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## The Socio-Political Role of a University: A Study of Jāmi‘ah al-Azhar

*Dr. S.M. Yunus Gilani\**

Al-Azhar, the oldest Islamic University and the citadel of Islam, is the largest Muslim University in the world<sup>1</sup>. It has been so throughout the centuries since its foundation. The Nizāmiyyah, established at Baghdad in 459 A.H./1067 A.D. by Nizām al -Muluk al-Ṭūsi, the famous grand Wazīr of Saljūq Sultan Malik Shah, as a rival of al-Azhar, could not stand the test of time and remains just a name in the history of Islamic learning. Al-Azhar has been important because of its teachers and rectors (all '*ulamā*') and the students (the '*ulamā*') that it produced. These '*ulamā*' of al-Azhar influenced the socio-political milieu of the ages. Al-Azhar has been renowned and significant for the role performed by these fathers and sons—'*ulamā*'—of this nerve centre of Islamic learning and activism in the Muslim world especially in Egypt and more so at crucial junctures in the Islamic history. This

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\*Professor, S.H. Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

light-house of the Islamic Ummah has fought the darkest encroachments and onslaughts, e.g., the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century A.D., the French aggression (1798-1801), the modernising reformatory autocracy of Muhammad ‘Ali Pāshā (1811-48), and the British colonialism in the last two centuries.

Al-Azhar has played a prominent role in defending Islam, preserving the classical traditions and Arab-Islamic culture, against the attacks, penetration, pollution and aggression in cultural, educational and socio-political fields. Al-Qā-hirah, Cairo, the capital of Egypt, as old as al-Azhar, is fortunate to have al-Azhar, her “oldest and the most influential theological school”,<sup>2</sup> the nerve-centre of Egypt as its soul. The past millennium has seen and experienced the influence of al-Azhar, not only in religious and intellectual fields, but also in social and political spheres.

Referring to al-Azhar as “a sanctuary and house of the people”, J. Jomier observes:

Like all mosques, al-Azhar has this dual function. The regular prayers were said here, as well as those on exceptional occasions. Its history from this point of view is linked with that of Egypt: people collected here in times of catastrophe (such as epidemic, famine, or war) to call upon God, and to hear special readings from al-Bukhari, it was also a place of refuge for fugitives. In modern times also some events of national significance have been organised here.... Teachers found within it peace and adequate quarters....<sup>3</sup>

**a) The Foundation and the Early Development of Al-Azhar**

Following the Fātimī takeover of Egypt (358 A.H./ 969 A.D.) with

al-Fustāṭ<sup>4</sup> or Old Cairo as its capital, Jawhar al-Qā'id al-Siqillī (the Sicilian), commander of the army of the first supreme ruler and the fourth "Caliph" of the Fātimī Muslim ruling dynasty,<sup>5</sup> built a military enclosure and a new capital in Egypt called al-Madinah al-Qāhirah al-Mu'izziyah, the Victorious or the Conquering City of al-Mu'izz. And the construction of Al-Azhar by Jawahar was begun on 24 Jumada al-ʿūla 359 A.H./3rd April, 970 A.D.<sup>7</sup> as a state mosque, Jāmi', for congregational purposes and a centre for teaching Islamic religion. Its construction was completed and the first Friday prayer was held on 7 Ramadan 361<sup>8</sup>/June 22,<sup>9</sup>972. This masjid (mosque) of the new capital was originally named the Mosque of Cairo, Jāmi' al-Qāhira later Jāmi' al-Azhar<sup>10</sup>, probably in honour of and as a compliment to the daughter of the Final Messenger Muḥammad (ṣalla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam/prayer (blessings) of Allah and peace (greetings) be upon him) and ancestress of the Fātimī dynasty, Fātimah with her title *al-Zahrā'* (the bright or fair one), of which word *Azhar* (resplendent) is the masculine. It was the first major work of artistic merit built by the Fātimīs in Egypt. Referring to this Islamic Centre, D.S. Margoliouth observes, "It was not at first a literary institution any more than any other mosque; all such places had from the beginning of Islam served as rendezvous for savants, and places where those who undertook to interpret the Koran [Qur'ān] or recite tradition could establish themselves"<sup>11</sup>. It was soon afterwards made an academy by the fifth Fātimī Caliph al-'Azīz (365-86 A.H./ 975-96 A.D.)

