

Al-Ghazali: A Mélange Of Theology, Law And Mysticism And, A Non-Totalizing Bayeux Tapestry Of Islamic Thought

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Submission: September, 15, 2021

Revision: September, 25, 2021

Acceptance and Publication: October, 20, 2021

Abstract

Al-Ghazali is the most influential personality of post-classical Islam who reconstituted the fundamental elements of Islam and struck harmony among the fundamental disciplines of Islam i.e. law, theology and Sufism by re-evaluating the kerygma-tic tradition on the touch-stone of his religious experience. His intellectual spiritual odyssey is replete with moral doubts and certainties i.e. an essential commodity for higher realization of Truth which is something quite natural to the Quran (2:260). However, amidst long journey his positions changed and evolved; and if one does not take stock of the crests and the troughs of his inner vicissitudes the fuller titanic grasp of his personality seemed improbable. He has much in his folds to be bracketed in the traditionalists as an anti-science and an arch-rival of philosophy but on the cost of intellectual integrity for his complete intellectual portrait portrays him concerned to keep philosophy in its proper place and secure the right of reason against cheap defenders of religion. He pioneered the discipline of religious philosophy wherefrom benefitted not only his friends and foes in Islam, the theologians of Christianity and Judaism strengthened their traditions by his religious philosophy. Yet he constructed personal-ism i.e. how to be a good person and possess all private soft virtues on a strong foundation of personal faith on the cost of Islamic positivism – how to establish a world social moral order by social or community virtues. This paper intends to evaluate his intellectual and spiritual legacy in systematic order to dislodge illusions and contradictions that emerge from partial and superficial view of his thought. This article is based on qualitative research.

Key Words: Islam; metaphysics; Sufism; philosophy; theology; law; Personal-ism; Islamic Positivism; social fact; pure reason; revelation; science; Cartesian doubt; Ghazalian skepticism; and certainty; transcendentalism.

Introduction

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali was born (450/1058-505/1111) five centuries after the Prophet, at the midpoint of Islam's march to a millennium: a time fraught with intellectual crisis for Islam after crossing over its most creative period i.e. classical age, all round seized by and indulged in pure speculation seemed a spent force. Islam being psychologically invincible and master of its own destiny had responded to all intrinsic and extrinsic challenges creatively that history and rivals flung on its side with swaggering confidence and come up with unique intellectual heritage of law, theology and mysticism during first three or almost four centuries i.e. classical Islam. However, soon after the eclipse of central caliphate (Abbasside Empire), the invasions of Mongol hordes from the East and Crusaders from the West sealed the fate of Islam's political unity and with the emergence of sparse and separated polities-Seljuk, Safavids, Ayyubid etc. preservation of the dynastic empire became the primary concern of Muslim institutions rather than the principles on which it was founded. In turn the Faith which has spiritual roots became earth rooted and began to be territorialized or relativized as per dictates and interests of the empire. Moreover, when Arabic ceased to be a lingua franca by the primacy assumed by Persian, Turkish and other languages; the unfortunate development put dampers on the prospects of communal solidarity and was bound to mature into further cleavages, chasms and fissures. Political shake up affects all details of life just as political stability strengthens the same for politics is the soul of life. Hence the ad-hoc arrangements and loopholes left in intellectual constructs of Islam whom only the thin veneer of political stability had covered and protected for a considerable time began to show their ugly heads amidst political crisis. "Since Ijtehad and Ijma – the effective framework of Islamic thinking came to an early stop; the inner integrity of Islam was destroyed, each element forcing its own way out in a direction it pleased or happened to take and thus parallel, indeed mutually opposed "Islams" developed throughout the latter centuries¹". The post-formative developments in Islam, roughly beginning with the fourth century in all fields- law, theology, Sufism and politics began running riot and became increasingly uncontrolled. Ibn Taimiyyah terms these "neo-fiqh", "neo-kalam", "neo-Sufism", and "neo-politics" and concludes that they became chaotic and irresponsible².

This was a socio-political milieu that Ghazali came to stage to reconstitute the fundamental elements of Islam. Early religio-political wars in Islam though had some unmistakable bearings on classical Islamic traditions of law, theology and mysticism still sincerity and clarity of purpose was there so much so that these disciplines were at least juxtaposed together if not organically linked at all. However, in post classical Islam, juxtaposition aside, each discipline was at cut throat war with the other. Neo-fiqh had succumbed to arbitrary approaches giving rise to controversies on such a massive scale that the science of legal disagreement (Ilm al-khilaf or khilafyat), became a discipline itself opening the floodgate of legal literature based on speculative assertions and conjectural propositions a sure recipe to mutual heresy declarations. The early generation of Islam was habitual to seek legal solutions from the entirety of the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah rather than individual verses. Yet, the first person to have formulated the principles of law was of course al-Shafi but his reliance on the Nass (Text) though proved beneficial on the realm of administrative affairs giving rise to an impressive uniform Islamic culture but the major casualty of this methodology was originality and creativity that issues forth from the major themes of the Quran where the entire teachings converge. Ibn Taimiyyah considered the Hanafi's principles of law fake for they relied on speculative principles which tend to be arbitrary. Hence, to him the jurists who rely on sharia texts (ahl al-nassus) are far more capable of giving [correct] judgments than the people of opinion (ahl al-ray) for in order to solve real life-problems Muslims need to know the source texts. But backed by official power Hanafi school had proved a hotbed of juridical conjectures now in post classical period was ready to reap off what it had sown.

Neo-theology had turned its back on the social fact which primarily used to serve as a necessary backdrop to a coherent elaboration of the moral, social and legal message of the Quran. Its over- indulgence in the attributes of God and differentiated view of Quran had robbed it of its action oriented impulse and mortgaged it to over-aestheticism. This

neo-theology had no basis in Quran and Sunnah. A dichotomy of reason and revelation had propounded that whereas theology is based on reason law is based on revelation. Yet, opposite was the case, in fact, for the revelation not only invites the exercise of reason but actually has many rational principles. Thus, whereas the jurists were at least formally bound to provide certain rational basis for their decisions and legal solutions the theologian were on the course of mere conjectures for their discipline has ceased to be a nourishing force for law and paled into insignificance in so far as the activities of real life are concerned. It had turned into “a justified form of poetry, as Lange defined it or legitimate play of the grown-ups, as Nietzsche described it ³”.

Neo-mysticism of post classical Islam too did not fare well and was playing havoc with the integrity and moral initiative of the community. Sufism’s roots and starting point was, of course, ever the Quran for “Muhammad’s prophetic consciousness, which issued in his mission, was founded upon very definite, vivid and powerful mystic experiences (17:1; 53:1-12; and 13-18; 81:19-25)⁴”. Hence, classical tradition of Islamic mysticism was justifiably based on the Quran and Sunnah which is even affirmed by Ibn Taimiyyah the harsh critic of neo-mysticism, and why not be so when even the Quran itself is the culmination of Muhammad’s mystic experience at the Cave of Hira. However, the gist of the issue is it was action oriented, a means to an end not an end itself, intended to build a just moral social world order on the earth. Muhammad once left the cave never returned to the same again throughout his life. Hence, “the mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the prophet⁵” has its basis through and through in the Quran and the Prophetic model, yet later on the utter personal self-pietistic posture it assumed and the retirement from community affairs it took was borrowed from and a hallmark of Christian Monks, it turned the Sufis into the dancing peacocks of the forest with moral gymnastics turning their backs on primary duty of building world moral ethical-social order. “It would be a simple oddity to attribute to any one of the Companions anything like, say, the ecstasies of an Abu Yazid al-Bistami or the theosophic lyrics of Ibn al-Arabi (107).⁶” Though Quran presents some distinct elements of ecstasy to invoke love and aestheticism in worship and service to God that how all the universe sings the glories of God still these are not divorced from serious purpose or rationale (see Sura 55; 39:75; 3:191). It is in tune with Schopenhauer’s statement that the height of any branch of knowledge is that it should become music. Then what would be the level of musicality of the rationale kneaded in sweet melodies of unique diction when God the source of all knowledge having universe in His titanic grasp speaks. The beauty, grandeur and aestheticism that the diction of the Quran entails was psychologically overwhelming and physically coercive in its persuasions so much so that it was enough to get some top-notch Arab poets resigned from their poetry. Yet, this ecstasy was means to an end not an end itself.

But the ecstatic Sufism a branch of this neo-mysticism in post formative period made ecstasies an end for unitary experience has an element of substantive pleasure the inertia and recalcitrance of which according to Quran is needed to get around for the establishment of concrete world moral order. O you [in thy solitude] enfolded! Arise and warn! (74:1-2). It is an allusion to “Muhammad’s intense desire for solitude before the beginning of his prophetic mission; “arise and warn”-i.e. “give now up thy solitude, and stand up before all the world as a preacher and warner⁷”. Behold, we shall bestow upon you a weighty message (73:5) elaborates that only opening of the window to the unknown, ghayb (94:1-3) is not be-all-and-end-all, responsibility to the history, to redress and redeem the balance of human socio-moral affairs is a weightier than to peep through the window of unknown that too had weighed so heavily on thy back. Hence, the subsequent history and the drift of the Prophet’s career are directed towards the execution of this tremendous moral task. Now, in the light of this moral imperative what relevance the post classical ecstatic Sufism has to the Quran? Ibn Qayyim al-jawziyya (d.751/1350) terms these Sufi ecstasies inconsequential and futile that when a Sufi becomes absorbed in his divine love and forgets about mankind and even obedience to God, because he relishes that love for his own sake, there remains no essential difference between him and a person who becomes similarly absorbed in human love and enjoys and relishes it. The Sufi poetry is replete with folklore love stories to induce divine love in their followers speaks volumes of the trend set in by Ibn al-Arabi. Had it any warrants the talent of the Arab poets would have provided a rich crop of such fancies in pristine Islam to dilute the serious enmity of its rivals. The seriousness of the message of Islam had invoked serious and severe reaction in the opponents.

Cognitive Sufism despite having roots in the Quran at early stage; veered off the road in the post classical period. Of course! Religious experience yields cognitive content that strikes biological transformation in the subject yet it differs from the intellectual cognition which is just informative while the former brings revolutionary changes or else prefers to remain hidden. The initial impulse of Sufism was to resurrect the simplicity and an anti-acquisitive spiritual and devotional fervor of the early generation of Islam and play the role of opposition against the tyranny and utter this-worldly attitude of the rulers. But when failed to it aptly steered its course toward self-piety and personal-ism. Still, to some extent was in harmony with kerygma-tic tradition. Junaid of Baghdad preferred sobriety to ecstasy and said whatever comes to us in ecstatic state we present it to the two witnesses (Quran & Sunnah) and accept the judgment. So pure and original are his mystic views that Louis Massignan in his "Passions of Hallaj" terms him theoretician rather than a pragmatic Sufi for as against al-Hallaj and Abu Yazid al-Bistami's mystic deliriums he finds no such over-blown Sufi claims in him. But soon it became a popular mass religion as the orthodoxy remained limited only to the external life of the community and at critical mass points would submit to Sufi doctrines repugnant to Islamic ethos. However, it was cognitive Sufism i.e. Sufi gnostic principle of knowledge coming through intuitive channels with intuitive certainty that practically overwhelming all other forms of Sufism sealed the fate of rationalism and numbed the rational faculties of the Muslim world. "The Asharite orthodoxy had already disparaged reason vis-a-vis revelation, and when the Sufis also disparaged reason in favor of an alleged knowledge immune from error, called unveiling (kashf), a powerful anti-rational impulse was bound to be generated⁸". The development was in sharp contrast to the entire ethos of the Quranic doctrine of cognition which is diametrically opposed to Gnosticism and mysterious cults. While the real religious cognition as above mentioned is necessarily action oriented and strikes revolutionary changes, the fulcrum of gnostic cognition, if any, was no more than empty talk, or to wrestle with oneself or ultimately to wrestle with God as deliverances of the prominent Sufis portray, the moral dimension of intra human relation the core concern of Quran was entirely excluded from Sufi ethos. This invites the harsh critique of Ibn Taimiyyah "when a Sufi divests his mind of all its positive content in order to "devote himself exclusively to God" as he claims, then the devil comes to inhabit his empty mind and freely does his work there⁹".

