

ICH 2019**International Conference on Humanities****ZAINAB AL-GHAZALI: A HISTORY OF MUJAHIDAH
AWAKENING IN EGYPT**

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Abstract

Islamic civilization has given birth to the myriad of Muslim intellectuals regardless of gender. Zainab al-Ghazali was the founder of Muslim Women Association (MWA) of '*Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Muslima*' and the driving force behind Muslimah Akhwat Association. The basis of her thinking was on women's right and place in Islam. The rallying call of her struggle was to spread Islamic knowledge towards Muslim women, instilling them with true Islamic principle of their rights and responsibilities, imparting a wave of change on them in line with the teaching of al-Quran and sunnah. Her approach towards spreading her da'wah was through written articles and lectures especially concerning women's right and status in Islam. Her enlightenment had greatly impacted a massive number of women in Egypt to rise up to defend and to fight for their rights. Her personality, bravery, and intellectual have succeeded in uplifting the hierarchy of women in the world of da'wah and Islamic politics. She successfully warded off conventional prejudice towards women's leadership in Islamic society. Her battle to define women's role in Islamic society was truly exemplary and could be used as a point of reference towards women's plight in society today.

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1. Introduction

Her full given name was Zainab Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Jubaili. She was born on 2 Januari 1917M / 8 Rabiul Awal 1335H in Mayeet Ghumar al-Daqilyah, in Buhairah district of Egypt (Uthman, 2011). Her lineage can be traced back to the respectful and distinguished descendant of very close friends of the prophet Muhammad (Rasulullah pbuh). Her father was from the lineage of khalifah Umar al-Khattab ra, while her mother was a descendent of al-Hasan bin Ali bin Abi Talib ra. Zainab's father was a well-known ulama' (Muslim cleric) during the time, and he was also involved in cotton trade. The cotton trade business was inherited from his grandfather who also crafted a name for himself as a successful and respected cotton trade merchant (Hamid, Ramli, & Yama, 2014).

Upon closer inspection, the life of Zainab al-Ghazali could be projected to have been rooted by strong Islamic faith; she was born and raised in a family that stressed upon Islamic teaching (Kashmiri, 2011). Her parents introduced Islamic teachings when she was only a small child. This upbringing shaped her outlook to be a woman of religiously hanging on to the teaching of al-Quran and al-sunnah. Her father regularly brought her along to attend Subuh (dawn prayer) and to take part in ta'lim (religious lectures) which were attended by al-Azhar ulama' during her early growing up years (Hamid & Hasan, 2015).

She was often reminded to pray punctually. Her father often said to her "*you should not spend too much time with your peers because you are saiyidah Zainab*". Her father also honoured her by calling her Nusaiyah. The title was before Nusaiyah binti Ka'ab al-Mazaniyah al-Ansoriyah, one of the inner circles (sahabiyah) of the prophet who was known for her bravery (Hamid & Hasan, 2015). Her father's stout determination in shaping Zainab's personality had eventually produced one Egypt's greatest female figures (Lewis, 2007). Zainab's persona, bravery, and larger than life personality was mostly because of her father's dedication and closed supervision during her growing up years (Kashmiri, 2010).

When Zainab stepped into adulthood, she married an Egyptian man but her marriage didn't last long. Her divorce stemmed from her husband's refusal to let Zainab immerse too deeply into her da'wah activity, even though da'wah was her *raison d'etre* in life and she had been deeply engulfed by it (Lewis, 2007). She hasn't had children from that marriage. This tribulation left not a single scar on her spirit to pursue the path of da'wah in Egypt (Hamid et al., 2014).

Moving on from this distressing episode, she remarried. Allah S.W.T is the All Knowing and the All Merciful. This time she was granted with a loving husband who completely understood her inner desire for da'wah, and lent her support to achieve that as well (Lewis, 2007). In her book "*al-Ayyam Min Hayati*", Zainab al-Ghazali tells his husband's story Haji Salam Muhammad Salam, an economist (Mursi, 2011). Her husband's warm support towards her cause didn't stop her from fulfilling her duties as a responsible wife, although she was constantly inundated by her busy da'wah schedule. Sadly, every beginning has an ending (Lewis, 2007). In 1966, her husband passed away while she was in prison, six months before she was released. She continued her da'wah's struggle after her husband's passing, until she died in 2005 at the age of 88 (Hamid et al., 2014).