Shortly after the arrival of the Fātimīs, in Egypt (358 A.H./ 969 A.D.) from their Ifriqiyyan (African) base of al-Mahdiyyah, a number of religio-educational institutions were established to disseminate Ismā'īlī<sup>12</sup> views and teachings. Many

masājid (mosques) with al-Azhar at the head were founded thus and used for regular lessons. In these places the minister, the *Dā'ī al-Du'āt* (Chief Preacher) of the time and other learned men sat to teach Ismā'īli doctrine. Referring to the Fātimī Caliph: C.E. Bosworth states: "Their connection with the seventh Imam Ismā'īl has never been fully elucidated, but it is clear that the Fātimid caliphate represents the most successful and enduring political achievement of the Ismā'īli radical Shī'ī movement."<sup>13</sup> *Al-Risālah al-Waziriyyah fi'l-fiqh al-Shī'ī*, the Wazir's Epistle or Shī'ī fiqh (Jurisprudence), used to be read by its author Ya'qūb ibn Killis, the Wazir of the fifth Fātimī Caliph al-Azīz (365-86 A.D./975-96 A.D.), to a great gathering. His audience included theologians, judges and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) who were to transmit his opinion to the public. The voluminous work contained the tenets of Ismā'īli Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as the author had heard them from the Ismā'īli Imāms.<sup>14</sup> Caliph al-Aziz fixed stipends for all the legal authorities who attended his Wazir's classes. They were granted monthly payments according to their needs. By the side of Jāmi' al-Azhar in 988 A.D. residential quarters were built for them. They received the annual stipends from the estate of the Wazir. Their number was thirty five, they used to receive robes and mules to ride on from the Caliph 'Azīz on the day of 'Īd al-Fiṭr.<sup>15</sup>

'Alī ibn al-Nu'mān taught at al-Azhar, an Ismā'īli work entitled *Kitāb al-Iqtisār fi usūl al-Fiqh*, an abridgement of his father's *Da'ā'im al-Islām* ('The Pillars of Islam'). 'Alī attributed the abridgement too to his father, the judge Abū-Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān ibn Muḥammad,<sup>16</sup> who was born in the tenth century A.D. and brought up at Qayrawān in what is today Tunisia. He was a provincial Fātimī judge and later

the Chief Justice of the Fourth Fātimī “Caliph” al-Muʿizz (341-365 A.H./ 953-75 A.D.).<sup>17</sup>

Thus the higher education was started at al-Azhar by ‘Ali ibn Nuʿmān and ibn Killis in 983 A.D. under Caliph al-‘Azīz. Later in addition to the Qur’ānic and Ismāʿīli studies, subjects like philosophy and astronomy were also taught there.<sup>18</sup> Hence in 988 A.D. al-Azhar began specially to be used by the learned to study religious law and live there<sup>19</sup> and it became the first state university<sup>20</sup> and “what it has been ever since, one of the chief Universities of Islam”.<sup>21</sup> This raised the mosque of al-Azhar, al-Jāmiʿ al-Azhar to the status of the University of al-Azhar, al-Jāmiʿah al-Azhar or al-Jāmiʿah al-Azhariyyah.