The moral Sufism rather than a genuine natural phenomenon was reactionary in nature. The utter this-worldly attitude of the empire provoked utter that-worldly outlook of moral Sufism. Hasan of Basra writes to Umayyad pious caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz that God has created nothing more hateful to Him than this world, and from the day He created it He has not looked upon it. This is how later it became the feature and furniture of moral Sufi literature. The Quran terms this gigantic universe, whispers of human soul, and operations of history great signs of God and and tirelessly reminds humanity of the blessings of food, drink, comforts and the laws and forces of nature at its disposal.

This was the sorry state of affairs that an orgy of intellectual deficits and nihilistic extremes was eating into the vitals of and tearing apart the warps and woofs i.e. the very social fabric of Islamic community when Ghazali comes to the stage destined to reconstitute the fundamental elements of Islam, to smooth the sharp edges of Islamic law, theology and mysticism by establishing an organic relation among them with the method and basis which are both intellectually and spiritually justified so that they may fall in their proper place in an awe-inspiring harmony to serve and enhance each other rather to be at cut throat war against each other which had sown the seeds of rifts and discord, in nutshell the integrally reconstituted community of Islam was the be-all-and-end-all of his intellectual and spiritual endeavors. The enormous fecundity of his intellectual cum spiritual accomplishments and the fulfillment of the task ahead him with a valor of staring the stark realities of life in the face could be gauged from the landmark remarks of Philip. K. Hitti on his spiritual odyssey that "He [al-Ghazali] reproduced in his religious experience all the spiritual phases developed by Islam¹⁰". He not only built bridges between law, theology and mysticism in Islam but also emerged as a pioneer of religious philosophy that not only provided long lasting firm hand-hold and definite anchoring points to the community of Islam but also inspired soul-mates in other world religions like Judaism and Christianity. His religious philosophy consolidated the community on moral vision of Islam that was bound to become a rallying cry for the long generation of theologians in the ensuing history beyond the division of sects or in the modern parlance modernists, traditionalists and revivalists with the exception of secular modernists in Islam all pay homage and owe allegiance to his venerated Islamic thought. "It was Ghazali who once again "built up breaches in Muslim Zion and

Islam exists still largely due to him¹¹". He was a man of broader "Self" and, intellectually speaking, the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and conflict between them in the same could not have yielded him truth. His career at Nizamiyya College Baghdad was a resounding success yet he thought that the pursuit of pomp, power and glory was not only worthless but positively harmful as well, if he was a genuine seeker of the truth and intends to seek truth for the sake of truth.

He found only four paths to go about the task before him: those of the theologians, the Ismailis (batnis), the philosopher, and the Sufis. "I said to myself, truth cannot lie beyond these four types, for these are the only ones who are seeking the way of truth. Should truth be blocked to them, there is no hope of ever finding it¹²". He thought Sufism to be the best way to untie the Gordian knot of realizing and appropriating the truth in a new and deeper way. Ibn Taimiyya acknowledging his sincerity and "ocean like knowledge" endorses his choice of Sufism the best among the four yet recommends that recourse to the Quran and Sunna would have been the best alternate for him to help solve the puzzle. Some attribute his choice of Sufism to his lack of knowledge in the fundamental disciplines of Islam. Perhaps this was the common feature of his age for the pure speculation had all round seized the community turning its back on the original élan of the Quran and Sunna and resurrection of the same from the debris of history or scholasticism was later to fall on Ibn Taimiyya. Or, the liberty to freely construct the theses of Islam amidst political vacuum which Ibn Taimiyya entertained or later in the Muslim sub-continent Shah Wali Allah enjoyed could not be the lot of al-Ghazali who had to hedge the bets i.e. accommodate the concerns of both the rulers and the community in his constructs. This is precisely because he failed to weave out a normative moral vision of Islam that should have been directed towards moral initiative to build an **ethical order** on the earth, his spiritual and intellectual endeavors transpired into purely individual pietistic thrust i.e. personal-ism on three possible ground i.e. either his Sufi experience was less mature to bring him into the arena of the moral world to teach, struggle and fight as is crystal clear from the Prophetic model or the course later pursued by Ibn Taimiyya, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, in the modern times Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani- all the three were almost martyred in the custody of rulers, or the interests of dynastic dictatorial rule divested his mind of Islamic positivism or he was through and through impressed by the Christian theologians as Hitti writes " Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians of Christianity, and later Pascal were indirectly affected by the ideas of al-Ghazzali, who of all Moslem thinkers came nearest to subscribing to Christian views¹³". Yet less cognizant of al-Ghazali's inner vicissitudes and organized study of his systematic thought, Hitti writes that his works "deposed fiqh from the high rank it had usurped, employed Greek dialectic to found a pragmatic system and made philosophy palatable to the orthodox school of theologians. Partly translated into Latin before 1150, they [works] exerted marked influence on Jewish and Christian scholasticism¹⁴" Hitti further remarks "He [Ghazali] Reconciled Sufism, with its many unorthodox practices, with Islam and grafted mysticism upon its intellectualism¹⁵". W.C. Smith presented a principle that outsider's assessment of any religion is true provided the insiders should endorse it. On this criterion Hitti's judgment of Ghazali seemed shaky. At the outset of his Sufi career due to being in the grip of certain psychological moods he despised law and theology once his most cherished academic accomplishments, but all along the way his positions changed his ideas evolved, he was uniquely poised to approach the Truth in its entirety, take the Absolute Reality in his ego's comprehensive sweep, yet absolute truth is prerogative of God, even divulges on the prophets partially proportional to the capacities they develop (53:10), but at the culmination of his spiritual odyssey by winning the battles fought in his mind and heart he had smoothened the sharp edges of the Islamic disciplines assigning to each its due proper place, he emerged as a blend of this-worldly and that worldly man. His last work on jurisprudence "al-Mustasfa (the Quintessence)" in contradistinction to purely rational or purely traditional sciences, terms the sciences noblest of all which combine both reason and tradition, personal thought and revealed authority and concludes that law and jurisprudence belong to this category.

Hence, Hitti's analysis of al-Ghazali portrays his partial, atomistic, piecemeal and truncated intellectual portrait, a systematic and holistic picture of his graded intellectual and moral odyssey comes alive in Fazlur Rahman's sober assessment. "The influence of al-Ghazali in Islam is incalculable. He not only reconstituted orthodox Islam, making Sufism an integral part of it, but also was a great reformer of Sufism, purifying it of un-Islamic elements and putting it at the service of orthodox religion. As such he represents a final step in a long developing history...endowed with a

rare religious insight and a keen and perceptive mind, his mystic experience enabled him to transform the formulas of orthodox theology about the Divine Will, Power and Mercy into a living and moving personal reality that throbbed in his very veins. He called both the Ulama and the Sufis to this in a philosophical language of remarkable clarity, incisiveness and irresistible persuasiveness...Sufism received, through his influence, the approval of Ijma, or consensus of community and Islam received a new vigor of life¹⁶. His intellectual ingenuity and skill not only provided stability to the shell-shocked community of Islam at that particular juncture of history but the normativity he bestowed on various disciplines proved a water-shed event bound to provide fertile grounds to produce in due course a galaxy of original thinkers who reconstituted Muslim theology on a new and more integral basis, than the old formal kalam. The Sufi impulse set forth by him won large areas in Africa, Central Asia and India to the Faith.

However, before going into the detail of al-Ghazali's contribution to Islam we are impelled to elaborate the nature, quality and essence of Sufi experience for it is the hinge on which the entire gamut of his thought rests. Had he not lived through the verities of the Faith through the Sufi experientialist method pure intellectual constructs would never have earned him the prestige to consolidate the intellectual empire of Islam, or the esteem in which community hold him to date, like Avicenna and Averroes he would have been condemned to oblivion. In the domain of knowledge-scientific or religious- complete independence of thought from concrete experience is neither possible nor desirable. So he judged his intellectualism on the touch stone of mystic experience so much so that it turned to be his experienced truth. "No doubt he [Sufi] has his pitfalls and illusions just as the scientist who relies on sense-experience has his pitfalls and illusions. A careful study of his method, however, shows that he is not less alert than the scientist in the matter of eliminating the alloy of illusion from his experience.¹⁷" Hence, the fluctuating matrix of al-Ghazali's thought reveals he was facing certain illusions yet getting around them by further experiences, as what experienced on him he was habitual to pour the same in his works, non-thorough study of his thought leads the readers to the conclusion that either his ideas are fraught with inner contradictions, or he condemned philosophy and science, or he deposed law from its high rank, or he despised theology. Indeed these statements are true and came as illusions on his spiritual journey yet in an ultimate sense he emerged successful enough to eliminate the alloy of these illusions from his experience this is what transpires from his last two works *al-Munqidh min al-dhalal* (Deliverance from the Error) which is his spiritual biography and *al-Mustasfa* (The Quintessence), on the principle of Islamic Jurisprudence. The metaphysics and social fact which had parted ways in the post classical Islam find an organic fusion in "The Quintessence" in such a finesse and overwhelming power of argument that his arch-rival Averroes was attracted to deliver an abridged version of the same. Not less fascinating is the fact that he brings in vogue such a cozy trend that after him, often a great theologian, a great Sufi and to some extent a great Doctor of Islamic law were, one and the same person: Ibn Taimiyya, Sheikh Sirhandi and Shah Wali Allah are cases in point. Now, we turn to the nature of Sufi experience.

As earlier said, the Sufism essentially has its roots in the Quran which itself is the culmination of the Prophet's mystic experience at the Cave of Hira. The Quran describes the mystic experiences of the Prophet in definite and vivid terms (17:1; 53:1-12 and 13-18; 81:19-25). Sufism in its normative terms is a sheer mercy and grace of God which bestows on someone an opportunity to peep into the unknown (ghayb) to receive light from the inner depths of life or apprehending the Reality with non-rational modes, yet the outcomes are psychologically so overwhelming and physically so coercive that are through and through rational or being an evidential or experienced truth are more than that. It neither require any particular exercise nor the rites of initiation as the popular Sufism asserts for the conscious effort, if any, has little to do with it (20:38; 16:68). To al-Ghazali, "Sufi way is a kind of an introduction to prophethood being beyond pure rationality although neither alien nor contradictory to it¹⁸". Sheikh al-Sirhandi says that "not all [Sufi] experience is of the same order and that it has grades of intimacy, clarity and authority¹⁹"... "The experiential unity is, nevertheless, a mystic fact which cannot be denied but must be transcended... but unless it is transcended, it impoverishes the personality and becomes harmful²⁰"... "The acquisition of highest perfections is peculiar to the prophets, and their perfect followers too can, through the leadership and mediacy of the prophets, share in them²¹" ... "the pure mystic is debarred from those reaches which are the province of the prophetic consciousness²²". The repose of unitary experience in which Sufis revel is hard to withdraw from for it causes pain yet it needs to be transcended in

al-Sirhandi's view because it is a realm where anything can happen and in the annulment of causes is the annulment of reason and wisdom, so vehemently desired by the Quran (3:191) and the purpose of causal processes is to make man endeavor whereby he both realizes his own capacities and truly appreciate the meaning of God for the world. It is harmony, order and causal processes through which universe reveals God to humanity the annulment of the same conceals God from mankind²³. In other words whatever transpires from mature mystic experience is the same what science and reason most humbly warrants (3:191; 10:5; 38:27). Thus intuition is the higher kind of intellect²⁴ and both "thought and intuition are organically related"²⁵. So, the mystic experience which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the prophet, according to Iqbal, "however, unusual and abnormal, must now be regarded by a Muslim as a perfectly natural experience, open to critical inquiry like other aspects of human experience"²⁶.