2. Problem Statement

The history of Egypt's civilization has proven that chaos is one of the main factors to doom a civilization (Mujani, 2010). Right until today, Egypt is still mired in chaos and uncertainty through political

stability, anarchism, radicalism, authoritarianism, and vandalism although Egypt has achieved independence for almost 70 years (Nurudin, 2015). This chaos has given birth to a number of Islamic fighters throughout Egypt to rise to defend the sanctity of Islam from infidels and the enemy of Islam. The rise of these fighters and thinkers has catapulted a wave of change in ideology of Islam, based on al-Quran and al-sunnah. One of the foremost female Islamic fighters to ever emerge from Egypt was Zainab al-Ghazali (Mursi, 2011). She was accorded the title of Mujahidah (female mujahid) because of her credibility as a leader of Muslim Women Association (MWA) of '*Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat*', the women wing of the Ikhawanul Muslimin organization (Mokrane, 2009). Zainab al-Ghazali was a famous Muslim female figure fighter during the period of 1937-1965. In Islam, women are not prohibited from participating in movement to defend Islam's sanctity, to take part in social activity, or to engage in politics, judiciary, education etc. Women's stature was also not in the lowest rung of society as was often propagated by anti-Islam naysayers. This article reviewed Zainab al-Ghazali's thinking and uprising as a contemporary Muslimah fighter as a method of history analysis, in a bid to appreciate her noble cause and to build upon her legacy as a figure of change. Her aura as a charismatic person not only succeeded in uplifting the women's standing in Egypt, but also managed to touch their conscience to rise up to defend their rights and dignity. She did all this through her awareness campaign during her leadership of Muslim Women Association (MWA) of '*Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat*' and Muslimah Akhawat Association in Egypt (Guezzou, 2009).

3. Research Questions

Zainab al-Ghazali received her early education at a local madrasah in her village of Mayeet Ghumar al-Daqiliyah, Buhairah district, Egypt. She furthered her studies to government school and followed Islamic study in al-Azhar. She learned and mastered various fields of Islamic knowledge including hadith, tafsir, and fiqh. After her father's passing in 1928, Zainab al-Ghazali left for Cairo along with her mother. She lived with her male relatives who studied and earned a living there. She was 11 at that time. While in Cairo, Zainab was prohibited from resuming her studies even though she repeatedly asked for permission from his eldest brother, Sa'aduddin al-Ghazali. Her father had imparted a great deal of courage inside Zainab. Finally, her second brother, Ali al-Ghazali gave her permission and support to continue studying as to mould her thinking into all matters relating to human life (Hamid & Hasan, 2015).

Ali helped her by giving her plenty of books, including the ones written by Aisyah al-Taimury concerning the stature of Muslim women. But Zainab, still young, was eager to indulge into something new. When she was twelve, while she was walking, she came into a school overwhelmingly filled with female students. She asked for permission from the guard to enter the school. She was brought into the attention of the headmaster. She promptly introduced herself and relayed her personal life story. Her determination and confidence caught the eyes of the headmaster. He was truly impressed by her courage and intellect. He accepted Zainab into the school, and let her study together with other kids. Armed with her natural intelligence, she passed all the examination levels with flying colours (Hamid et al., 2014).

Zainab al-Ghazali then furthered her religious studies with several notable al-Azhar teachers and ulama'. Among them were Syeikh Ali Mahfuz, Head of al-Azhar Teaching and Counsel, Syeikh Muhammad Sulaiman an-Najjar, and Syeikh al-Majid al-Labban. Their closed supervision (*talaqqi*)

resulted in Zainab mastering the combined system of traditional and modern knowledge of Islam (Hamid et al., 2014). Her mastery and intellectual capacity placed her among the influential women thinkers, on par with other celebrated and world known Muslim thinkers (Uthman, 2011).

Zainab al-Ghazali's arrest took place on August 20, 1965, when she was 44 years old. She was originally sentenced to hard labour for a period of 25 years, but she was released in 1971 during Anwar Sadat presidency (Ramadhana, 2011). Her torment was unbearable for a woman. Her piece rendering her ordeal in prison titled "*Return of The Pharaoh*" (the Pharaoh here referred to president Nasser) revealed the anguish and suffering of she and fellow Ikhwan Muslimin fighters in prison under the ruthless rule of Egypt government of that time (Lewis, 2007). According to Zainab, before she was arrested by the government under Jamal Abdul Nasser, MWA was deregistered by court notice (Uthman, 2011). There was a condition attached; the deregistration would be lifted once Zainab agreed to cooperate with Istrokiyah party (Ramadhana, 2011).

