

Imam Ghazzali and his Criticism on Greek philosophy of theology

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Abstract

Imam Ghazzali is one of the distinguished intellectual personalities in the history of mankind. He lived in the 5th century of Hijrah where cultural clashes between different ideological groups reached the crucial point. The Muslim younger generation was in a great confusion to choose a right direction. The Greek philosophy attracted the intellectual youngsters and the other ideological groups like Fathimi, Mu'tazilah and Sufism were in conflict among themselves. Imam Ghazzali had acquired a thorough knowledge of all ideologies of his period. He had identified a sort of psychological demoralization imposed by Greek philosophy in the minds of intelligent Muslim youngsters against Islamic faith and values. Therefore, he had taken up the task of socio-cultural reformation on his shoulder.

He authored a number of books on refutation of Greek philosophy and rejection of the ideologies of the Batini and Mutazilah. This paper critically analyses the life history of Imam Gazzali, his intellectual contributions and his task towards refutation of Greek philosophy in order to defend Islam and safeguard the faith.

Key words: Ghazzali, Philosophers, Tahafut, Nizamiyyah, Juwaini

Introduction

Imam Ghazzali is a genuine and amazing personality. He rejects the involvement of human reason in the religion but establishes the victory of Islam by using the reason. He launched critical attacks on philosophy, but borrowed logical and philosophical evidences to defend Islam. He also refuted the philosophical arguments in the field of Islamic doctrine, but he had chosen the spiritual and Sufi way of life.

His total life span of about 55 years can be categorized as follow: He had taken up the teaching assignment at the age of 33 and served as a teacher in Madrasa Nizamiyyah in Bagdad about 5 years. Quitting the public life, he led an isolated and devoted life for about 11 years. Then he had resumed teaching job in Madrasa Nizamiyyah, Naisapur. But he could not continue more than a few months. Finally, he had returned home, established his own institution for

learners and a prayer hall for Sufis adjacent to his home and devoted rest of his life about 5 years in teaching, preaching, reciting the Holy Quran and researching on Hadeeth.

Dr. Yusuf Qardawi says, "Ghazzali represented the encyclopedia of his era and he was one of the giants known in the history of knowledge and culture".

His intellectual contributions still remain as references for many disciplines like Fiqh, Principles of Jurisprudence, Philosophy, Ilmul Kalam-Science of discourses, Sufism, Comparative religion, Comparative thoughts of schools, Psychology, Sociology, Economy, etc .

Shaikh Muhammad Mustafa Al Maraghi, ex Vice- chancellor of Al Azhar university, Cairo, said, "If a scholar is named, we may relate him to the branch of knowledge that he excelled in. For example, Ibn Sina and Farabi are giant Muslim Philosophers. Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim and Imam Ahmad are authentic authors of Hadeeth. However, if Ghazzali is named the fields are multiplied. It doesn't reflect a single person in our mind, rather it represents a multiple personality."

Brief life history of Ghazzali

Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad Al Ghazzali was born in 455 H (1058) in a village called Tus in the province of Khurasan. His father was a poor weaver and died while Ghazzali was a young boy. As his father wished, the young Ghazzali determined to devote his life for education. On completion of primary education at his home village, he travelled for higher studies to Khurasan, where he became a close student of Abul Qasim Ismail al Jurjani, a well-known scholar of Shafi school of thought, Hadeeth and Arabic literature.¹ Ghazzali compiled whatever he learned in a note pad and it was his first book he authored as named as a collection of Fiqh Issues.

For further higher study, he had joined Madrasa Nizamiyyah, Naisapur where his personality was fully shaped. He had specialized there in the areas of Islamic Jurisprudence, Principles of Jurisprudence, Doctrine of Ash'ariyya and logic under the guidance and mentorship of the prominent scholar Imamul Haramain Abul Ma'ali Al Juwaini. The young Ghazzali was very much inspired by his master. The master played a very important role in formulation of Ghazzali's mind. On the other hand, Ghazzali acquired spiritual guidance of Sufism from Abu Ali Fadl bin Muhammad Farmadi.² In 484 H, he was appointed as a teacher by the minister, Nizamul Malik in the Madrasa Nizamiyyah, Baghdad. In a short period, he became a

1. Ibnul Atheer, Al Kamil, Vol.10, page 52

2. Omer Farrukh, Tarikh al Fikr al Arabi, Darul Ilm Lil Malayeen, Beirut, 3rd Edition, 1981, page 485

leading famous teacher to attract a huge crowd of students from various parts of Muslim world. However, he could not continue the job for longer. Renouncing the worldly pleasure, he isolated himself from the people in the year 488 H. He was wandering between Damascus, Jerusalem, Makkah and Madinah for about 11 years. In 499 H, he resumed the teaching job in Madrasa Nizamiyya, Naisapur for a few months and returned home where he settled and stayed till his death in the year 505 H.

