

# Sufistic influences had all along been working upon Ghazali's mind right from early childhood

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**Abstract-** Imam al-Ghazali has been regarded as the mujaddid (the reviver or the Islamic reformer) of the 5th century AH of Islam, and has been credited with various titles, of which the most famous is as Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam). This article investigates the development of al-Ghazali's thought and spiritual journey through different stages of his life, ie Spiritual Illumination, Al-Ghazzali Praises Sufism, Becomes a Sufi, Sufism The One True Way. Ghazali's Impact on Sufism .This article basesd how Al-Ghazali renounced his brilliant career and turned to Sufism and radically transformed to become a personal Sufi during the seclusion period, leading to his subsequently becoming an active public Sufi.and contributed in this field

**Index Terms-** al-Ghazali, spiritual journey Spiritual Illumination, Sufism The One True Way, during seclusion, *personal* Sufi, *public* Sufi. internal conflict, Impact on Sufism

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest re newers of the faith in history was the 11th century scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Today, he is known as *Hujjat al-Islam*, the Proof of Islam, because of his efforts in intellectually fighting against some of the most dangerous ideas and philosophies that plagued the Muslim world during his time. From the ubiquitous nature of ancient Greek philosophy to the rising tide of political Shi'ism, Imam al-Ghazali did not leave a stone unturned in his effort to bring back serious Islamic scholarship in the face of heterodox threats.

Al Ghazali was born in 1058 AD in Tus, which lies within the Khorasan Province of Persia (Iran). He started to learn about Islam at the age of 7 by attending the local *madrassa* (school).He studied Arabic, Persian, the Qur'an and the principles of religion. He went on to intermediate and higher education at a *madrassa*. Here he studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) and *hadith* (Prophetic tradition).Towards the age of fifteen, Al Ghazali moved to Jurjan to study *fiqh*.He then moved to Nishapur, where he studied *fiqh*, *kalam*(scholastic theology), logic and, possibly, some philosophy. Al Ghazali was 23 at the time. He also began to write and study Sufism.

At the age of 28 he moved on travelling to meet Nizam ul-Mulk, the Seljuq minister, and remained with him in his 'camp' for six years, during which time he lived the life of a 'court jurist'.He took part in political and learned disputes and wrote books until he was appointed as a professor to the Nizamiya *madrassa*at Baghdad, the most celebrated and important centre of science and teaching in the *Mashriq* (Islamic East) at that time. He worked there for 4 years. In 1095, at the age of 38, Al Ghazali suddenly underwent a six-month-long spiritual crisis;

internal conflict between rational intelligence and the spirit, between this world and the hereafter. His crisis had two dimensions. He questioned the efficacy of the tools of knowledge; and he questioned his own intentions. This crisis brought on a physical illness which prevented him from speaking or teaching, finally causing him to leave his post and renounce wealth, fame and influence.<sup>(1)</sup>

## II. SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION

Among the Sufis, al-Ghazali came to know the certainty that philosophy had failed to provide. He became convinced that knowledge of God results only from spiritual illumination, from the soul journeying back towards its source. He wrote:

"I learnt with certainty that it is above all the mystics who walk on the road to God; their life is the best life, their method the soundest method"<sup>(2)</sup>

Returning to his hometown of Tus, he took charge of a *khanka* (Sufi hospice or even monastery, which included a study house). There he taught what became the content of his most

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(1) Al-Ghazali *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal wa al-Muwassil ila dhi al-'Izzah wa al-Jalal*. Edited with introduction by

Jamil Saliba and Kamil 'Ayyad. 7th ed. Bayrut: Dar al-Andalus,

(2) Al-Ghazali. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: Tahafut al-Falasifah: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*.

Translated, introduced and annotated by Michael E Marmura. 2nd ed. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press.

important work, the *Ihya ulum al-din* (The Revivication of the Religious Sciences). This work again singled him out as the most important theologian of the day. However, after 11 years away from his formal post, he again felt the compulsion to teach, commenting that it was "God most high who determined this move." He began to ask colleagues whether he ought to return to teaching, as he now feared that it was love of retirement and of a life of ease that was holding him back from public duty. His friends urged him to return to his own alma mater, Nishapur, which had become lax. They pointed out the promise of a renewer (*mujaddid*) towards the start of each new century, and that he was well equipped to take up that reviving role. Ghazali therefore ended his seclusion for a short period, at the behest of Fakh al-Mulk, the vizier of the Seljuk ruler of Khorasan, to teach at the Nizamiyyah (1106). He also gave some lectures on the *Ihya* in Baghdad. It was not really, he wrote, a 'return' to what he had been doing before, since before he had "disseminated the knowledge by which worldly success is gained," while now he taught the knowledge "whereby worldly success is given up and its low portion in the Scale of real worth is recognized."<sup>(3)</sup>