Since the foundation of this “collegiate mosque of al-Azhar”<sup>22</sup> by the Fātimīs, the successive sovereigns of Egypt have vied with one another in perfecting and adding new halls, new galleries, new minarets, till they made of al-Azhar “almost a town within a town”.<sup>23</sup>

With the passage of time and especially after the establishment of Dār al-Ḥikmah by the sixth Fātimī Caliph al-Ḥākim (386-411 A.H./ 996-1021 A.D.), it seems that al-Azhar, “the seat of the most renowned Muslim University in the world”, got rid of its position as an Ismāʿīli propaganda and indoctrination institution. Now Dār-al-Ḥikmah taught science, philosophy and Fātimī Ismāʿīli doctrines while al-Azhar devoted itself to legal, linguistic and religious studies.<sup>24</sup> Hence orthodox “Sunnism” seems to have gained ground gradually. As a counterblast to al-Azhar of the Ismāʿīli Fātimī Egypt, Niẓām al-Mulk Ṭūsī, the Saljūq Wazir and the Champion of Sunni orthodoxy founded the Niẓāmiyyah as a citadel of “orthodoxy”

at Baghdad in 458 A.H./1067 A.D.<sup>25</sup> However, as observed above, it could not stand the test of time in comparison with the time-tested University of al-Azhar.

Jāmi'ah al-Azhar is the oldest University in the world with its history going back beyond the founding of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Padua. Al-Azhar, the fort of learning and education, was established and developed during the period that was the Dark Age in the Christian Europe.

The University of Cordova, founded by the Andalusian Caliph al-Ḥakam-II (R.350-366 A.H./ 961-976 A.D.) at Cordova in Muslim Spain in the principal mosque of his predecessor 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (R. 300-350 A.H./ 912-961 A.D.), had risen to a place of pre-eminence among the educational institutions of the world. The fate was against it and it could not live longer though at its heyday, preceding both al-Azhar of Cairo and the Niẓāmiyyah of Baghdad,<sup>26</sup> it had attracted the students, Christian and Muslim, not only from Spain but from other parts of the three continents-- Europe, Asia and Africa. This lighthouse in the Dark Ages of Europe was extinguished leaving Al-Azhar to be radiant and resplendent for over a millennium now.

#### **b) Al-Azhar Through the Ages**

Al-Azhar, founded and developed by the Fatimis during their Caliphate up to 567 A.H./ 1171 A.D., continued to grow and enlighten the world of Islam. The '*ulamā*' teaching at al-Azhar and the '*ulamā*' produced by al-Azhar continued to play prominent roles in the history of Islamic World in various spheres and specially in the socio-political field.

After the downfall of the Fātimī Caliphate of Egypt, the Ayyūbīs took over

Egypt in 564 A.H./ 1169 A.D. and the famous hero of the Crusades al-Malik al-Nāṣir Salāḥ al-Dīn (Ṣalāḥuddīn) the first Ayyūbī ruler put to end Fātimī rule altogether in 567 A.H./ 1171 A.D. as the last Fātimī Caliph al-‘Āḍid (557-567 A.H./1160-1171 A.D) lay dying.

The Ayyūbī Sultāns patronised al-Azhar. It was cleaned from its sectarian blemishes and Ismā‘ilī tinge. The classes were not only held there but were even encouraged by the Sultan. During the time of Salāḥ al-Dīn (R.564-589 A.H./ 1169-93 A.D) and his successors the development which most directly affected al-Azhar was the encouragement of the Sunni system of education.<sup>27</sup>

The Ayyūbī Sultanate in Egypt came to an end with al-Malik al-Ashraf II Muẓaffar al-Dīn (R. 648-50 A.H./ 1250-52 A.D.) and the Mamlūks took over as the Sultans of Egypt in 648 A.H./ 1250 A.D.) even when this last Ayyūbī Sultān lingered on. However, during the Mamlūk rule al-Azhar continued to be patronised by the rulers and with the change in time, it played still higher and marked role. Especially with the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 656 A.H./1258 A.D., the prominence of al-Azhar became unquestioned and under the Mamlūks it enjoyed a Golden Age as a centre for intellectual leadership and teachings of Islam. The rulers steadily relied upon it for instruction and advice.<sup>28</sup> Cairo with al-Azhar in its bosom took the place of Baghdad as the principal cultural centre of the Arabs as the Western Asia was debased by Mongol invasions during the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries A.D.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Azhar was called upon to play major socio-political role during the long period of Mamlūk rule (648-922 A.H./1250-1516 A.D.) in Egypt. The knowledge