Imam Ghazzali: The Reformer of 5th Century

Imam Ghazzali was distinguished by his comprehensive knowledge of multiple disciplines on one hand and on other hand, known by untiring efforts for reformation of the Muslim community, re-orientation of their thoughts and strengthening their faith in Islamic belief. That is why he is regarded by majority of Muslim scholars as the reformer of the fifth century of Hijrah. In this regard the following Hadeeth is quoted.

The Messenger of Allah said, "At the beginning of every century, Allah will send for this community, the one who will renew its religion for the people".¹

Though the scholars differ in identifying the reformers of each century, they agreed of reformers of certain centuries. Among them, Umar bin Abdul Azeez is considered as a refoemer of the first century and so does Imam Gazzali for the fifth century.

Intellectual invasion From Greek Philosophy

While Imam Ghazzali was a teacher in Baghdad, he devoted his whole time on teaching, reading and researching. He was also in close touch with the younger generation of Muslim society. He was able to identify the nature of conflict in the minds of intellectual Muslim youngsters during his era. When the Greek philosophy was translated into Arabic, and in due time, the Muslim intellectuals were attracted towards its development, the situation posed serious challenge to the Islamic thoughts. Imam Ghazzali considered the Greek philosophy as intellectual invasion and an attempt to create in the minds of young Muslim society a sense of doubt and suspicion about the faith-based issues of Islamic doctrine.

The Muslim scholars were divided into two groups; one was in support of the Greek philosophy and the other was in total rejection of it. The supporters started glorifying the Greek philosophers like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoras and considered them as successful real heroes and role models. Thus, in doing so, they indulged in underestimating the Islamic

1. Imam Abu Dawud Sualiman bin Ashath, Sunan Abu Dawud, Darussalam, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

values, faith, creeds, system of prayers and even Muslim role models. They also tried to prove the superiority of human reason over the revealed scriptures and the traditions of the messenger of Allah particularly in the matters related to faith. All these factors caused a sense of demoralization in the minds young muslims.¹

Criticism on Greek philosophy of theology

After having identified the root cause of demoralization and psychological defeat in the Muslim minds, Imam Ghazzali took up the task of reforming the situation. He determined to diminish the prestige and magnificence of Greek Philosophy by highlighting its weakness and error and eventually to prove the limitation of the human reason in the matters of theological believes and doctrines. Before handling this task, he carried out a critical research on all the branches of Greek philosophy. The result of his research was compiled and published in the name of "Objectives of the philosophers" (Maqasid Al Falasifa) in 487 H. By publishing this book, Imam Ghazzali aimed at showcasing his exceptional mastery over the Greek philosophy. Because, he believed that one cannot challenge the philosophy unless he mastered in it.²

In the next step, Imam Ghazzali decided to launch a critical attack on the Greek philosophy and the philosophers in order to blacken their chapter in front of the public and demolish the philosophy itself. He published his book "Tahaafut Al Falasifah" in 488 H. in which the author tries to prove evidential conflicts and inability of the philosophers to establish convincing proof of their philosophical opinions.

While criticizing the philosophers in his book, Imam Ghazzali does not target everyone, but very clearly identify the enemy. He focusses only on the philosophy that related to metaphysics and matters beyond what is perceptible to the sense. During the period of Imam Ghazzali, the philosophy covered many branched and most of them have become sciences in the modern age. For example, in those days, Mathematics, Physics and Logic were studied under philosophy and they became separate disciplines of science today.

