Al Ghazali and His Theory of Government

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Introduction

In his article, Islamic Concept of State, Nasim Hasan Shah states that there are many forms of an Islamic state, and every period Muslim comunity discreate most suitable form to their demands, and the most consonant with the spirit of the Shari'a.[1] That is probably why muslim thinkers both the earlier and the present period have expressed ideas about Authority in Islam as a dogmatic approach. This is greatly different from al-Mawardi's administrative approach, Ibn Khaldun's sociological approach and al-Farabi's philospohical approaches.[2]

This paper will discuss al-Ghazāl's theory of Islamic government. Before discussing this subject, it is necessary to understand al-Ghazāl and his works so we are able to understand his theory better. This paper divide into three parts. The first part concerns with al-Ghaz āl's life and his works, the second part discusses his concept of Islamic government, and the last part comprises the conclusion.

Al-Ghazālī's Life and Works

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Gazāl was born in Tus,[3] a town near modern Meshhed in northeast Iran, in 1058/450 A.H. Almost since his lifetime, there has been a debate on whether his nisba (relative name), should be considered to be al-Ghazāl or Gazzāl. The former would relate to village or woman called al-Gazāl, while the latter relate to the profession of the spinner or seller of spun yarn (ghazzāl). But there is no certainty about the ancestor who was a spinner, since he had a grand-uncle (or less probably an uncle), who was also called al-Ghazāl, and the village or woman is otherwise unknown.[4]

His early education was in Tūs itself. Here he studied jurisprudence under Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Radhkārī.[5] At some time not later than 1074, al-Ghazāl

went for purposes of study to Gurgan/Jurjan in the south-east of the Caspian Sea.[6] He studied further under the Imām Abū Nasr al-Ismāᶜīī, and made copious notes. On his way back from Gurjan to Tūs robbers fell upon him, stripped him and even carried off the bag containing his manuscripts, eventually they gave them back to him.[7] After coming back from Jurjan, al-Ghazāī stayed at Tūs for three years, during which he memorized his notes as a precaution against future robbers.

In 1077, he went to Nishapur to study under Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī at the recently founded Nizāmiyya college. He remained there until the death of al-Juwaynī in August 1085/25th R. Akhir 478 A.H[8]. Jurisprudence was presumably the main area of his study. He was also encouraged by al-Juwanyī to read the works of the philosophers al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.[9] According to Macdonald, the range of his studies embraced, besides Jurisprudence, theology, dialectics, philosophy and logic.[10]

He was associated with the court of Nizām al-Mulūk and taught in Nishapur after the death of al-Juwanyī until July 1091/484 A.H., when he was appointed as professor at the Nizāmiyya college in Baghdad. Thus, at the age of 33, he went to one of the most prestigious positions in the Sunnite Islamic world.[11]

While he was a professor in the Nizāmiyya of Baghdad, he studied philosophy and did some writing.[12] He left Baghdad in November 1095, ostensibly to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca; in fact, this was an excuse to prevent obstacles being placed in the way of his carrying out his real intention of becoming a sufi. He only went as far as Damascus, and lived there for several months.[13] According to Macdonald, he appointed his brother Ahmad to teach in his place at the Nizāmiyya college.[14]

From Damascus, he went to Mecca in November/December 1096 to perform the pilgrimage. He went there passing through Jerussalem and Hebron,[15] where he visited the grave of Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl.[16] He returned back to Baghdad not later then June 1097. But he did not remain there for a long time. He then went to his home town Tūs, establishing a hostel or Islamic boarding house (khanqah), where young men came to join him in leading a sufi life as a community.[17] According to ᶜAbd al-Ghafār, when al-Ghazāī finished his pilgrimage, he went to Syria and remained there wandering from place to place and shrine to shrine for nearly ten years. At this time he composed several works : the Ihya, and books abbreviated from it such as the Arbaᶜin and Rasail, beside laboring at his own spiritual advacement and growth through the religious exercises of the sufis. Then he returned to his home town of Tūs.[18]