of the Arabic language was kept alive by the ‘*ulamā*’ of al-Azhar as the Mamlūks themselves spoke Turkish. The Mamlūk was basically a soldier and had the marshal temptation to settle the matters by force. Al-Azhar with its ‘*ulamā*’ maintained the respect for the Shari‘ah which otherwise would have been trampled. The Mamlūks mostly given to exploitation, pomp and show, the Islamic ideals of social justice had to be upheld by the ‘*ulamā*’ of al-Azhar, the leaders of the silent populace of Egypt. Against the brutality of the Mamlūk officers, the Shaykhs of al-Azhar kept alive Islamic love of kindness and forgiveness and provided shelter at times of danger.<sup>30</sup> The public notices were issued from al-Azhar. “In 1266 and 1267 A.D., for instance, ordinances were announced forbidding the use of hashish and liquor and demanding that wine-shops and houses of prostitution should be closed” observes Bayard Dodge.<sup>31</sup> A “progressive” spirit seems to have prevailed during this time of repression as a woman Umm Zaynab Fātimah bint- ‘Abbās al-Baghdādi (d. 1314 A.D.) was permitted to study at al-Azhar. A revolutionary activism was in the air at al-Azhar as the Shaykhs of al-Azhar and other masājid (mosques) declared a holy war (jihad) against the terrible Mongolian invasion of Syria during the rule of Mamlūk Sultān al-Nāṣir (693-741 A.H./ 1294-1340 A.D.)<sup>32</sup>

During the reign of Sultān al-Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir (748-762 A.H./ 1347-1361 A.D.) epidemic of bubonic plague known in Europe as the Black Death, occurred in Egypt. The people were terrified. They entered the great courtyard and quiet sanctuary of al-Azhar seeking peace for their souls and strength from Allah. The Shaykhs of al-Azhar, as has been practice with some of them on such occasions, read the aḥādīth (traditions) of the the Final Messenger (ṣalla Allahu alayhi wa sallam) to invoke the



mercy of Allah. However, their efforts were in vain.<sup>33</sup>

Thus al-Azhar under the Mamlūks continued its activities unabated and made “the Nile Valley the spiritual centre of Arabic Islam for centuries to come; its influence was felt all over North Africa”.<sup>34</sup> Needless to say that this influence al-Azhar owed to its ‘*ulamā*’.

The Mamlūk Sultanate in Egypt comes to an end when the Ottoman Sultān Salīm I Yauuz, the Grim (R. 918-26 A.H./1512-20 A.D.) conquered Egypt and Syria from the decadent rule of the Mamlūks in 923 A.H./1517 A.D. The fall of Mamlūks was no tragedy for al-Azhar. In fact it was in the Ottoman period that al-Azhar gained pre-eminence which has made it so famous throughout the Muslim world.<sup>35</sup> The Ottomans realised and valued the importance and role of the ‘*ulamā*’ of al-Azhar throughout their long, direct and unchallenged control up to 1213 A.H./1798 A.D. when the Napoleonic French expedition shook the socio-political fabric of Egypt.

The Ottoman conquering troops in 923 A.H./1517 A.D. killed those who stood against them. However, the fugitives found at al-Azhar were pardoned because of its sanctity. The Ottomans tried to win the loyalty of the Egyptian masses by upholding the Shari‘ah law and showing favour to the ‘*ulamā*’ and *ṣūfis*. The two advisory councils established at Cairo during the Ottoman rule and usually referred to as the Greater and Lesser *Dīwāns* had as their members not only the leading administrative officials and Mamlūk *amīrs*, but also the heads of four *madhhabs* of *fiqh* (schools of jurisprudence) and a number of important shaykhs. Al-Azhar held the power to influence the political affairs for the most of these legal and religious

leaders were the '*ulamā*' of this very grand institution.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the Ottoman rule, al-Azhar was required to perform the same role as it has played during the period of the Crusades (12th and 13th centuries A.D.) and the Mongolian invasion (13th century A.D.), when its '*ulamā*' had awakened the Islamic world, revitalising it and infusing the spirit of *Shahādah* (martyrdom) and readiness to stand in *jihād* against the anti-Islamic forces of the Christian imperialist Crusaders and the barbaric Mongols, who had threatened the very existence of the Islamic Ummah. The '*ulamā*' had been befriended by the ruler like the Islamic hero of the Crusades, the Egyptian Sultān Salāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī who admitted them into his society and consulted them.