However, Sufism is poles apart from the esotericism of the Ismaili Batinism for the latter was a set of doctrines kept hidden, Batanis even developed secret codes to communicate these doctrines to their fellow adepts, the same were not publicly divulged to avoid persecution and so cannot be equivalent to religious experience. Ismailis were claimant of power their political ambitions impelled them to claim that the Quran has hidden meanings which are "deep and profound" and only divulge on their imam. However, the tenure they enjoyed despite their serious, sustained and large scaled efforts to produce an alternate to the version of official Islam with a parallel aim to create a just socio-political order, their reforms were bound to fail because they had nothing to do with the Quran. The only point that nears the Batinism to mystic experience is former's keeping the doctrines hidden and latter's ineffability but sheer the absence of religious experience in Batinis is sufficed to consider it essentially different from the Sufism with an added difference that while the Sufi's starting point was ever the Quran and despite its esoteric adventures in the latter centuries it never cut itself off from its pietistic roots in the Quran, the Batini's roots are essentially outside the Quran and remain so to date. Its esotericism in Western parlance has become a misnomer of Sufi truth and connotes "more true" or the "more profound" and "more deep".

A genuine religious experience is an essence of Sufism. "Experience may be defined as a more or less sudden spiritual happening, accompanied by at least a certain degree of amazement or a sense of wonder or being "taken aback", which reveals a new meaning to reality as a whole."²⁷ This experience might be content-less, only ecstatic fits as the common run of the Sufis express, a unitary repose hard to withdraw from, when the mystic withdraws, as he must, his withdrawal does not mean much for mankind at large for this return is not creative and have no values in its folds. It is mere a pleasure of experiential unity and as Sufism at large has been neutral to social reality it strengthens the case of its having no cognitive content. It might only be the touch stone of judging the verities of faith to make the same an experienced truth as is evident from al-Ghazali, Mulla Sadra etc. Yet, the Prophetic experience differs from the Sufi's that it brings with itself a cognitive content, moral values, new patterns of behavior. Still, the Bible of al-Sirhandi portrays if unitary experience is transcended the perfect followers of the prophets through the mediacy and leadership of the same can share their highest reaches and perfections. As the highest reaches of the prophet bestow an inherent impulsion and fecundity upon his experience to become historic, same is the case of a rare class of the Sufis with a major difference that while prophet returns with new patterns of behavior, moral values i.e. Sharia to inject the same in the flesh and blood of history the content of such Sufi experience is not beyond the Sharia values though it is apt to give new meaning to and reinvigorate the same with new and fresh breath of life and seeks the fearless implementation of the same as is evident from the moral struggle of Ibn Taimiyya, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi and Shah Wali Allah.

However, though the sudden happenings may be ineffable but not necessarily so as certain thinkers such as Plotinus (d. c.270) and al-Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) also experienced sudden illuminations. But thinker's illuminations are intellectual and communicable still the nature of these happenings is ineffable and thus must be characterized as experiences. The content being intellectual in nature is information and cannot strike biological transformation in the subject. Isaac Newton, Michal Anglo, Archimedes, Pablo Picasso and Thomas Edison etc. fall in this category. But the "religio-moral experience, although it certainly has a cognitive element, radically differs from other forms of cognition in the sense that it is full of **authority, meaning and imperviousness** for the subject...a man who has a

genuine religious experience is automatically transformed by that experience²⁸”. “It is not a conceptually manageable intellectual fact; it is a vital fact, an attitude consequent on an inner biological transformation which cannot be captured in the net of logical categories²⁹”. There are moral experiences which transformed the people to more spiritually productive and meaningful lifestyles. Sufi experiences fall in this kind.

Sufism has its pitfalls and fell prey to its own snares yet it incessantly tried its best to justify the same by bewildering variety of doctrines and ideals from the terminology of the Quran in the light of its own idiosyncrasies and peculiarities but love of God, gnosis of God, and obedience to God the three ideals are pivots of Sufism. The Quran of course gives a systematic and consistent view of these ideals yet the Sufi’s treatment of these terms is imposed on the Holy Book from without. The love and gnosis of God are two separate ideals but Sufi for the most part treat them as same and one on the premise that love necessarily yields gnosis of God while Sufi gnosis seldom talk of divine love in any important sense. The Quran recognizes an ecstatic ideal of love and gnostic ideal of cognition on its own terms and both are meant for action. It vehemently brings forward the harmony and the order in the universe without gaps and flaws pointing to a serious purpose of creation but terms all the beauty and grandeur of the universe transitory and ephemeral (18:7-8; 55:26 etc.). The statement of the natural phenomena at times is such a moving that it rises to an ecstatic pitch leaving the reader or listener spellbound yet the deep and profound meanings behind the surface of the words invites serious reflection. Hence, ecstasy is means to an end even in worship rather than an end itself in the parlance of the Quran, the artificially induced ecstatic fits, or chanting the name of God, or to dance ecstatically to the rhythm of dhikr is out and out alien to the tone, tune and the tenor of the Quran or it would be a simple oddity to attribute the same to the Prophet and his Companions.

In so far as the cognitive ideal of gnosis is concerned; again the Quran surely supports it on its own terms. It is faculty of creative knowledge that establishes superiority of man over all creatures. Besides belief in One God the Quran sets highest value on knowledge and term it guidance or hidaya, and light or nur. Knowledge is one of the highest attributes of God so much so that in an ultimate sense Quran aptly defines God as the light of the heavens and the earth. Knowledge in essence is infinite bound to ever develop and evolve because “over every person of knowledge is One who knows (12:76)” and the Prophet was asked to pray “O God keep my knowledge constantly increasing” yet it is unity as an organic whole. However, the Quran with an utmost clarity and conviction is replete with the assertions that not only all knowledge whether it is intellectual or intuitive or scientific comes from God (96:1-5; 82:6-8 55:3-4 etc.) but the substitution of the old philosophies, skills and technologies with the most promising new ones is also effected by the Will, Plan and Mercy of God (87:6-8 see Muhammad Asad’s note). The Quran even attributes the rise of virile communities better equipped with new knowledge and world view against the morally spent and decadent senile ones to God. This being so because so vast is the range of potencies and capacities in man that he can never ever exhaust the same to the fullest (80:23; 12:76). However, be it David’s expertise of making coats of mail or Joseph’s proficiency of interpreting dreams or generally speaking the skills of scribes to write down the documents of agreements, wills etc. all comes from and are “taught by God” (21:80; 12:37; 2:282). However, “the primary orientation of cognition in Islam is decidedly towards action. For Islam is concerned with building a certain socio-moral order in this world. Cognition thus serves a practical value, finding its justification and referent in knowledge. Without knowledge as a referent the truth-value of cognitive statements cannot be established.³⁰” For, to the Quran true faith and works go together and faith without deed is no faith at all (6:158). It was a kharijite’s extreme challenge that prompted the orthodoxy to formulate an extreme loose definition of the Muslim which in turn struck a yawning chasm between faith and action and in the long run transpired into a sort of Christian doctrine i.e. **justification by faith**.

It is this premise on which with the exception of moral Sufism, both ecstatic and cognitive forms of Sufism failed so much so that to them Islam ceased to be a social pragmatic proposition. “The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something, but to be something. It is in the ego’s effort to be something that he discovers his final opportunity to sharpen his objectivity and acquire a more fundamental ‘I am’ which finds evidence of its reality not in the Cartesian ‘I think’ but in the Kantian ‘I can’.³¹” Hence, actions rather than inner states and dispositions define men. Thus, men are what they do. It is this touch-stone on which cognitive Sufism being neutral to social reality largely fails. Sufi

theosophy i.e. torch bearer of the gnostic principle of knowledge culminated in ibn al-Arabi's doctrine of monism *wahdat al-wajud* – according to Hitti an essentially pantheistic idea which Fazlur Rahman endorses and writes in fact “philosophy after it had been attacked by al-Ghazali, went underground and reappeared in the name of theosophical intuitionism³²”.

Now, the content of cognitive Sufism is through and through intellectual. Being a man of broad gauged outlook Ibn al-Arabi presented his views in all available stock in trade of religious and philosophic traditions and Sufism through him developed into syncretic movement, absorbing many elements from Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Buddhism etc. and Sufi-theosophy overwhelmed practically all other forms of Sufism in the later medieval centuries. But pantheism aside the gigantic loss it incurred on the intellectual fabric of community was the cleavage between *kashf* (intuition) and reason for he claimed intuitive channels and intuitive certainty for his deliverances that becomes a norm in Sufism. In his magnum opus “The Meccan Revelations” (*al-futuhat al-Makkiya*) he states the ‘ways of knowledge’ terming intuitive channel the highest and only sure source of cognition. “What really happened in this process was that the philosophical legacy was adopted and developed by Ibn al-Arabi and his followers into a monistic doctrine, but instead of being given out as a product of reason it was issued in the name of mystic intuition.³³”

However, in his more organized work titled “Ringtones of Wisdom” (*Fusus al-Hikam*) he claims in the preface that it has been given to him by the Prophet Muhammad for transmission to the Muslim community. This is the nub of cognitive Sufism i.e. disclosure or revelation of mysteries-knowledge is hidden and the way to reach it is mysterious. And Sufism never fails to warrant its claims from the Quran. The story of the teacher and companion of Moses (18:65) and other metaphoric statements and parables of the Scripture proved a fertile ground for Sufi ventures into the realm of mystery-mongering obsessions with an essentially conspicuous difference that whereas the metaphors and parables of the Quran are a magical statement of reality resting on conscious insight accessible to reason the Sufi claims are in Churchill's apt phrase “riddles wrapped in an enigma inside a mystery”, out and out figment of imaginative gymnastics or hallucinations.

Dr. Fazlur Rahman treats these Sufi ramblings as things quite different from the unknown (*al-ghayb*) of the Quran. The *al-ghayb* of the Quran, i.e. the totality of the unknown, is known only to God. The prophets have a special avenue of knowledge called *wahy* whereby unknown matters are disclosed to them. Still no prophet is entitled to envelop and encompass this totality of the unknown in one fell swoop (53:10). This *ghayb* can be partially made known to some people [prophets] (52:41; 68:47; 53:35). Quran suggests that all the Heavenly Scriptures are part of or sprang from “The Mother of Book” (*Um al-kitab*), or “The Preserved Tablet (*Loh-e-Mehfuz*)” or “The Hidden Book (*Kitab al-Maknun*)” that is the key book of the universe rests with God, wherefrom only the matters concerning the universe of human affairs are revealed to the prophets in their respective social milieus. As earlier said, God teaches all sorts of knowledge and skills to humans (21:80; 12:37; 2:282); although Quran does not term it *ghayb* yet it falls in the same category. Moreover, the *Ghayb* is also relative. It is made known to some people, but is unknown to others, or something may be *ghayb* to someone now, but may become known later on as is evident from the story of jinn laboring for Solomon in the Temple even after his death (18:65).