### III. GHAZZALI PRAISES SUFISM

What Imam has to say about the Sufistic path, in his candid and heartfelt *Confessions of Al-Ghazzali*:

"I saw that in order to understand Sufism thoroughly one must combine theory with practice. The aim which the Sufis set before them is as follows: To free the soul from the tyrannical yoke of the passions, to deliver it from its wrong inclinations and evil instincts, in order that in the purified heart there should only remain room for Allah and for the invocation of His holy name."<sup>(4)</sup>

But without a clear path of practice, Al-Ghazzali undertook an exhaustive study of the great books on Sufism:

"As it was easier to learn their doctrine than to practice it, I studied first of all those of their books which contain it: *The Nourishment of Hearts*, by Abu Talib of Mecca, the works of Harethel Muhasibi, and the fragments which still remain of Junaid, Shibli, Abu Yezid Bustami and other leaders (whose souls may Allah sanctify). I acquired a thorough knowledge of their researches, and I learned all that was possible to learn of their methods by study and oral teaching. It became clear to me that the last stage could not be reached by mere instruction, but only by transport, ecstasy, and the transformation of the moral being...I saw that Sufism consists in experiences rather than in definitions, and that what I was lacking belonged to the domain, not of instruction, but of ecstasy and intuition."<sup>(5)</sup>

Al-Ghazzali's heart and mind were cast into a sea of conflicting intentions and emotions:

"Coming seriously to consider my state, I found myself bound down on all sides by these trammels. Examining my actions, the most fair-seeming of which were my lecturing and professorial occupations, I found to my surprise that I was engrossed in several studies of little value, and profitless as regards my salvation."<sup>(6)</sup>

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Munir Ahmad Mughal. Lahore- Pakistan: Kazi Publications,

(5) Al-Ghazali. *Kimiya'-i-Sa'adat (Alchemy of Eternal*

(3) Al-Ghazali. (1967). *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal wa al-Muwassil ila dhi al-'Izzah wa al-Jalal*. Edited with introduction by Jamil Saliba and Kamil 'Ayyad. 7th ed. Bayrut: Dar al-Andalus,

*Bliss*). Full English translation of the Persian original texts. Translated by Muhammad Asim Bilal. Revised by Munir Ahmad Mughal. Lahore- Pakistan: Kazi Publications,

(4) Al-Ghazali. *Kimiya'-i-Sa'adat (Alchemy of Eternal Bliss)*. Full English translation of the Persian original texts. Translated by Muhammad Asim Bilal. Revised by

(6) Al-Ghazali. *Kimiya'-i-Sa'adat (Alchemy of Eternal Bliss)*. Full English translation of the Persian original texts. Translated by Muhammad Asim Bilal. Revised by

#### IV. GAZALI S AS A SUFI

A distinction needs to be made between the Sufism of al-Ghazali and some of the various brands of Sufism today. Al-Ghazali's support of the sufis in his time should not be taken as a blanket endorsement of all of today's 'sufi' ideologies.

Much of al-Ghazali's journey to Sufism is described eloquently in what is often called his 'spiritual auto-biography' (the *munqidh*). He describes how he turned to the way of Sufism by examination and exhaustion of all other paths to certainty (*yaqin*).

'I knew with certainty that the sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of works, and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way. From the sciences which I had practiced and the methods which I had allowed in my inquiry into the two kinds of knowledge, revealed and rational, I had already acquired a surer and certain faith in God Most High, in the prophetic mediation of revelation, and in the Last Day. These three fundamentals of our Faith had become deeply rooted in my soul, not because of any specific, precisely formulated proofs, but because of reasons and circumstances and experiences too many to list in detail...'

'The sufi path consists in cleansing the heart from whatever is other than God... I concluded that the sufis are the seekers in God's Way, and their conduct is the best conduct, and their way is the best way, and their manners are the most sanctified. They have cleaned their hearts from other than God and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run, carrying the knowledge of God.'<sup>(7)</sup>

To al-Ghazali, Sufism meant purifying the soul and turning it towards God, and as practice, the sufi is busy in detachment from all else for the sole purpose of attachment to God alone. Al-Ghazali states this as:

'The aim of their knowledge [the sufis] is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God.'

His most succinct summary of Sufism being:

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Munir Ahmad Mughal. Lahore- Pakistan: Kazi  
Publications,

(7) Al-Ghazali. *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal wa al-Muwassil*

*ila dhi al-'Izzah wa al-Jalal*. Edited with introduction by

Jamil Saliba and Kamil 'Ayyad. 7th ed. Bayrut: Dar al-  
Andalus,

'...truthfulness with God Almighty and good conduct with people.'