In 1105 or early in 1106, he was appointed again as a professor at the Nizāmiyya college in Nishapur by Fakhr-al-Mulk, son of Nizām al-Mulk. Here, he could combine teaching with the sufi practices which he had been engaged in Tūs. He continued his teaching at Nishapur until at least August 1109. He passed away on Monday, 14 Jumadi al-Akhir 505 A.H./18 December 1111 in Tūs.[19]

His brother Aḥmad tells us about the day of his death :

After making his ablutions and performing the dawn prayer, he asked for his shroud, kissed it, laid it on his eyes and said. "Obediently I enter into the presence of the king, then facing Mecca he stretched out his feet and was dead before sunrise.[20]

Hourani has classified al-Ghazāī's life into four periods. The first is an early period of teaching and writing until the death of Imām Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. Only one work is definitely assignable to this time : al-Mankhūl min Taᶜlīqāt al-Uṣūl. But he also worked on some parts of al-Mustāsfā and al-Munqīd min al-Dalāl. The second period is a period of retirement, extending for eleven lunar years, from his departure from Baghdad in Dhu al-Qaᶜdah 488/November 1095 to his return to teach at Nishapur in Dhul al-Qaᶜdah, 499/July 1106. It was probably during this period that he wrote all or most of his greater work, IhyāᶜUlūm al-Dīn. The third period began when he came out from retirement in Dhul al-Qhaᶜdah 499, to resume teaching in Nishapur. The end of this period is not known. He completed his work al-Muṣtasfā during this time. The last period was spent at Tūs, where he lived until his death; the only work which was finished by him during this period is the iljam.[21]

The following is a chronological ordering of his works.

1. al-Mankhūl min Taᶜlīqāt al-Usūl -- this book is mentioned in al-Mustaṣfā, and was written during the lifetime of his teacher, Imām al-Ḥaramayn; 2. Shifāᶜ al-Ghalīl --- unfortunately this book is lost; 3. The following three books related to each other : al-Basīt, al-Wasīt and al-Wajīz fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfiᶜī; 4. Khulāsāt al-Mukhtaṣar wa Naqāwat al-Muᶜtasar --- this book is mentioned in Ihyā; 5. Taḥdhīb al-Uṣul -- al-Ghazāī refers to this book in al-Mustaṣfā as his own and as a work on Fiqh;[22] 6. Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa --- this book was written in Baghdad; it could not have been started earlier than 1091/1092. Taḥāfut al-Falāsifa was completed on Muḥarram 11,488/ January 21 1095; 7. Miᶜyār al-ᶜIlm fī Fann al-Mantiq --- this book was anticipated as an appendix to the Ihyā; 8. Miḥak al-Naẓar fī al-Mantiq --- this book mentions Miᶜyār;[9]. al-Mustaẓhiri --- this was probably completed after Taḥāfut; 10. Hujjat al-Ḥaqq --- this is lost, but is mentioned in Jawāhir al-Qurᶜān, he wrote it perhaps during his second residence in Baghdad; 11. al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iᶜtiqād --- it mentions Taḥāfut, and therfeore cannot be earlier than 1095. it is mentioned in Ihyā, therefore earlier than the earliest part of Ihyā. Iqtiṣād itself is not easy nor short, it is possible then that it was completed during the second half 1095; 12. Mīzān al-ᶜAmal --- this was anticipated at the end of Mi'yar; 13. Al-Risālah al-Qudsiyya --- this is mentioned in the Ihyā; 14. al-Radd al-Jamīl ᶜala Ilāhiyyāt ᶜIsa bi-Ṣarīh al-Injīl --- but Lazaruś Yafeh has proved that this book is inauthentic; 15. Ihyā cUlūm ad-Dīn --- this mentions ar-Risālah al-Qudsiyya, and al-Iqtiṣād. He probably did not begin with this book before 490 A.H./1097. This book is