The Mamlūks were permitted by the Ottomans to handle local affairs. Important offices like those of the Shaykh al-Balad and Amīr al-Ḥajj were held by the Mamlūks and thus the Mamlūks had control over al-Azhar. The positions of great influence and importance were held by the Azharī '*ulamā*' since they occupied the posts of *qāḍīs* and *muftīs* in the courts. And as the legal and religious authorities the '*ulamā*' were the true leaders and spokesmen of the masses. They championed the rights of the exploited particularly the artisans and even the Mamlūks were obliged to listen to them.<sup>37</sup>

This Jāmi'ah (university) and Jāmi' (masjid) of al-Azhar, the cultural home of Islam served as a guide to the Muslim community in the Ottoman Egypt of the 18th century as it had done earlier. Cairo had an outstanding position as an education centre for it housed al-Azhar which enjoyed a reputation in all parts of the Muslim World. The majority of the Muslim population of the 18th century Egypt received

instruction and education from the *Kuttāb* or *maktab* (pl. *makātib*), mosque-madrasahs and the religious orders. However, al-Azhar was at the centre of the entire educational organisation.<sup>38</sup> The imparting of higher education was reserved for a special class, viz., the '*ulamā*' and shaykhs and it could be had at al-Azhar. At least for the purpose of teaching al-Azhar dominated the whole educational system and organisation in Egypt and other schools gradually became as its annexes and dependencies. Many teachers of al-Azhar taught at some other mosque-schools side by side. The old Shaykh Muhammad al-Shanwānī gave his lectures at the mosque of al-Fakahān (or Fakhānī). This simple and sincere '*ālim* cleaned the mosque himself. He insisted on keeping up this work even after becoming Shaykh al-Azhar (The Rector of Al-Azhar University) in 1227 A.H./ 1812 A.D.<sup>39</sup>

The public opinion was moulded by the social leaders at the mosque gatherings. The *Khuṭbah* or Friday sermon used to be a very serious affair. In certain larger mosques additional lectures were usually given after the afternoon ('aṣr) prayers and on Friday mornings; the lecturers generally being '*ulamā*' from al-Azhar.<sup>40</sup> The most important Shaykhs who held chairs in provincial mosques were educated at al-Azhar for the attendance at this *Jāmi'ah* was the hallmark of learning. The mosque-schools and colleges in other important towns were staffed by the '*ulamā*' from al-Azhar.<sup>41</sup> The Shaykhs of *madhhabas* were attended by the '*ulamā*';<sup>42</sup> thus '*ulamā*' were mediators between the rulers and the ruled, (religious) leaders and the masses, ṣūfī orders and the populace. All the four major Sunni schools (*madhhabs*) of jurisprudence were taught and represented in al-Azhar.<sup>43</sup> The majority was those of the Shāfi'īs followed by the Ḥanafīs. There were very few Ḥanbalīs too in Egypt.

