a voice for traditionalist and revivalist Islam.

Daurius Figueira has mentioned Jameelah's discourse on "Ahl al Kitab past and present" in his book "Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st Century". He states that Jameelah deems Islam is a universal religion owing to the conserving of its religious text in the original form. He portrays Jameelah's viewpoint regarding *Ahl al Kitab* that Muslim should maintain their supremacy prior to entering into a dialog with them. He establishes the link between Jameelah's "operational strategy" and "Salafi Jihadi agenda" which offers a "joint operational basis" that has come into view between the "Salafi Jihadis" and the "Islamic jurisprudence of South Asia".¹⁸ Daurius Figueira makes an attempt in his book; similar to Deborah

they are intrinsically Western and in this way the same old Western dominion under another and significantly more beguiling pretense. As a whole, Jameelah's criticism targeted the modernists in both attires, i.e. secular and Islamic. She looks at them "West-worshippers" in a broader sense.¹³

Difference of opinion can be made against few interpretation of Jameelah says Khurshid Ahmad, as she herself varied with the scholars, who made a contribution in the development of her thought and intellectuality. Yet, it can be said with confidence that her fifty years scholastic endeavors are an illuminated chapter of our intellectual history, especially, her critique on the Western civilization is like a milestone. She was blessed with a powerful expression. She presented the message of Islam with utmost faith and belief in the truth of Islam. She tried to save the whole mankind from disbelief, atheism, skepticism, straying, and social disorder with a dynamic passion of sincerity, which is a distinction of prophet hood.¹⁴ He interprets this passion of Jameelah in the words of the Quran as such:

مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَنْتَظِرُ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا (الاحزاب: ٢٣)

Among the believers are men who have [always] been true to what they have vowed before God; and among them are such as have [already] redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await (its fulfillment) without having changed [their resolve] in the least.¹⁵

Munir Wasti and Aasia Yusuf both express the same thing in the critical analysis of Jameelah's thought that Jameelah mixes up modernism and westernization. They both want to maintain a difference between modernism and westernization, while Jameelah takes them as the manifestation of the Western domination in the Muslim world with a different guise. On the other hand, Khurshid Ahmad without citing an instance, points out mildly that a difference of opinion can be maintained with Jameelah's thought. Nevertheless, he appreciates Jameelah's thought and her services concerning atheism and materialism, for the Muslims as well as for the whole world.

Western Scholars' Views on Jameelah's thought:

Jameelah's stance *vis-à-vis* is a modern technology, her defense to primordial Islamic tradition, her rejection of the Western philosophies of materialism and secularism, and her staunch stand against modernist Muslim

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movements. Thus, these reviews are unable to portray the other side of the picture.

Articles:

Maryam Jameelah refuted the ideas of modernity in Muslim societies and produced the literature to invigorate the Muslim' resurgence. She studied the modern trends in the Western thought and presented the critique of the Western civilization. The thought of Jameelah is examined by the various writers into their articles. Munir Wasti writes about Jameelah's intellectual and literary contribution in the article, "Maryam Jameelah: A Pioneer of Muslim Resurgence" that Jameelah deserves the due credit for unmasking and analyzing the polemical literature headed against Islam. Jameelah's western origin proved a great assistance for her to uncover the core causes of western hostility against Islam. According to Jameelah's view Islam possesses an enduring tradition which encircles all the dimensions of human life. Therefore, she dissects all the modernists and Apologetics in the Muslim world and refutes their arguments. She is particularly against the westernized Muslims. However, Jameelah mingles together modernism and westernism; she remains unable to highlight the ever present validity of Islam to address the new challenges. Moreover, she is "overly critical seeing the West as 'the other' in the same manner that the West sees Muslims at present." A less clamant methodology could be assumed without deviating of her core position on the tenets of Islam. The role of Jameelah in discerning and handling the contemporary issues faced by Muslim Ummah is pivotal, which calls for the spreading of her literature on a broader scale.¹² Munir Wasti criticizes Jameelah's notion of modernism, and thinks that she adopted too critical position against the West, yet he concedes Jameelah's contribution, in bringing about a comprehension of modern contemporary issues of the Muslim thought.

Aasia Yusuf has composed a research article on Jameelah's approach to modernity by the title, "Maryam Jameelah's Traditional/Conservative Approach to Modernity." In the research paper, it has been discussed after the citation of the instances from Maryam's books, in the refutation of modernism that Jameelah's thought and viewpoint is au fond traditional or conservative. Jameelah has a tendency to liken modernism with Westernization. She assumes Modernity, modernization and modernism are not just widespread, worldwide phenomena but rather, she accepts, that

every stroll of their lives to build up Islam in its whole in political, social, financial and all other dimensions. At that point, Islam would be a living force, and not only a scholastic suggestion. As in different compositions of hers, Maryam Jameelah is getting it done when she takes to record Western rationality, thought, goals and practices. Her added advantage is that she was raised and sustained in Western culture, and instructed and prepared in the Western convention, so normally she is better fitted to know its dull spots and the fountainheads of underhandedness, which have contaminated Western culture, and which are currently consuming the establishments of Muslim society with its offensive impacts. Few scholars, possesses such a balanced viewpoint on Islam like this “American-born” authoress depicts in her pithy writings.⁹

The Muslim: Journal of the Federation of Student Islamic societies in the United Kingdom and Eire, London says about “Islam Versus Ahl Al Kitab Past and Present” the writer passes on quite a bit of her focuses by the very expressions of the individuals she discusses. To abstain from citing outside of any relevant connection to the issue at hand, she utilizes numerous protracted extracts. The outcome is a reasonable, adjusted and “objective” presentation. The authoress’ “Jewish-American” family background places her in a better position to comment on all three Abrahamic faiths.¹⁰

The Companion says that Jameelah was against the “Revivalist” movements of the Islamic world. She thought such ideas were predicated upon Western notions, because she was of the opinion that the reforms of Muslim societies should be founded on Islamic precepts. She said that Islam is much more genuinely menaced from inside than from without. Her work would prove helpful for the coming generations of Muslims to formulate their thoughts in accordance with Islamic spirit.¹¹

Since the aforementioned journals are not of research type, so, their reviews are based upon the appreciation of Jameelah’s thought and work in a positive manner. Journals cited above deals with Jameelah’s individual books. “The Criterion” comments on “Islam in Theory and Practice”, “The Muslim” reviews “Islam Versus Ahl Al Kitab”, whereas “The Companion” discusses Jameelah’s views regarding the “Revivalist” notions in the Muslim world, and depicts Jameelah’s apprehensions with respect to the Revivalist