Zainab al-Ghazali refused all offers to entice her, including an offer by Jamal Abdul Nasser for her to be Minister of Public Affairs. She stood fast on her principle to spread da'wah. After failing to force Zainab to join Istrokiyah party, Jamal Abdul Nasser eventually ordered her arrest (Uthman, 2011). Her car was deliberately crashed. Fortunately, Allah SWT still guarded Zainab under His care; she survived. Her attempted murder failed, but she was finally arrested and detained in a prison at the edge of Cairo, Egypt in 1964. During her journey to the prison, she was harshly insulted and abused with degrading terms by the enemies of Islam (her captors) (Ramadhana, 2011).

Upon her arrival in prison, she was dragged to her prison cell and threatened to be killed, as what was experienced by other Ikhwan Muslimin members. During her prison time, she witnessed first-hand all forms of punishment and suffering undertaken by her fellow comrades (Uthman, 2011). All of them were heavily tortured. Zainab's torment began when she was thrown into a cell full of starving dogs. She was left alone there to fend for herself. In no time, she was surrounded by the hungry dogs and was bitten to no end (Ramadhana, 2011).

Zainab was brought out of that room afterwards, expecting that she had suffered profuse bleeding due to multiple bites from the piercing dog's teeth. But miracles happened; there were no signs of blood anywhere near her body, not even a bite mark, as if she were not even touched by the dogs. She was clearly protected by the grace of Allah (Ramadhana, 2011). This is one of the tortures experienced by Zainab as she strived to be protector of Islamic faith. Around 1971, she was released from prison. She once narrated that what made her so steadfast in her belief to shoulder all of her suffering during her torture was because of her constant meeting with prophet Muhammad pbuh in her dreams. This solidified her belief that she was on the right track to defend the integrity of Islam (Kashmiri, 2010).

4. Purpose of the Study

Zainab al-Ghazali moment of uprising started in her teenage years around 1936. During that time, Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) released an advertisement offering places for students to join a study visit to France. EFU was known to favour the path for women's liberation championed by western thoughts and leaning (Cooke, 1994). The association's leader was Huda Shaarawi (Uthman, 2011). She was a fearless and strong leader who was fiercely advocating women's right in society. Huda Shaarawi's meeting with

Zainab al-Ghazali proved a major turning point...she was absolutely impressed by Zainab's leadership quality and her strong personality. She subsequently registered Zainab's name as one of the participants to France. Huda Shaarawi even appointed Zainab as one of EFU's member and positioned her in administration (Lewis, 2007).

When serving as an ordinary member of EFU, Zainab's leadership quality shone brightly, and this was noticed by fellow members (Anggraeni, 2016). She was actively involved in all activities (such as debates) organized by the association. As time passed, she was gradually being disenchanted by EFU's direction (Lewis, 2007). She believed that majority of EFU's members defied Islamic guide in interpreting women's role in society. Her scepticism was further emboldened when vision of her father came during her sleep. Zainab's strong character was the result of his father's tutelage. Her father casted such an influential effect on her exemplified by the following narratives. When shortlisted candidates and exact date of departure to France had been announced, Zainab al-Ghazali met her late father in her dream a month later. In it, her late father advised her against joining the trip. She remembered vividly what her late father told her in that dream; *"truth be told, there will be better substitute from Allah S.W.T to what you will gain from that trip"*. That dream affected her tremendously. She eventually decided to cancel her participation in that trip even though she was repeatedly persuaded by Huda Shaarawi and other members to withdraw her decision. She rejected their request modestly, standing firm on her decision. She reiterated this phrase when explaining her reason of not joining the trip *"I feel that my father was always here with me and this feeling of accompaniment is not the same with my other family members"* (Hamid et al., 2014).

Throughout Zainab al-Ghazali's struggle to defend and empower women's right, she was also actively involved in major discussions with ulama' (*the learned ones* in Islamic faith) and other Muslim thinkers. Slogans chanted by Women Association solidified Zainab's assertion of her purity of struggle towards the perfection of the Islamic faith (Lewis, 2007). But underneath her outright confidence, there lies fragments of Islamic problem that were not fully understood by Zainab al-Ghazali, particularly concerning women's right. Al-Azhar's ulama' saw in Zainab a rare gem in terms of her personality and her ability to attract and convince others towards the subject of women's right. This led the ulama' fraction to invite Zainab to a series of discussion to enlighten her with the true understanding of women's right that was contrary to Women Association long-held belief. Syeikh Muhammad al-Najjar was one of the al-Azhar ulama' who was responsible to delivering a correct and detailed interpretation of women's right to Zainab (Hamid et al., 2014).