The rectorship of al-Azhar was held mostly by the Shāfi'īs and Mālikīs. Each *madhhab* had its own mufti but the Ḥanafī mufti was senior on account of his *madhhab* (rite) being the official one of the Ottoman Caliphate. A movement for the change of madhhab in favour of the Ḥanafī School is discerned later in the 19th century.<sup>44</sup>

The head of the Jāmi'ah al-Azhar was known as *al-Mushrif* in the Fātimī period, in Mamlūk times he was termed as *al-Nāzir* and it was probably towards the end of the 17th century A.D. that the authorities established the position of *Shaykh al-Azhar*, the Rector of the University of al-Azhar.<sup>45</sup> Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Khurashī (or Khirshī), the first Shaykh al-Azhar died in 1101 A.H. /1690 A.D.<sup>46</sup>

The internal affairs of Egypt were dominated during the last quarter of the 18th century by two Circassian Mamlūks; Ibrāhīm, Shaykh al-Balad and Murād, Amīr al-Ḥajj. Due to their oppression this period was miserable. The ninth Shaykh-al-Azhar (1768-78) Aḥmad ibn-'Abd al-Mun'im al-Damanhūrī died in 1778 and there was dispute about the appointment of his successor. Shaykhs al-'Arīshī and al-'Arūsī were two opposing candidates. The 'ulamā', government officials and the populace took sides. The Syrian students supported Shaykh al-'Arīshī since he presided over them and the opposing party was joined by the Turkish students. The conflict caused the death of a Turkish student; the police intervened, arrested some of the Syrians, closed their lodgings and confined al-'Arīshī to his house. Al-'Arūsī was appointed as Shaykh al-Azhar but it took seven months to normalise the conditions. The most of other disputes, however, took the form of popular uprising outside al-Azhar against the injustices of the rulers. The Shaykhs acting as the

mediators between the Egyptians and their Mamlūk rulers championed the cause of the community. The Mamlūk ruling clique let loose reign of terror. They looted the masses, invented new forms of taxation and trade monopolies. The life of the common people was made unbearable. The Mamlūk troops openly resorted to immorality and brutality. Al-Azhar served as an oasis in the midst of this desolation. It kept spiritual and intellectual influences alive in spite of the occasional quarrels. The desperate and wretched people had it as the last resort of hope. To the close of the 18th century it was the most important masjid (mosque) and centre of higher learning in Egypt.<sup>47</sup>

Al-Azhar has been a residential University since its very inception. Its hostels or *riwāq* made it much more than a mere college or madrasah. It has ever been a great *jāmi' masjid* (assembly-mosque) and a place of refuge for the populace. Since it served so many useful purposes so towards the end of the 18th century, that period of chaos and turmoil in Egypt, it enjoyed tremendous prestige as the centre of justice and revolution.<sup>48</sup> It has been always a centre of a group of true scholars as its teachers. A professor, one of the body of '*ulamā'*', would be called *ustādh* or *Shaykh*. He would be a man of scholarship with an experience of years of advanced study. They worked hard, exerted a great influence over their students. They championed the causes of all the common people at all the stages of Egyptian Muslim history and all the classes of society respected them. Some of them were mystics, certain others studied the Greek sciences, a few others were poets, savants, and men of letters. Most of them living in a simple and pious way devoted themselves to linguistic, legal and religious studies.<sup>49</sup>

Al-Azhar with its '*ulamā*' played an important role in public affairs especially during the last three decades of the eighteenth century. "Both the Mumlūk Amirs and the people acknowledged that the '*ulamā*' were the carriers of the ancient tradition and exponents of Islamic law. The Mumlūks also appreciated the very strong tie between the '*ulamā*' and the people, that they had much in common" and that every part of Egypt had its representative at al-Azhar. This acted as a check on the actions of the Mumlūk ruling class.<sup>50</sup>

The role of the Jāmi'ah al-Azhar and its '*ulamā*' from its inception in 361 A.H./ 972 A.D. upto 1212 A.H./ 1798 A.D., as sketched above continued with more importance, vigour and depth later. Al -Azhar' continued to be inseparable from its sons, the '*ulamā*' and they form the part and parcel of this soul and centre of Islam in Egypt. Al-Azhar provided the main leading '*ulama*' during the chaotic period of the Napoleonic invasion (1213-1216 A.H./ 1798-1801 A.D) and they delivered Egypt from the French and confusion,<sup>51</sup> only to see their own selves trapped, their fundamental rights denied and their privileges trampled by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha once he was well-saddled on the throne of the Viceroyalty of Egypt and on his way to building what Kirk calls "the Egyptian Empire in the 19th Century".<sup>52</sup>