However, the entire edifice of the Sufi gnostic principle of knowledge crumbles to dust, comes to smithereens or utter ruins when we see that the unknown of the Quran, when it is disclosed is perfectly “natural” knowledge as is clear from the numeral instances cited by the Quran. But much of the Sufi theory of knowledge turns mysticism into mystification, to use Underhill's expression. Whereas a rare genuine class of Sufis found nothing beyond the scope of Sharia ideals in their religious experience except turning the same into an experienced truth for themselves while many conventional Sufis were after the “hidden” and “mysterious” putting the manifest and the obvious things on the back burner keeping themselves indulged in the red-herring spirituality. In nutshell the *ghayb* of the Quran is simply unknown, when it becomes known it falls in the category of “natural truth”, it is accessible to reason, it is of the same order as other known things as against Sufi speculations and mystic deliriums- desert winds coming from nowhere and going to nowhere destined only to shifting the sand dunes making the original paths blurred by creating the

imaginary and illusory ones for “the entire ethos of the Quranic doctrine of cognition is that it is diametrically opposed to Gnosticism and mysterious cults³⁴”.

However, in so far as the *ghayb* of the Quran is concerned when it comes to the arena of known strikes biological transformation in the subject making him vehicle of revolutionary changes in the flesh and blood of history i.e. world-making or world-shaking act; or else prefers to remain hidden. “Delving into the *ghayb* is absolutely essential. For indeed a perpetual immersion in this sensory world tends to sap one’s moral energies, disorients the mind, and produces the corrosive acids of secularism. But when the window from the *ghayb* opens, it oxygenates the petrified bloodstreams of this sensory realm and breathes new life into him: “What about him [Muhammad] who was dead and We gave life to him and bestowed upon him a light whereby he walks about people [i.e. he does not retire to hermitage] (6:122)”. To seek about the *ghayb*, it is necessary to be a recluse in the “Cave of Hira”, but once the window opens it must free one to come into the arena of the moral world to teach, struggle and fight. It is on this touch-stone that cognitive Sufism largely fails.³⁵”

At this stage another crucial point needs our serious attention that the Orientalists have weaved mesmerizing stories about the Prophet’s anchorite at Hira. As the Western academic orthodoxy and its rigged scholarship is hell-bent to establish that the Prophet of Islam concocted the new religion out of prevalent Judaic-Christian scriptural sources, “the field is sharply divided between two camps, one contending, like Richard Bell, that the main source of the Quran’s teaching was Christianity, the other, represented by C.C. Torrey, insisting that Judaism was the chief historical antecedent of the Quran³⁶”. Hence, they say that about 15 years of Prophet’s retreat were pretty enough to plan a work as immense and masterly as the Holy Quran. They present a specious argument that after marriage with Khadia he found enough time and resources to spare him-self for the task. The hypotheses is not only unfounded, but also, historically speaking, false. The most authentic sources fix the date of this retreat at just a month before the revelation of the Quran. This month was interrupted several times by visits to the warmth of the family for getting supplies and was preceded by a period of very clear dreams, afterwards confirmed precisely by realities. All these precursory signs occurred towards the age of forty, which is to say properly, the age of revelation. It shows that he neither entertained ambitions to assume such enterprise nor opted for moral gymnastics in someone’s guidance or himself to induce an artificial spiritual faculty. It is crystal clear that some powerful signs and signals were intermittently yet un-mistakenly directing him to the destiny he never imagined (42:52; 28:85-86; 29:48). The socio-economic disparities and the plight of disenfranchised segments of immediate society before him had put him in an intense desire to unravel the mysteries of truth “He [God] found you probing in the dark and guided you to the right path (93:7)”. Yet it is still certain that eleven twelfth of his life in this interval was spent in the full glare of social milieu, at 35 he took part in the reconstruction of Kaaba, was always known to bravely discharge his family responsibilities, had most of his children before the Call... “Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you ere this [Revelation came to me]; will you not, then, use your reason? (10:6; see 2:151)”. However, apart from Orientalists’ preoccupations with the exaggerated view of the period of Prophet’s withdrawal commonplace Sufi literature also dwell on such hyperboles. Now, after grasping the nature of Sufism in context of the Quran and prophetic model, we are in a safer zone and position of understanding the life and works of al-Ghazali.

Al-Ghazali in the simplest terms represents a final step in a long developing history of Islam. If assuming the task of bridging the gulfs between Sufism and orthodox Islam was a great initiative of al-Junaid, a first step forward toward the formulation of orthodox Sufism, the fusion of both fundamental constitutive elements of Islam finally culminated at the hands of al-Ghazali. He is heir to and an addition on the legacy of al-Junaid who preferred the state of “sobriety” to “intoxication” so much so that Massignan wrongly termed him merely a Sufi theoretician who never had a Sufi experience which he seemed to apologize in his later work. It was al-Junaid who first made Sufism subservient to Sharia, then on whenever Sufism transgressed the boundaries a rare yet genuine Sufis would appear on the stage to cut it to size. Al-Ghazali is the first who on the touch-stone of his Sufi experience smoothed the sharp edges of Sufism, theology and law so each fell into its proper place.

The million dollar question is that why did he opt for Sufi path? Generally, great incidents in life especially sad ones change the moral vector of sensitive and curious minds; yet though generally resounding material success, power, progress, pomp and glory invoke further acquisitiveness and megalomania still at their zenith in some extraordinarily unique persons the same are apt to raise existential questions of the highest possible magnitude that they deem their personal fate at stake, in this category falls the case of al-Ghazali. He was a man of high academic accomplishments and his career a resounding success. His marvelous excellence and achievement of work of brilliance and originality in traditional disciplines of Islamic law and theology had won him the coveted post of Rector of Nizamiyya College, Baghdad by Nizam al-Mulk the illustrious Seljuk minister at the age of thirty four. His intellectual brought up amidst a galaxy of scholars at the same institution was a catalyzing force behind his intellectual endeavors and top-notch stature and esteem he held among the masses that can be assessed by the fact that whenever a friction surfaced between Abbasid and Seljuk would often have been resolved through his good offices. However, his yearning for the knowledge and truth was not meant for a smart career, it was an instinctual nudge. He tells “ever since I was under twenty (now I am over fifty)...I have never ceased to investigate every dogma or belief. No Batinite did I come across without desiring to investigate his esotericism; no Zahirite, without wishing to acquire the gist of his literalism; no philosopher, without wanting to learn the essence of his philosophy; no dialectical theologian [mutakallim], without striving to ascertain the object of his dialectics and theology; no Sufi, without coveting to probe the secret of his Sufism; no ascetic, without trying to delve into the origin of his asceticism; no atheistic zindiq, without groping for the causes of his bold atheism and zindiqism. Such was the unquenchable thirst of my soul for investigation from the early days of my youth, an instinct and temperament implanted in me by God through no choice of mine.³⁷”

His broad gauge scholarship, mores and manners earned him uniform prestige among the intellectual elite of various disciplines to such an extent that Averroes calls it all but hypocrisy “ Ghazali is a man for all seasons- one who pretended to be Ashari when he was with theologians of that stripe, a mystic with the Sufis and a philosopher with philosophers³⁸” while the fact is “ Averroes might have been far too placid and uncritical a follower of Aristotle, which would explain his formalism- a trait that stifled his own inventiveness and creativity culminating in his allergy to Ghazali’s omnivorous intellectual appetite.³⁹” “Averroes’ own intellectual agenda, shaped though it was by his debt to Aristotle, was also shaped by his response to Ghazali⁴⁰”. Had there not been Ghazali Averroes would have been nothing but the blind imitator of Aristotle or as he is best described as an interpreter of Aristotle.

Yet, despite his across the board influence and approval Ghazali right at the zenith of his glory resigned his rectorship, having held it for four years. His heart turns into a boiling caldron of doubts both about his personal faith resting on traditional theology and law and his practical life kneaded in awe and reverence and enticements of power, fame and monetary acquisitiveness. This is the moment in one’s life when the world with all its beauties and wonders crumbles to dust before the very eyes of the inquisitive subject and something from within impels him to seek the Truth which is beyond of all phenomena yet integrity of everything which bestows meanings and orderliness to our swirling cosmos. So far as religious truth is concerned, the Pure Intellect is not capable enough to sift fact from fiction. For, “intellect is like a balance which is meant for gold, but which is sometimes inappropriately used for weighing mountains. Logic cannot be applied to this area of inquiry and must be restricted to non-theological topics.⁴¹” It is the search of an Ultimate Reality which lay beyond sunset and sunrise yet the true seeker get there with the power of faith and the feet of his eyes. This is weighing of the outer realities (universe) on the touch-stone of self (Nafs) and vice versa (41:53), for the signs of the text (Scripture), context (universe), and the Ego mirror and echo each other and speak of the One.

Now, amidst the crisis of severe doubts begins his vicissitude-nous intellectual spiritual career. “This doubt was two-pronged. It was both personal (moral) and intellectual. If it had been only cognitive-intellectual, it was hardly necessary for him to resign his post suddenly the way he did. He could have proceeded to resolve such doubt without throwing away his career all at once. But it was his personal and moral crisis, the realization that his pursuit of pomp, power, and glory was not only worthless, but dangerously harmful if he was a genuine seeker of truth.⁴²” The question that whence one came and where to go takes in its seizure not only to men of high academic pursuits, sensitive man

of any worldly resounding success is prone to such volcanic bursts. His personal destiny was at stake for neither his life-style nor his preoccupation with theology and law has yielded ultimate truth, a glaring truth that pierces through his heart was that if he wanted to pursue truth, then he must not only forgo his pompous life style but also his preoccupation with theology and law. It dawned on him that theology was an intellectual ploy that presupposes the truth of faith whereby theologians defended the fundamentals of the same against doubts. As for law, it manages the outer realm of society; it cannot and does not claim to be an avenue of truth. Hence, though at the culmination of his spiritual odyssey he emerged successful in revalorization of these traditional Islamic sciences, but the threshold at which he was standing at the outset of his spiritual career such statement of problem was quite essential to leave the shore.

However, at this stage his problem pretty resembles Abraham an archetype of hope (2:260) not Rene Descartes as a dominating opinion of modern scholarship asserts. For, his faith on God, Prophet and hereafter was unshakable he wanted to turn the same into an experienced truth so that his heart may be set fully at rest. He writes “from the various sciences that I had mastered and the methods I had practiced in investigating, the two types of knowledge- the traditional and rational, I had already obtained an unshakable faith in God, Prophet-hood and the Last Day. Faith in these three principles had become deeply ingrained in my soul, not by any definite abstract proof but rather through a host of reasons, indications and experiences whose detail cannot be comprehended by any enumeration⁴³”. A valid question arises when his faith was not just intellectually entertained but was deeply ingrained in his soul what else he required by opting for the mystic path here lies the nub of his cool equipoised approach to the truth that is puzzling viz. a viz. irresistibly fascinating and the one who ignores the troughs and crests of his wavy fluctuating history of intellectual spiritual odyssey is liable to overwhelming perils and pitfalls and getting around the same requires thorough systematic and exhaustive study of the holistic drift of his inner vicissitudes and intellectual thrusts.