Then, Syeikh Muhammad al-Najjar explained what was required in a woman's heart before she could fight for her rights. Her dignity and self-worth are of paramount importance if Islam were to be correctly interpreted. Islam's stance should be realized by Muslim women of all strata to fulfil their overarching needs in a time when western civilization systematically denied women's stature in religion. After numerous discussions with Syeikh Muhammad al-Najjar, Zainab al-Ghazali came to comprehend the true meaning of the real Islamic path. This prompted her to walk out from the Egyptian Feminist Union although she was destined to have a bright future in their leadership structure (Anggraeni, 2016).

When she was inching towards her early twenties, Zainab al-Ghazali was hit by a calamitous tragedy; she accidentally caught fire and her face and body were almost fully burnt. She suffered critical burn her whole body and she was doomed not to fully recover from that burn injury. Doctors responsible

for her treatment asked her family members to pray for her recovery. When Zainab realized the extent of her injury, she prayed to Allah full-heartedly. She was aware of the real reason behind her ordeal; her prior involvement in EFU. She vowed if she were to recuperate from her burn injury, she will devote her whole life towards spreading the Islamic faith throughout Egypt and beyond, as was practised by previous Salafi women just after the period of prophet Muhammad pbuh. Her prayer, repentance and devotion towards the holy cause brought miraculous outcome; her body parts that were severely burnt before slowly recovered. This surprising turn of event solidified her belief and confidence towards spreading the message of Islam in Egypt (Hamid et al., 2014).

Zainab resigned from the EFU after the ordeal. Around 1937, she founded the Muslim Women Association (MWA) (*al-Saiyidah* in Arabic), taking helm of its leadership. MWA was the first women Muslim association in Egypt and it had brought a new dimension towards Islamic development in Egypt (Uthman, 2011). MWA was incepted primarily to call for and invite Muslims to revert to the true teaching of Islam. Western ideas and ideology had gravely influenced and polluted the lifestyle and thinking of Muslims during that time. Insultingly, Muslim leaderships were not spared of this western influence (Anggraeni, 2016). MWA other objectives were to encourage more knowledge acquirement among its members to free Muslims from enemies' leadership. MWA also trained its members in debates, engagement and interaction with community to further promote Muslims to actually familiarized themselves with the true teaching of Islam according to al-Quran and al-Sunnah (Lewis, 2007).

Zainab then took several steps to further her spread of da'wah by initiating Islamic classes throughout mosques in Egypt. Among the mosques involved include al-Imam Syafi' mosque, al-Jami' al-Azhar mosque, Ahmad Tolon mosque, and Sultan Hassan mosque with assistance from al-Azhar's preachers. She was the main driving force behind these classes (Hamid et al., 2014). Apart from that, Zainab also published Sayyidah Muslimah, a magazine packed with Islamic articles. Her speeches were also included in the magazine to showcase her burning desire and spirit to call upon and convince Muslims at large to return to the genuine Islamic faith and practice. Sayyidah Muslimah brought a new phenomenon and received massive acceptance among Egyptians of that time. MWA proved to be an instant success with branches mushrooming all over Egypt (Lewis, 2007).

Fuelled by MWA's development, Zainab al-Ghazali structured various strategies to systematically organize her association to further spread the da'wah of Islam. Foremost among them was the establishment of a da'wah centre focussing on producing competent preachers from among the Egyptian women (Lewis, 2007). To be admitted into this da'wah centre, there were several conditions that must be adhered to, including a compulsory six months period of learning various subjects specified by the da'wah centre. The subjects included were fiqh, history, hadith, and numerous other Islamic related fields to better prepare them to preach in mosques around Egypt. Zainab also founded houses for the parentless children to safeguard their future and wellbeing. These acts of kindness received overwhelming response and attention from all walks of life including NGOs and government bodies from Egypt and overseas (Uthman, 2011).

In 1952, during the rule of Jamal Abdul Nasser, a revolution swept Egypt that caused MWA to cease all its activities (Uthman, 2011). The revolution was called July Revolution (Hamid et al., 2014). Publication of MWA's official magazine, Sayyidah Muslimah, was halted, resulting in a disruption to Zainab's da'wah activities. She was also slapped with fabricated slanders and accusations as a government

revolt. Zainab was subsequently arrested and charged; she was finally handed a death sentence (Kashmiri, 2010). However, after trials in court, her death sentence was reduced to a lifetime prison with heavy labour during the course of her imprisonment. She was severely tortured during her time in prison. She recounted her ordeal in prison through her now famous book, “*Days from My Life*” (Arabic - *Ayyām min ḥayātī*). Today, this book has been translated to multiple languages throughout the world (Lewis, 2007).