Al-Azhar (*al-Jāmi'ah al-Azhariyah* as it is officially known) has completed a millennium of Muslim learning and leadership. Its achievements and failures and role and response is better summarised in the words of its excellent 'biographer' Bayard Dodge:

Al-Azhar stands on the threshold of something new and unknown. For ten centuries it has been a place of worship, a refuge for the oppressed

and a centre of learning. When Baghdad fell in the East and Cordova in the West, al-Azhar kept the torch of wisdom burning. When Islam was threatened by Crusaders and Mongolians, al-Azhar filled men's hearts with courage. During centuries of Mamluk and Ottoman rule, al-Azhar kept alive a knowledge of the Qur'ān and the language in which it was written. At times of earthquake and civil war, invasions and plague, al-Azhar gave shelter to thousands of frightened people. When ignorance and calamity caused Muslim thought to become barren, al-Azhar encouraged the ethical influence of mysticism. During years of foreign rule and the occupation of European armies, the Egyptian people hailed al-Azhar as a champion of patriotism. Although it had its periods of internal strife and intellectual stagnation, its history is full of achievements.<sup>53</sup>

In conclusion one may dare to say that al-Azhar is unique in many ways. As a *Jāmi'* (mosque) it has been always a place of prayers, as a *Jāmi'ah* (University) it has been centre for learning and propagation of the principles of Islam and last but not the least, its '*ulamā'*' used to be socio-political leaders of the community.<sup>54</sup> They articulated the people's grievances against the injustice by certain rulers as well as against every foreign invasion, aggression and occupation.<sup>55</sup> The Muslim vitality during the long history of Egypt has been due to the proud host of '*ulamā'*' that al-Azhar produced. Al-Azhar has been a nerve-centre, lighthouse and a control-tower. The voice of its doctors and learned theologians – *al-'ulamā'* has been heard and attended to. They have as a mission guided the “steps of the Faithful through the snares of existence, to reply all the questions asked by the Wily One, to reassure all hearts, to strengthen all minds and to give everyone the inestimable peace of certitude”.<sup>56</sup>

**References and Notes**

1. P.K. Hitti, *The History of the Arabs* (London, 1970), p. 127.
2. R. Galt, *The Effects of Centralization on Education in Modern Egypt* (Cairo, 1936), p. 11.
3. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. "Al-Azhar", pp. 815-816.
4. It grew into a city out of military camp. "The word 'Fustat' is derived from Graeco-Latin *Fossatum*, a camp surrounded by a moat."— A.A.A. Fyzee, *Islamic Culture*, (Bombay, 1944) p. 14.
5. Sultān al-Mu'izz li Dīn Allah (R. 341-365 A.H./ 953-975 A.D.)
6. B. Lewis, "Egypt and Syria" in *The Cambridge History of Islam* (ed.) P.M. Holt et al., Vol. I (Cambridge, 1970), p. 185.
7. Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London, 1902), p. 123.
8. B. Lewis, *loc. cit.*
9. B. Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Washington, D.C., 1961). p. 4
10. *Idem.*
11. D.S. Margoliouth, *Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus* (London, 1907), p. 40.
12. Ismā'īlī constitute a Shi'ī sect who believe in Ismā'il (d. 762. A.D.) the elder son of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 A.D.) to be the seventh infallible imām, hence also called *Sab'iyyah* (Seveners), They "do not follow the face value (*Ẓāhir*) of the (*Qur'ānic*) law, but its hidden meaning (*batn*)"— D.B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (Lahore, 1960) p. 42.
13. C.E. Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 46.
14. Ahmad Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education* (Beirut, 1954,) p. 234.
15. B. Dodge, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
16. Not to be confused with his earlier namesake Abū-Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān ibn Thābit (d. 150 A.H./ 707 A.D.), the founder of the Ḥanafī (the first of the four schools of ) Sunni jurisprudence.
17. B. Dodge, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.



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