He rejected theology and philosophy as method not as subjects, for his moral problem has almost crippled him physically for about two months as he himself tells, the reasons of which are still unsettled even by the shark-toothed modern scholarship, he indeed stood in need of deep, profound and surer way to the truth because his personal fate was at stake. Had theology, philosophy and law per se been rejected by him his mystic experience would never have revitalized and revalorized them.

Indeed, the Ghazalian suspicion and Cartesian “doubt” are poles apart in nature, spirit and dimension. Cartesian “doubt” was sparked by Protestant Revolt in Europe and was bound to shake the basis of religion whatsoever though he never intended it. “Rejecting blind conformity to authority and proclaiming the right of reason, he prescribed the duty of every one to yield only to real and irresistible evidence”... He clarifies that he does not intend to talk about “things which concern faith or conduct, but about the speculative truth which can be realized only in natural right”... This restriction which Descartes was obliged to make because he deemed that “Christian faith concern itself with obscure things⁴⁴”. Then on though he tried his level best to establish rationally God’s existence which was in doubt for Protestant Revolt has assumed all but an anti-religion impulse due to its violent spiritual break with its immediate parent, European medievalism and transpired into Peace of Philadelphia (1648) and with the emergence of an idea of Nation State secularism was a logical outcome and symbiotic relationship between nationalism and secularism feeding on Cartesian doubt pushed religion to the wall and proclaimed that “Reason can stand on its own”, scripture/revelation is no more required.

What then sets Ghazali apart from Descartes? “It is clear that this [Ghazali’s] doubt is not at all of the same nature as the Cartesian “doubt” which was self-induced and formal and which was also remedied by a purely abstract and formal proof⁴⁵”. Ghazalian doubt was natural. Just as Abraham doubted Sun, Stars and moon to be an ultimate reality to penetrate into the heart of Absolute Truth Ghazali’s skepticism of law, philosophy and theology was directed in the same direction. His obsession with law and theology had failed to yield him truth; he found them replete with gaps, lacuna and short-comings. He wanted to resuscitate his kerygma-tic tradition with some deep and profound way of approaching the truth. Again, if belief in one God, Prophet-hood and Hereafter had become the very stuff of his mind,

as he himself proclaims, what else he needed and sought for that yet he pursued the realization of these truths for himself. This, in fact is the pivotal point of secular scholarship's argument about Ghazali. "On the contrary, it is commonplace in life that the simultaneous co-existence of certainty and skepticism is sufficient to drive one to greater realization. For the Quran, it is something quite natural: cf. Quran 2:260 on Abraham's faith⁴⁶". "Faith" in its essence is somewhat inaccessible to the pure reason and so to the secular academia. Veteran Indian journalist Kaldip Nayyer writes in his biography that his secular education was inimical to the faculty of faith yet he remained always envious of those possessing faith. Nothing is so hidden (45:24) and as palpable (50:16) as God. All phenomena of nature, the whispers of the soul and the verses of the Quran are nothing but signs pointing to Him. "The Quran, indeed, insists throughout that to read the signs correctly and to understand the Quran requires a mental-cum-spiritual attitude so that one may "really hear, really see and really understand". For that matter, the signs do not become subjective for the Quran because many do not "see" them, any more than the sun becomes subjective because animals habituated to darkness cannot see it.⁴⁷" The intellectual spiritual odyssey of Abraham is replete with the trial of faith that consists in doubt and trust. The whole Abrahamic experience unveils the essential dimension of faith in the One. God tries him but is always speaking to him, inspiring him and strewing his path with signs that calm and reassure him. The abandonment of Ismail and Hagar to a lifeless valley, very close to death was a trial he doubted yet decided to fulfill but the active acceptance on the part of Hagar was a sign through which God spoke to him. God inspired him to sacrifice Ismail, which he rather doubted yet decided to execute the task, but the surrender of Ismail to the will of God was a sign God spoke through. Hence, Abraham, Hagar and Ismail present the profound steps of "active acceptance" of God's will: to question with one's mind, to understand with one's intelligence, and to submit with one's heart. Muhammad inherited the spiritual legacy of Abraham that the simultaneous coexistence of certainty and skepticism which is essential to keep the alloy of illusions eliminating from the experience- combustion to higher realization- was in him so profound that he even doubted his face-off with Reality which Khadija affirms him. Skepticism is necessary fire and ferment for the successful culmination of spiritual journey.

Hence, riddled with severe doubts both about his career and personal fate that philosophy and theology flung on his side; Ghazali was impelled to address the same by some deep and profound way. He found four paths as gateways to the truth: those of theologians, the Ismailis (Batinitis), the philosophers, the Sufis. He concludes that truth cannot lie beyond these four types, should truth be blocked to them; there is no hope of ever finding it. He found Sufism the best way to appropriate and realize the truth. His sincerity of purpose, choice of Sufism, quality of undifferentiated faith and his ocean like knowledge all are appreciated by Ibn e Taimiyya with an added regret and caveat that al-Ghazali did not consider another path- the true one-namely that of the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet. Yet, in sharp contradistinction to Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taimiyya preferred non-extremist Sufis over theologians. Ibn Taimiyya attributes Ghazali's choice of Sufism to the social milieu and religious intellectualism of those times. The Muslim community had drifted away from its cores; the Quran had long ceased to be the direct and unique source of guidance, and had been buried under its alleged or real derivatives-fiqh, kalam and Sufism. The second hand knowledge of the Quran and Sharia could produce nothing but tedious, stale and stolid truth, so in that context Sufism was the best among four paths available to Ghazali. Ibn Taimiyyah sums up his intellectual odyssey saying "He [al-Ghazali] took the [Sufi Spiritual discoveries] to be the standard with which to judge [the veracity of] what the revelation provided. The reason for [this approach] was that he soon discovered by means of his intelligence and devout inquiry, that the method of the theologians and philosophers was incoherent. God had granted him faith in principle and summary, as he himself tells us, and so he began to search for the exposition [of this faith]. Then he discovered in the discourses of Sufi shaykhs that which was nearer to the truth and more reasonable than what theologians and philosophers had to offer. And the matter was as he found it. But he did not gain access to the prophetic heritage, namely the sciences and spiritual states possessed by the elect of the community. Nor did he attain the proper knowledge and devotion achieved by the earliest generations and the forerunners [of the community]. [Both these groups] attained so much by way of cognitive discoveries and practical modes of service to God which those others [i.e. theologians, philosophers, Sufis] never attained. Hence, he [Ghazali] began to believe that the exposition of his concise faith could be obtained only through the Sufi way, since he knew no other path. [This happened] because the special path of the elevated prophetic

example remained closed to him, since he had little knowledge in this area and also because of the doubts that he had inherited from the philosophers and the theologians.⁴⁸”

In fact, the community was at that time submerged in the ocean of “neo-theology”, “neo-fiqh”, “neo-Sufism” etc. In the Post Classical Islam Jamaa-Sunna (community-tradition) normative equation of pristine and classical Islam transformed into the bida-firqa (innovation-sectarian) equation and as a corollary historical events and developments assumed the status of ultimate values and Sharia began to be interpreted and reinforced by way of and in light of exclusive group loyalties and the concern for an integrated community lost in the labyrinth of communalism and sectarian aspirations. Fazlur Rahman presents general intellectualism of those times in the words of Marshal Hodgson: “The strong kerygma-tic tone of Islamic thinking, in which certain historical events were explicitly vested with ultimate values, had issued in communalism, in which sharia was reinforced by way of exclusive group loyalties- so that the Quranic event became intellectually more isolated even then in the Quran itself, where it appeared as one in a long chain of revelatory events.⁴⁹” Amidst these controversies and cut throat wars Islam had become a semi-fossilized religion with sectarian cults and law, theology and mysticism were at daggers drawn and if bound together only with ‘ropes of sand’. Hence, whereas Ghazali’s choice of Sufism at the outset resolved his double crisis: at the personal level, it saved him from worldly enticements at intellectual and spiritual level, it helped him re-appropriate the verities of religion with a new depth and meaningfulness yet in the long run the same mystic experience at its zenith was bound to culminate into catholic marriage of happy convenience between Islamic law, theology and mysticism. Right at the zenith of glory he threw everything worldly in his backyard and wandered for twelve years in Syria, Egypt and holy cities of Islam. His intellectual and spiritual odyssey transpired into his magnum opus, the great Ihya Ulum al-Din (Revivification of the sciences of Religion). “His purpose was to live through the verities of the Faith and to test those verities through the Sufi experientialist method. He succeeded. The test confirmed his faith and he concluded (1) that it was only through the ‘life of the heart’ that faith could really be acquired and (2) (and what is of equal importance) that Sufism has no cognitive content or object but the verities of the faith. He, therefore, disallowed the pretensions of theosophical mysticism and castigated the men of ecstatic delirium.⁵⁰”

Here, in great Ihya the principle of ratiocination, reason, logic, style and diction he assumed was again inspired by the model of Abraham’s dialogue and discussion with Nimrud (it turned from debate to dialogue and discussion) and the syllogism of the Quran. He admitted that he learned the art of dialectic from Abraham’s debate with Nimrud. Abraham tells the tyrant king, “my sustainer is the giver of life and death”, to which the king replies, “I am the giver of life and death”. Realizing that the dialectic is not suited to the opportunity, Abraham resorts to a more appropriate polemical technique and says, [“okay] God causes the sun to rise from the East, so [why don’t] you cause it to rise from the West? And dumbfound was the infidel”...Abraham discontinued his first line of debate and adopted a more potent polemical line of argument for a good reason; his goal was “not to annihilate [ifnahu] him [Nimrud] but to resuscitate him [ihyahu],” a goal that required change in polemical strategy. On the line of Abraham, Ghazali instead of the science of disputation (Jadal) a recognized currency of his time employed polemics to revive and reinvigorate the sciences of Din so that their sharp edges be removed and smoothed so much so that each science may fall in its proper place. Ibn Taimiyya denounces his over-reliance on Greek philosophy; Iqbal terms him “on the whole a follower of Aristotle in logic⁵¹”, yet Ghazali proclaims that he adopted Quranic syllogism and style of argument that resuscitates instead of annihilating the rival. The verses of the Quran are sublime pointers (signs) towards God divided into four categories (Ayat, Bayyinat, Burhan, Sultan) according to the magnitude, grandeur, intensity and power of appeal, rationale and resuscitation. Quran terms all natural phenomena signs (ayats) and the entire gigantic machine of universe a great miraculous sign (Aya) of God just as all verses of Quran are signs. Whereas ayat might be perceived or not perceived as natural signs lie buried beneath veneer of natural causation until Quran resurrect them and clarify them as signs of God, a bayyina is perceived or misperceived and misidentified but it cannot simply be denied. The Prophet together with Quran is termed a bayyina i.e. manifest sign (98:1-4). Burhan is a term stronger than bayyina which means “a demonstrative proof” and contains a factor of compelling rationality. Quran itself is termed burhan (4:174). But the strongest type of aya or sign is sultan literally means authority or power, a “knock down proof” that which overwhelms without leaving any real alternative. It is almost psychologically coercive, physically compelling

(55:33). As the locus of the faith is heart a bridge between the physical and the spiritual and exhibits characteristics of both, the Quran's line of argument addresses the reasons of the heart. A.J Arberry pointing to the same reality writes while in Cairo "long ago, when I would sit on the veranda of my Gezira house and listened entranced to the old, white-bearded Sheikh who chanted the Quran for the pious delectation of my neighbor. It was then that I, the infidel, learnt to understand and react to the thrilling rhythms of the Quran, only to be apprehended when listened to at such a time and in such a place⁵²". The unique poetic diction of the Quran and Sufi experience bestowed an inherent impulsion and fecundity upon Ghazali to call experts of Islamic law, theology and mysticism on a single platform with psychologically overwhelming and physically coercive tone of argument that worked. However, "Ibn Rushd charged Ghazali with using poetics, which is a subset of rhetorical discourse, in his analysis, along with philosophy. His main complaint was that Ghazali introduced an unwelcome heterogeneity of knowledge in his repertoire⁵³".