5. Research Methods

This paperwork aims to have a discussion focussing on Zainab al-Ghazali’s uprising as a contemporary mujahidah in Egypt. Analysis on her thoughts and struggle, particularly her articles and sermon, was done to give greater insights into her strategy to lead MWA and Muslimah Akhwat Association in Egypt from 1937-1965. Qualitative method (content analysis method) was employed in this analysis. According to Othman Lebar (2006), data collection via content analysis could give relevant information regarding issues and problems of the case study.

Analysis method was done based on descriptive inductive approach to study Zainab al-Ghazali’s strategy towards empowering and upholding Muslim women standing in society. Several methods applied include review of literature, observation and data analysis based on Zainab’s own articles and collection of sermons. The overall discussion and summary were critical into developing a general idea about the impact of Zainab al-Ghazali’s momentous achievement towards improving the Muslim society in Egypt amid political and religious turbulence during that era.

6. Findings

Zainab al-Ghazali was a leading figure in contemporary Mujahidah movement, famed for her steadfast attitude towards empowering Muslim women stature, as well as striving for the real and genuine practice of Islamic faith. She was also well known for her mastery of Islamic scripture (*tafsir*); in fact, she was the first Muslim women to have ever done so in the 20th century. Her well-acclaimed *tafsir* titled “*Nazarat Fi Kitabillah*” was considered by many scholars to be a masterpiece among women intellectuals (Hamid & Hasan, 2015). She was also instrumental towards organizing and strengthening MWA and Muslimah Akhwat Association. Her leadership prowess shaped a new dimension in Islamic ideology towards strengthening and uplifting women’s stature across social, economy, politics, education and many more (Uthman, 2011). Her expertise and bravery greatly enhanced the development of da’wah activities in Egypt. She was actively involved in writings, engaging society at large, giving lectures and many other activities (Lewis, 2007).

Known as a contemporary mujahidah figure, Zainab al-Ghazali growing reputation brought a massive contribution towards Islamic development in Egypt (Uthman, 2011). Among her most noted contributions were the founding of MWA in 1937 in Cairo. She also founded Muslimah Akhwat Association and were their main driving force in accomplishing their numerous da’wah and social activities (Ramadhana, 2011). She also personally taught, preached, and trained WMA members to master the arts of communication and debates to better improve their interaction with society at large. With this improved approach, da’wah could be better propagated and easily accepted. Zainab was also a mother figure to many

Muslim women of her time as she tirelessly stressed the importance of acquiring and synthesizing the real concept of Islam (Kashmiri, 2010).

Zainab al-Ghazali played a leading role in defending the sanctity of Islam alongside another distinguished Muslim great such as Hasan al-Banna in Ikhwanul Muslimin (Ramadhana, 2011). She was tasked to lead one of the wings in Ikhwanul Muslimin at that time. She also made contribution to Ikhwanul Muslimin at the time when the organization was severely oppressed by the government in 1954 (Kashmiri, 2010). Zainab was also appointed as an editor in spousal relationship section in al-Da'wah magazine. She was active in seminar and debates in Egypt upon her release from prison. Even when she was in custody, she regularly gave short sermons to other detainees (Hamid et al., 2014).

7. Conclusion

Zainab al-Ghazali has brought tremendous development in Islamic reformation in Egypt through her sheer determination and personality. She had sacrificed her whole life towards achieving her dream of institutionalizing Islamic principles in Egypt. She encountered blood and tears throughout her struggle; but all these never once halted her indomitable spirit to uphold the true and holy teaching of Islam. She weathered all the storms with calm and dignity as she steadfastly believed that she was on the right path. Zainab's modest personality coalesced well with her sharp and firm thinking, making her highly approachable yet deeply respected. Her track records proved that she was not only a preacher, she was also a protector of Islamic faith against invading enemy of Islam. Her great wisdom was displayed when she almost single-handedly effected Egypt's masses of women to rise to defend their rights in social, politics, economy and education through relentless activities initiated under her association. This short research has succeeded in understanding the true nature of Zainab al-Ghazali's real struggle towards Islam. Her significant sacrifice and contribution towards achieving her goal should be emulated, referenced, and archived so it will not be lost on the future generation.

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