mentioned in his later works. Unfortunately its date of completion cannot be determined accurately; 16. al-Risālah al-Wa^{C}ziyya --- this refers to Qàwā^{C}id al-^{C}Aqā^{C}id, i.e. Iḥya^C; 17. Ayyuha al-Walad --- mentions Iḥya^C; 18.al-Imlā fi Ishkālat al-Iḥya^C --- this is printed at the end of I ḥya^C;,19. al-Maqsad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Ma^{C}ānī Asmā Allah al-Ḥusnā --- mentioned in Arba^{C}in, also gives refers to Jawāhir al-Qur'ān; 20. Qawāṣim al-Bāṭiniyya --- mentioned in Jawāhir al-Qur'ān; 21. Jawāb Mufaṣṣl al-Khilāf --- lost; 22. Jawāhir al-Qur'ān mentions 40 books of Iḥya'; 23. al-Arba^{C}īnfī Uṣūl al-Dīn --- mentions Bidāya, Maqsad, and describes it self as sequel to Jawāhir al-Qur'ān ; 24 Mishka āt al-Anwar ---- mentions Ihyā', Micyaār, Mihakk, al-Maqsad al-Ansā; 25 Kitāb ad-Darj al-Marqūm bi al Jadāwil --- lost; 26 al-Qistās · al-Mustaqīm --- mentions Jawāhir al-Qur'ān ,its sequel Arbai'n Munqidh, polemic work against Isma^{C}ilism; 27 Faysal at-tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaga, -- in al-Jawāhir al-Ghawālī, mentioned in Munqidh; 28. K īmīya al-Sa^{C}ādah --- this is likely have to have been composed after al-Ghazāl's return from the Arab countries; 29. Naṣīhat al-Mulūk --- this work follows closely the organization and the contend of K īmīya al-Sha^{C}ādah; 30. al-Munqidh · min al-Dalāl --- mentions the month of his return to Nīshāpur; 31. al-Mustaṣfa min' ^{C}Ilm al-Uṣūl al-Fiqh; 32. Iljām al-^{C}Awām --- completed on the 1st of Jumadi al-Akhir, a few days before al-Ghazāl death.[23]

All the above works are those which are mentioned by majority of scholars interested in studying al-Ghazāl,[24] but there are many more works which are not usually cited, such as Marāqi al-Zulfa, al-Madnūn bihī ^{C}Ala Ghayr ahlihi, al-Ḥikmah fī Makhlūq Allah and so forth. According to Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan's at-Tabāqāt al-^{C}Aliyat fī Manāqib al-Shāfi^{C}ī, there are a total of 98 titles of his works.[25]

The Concept of Government

In examining al-Ghazāl unutterable · on politics means we must take into consideration the time and circumstance no less than the purpose he had in mind when making them. In Al-Iqtiṣād he speaks as a jurist, and the contend is not different from al-Mawardi. Kitāb al-Mustazhiri[26] purpose is to establish the legitimacy of the Abbaside caliph al-Mustazhiri against the opposition of the Batinīya sect who recognized his Fatimah rival. Since effective power was exercised by the Saljuq sulṭān, Al-Ghazāl had to base his claim for the Abbasid caliph's legitimacy on Fiqh.[27]

Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk written by al-Ghazāl for the great Seljuq Sulṭān Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh, who ruled from 498 to 511/1105 to 1118.[28] This book combines with the literary theory, which is something of the theory of the jurists and the philosophers together with traces of the ethic of the Ṣufis.[29] In Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk, al-Ghazāl writes the only justice and equity of the sulṭān true qualification.[30]

With regard to the necessity of Imām is quite similar in both his book al-

Iqtiṣād and kitāb al-Mustazhiri. In Kitāb al-Mustazhiri, the necessity of Imām is for the advantage and keeps away damage in the world. The good order should be based on the religious teaching, in contrast, it is not sufficient if merely on the community. The religious order can be achieved just through an Imām who has indeed to be obeyed.[31] The word Imām is replaced by sulṭān. Since the meaning of sulṭān is authority, power and not the man in power, the ruler. This explanation is taken from the Sunna of the Prophet which states that : "Religion and (temporal) power are twins and a continuation :" therefore it can be concluded that dīn is the foundation and sulṭān is the guardian.[32]