However, Ghazal's intellectual and spiritual odyssey's real worth lies in his evaluation of this and that worldly life and consequently how he treats law and theology in ultimate terms. The major pitfall of evaluating his intellectual legacy is to ignore his temperament and mood swings that in the most part kept him oscillating between one extreme to the other, and as prolific writer he was, not even an iota of his thought and experience could escape the stroke of his pen to be jotted down hence both his proponents and opponents have an equal opportunity to benefit from his diverse and heterogeneous wealth of ideas according to their own liking and need to establish what they intend rather than what transpires from the careful perusal of the totality of his thought. As a corollary both his friends and foes make the saltus mortalis and conclude him either as an arch-enemy of science and philosophy or a mere proponent of static, stale and stolid tradition. The science of disputation (jadl) a necessary disease of bida-firqa or innovation-sect equation that Ghazali had addressed with intellectually reviving and resuscitating technique and discourse, after the colonization of the Muslim world and commencement of secular education and viewpoint there re-appeared with fresh vigor for on one side were arrayed with so called scientific outlook secular modernists reared and propped by colonial powers for whom Islam was a thing of show-case to be mere appreciated rather than a force for action and on the other were madrassa lots to whom Islam was no more than a set of medieval rituals. We term it disputation for both intellectual streams being anonymous to each other due to respective social milieu, class and epistemological divide, let alone discussion, they have no chance of even dialogue and are destined to ever locked in debate and disputation unless a serious synthetic project of fusing modern ideals with Islamic ethos is undertaken on broader scale in the Muslim world. The Western intellectual imperialism has done a great loss to Islamic intellectual heritage. "Over time, placing the knowledge of the others in an inferior position results in "epistimicide" the destruction or murder of knowledge of a particular social group. Imperialism and "epistimicide" is part of an ineluctable trajectory of Western modernity⁵⁴". This is the singular aspect which set reactionary impulse free in both camps i.e. traditionalists and secular modernists with resultant casualty of "the middle path", "the golden mean", "the creative integrative balance" not only the hallmark but the raison detre and an intrinsic feature of Islamic community constituted and inspired by the model of Abraham (22:78) termed as the median community [i.e. between the imperviousness of Judaism and liquidity of Christianity] (2:143); the best community tasked to command good and forbid evil (3:110; also 3:104), establishes an effective system of prayer and zakat i.e. moral order on earth that culminates into socio-economic justice and essential egalitarian society when its social activism achieves power on earth (22:41), and keeps its effort of ethical order on with the instrument of jihad without which prayers of physical gestures though cardinal duties of a Muslim are mockery and hypocritical (2:177; 107: 1-7). The loss of the real viewpoint and destiny gives way to the imaginary one. Resultantly in the Muslim world "Today, all too many militants and intellectuals are proponents either of authenticity with no future or of a modernism with no roots.⁵⁵"

The same epistemological and class divide has masked the real intellectual portrait of Ghazali for both falls on the body of his thought to take and fly with their own piece of flesh, sectional view suited to their porcupine intellectual postures. Most often, in intellectual debates and disputations, the truth cannot be said to lie automatically on either side. Fact lies between two extremes and truth emerges by collapsing the extremes into middle position or from the synthesis of opposing extremes. This is what we need to figure out the real picture of al-Ghazali's intellectual portrait. On the one side of the spectrum is the exaggerative, swollen and over-blown disparagement of al-Ghazali that the

secular modernists of Islam deem him all but instrumental for the decline of Islam saying “but for al-Ashari and al-Ghazali the Arabs might have been a nation of Galileos, Keplers and Newtons⁵⁶” the traditionalists on the other hold him in such an esteem that have become imperceptibly irredeemable prisoners of his thought so much so that even the Quran and the model of the prophet has unconsciously become only a secondary source/ referent point for them. While the secular intelligentsia for judging the systems of belief owed allegiance to the principle of ‘**conformity to Nature**’, the conservatives found safe refuge in historical formulation or static **tradition**.

To err is human; al-Ghazali is neither far from nor is an exception to this rule, the terrible lapse in his constructs is the vacuum of Islamic positivism i.e. social construction, unceasing social activism for the establishment of world moral order on the earth the unmistakable stand of pristine Islam. Whether his intellectual affinities to Christian theologians nudged him to personal-ism or his idiosyncratic attitude prodded his intellect on personal pietism or ironed fist dictatorial rule discouraged him to take a tremendous moral initiative, physical struggle aside, the conspicuous absence of moral social reform in his intellectual endeavors and constructs depicts his neutrality to social matrix. His works and experience can, at best, be described a prescription for the salvation of the individual soul rather than a software of social engineering, the same after getting integral to orthodox creed proved such a fixed malware that later the all-out struggle of Ibn Taimiyya and Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi could put but a little dent in the thought and attitude of the community at large and though they lost lives (died in prison) amidst struggle to put community on the right track yet failed to ruffle the conscience and calm posture of their people. The same inertia, recalcitrance still reigns supreme in the vast swathes of the Sunni Islam.

We see reciprocity of intellectual spiritual logistics between Sufism and Asharism for both subscribed to the inanity of natural and human voluntary causations. This symbiosis with law as an icing on the cake culminates into the orthodox formula of Islam at the hands of al-Ghazali. However, the element of universal divine mercy was an exclusive feature of Sufism which Mutazila practically denied and the Asharis overlooked provided Ghazali a unique ground to augment his orthodox formula of Islam in an important way which proved catalyzing agent in its massive approval.

For careful perusal the survey of al-Ghazali’s inner vicissitudes holds the key to the fair systematic analysis of his thought. At the outset of his Sufi career he denounced theology and law i.e. the idols of sensory realm in his own case. He wrote *Iljam al-Awam min Ilm al-Kalam* (Restraining the masses from [the Harm] theology) the pivotal point of which is that the theologians are immature children who presuppose the truth and defend it to whom spiritual truths must never be divulged. He denounced law as “this worldly science” having nothing to do with the religion the “science of hereafter” and termed the bearers of this science as corrupt men of this world. This seemed an extreme reaction to the milieu witnessed and experienced at the royal court and all-embracing immersion of the jurists in this sensory world, their mutual jealousies and conspiracies. But once the equanimity of Sufi experience gets hold of him reactionary spirit subsides gradually yet surely the humanly possible stark, saner, systematic and serene truth dawns on him and a cool equipoised approach begins to emerge that reached its zenith in his last two works *al-Mustasfa* (The Quintessence) on Principle of Jurisprudence and law and his spiritual biography *al-Munqidh min al-dhalal* (The Deliverance from the Error) simultaneously written at the same time, in the last period of his life.

His Criterion of Action (*Mizan al-Amal*) belongs to his early days of conversion to Sufism and here that-worldly tilt reigns so supreme that praying without understanding the meaning of prayer is termed just as religious as dancing, since both are merely physical movements, such statements are abound yet beg to understand his intent rather than literal sense. “*Jawahir al-Quran*” (The Gems of Quran) belongs to his mid-Sufi career, the junction where his mysticism strikes horrible fusion with Asharite theology terming the causations behind natural phenomena and human voluntary actions inane and absurd he proclaims “indeed, there is nothing in existence except God and His acts, for what is there besides Him in His act.⁵⁷”.

In fact so great is the pull of monism, that any broad gauged intellectual of aesthetic religious consciousness who fails to understand God’s universal creative will that on the one end creates everything good and evil and the divine

command (Holy Scriptures) on the other whereby good and evil stand clearly distinguished, falls in the abyss of this doctrine. It is only an intellectual moral religious consciousness which saves from monism. To Ibn Taimiyya God's universal creative will work at two levels, the first he terms creative will (Irada kawniyya) and the second he calls religious (moral) will or command (irada diniyya). The both are not only mechanically juxtaposed, but are interwoven, integrated and subsumed under the purposive activity of God, which both philosophers and Murjia including Asharite denies. The evil though incidental to the good and relatively small compared to the abundance of good includes God's plan for it is necessary to attain greater good. When one indulges in excessive debates of philosophy, theology and Sufism ignoring moral commands essentially lands in monism which is an Achilles heel of all world religions. Hence, to him neither the philosophic contemplation of God nor the mystic type of love of Him is required for both lead to Unity of Being, of the identity of God and universe and so to the absolute inanity both of God and man. The utmost concern of the Sharia is the knowledge of God's will and its fearless implementation. Yet so strong is the attraction and felicity of monistic philosophy, the Bermuda triangle of religious thought that no Sufi theologian passed by it unimpressed and uncaught. Though Ibn al-Arabi in his creed and legal persuasion was literalist but once he entered Sufi theosophy, there was no way to return to literalist creed. Al-Maturidi contrary to the Asharite theologians had termed man an actor in reality and not metaphorically and Hanafi-Maturidi tradition had been follower of Naqshbandi Sufi order that inculcate positive attitude to the world still it could not sustain the blitz of Ibn al-Arabi's monism. Even the contender of Ibn al-Arabi's theosophy Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi (1564-1624) criticizes the Ulama for "attributing real existence to this world besides God⁵⁸". Mulla Sadra (1572-1640) states that "reality is one and only one, God, and all other beings are inane and vacuous. They are not even entities related to and dependent upon God, but are mere relations to God. In this relation only one term is real, that of God, the other term being nothing at all."⁵⁹ The aggressive optimism of monistic idea has no room for real evil which views the conflict of good and evil in terms of the waves that arise from the sea, collide with each other, and then fall back into the same sea. Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762) also accepts the premises of Ibn al-Arabi. Thus what al-Ghazali proclaims in al-Jawahir as quoted above is nothing but a sort of 'Hama Ust' all is God, which to some finds its very roots in Avicenna philosophy. Known Moroccan Arab Philosopher Muhammad Abed al-Jabri (1935-2010) writes "Avicenna reconstructed the pagan-based Harranian emanationist metaphysics with an Islamic varnish; Ghazali borrowed it from him to make of it an alternative to Aristotelian philosophy. But as a partisan of Asharite doctrine, Ghazali spread this Avicennian "Oriental" commodity as "Sunni Sufism⁶⁰". He further elaborates that Avicenna's thought based on gnostic principle of knowledge i.e. an essence of oriental philosophy employs qiyas (analogical reasoning) as "method"- the two combined embody the "Avicennian moment" in Islamic history. He concludes "post-Averroes Arabs, have lived on the margin of history (in inertia and decline), because we kept clinging to the Avicennian moment after Ghazali granted it currency within "Islam"⁶¹".