Al-Ghazali attained early information and some understanding of Sufism through: his first teacher, the ongoing influence of his older brother and by reading many works of great Sufis. This form of knowledge he describes as being 'indirect', with verification only through trust and reason. He realized, however, that the essence of Sufism is essentially a matter not of knowledge, but of lived experience. Al-Ghazali then describes 'direct' knowledge as being 'tasted' or 'savoured', insisting upon the subjectivity of its experience and internal appreciation. Hence, he admits that he had no true knowledge of Sufism until he himself began to live by it, similar to how a simple description of love pales in comparison to its actual, lived experience.

He recounts that Sufism is a path through which one experiences an intimate relationship of love with his Creator. How this is possible can be understood through a human analogy. When one intends to grow in love and nearness to another, some level of commonality must be sought. He can approach them, and thus occupy similar locations in space and time; or he can reason with them, experiencing a convergence of the intellect; or he can express emotional sentiments, sharing in experience through empathy. Similarly, if one intends to draw near to God, who cannot be approached in any of these human capacities (as He is Transcendent and Formless), one must seek to purify the heart of all that is 'ungodly' and experience total absorption in God through the annihilation of the self (*fana*). In a practical sense this is first to rid oneself of the ego and of undesirable qualities, such as: greed, gluttony, ostentation and conceit. Then, it is to struggle to embody qualities praised by God, which parallel (at an incomparably lesser capacity) the Infinite, Flawless Qualities and Attributes of God, such as: mercy, compassion, love, justice, honesty, generosity and kindness. In this light, a gnostic once said:

'A sufi is not a sufi unless, were everything that is in him to be exposed on a plate in the marketplace, he would not be ashamed of anything that came to light.'<sup>(8)</sup>

#### V. SUFISM THE ONE TRUE WAY

He then sums up his life of a most exhaustive and devoted study of Allah and His Islam, with these words:

"During my successive periods of meditation there were revealed to me things impossible to recount. All that I shall say for the edification of the reader is this: I learnt from a sure source that the Sufis are the true pioneers on the path of God: that there

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(8) Al-Ghazali. *The Book of Knowledge*. Translated by  
Nabih Amin Faris. New Delhi: Islamic Book Service

is nothing more beautiful than their life, or more praiseworthy than their rule of conduct, or purer than their morality.)<sup>(9)</sup>

"The intelligence of thinkers, the wisdom of philosophers, the knowledge of the most learned doctors of the law would in vain combine their efforts in order to modify or improve their doctrine and morals; it would be impossible. With the Sufis, repose and movement, exterior or interior, are illumined with the light which proceeds from the central Radiance of Inspiration. And what other light could shine on the face of the earth? In a word, what can one criticize in them?"

"From the time that they set out on this path, revelations commence for them. They come to see in the waking state angels and souls of prophets; they hear their voices and wise counsels. By means of this contemplation of heavenly forms and images they rise by degrees to heights which human language cannot reach, which one cannot even indicate without falling into great and inevitable errors."<sup>(10)</sup>

For those who condemn or deride the life and practices of the Sufis, Imam Al-Ghazzali offers this advice:

"But behind those who believe comes a crowd of ignorant people who deny the reality of Sufism, hear discourses on it with incredulous irony, and treat as charlatans those who profess it. To this ignorant crowd the verse applies: *"There are those among them who come to listen to thee, and when they leave thee, ask of those who have received knowledge, 'What has he just said?' There are they whose hearts Allah has sealed up with blindness and who only follow their passions"*.

It was during the period of seclusion and search that he wrote his remarkable work *Ihya-ul-Uloom* which resuscitated Islam which had become merely a set of rituals and ethical rules under the domination of the orthodox *Ulema*. His indomitable will and devoted work earned him the title of *Hujjat-ul-Islam* (the proof of Islam) and the charges leveled against him that he did not follow the scriptures and canonical laws, that he accepted the rules of philosophy and followed them and thus lowered the dignity of ritual and canonical laws of Islam were all leveled to dust.

## VI. AL GHAZALI'S IMPACT ON SUFISM

Al Ghazali sought and succeeded in creating a synergy of scholarly knowledge and evidence to support Islamic teachings.

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Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism that seeks to rid oneself of the ego, will and self-centred actions and thought to seek God's pleasure. As a result of his support, Sufism gained momentum in mainstream Islam. Sufism for Al Ghazali bridged the gap between the current transient world and the world of the hereafter. Al Ghazali reconciled Shari'a and Sufi mysticism at a time when Sufism was being rejected as being un-Islamic.

He defined Sufism as: "two things: truthfulness with God Almighty and good conduct with people. Anyone who practices these two things is a Sufi".

He stated, "The Sufi path consists in cleansing the heart from whatever is other than God... I concluded that the Sufis are the seekers in God's Way, and their conduct is the best conduct, and their way is the best way, and their manners are the most sanctified. They have cleansed their hearts from other than God and they have made them as pathways for rivers to run, carrying the knowledge of God".<sup>(11)</sup>

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