A reader of this book can obviously understand that the author is not even targeting the naturalist of philosophers who denies existence of God and resurrection in the Hereafter. Because their intention or their disagreement with Islam is openly known and no hidden danger is expected from them. The real danger is with the philosophers who on one hand, admit the existence of the creator, the first Cause, eternity of the world, heaven, hell etc. and do not

1. Ghazzali, Tahafut Al Falasifa, Maktaba Asriyyah, Beirut, 2015, page 42

2. Ghazzali, Maqasid al Falasifa, Matba'a Sabah, Demoscus, 2000, page 10

frankly deny religion but contradict with the belief and basic doctrines of Islam. The fight of Imam Gazzali is directed toward such philosophers.

The book "Tahaafut al Falasifah" contains 20 issues in which the author refutes the arguments and evidences of philosophers. They are categorized into two sections:

- 1) Theological issues related to unseen matters: 16 issues
- 2) Physical matters: 4 issues.

All the 20 issues are summarized in three parts

- 1) The Issues which are basically against Islam and they consist of denial of prophethood. The upholders of Such philosophy are not Muslims.
- 2) The issues which are not directly related to the basics of Islam. The upholder of Such philosophy is innovator (Bid'ath).
- 3) The issues are not at all related to Islam.

In this book, a logical and philosophical methodology is followed. The author, Imam Ghazzali presents the issues one by one and explains the evidences of philosophers from their point of view and then he puts forth his own objection on their opinion and finally proves the invalidation of their evidences. He first tries to refute their arguments with similar philosophical evidences. The introductory evidences are always followed by logical results. In addition, the author quotes revealed evidences from the Holy Quran and the Sunnah.¹ A reader can observe that the logical methodology of the author in this book is mostly similar to the methodology of Scholars of Ilmul Kalam – science of discourse and therefore, one can conclude that Imam Ghazzali followed the footsteps of Imam Ash'ary.

Impact of Ghazzali's attack

The impact of the book "Tahaafuth al Falasifa" was very much significant. It was a powerful blow on the prestigious image of the Greek Philosophy in the mind of younger Muslim generation of those days. It had brought the philosophy down to the defense position. However, the intention of the author in diminishing the philosophy was not to establish his own theory or a school of his own, but to establish values of Islam. The defeat of Greek philosophy was an intellectual victory of Islam.²

By launching such a powerful intellectual attack on the philosophy, Imam Ghazzali did not mean to undermine the value of human reason. He strongly believes that reason and

1. Ghazzali, Tahafut Al Falasifa, Maktaba Asria, Beirut, 2015, pages: 104 & 174

2. Dr. Qardawi, Imam Ghazzali, Bain maadiheehi wa Naqideehi, Darul Wafa, Al Mansura, Egypt, 3rd Edition, 1992, P.41

revelation never go against each other and hence, this point is highlighted by him in many of his works.

For example, he said: "the reason never gets guided without the revelation and revelation never be understood without reason".¹

" Human reason along with revealed shariah is like light on light."²

Imam Ghazali believes that the major task of human reason is to recognize the existence of God and the prophethood. Till such time, the human reason would be the deciding authority. Once recognized, it withdraws from the position of decision making and become the follower of the directions and decisions of the revelation. Thereafter, the task of the reason remains to explain the revealed texts and accordingly derive and formulate laws and regulations.³

Conclusion

Imam Ghazzali who lived 55 years in the 5th century of Hijrah, where the Muslim minds were in a great confusion due to pressure from various groups of ideologies and increasing influence of the prestigious image of Greek philosophy interfering in the field of theology. By acquiring a thorough knowledge of all branches of the philosophy and ideologies of all Muslim groups, Imam Ghazzali took up the task of socio-cultural reformation. His reformation covered three major areas: one was diminishing the prestigious image of Greek philosophy in theology, the second was refuting the wrong ideologies of various groups, especially Batini and Mutazilah and the third was to moderate the Sufism.

Leaving the second and third areas of reformation for the further scope of research, this paper has carried out a critical analysis of the first area of Imam Ghazzali's reformation in the Greek philosophy. The majority of Muslim scholars regarded him as the reformer of the 5th century of Hijrah.

1. Ghazzali, Ma'arij al Quds, Dar al Aafaq al Jadeedah, Beirut, page 57

2. Ghazzali, Al Iqtisad Fi Eitiqad, Darul Minhaj, Beirut, 2016, page 97

3. Ghazzali, Al Iqtisad Fi Eitiqad, Darul Minhaj, Beirut, 2016, Page 198-199

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