The Pivot of al-Jabri's thesis is that the mysticism cannot be located anywhere in the "authentic" Arab-Islamic tradition, "the scholars and jurisconsults who firmly espoused Islam's original character, its Arab character, always rejected Sufism, in which they saw a foreign commodity imported from Persia and incompatible with Muslim religion."⁶² While it can be hardly denied that through Avicenna's philosophy, a mélange between Sufism and speculative rational thought had already occurred and footprints of Greek philosophy in Avicenna's thought abound and al-Ghazali presented his thought somewhat in the cast of Avicenna's philosophy and as Ibn Taimiyya criticizes his obsession with Greek philosophy and Iqbal found him entrenched in Aristotelian logic but Avicenna found full expression in Ibn al-Arabi's theosophical intuitionism which reached India via Iran and joined hands with Hindu India's patent and specialist native product of Vedantic monism and culminated into Akbar's Din-i-Elahi, with the joint venture of some Muslim Sufis and Hindu monists like Kabir and Guru Nanak, yet both Muslim and Hindu masses rejected; this rejection on the part of Muslims owes to the spiritual legacy of al-Junaid, turned into orthodox Sufism at the hands of al-Ghazali, rounded off by Ibn Taimiyya, enriched and brought to the highest water mark by al-Sirhandi and at last in Shah Wali Allah synthesis of Wahdat al-wajud (Oneness of being) and Wahdat al-Shahud (Oneness of appearance) takes place. Whereas "Sirhandi proved the supreme status of Sharia- the moral command of God; a century and a half later, Shah Wali Allah of Delhi gave a new solution by accepting the premises of Ibn Arabi but by reinstating at the same time the full reality of the moral order within this framework⁶³".

However, al-Jabri's statement of importation of mysticism from Persia to Islam reflects his unawareness with his own tradition- the Quran was culmination of Prophet's mystic experience at the Cave of Hira which portray some vivid and definite mystic experiences of the Prophet (17:1; 53:1-12 and 13-18; 81:19-25). The basic leitmotif of the Quran was to address the life and queries of heart i.e. locus of faith and inculcated in its early followers, "in varying degrees a grave sense of responsibility before justice of God which raised their behavior from the realm of worldliness and mechanical obedience to the law to a plane of moral activity. The keynote of this piety is fear of God or responsibility to the moral ideal (62:2-3). Among the companions, there were some with whom this sense deepened into a special degree of inwardness of actions, or the interiorization and introspection of the moral motive. This is exemplified by men like Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, who formed the nucleus of Medinese piety after the Prophet. This became the foundation stone of Muslim asceticism that developed rapidly in 1st/7th and 2nd/8th centuries.⁶⁴" al-Jabri's rejection of mysticism in Islam seemed partially inspired by the Western pure rationalism which deemed faith a subjective affair in backdrop of its own social milieu and historical developments, partly he seemed fallen prey to Orientalist's nationalistic interpretation of Islam which transpired into Abd al-Jamal Nasir's Arab Nationalism to secure privilege of "authentic Arab tradition, Arab character of Islam to his mind uniquely distinguished and disparate from the cumulative Islamic tradition. Al-jabri's preoccupation with Averroes and aversion to al-Ghazali depicts not only his predilection for anything Arab but reveals his grounding in and preference for Western epistemology. The real feather in Averroes' cap is to be an interpreter of Aristotle and as the West claim herself an heir to Greek heritage she recognizes Averroes the greatest philosopher and proclaims that philosophy ended in Islam after him.

The nub of the matter lies in misperception of reason and rationality both in Occidental and Oriental epistemologies. Whereas the Cartesian mindset of Europe thrives on Cartesian doubt putting all eggs in the basket of natural philosophy i.e. judges everything on the criterion of 'Nature', the post-classical Islam indulged in speculative truth seemed unilaterally addicted to "intuition". Both entertain a partial view of reason/rationality. Reason is perceptive as well as conceptive. Whereas the perceptive part of the reason intuits the conceptive formulates. "God is percept and the universe is concept" an acute observation of Ibn Arabi testifies the same reality though he himself remained irretrievable prisoner of Sufi gnosis. The Quran when says that We shall make them understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth (41:53) it unequivocally states that only the fusion of pure reason and intuition holds the pearl of truth in its fold for to the Quran the real truth is where the Signs [messages] of the Scripture, Nature and human - self echoing and mirroring each other and speaking of the One converge. This is because Al-Ghazali termed Holy Scripture the Kitab al-Mastur (the written Text) and the context i.e. universe Kitab al-Shahud (The Book of Manifestation) for both contain Signs pointing to the same Reality the Creator of both having no inner contradictions, flaws, vacuum and gaps.

However, al-Ghazal's evaluation of theology and law when viewed in the context of the entire history of his thought is strewn with intricacies and unless the nettle of his inner vicissitudes is grasped thoroughly and firmly it poses a complicated problem. His first period of resounding external success at Nizamiyya College is marked by devotion, teaching and excellence in these two central Islamic disciplines. In the middle period lasting for twelve years he was devoted to Sufism. The prolific writer as he was he wrote good many works in this period including his great Ihya that won laurels in intra faith and interfaith academia. In this work he regarded only the "science of hereafter" as truly religious science while assigned an instrumental value to law as maintaining the order and outer life of society and sometimes even condemned it as "a this-worldly science" and its bearer as the corrupt men of this world. Yet his work Moderation in Creed (al-iqtisad fi l-itiqad) positively presents an 'economy of creed', basic kalam formulas purged of extravagances, transgressions and regressions and theology feasibly begins to assume its due portion in his discourse through non extreme Sufism. But it is in his Jawahir al-Quran where he repeatedly attempts to give religious evaluation of theology and law. Theology herein he deems necessary to dispel doubts sown by the atheists and law is essential to regulate the order of society. Thus the jurist and the theologians are close to each other. "...the jurists are to be regarded as the builders of the hospices and other facilities on the way to Mecca for the sake of the pilgrimage, while the position of the theologians is like of the guides to the pilgrimage and guardians along the way⁶⁵". He immediately

adds: “if these people add to their arts [i.e. kalam and fiqh], the following of the [Sufi] path to God by cutting through the steep passes of the soul and disengagement from worldly attractions and making God their sole concern, their excellence over all others would be like the excellence of the sun over the moon. But if they cannot do this, their rank is very low, indeed.⁶⁶”

Now, as his intense predilection for understanding the inner meaning of life fulfills and the inertia of solitude subsides, law (Fiqh) assumes supreme importance in his discourse yet with avoidance of extravagances, intricacies, ambiguities and labyrinths. “This [Fiqh] is a science for which there is universal need because it is related to betterment, first, of this life and then of the life to come. For this reason, one who possesses this science is additionally privileged by fame, honor and priority over others- preachers, those who tell [Quranic] stories and the theologians. And for this reason, this knowledge has had the fortune of being the beneficiary of a great deal of discussion and lengthy investigations in proportion to the need of it so that works on it have multiplied, particularly on those issues where opinions differ. This, despite the fact that these differences are not very large and even error in legal matters is not far from the truth, for nearly all legal thinkers (mujtahidun) can be said to be right or it can [at least] be said that every mujtahid deserves one reward [from God] while one who hits the right opinion gets a double reward. However, since a great deal of pomp and glory is dependent upon it, legal thinkers are heavily motivated to go to excesses in building up its details. I myself wasted a considerable part of my life in writing about disputed matters in the field and spent a good part of it in authoring works of the [Shafi] school and in organizing these into long, middle and small ones, indulging in far too excessive elaboration and detail. However, what I deposited into my ‘Abridgement of the Abridgement’, being my fourth and shortest work [on the subject] is quite sufficient [as a law guide].⁶⁷” This shift from taking law as “purely this worldly science” to rate it high in the scale of religious sciences is of utmost importance in thorough understanding of his intellectual spiritual odyssey, yet the stigma he attaches to over- indulgence in details of law is not without reason. His stance rings clear and louder in the pithy remarks of modern philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), that “the law is more easily understood by few than many words. For all words are subject to ambiguity, and therefore multiplication of words in the body of law is multiplication of ambiguity⁶⁸”.

However, after the fulfillment of Sufi experience, and his return to public life there emerges a spiritually transformed and intellectually cool equipoised Ghazali if his last two works one on jurisprudence, al-Mustasfa (The Quintessence) and the other on his spiritual biography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal (Deliverance from Error) written simultaneously in the state of sobriety in his last phase of life, are any guide to us. In al-Munqidh, Sufism being beyond pure rationality, although neither alien nor contradictory to it is described the only way to God. However, nothing is more alien to Enlightenment and modernity than the idea of revelation and mysticism the latter in Ghazali’s view is a kind of introduction to prophet-hood. However, if his statement about the categories of sciences and their functional import is viewed in the full glare of Quran and normative Islam, it is sufficed not only to dispel the misperceptions about his thought but it is pretty enough to put the derailed intellectual tradition of Islam back on the right track. In the introduction to al-Mustasfa he writes: “sciences are of three kinds, first, purely rational which the Sharia neither incites against, nor does it invite to them, for example, mathematics, geometry, astronomy etc.....secondly, there are the purely traditionally transmitted sciences for example, hadith and commentaries of the Quran...there is little of importance in these, for all big and small can acquire them equally, since transmission requires sheer power of memory and demands no rational activity. The noblest of sciences are those that combine reason and tradition; and personal thought as well as revealed authority. Now, law and jurisprudence belongs to this category because it takes a balanced path, by taking the choicest of revelation and reason. Neither is it a manipulation by pure reason, which is not welcomed by the sharia. Nor is it based on blind acceptance of pure authority which reason cannot certify to be correct nor support. It is because of the nobility of the science of law (fiqh) and its cause [which is a combination of authority and reason] that God has made abundant the motivations of people to acquire it and those who are learned in it are the highest of scholars in rank and greatest of them in prestige; and they have the largest number of colleagues as followers.

In my early youth, specialization in this science brought religious and secular benefits, as well as rewards in the afterlife and the first life, requiring of me to devote to it a good part of my life and expend on it alone a considerable portion of my effective activity. I, therefore, authored several works concerned with law and jurisprudence. After that, I turned myself to the science of the path of hereafter [and acquisition of] the knowledge of the secrets of religion [i.e. Sufism]. Thus, I authored on this topic comprehensive works like the Revivification of the Sciences of Religion [Ihya Ulum al-Din], and small works like Gems of the Quran [jawahir al-Quran] and middle [length] ones like The Alchemy of Happiness [Kimya al-Saadat]. **Then, divine decree drove me to return to teaching and thereby benefit others.** So a group of experts in the science of law proposed that I write a work on jurisprudence.⁶⁹

This statement in its utmost sense portrays religion as a “synthetic construct i.e. fusion of revelation and reason” which combines metaphysics and social fact, a hallmark of pristine Islam. Post-classical Islam due to its indulgence in speculative philosophy turned back on this fusion severing the organic link between revelation and reason and community-tradition equation turned into innovation-sect equation with the loss of the Quran inspired scientific empirical investigative spirit speculative and conjectural approach became a norm, the hide-bound tradition divorced from reason stayed Islam. The eminent historian of science, George Sarton writes “the immense cultural importance of Islam lies in the fact that it finally brought together the two great intellectual (i.e. the Semitic religious and the Greek pagan) streams which had flowed independently in ancient times... Jews and Greeks had mixed in Alexandria but, in spite of the fact that the former had learned the language of the latter and that one of their learned men, Philo, had made a deep study of both traditions, there had been no real fusion. The Christians had not succeeded any better, because of their single-hearted devotion to the new Gospel, which reduced everything else to futility in their eyes. Now, for the first time in the history of the world, Semitic religion and Greek knowledge actually combined in the minds of many people. Nor was that integration restricted to a single city or country; the new culture spread like a prairie fire from Baghdad eastward to India, Transoxiana and further still, and westward to the very edge of the world.⁷⁰” The post-formative developments in Islam wedged the fusion of the same two intellectual streams of revelation and pure reason. In the last phase of his intellectual odyssey al-Ghazali seemed reconciling tradition with reason, combining metaphysics with social fact, kneading knowledge in faith, yet by then the community had gone so far, and it was too late to bridge the yawning gulfs between tradition and reason. Even after him the fair assessment of **the malaise and** remedy proposed by Ibn Taimiya, Sirhandi and Shah Wali Allah for the most part fell on the deaf ears. The thick skinned orthodoxy over the time had developed a capacity to brush revolutionary ideas of such reformers under the carpet and how to cherry-pick from their corpses suited to their conservatism and still own them.

However, though some Orientalists attribute Ghazali’s change of heart and resumption of public life to the pressure of Fakhr al- Mulk to resume teaching at Nishapur still his works and spiritual odyssey depict it is all about how truth plays out before him in the long road of exile leading to oneself. A cursory glance of his thought portrays a developing and evolving Ghazali whom at last destiny kisses in his last two vignettes. The Co-existence of certainty and skepticism of theology and law in him at the outset of his Sufi career was a sufficient drive towards greater realization. Sufism turned the propositions of faith into his experienced truth. The Ghazali of Ihya terms theology a farce and law a purely this worldly science having nothing to do with the science of hereafter. Of al-jawahir regrets over waste of time in writing about intricate details of law, of al-Mustasfa terms law as the noblest of sciences and shows measure of approval and pleasure with his earlier preoccupation with law. He had disparaged theology (Kalam) at the commencement of Sufi career but in al-jawahir terms theologians like guide and guardian on the way of pilgrimage to Mecca and jurists as builders of hospices and other facilities on the way to Mecca and if both add to their arts [i.e. kalam and fiqh] the following of Sufi path to God their excellence over all others is like the excellence of the sun over the moon. Otherwise their rank is very low. However, in al-Mustasfa, a law is termed the noblest of all sciences yet the Kalam is a theme sprinkled all over the pages of the same. The most telling is the statement that about his conversion to Sufism he says “I turned myself to” (aqbaltu) while about his resumption of public teaching and return to law he says “divine decree led me” (saqani qadarullah). Still, when he resumes public life and writing on fiqh, the pages of al-Munqidh reveals, Sufism as a unique and an only way to God was very much with him.

But what makes al-Ghazali the most influential and impressive religious personality of post-classical Islam and equally a final step in the long developing history of Islam? His three major achievements among others bestow a unique privilege and prestige on him which make him a towering personality among classical and post-classical intellectuals of Islam and a light-house for the coming generations of the Muslim world.

Firstly, he succeeded in delivering a thorough systematic and coherent philosophy of religion. Ibn Khaldun writes “prior to Ghazali, the mutakalimun had advanced a number of arguments offering a rational defense of religious teachings to counter the heretical claims of a variety of sects. But many of these arguments were based on elementary and unsound reasoning. He [al-Ghazali] was the first Muslim thinker to utilize the science of logic to offer a coherent exposition and rational defense of religious faith...he refuted a good many of the (opinions of metaphysicians) that were in vogue during his day.⁷¹” His philosophy of religion was not only accepted among various sects of Islam through the translation of his works in Latin it provided necessary logistics to Jew and Christian theologians to strengthen their respective religious traditions. His appeal to modern world is as refreshing breath of life that Syed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani employed his metaphysical thoughts to raise intellectual and moral standards of the Muslim world to combat Western imperialism.

Secondly, though he belonged to Shafi school his broad-gauged scholarship brought him close to the Medinese tradition of Umar the second caliph and Malik bin Anas and in his seminal work on the fundamental of law, al-Mustasfa, he clearly supported the opinion of Malik about al-masalih al-mursala (public interest issues about which the texts say nothing) and al-Istislah (reasoning that, in the absence of relevant texts, it relies on public interest). With grand synthetic approach he succeeded in the establishment of the School of Maqasid al-Sharia (The Objectives of Sharia School) whose basis had been laid down by his teacher Abu al-Maali al-juwayni (d. 478/1085). He writes “in its significance, (al-masalaha) is a term that means seeking something useful (manfaah) or warding off something harmful (madarrah). But this is not what we mean, because seeking what is useful and preventing harm are objectives (maqasid) sought by creation, and the good (salah) in the creation of mankind consists in achieving those objectives. What we mean by Maslahah is preserving the objectives of the law (sharia) that consists in five ordered things: preserving religion, life, reason, progeny and property. What ensures the preservation of those five principles is maslahah; what goes against their preservation is mafsadah, and preventing it is maslahah.⁷²”

Thirdly, his rational defense of the Faith which transpired into coherent exposition of religion and his formulation of the higher Objectives of Sharia supplied him necessary mechanism and intellectual logistics to eliminate the extremes of Islamic law, theology and mysticism and reconstitute the fundamental elements of Islam with such a finesse that defies description. The theologians, doctors of law and Sufis were at cut throat war against each other in the post-classical Islam but Ghazali secured harmony and symbiosis of the same with such an effective force of argument that these fundamental disciplines of Islam became synergetic movement in the subsequent history of Islam so much so that often a great theologian and a great Sufi were one and the same person, a development which was bound to produce in due course a series of original thinkers who reconstructed Muslim theology on a new and more integral basis, than the old formal Kalam. He “immeasurably strengthened Sunni Islam by injecting into its intellectual shell a new spiritual life and reorienting it from being a semi-fossilized “religion” to becoming a vibrant faith⁷³”. The community through his efficient constructs and endeavors got consensus on the due status of law, theology and Sufism. Ahmad b. Hanbal had rejected Sufism with decisiveness and disdain yet after Ghazali, Ibn Taimiyyah despite being Hanbali accepted non-extremist Sufism and appreciated Ghazali’s choice of Sufism among the four of philosophers, batnis, theologians and Sufis with cautionary note that he had another better choice of the Quran and Sunna which he condones on the premise that he was not well-versed in these disciplines.

However, his critique of philosophy and science is misunderstood. He rejected metaphysical views of philosophers not philosophy per se. The Muslim philosophers genuflecting Greek thought particularly Aristotle said the universe is eternal, denied the possibility of bodily resurrection and equally denied God’s knowledge of particulars and claimed that he only knows universals. Ghazali rejected these statements from the standpoint of the Quran. The Greek thought

essentially lead to Atheism “the cause of the decadence and fall of the Greek spirit was that their intellectual activities were hopelessly out of proportion to their political wisdom and morality⁷⁴”. What impact it made on Judaism and Christianity, still what havoc it is wreaking on self-proclaimed heir (Judaic Christian West) to Greek heritage. It is an utter loss of transcendentalism which makes man law unto him-self, self-evident from Western humanism. To Ghazali, in so far as the moral realm is concerned philosophers plagiarize from the scriptures and Sufi sayings. Moral values i.e. product of religio-moral experience though have a cognitive element radically differ from other forms of intellectual cognition. Since man is party to his affairs, moral values cannot be made and unmade by him at his own whim or convenience, whenever in history his inflated over-blown ego and hubris of self-sufficiency assumed this role with the misnomer of “reform” (2:11-12) it would lead to corruption on the earth (fasad fil-ardh) a sufficed source for an utter extinction of civilization, how many civilizations came and gone, **none knows them [now] save God** (14:9). Ghazali flung severe critique against metaphysical views of philosophers that dynamite the very basis of religious truth, “the al-Ghazali of the Tahafut should be classed not with the anti-rationalists, but with those concerned to keep philosophy in its proper place.⁷⁵” For “philosophy, no doubt, has jurisdiction to judge religion, but what is to be judged is of such a nature that it will not submit to the jurisdiction of philosophy except on its own terms. While sitting in judgment on religion, philosophy cannot give religion an inferior place among its data. Religion is not a departmental affair; it is neither mere thought, nor mere feeling, nor mere action; it is an expression of the whole man.⁷⁶” Ghazali seen with the lens of natural philosophy seemed anti-philosophy but very limited is the scope of naturalism (i.e. as old as man himself and in known history Greeks were its pioneers) which cannot see beyond the chain of cause and effect. Hence, commenting on the scope of philosophical metaphysics and religious law writes Ibn Khaldun “there is a great difference between the two positions. The perceptions of which the Master of the religious law (Muhammad) had are wider (than those of philosophers), because they go beyond rational views. They are above them and include them, because they derive their support from divine light⁷⁷.”

Al-Ghazali in his *Munqidh* made some statements of profound order and astounding fecundity which are part of his enduring legacy. He wrote since the philosophers were scientist and since their philosophical theses conflicted with religion some fool friends of religion rejected their scientific propositions as well which were obviously true. Thus showing great power of discernment he rebuked cheap defenders of religion against reason. He further says since some people are impressed by the scientific thought of philosophers hence they perceive their metaphysical statements as an unquestionable truth. It was also correct, but the precautionary note he issued that people should be discouraged from studying even the scientific works of those philosophers for through these works they can have an access to their heretical philosophic propositions. “This was the first blow the orthodoxy explicitly and formally dealt to positive knowledge and ultimately also to itself and it was subsequently echoed by innumerable representatives of the orthodoxy down the ages.⁷⁸” To Quran, all knowledge-intellectual, scientific, or intuitive- comes from God. Be it David expertise in making coats of mail (21:80) or scribes’ skill of writing documents of agreements (2:282) or Joseph’s proficiency in interpreting dreams (12:37) or even man’s skill to receive cumulative knowledge recorded by foregone generations or his ability to hand down his own knowledge to successor generations by the pen is the bestowal of God on him (96:3-5). The Quran presents knowledge as unity without any distinction of religious and secular, yet the distinction lies in its utility for the good or the bad purposes. However, though the divide of religious and secular already had set in in post-classical Islam Ghazali’s precautionary note only deepened the gulf and it became a norm in subsequent history of Sunni Islam. After him Ibn Taimiyya attacked philosophy and rationalism. Al-Shatibi in his *al-Muwafaqat* discouraged the cultivation of pure intellectual disciplines. Al-Sirhandi unreservedly condemned pure sciences and ridiculed arithmetic, geometry etc. The orthodox condemnation of positive thought has become a constant feature and furniture of Sunni Islam.

Still, al-Ghazali’s precautionary note of keeping people away from the scientific works of philosophers was a time-bound strategy to subside Greek metaphysical thought of which the Muslim philosophers have become an irretrievable prisoners. He at times leveled harsh critique against philosophy; his critique is focused and specific. On perhaps justified grounds writes M.E. Marmura “Ghazali’s ultimate “purpose is to refute the Islamic philosophers’ metaphysical theories and not their natural science.⁷⁹” He in *Munqidh* condemned the cheap defenders of religion

against the self-evident truth of natural sciences in strongest possible terms and 19th century Reformer Syed Jamal al-Din refers to the same for cultivation of positive sciences in the Muslim world. "Someone who claims that the Islamic religion is incompatible with geometric proofs, philosophical demonstrations, and the laws of nature is an ignorant friend of Islam. The harm of this ignorant friend to Islam is greater than the harm of the heretics and enemies of Islam. For the laws of nature, geometric proofs, and philosophic demonstrations are self-evident truths. Thus, someone who says, my religion is inconsistent with self-evident truths, has inevitably passed judgment on the falsity of his religion (107)⁸⁰."

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Long is the road of exile leading to oneself.