The first statement by al-Ghazāl in his book al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iᶜtiqād is that the imāmāte or caliphate is an institution prescribed by the Shari'a (rather than a logically necessary institution as the Bāṭinites and philosophers held).[33] al-Ghazāl attempts to prove that the Imāmāte is necessary for the realization of the Prophet's goal. He argues that the Prophet's purpose was the formal establishment of the religion of Islam. To secure this end both life and livelihood must be protected. The appointment of an Imām is, therefore, necessary. His conclusion is that the caliphate (execution of the Shariᶜa) because of its relationship with the Sultanate (coercive power) is required as a result of the objective of the Prophet (the establishment and institutionalization of the Shariᶜa).[34]

al-Ghazāl follows the Sunni idea that the Shariᶜa is the basis of the caliphate. But he adds new elements. First, he states that the caliphate does indeed have utility, but he rests the proof of the Shariᶜa obligation of appointing an Imām upon two main bases. First, the caliphate is based on ijmāᶜ. What had been done by the Companions is used by al-Ghazāl as an example to prove this ijmāᶜ basis. He cites the appointment of the Khulafā al Rāshidūn; Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ᶜUmar ibn al-Khattāb, Uthmān ibn ᶜAffān and ᶜAli ibn Abī Tālib.[35] The second and more important basis is deduced will of the Prophet. As noted above, that the purpose of the Prophethood is human beings' happiness. Thus public interest (maṣlaḥa al-umma), such as justice, is the source and reason of the obligation of authority.[36] The requirements of the Shariᶜa imply the requirement of an institution of some sort to secure them. The form of such an institution has been authorized by the consensus of the community, that is the caliphate.[37]

al-Ghazāl says that there are three ways in which one of those who is qualified for the caliphate may be chosen : by designation of the Prophet, by designation of the ruling caliph as had been done by the Khulafā al-Rāshidūn, or by designation of the holder of actual power. He tells us that only the last alternative is applicable in his own day.[38] Designation alone is not sufficient for appointment, for there must be the bayᶜa as well. The bayᶜa must be performed by the great men and the people of loosing and binding (ahl al-ḥalli wa al-ᶜaqd). The great men seem to be the men in power, and those loosing and binding are apparently the ᶜUlamā. There is probably a fourth stage in which the appointment is to be realized, that is by announcement in the mosques, and the people are to accept the

decision handed down from above.[39]

The qualifications of the caliphate in al-Ghazāl view are the same as laid down by al-Mawardi. However, in his book al-Iqtiṣād, al-Ghazāl just gives four criterias : (1) he must be able to make judgments in accordance with the Sharīᶜa (ᶜilm); (2) he must be able to administer the affairs of state (kifāyah); (3) piety (wara'); and (4) he must from Qurayshite descent.[40] In Naṣīhat al-Mulūk, he also mentions the necessity of justice (al-ᶜAdālah), the ability to act against enemies (al-Shujāᶜah), to maintain internal order (maṣlahah), and sound sight and hearing.[41] But in doing so he can be helped by his Wazīr and the ᶜUlamā al-Ghazāl adds that the çaliph must be an ᶜAbbasid. These requirements are very great, and it is not surprising that they were in reality never completely fulfilled. The requirement of a Quraishite lineage was the only one to be fulfilled.[42]

When his opponents contend that there is no qualified person to serve in that capacity, al-Ghazāl replies by asking : what would become of all these religious, sicial, economic and political phenomena which are regulated by the Sharīᶜa if there were no Caliph. He contends that without the existence of the caliphate no judgment of a qādi, and no testament would be valid, since the power of the qādi and government officials is derived from the caliph. Thus the absence of the caliphate would turn every normal human relationship into sin, and lead to disorder and strife. But he does not say what effect such sosial disintegration might have on the chances of the individual Muslim for salvation. From other indications, we might conclude that they would be considerably reduced.[43]

Further, al-Ghazāl tells us frankly that the necessity of having an Imām is so great that it compels the alteration of the qualifications when there is no other way out. al-Ghazāl is willing to concede many of the qualifications in order to maintain the caliphate. As a result, the personal qualification of the caliph are hardly applicable to the nature of the caliphate.[44]

al-Ghazāl even contends that the sulṭān is God's shadow on earth. It must, therefore, be recognized that kingship and the divine effulgence have been granted to him by God, and he must accordingly be obeyed, loved and followed.[45] To support this idea, al-Ghazāl cites Q.IV : 62 "Obey God and obey the Prophet and those among you who hold authority."[46]

al-Ghazāl, then, gives much advises which should be followed by the caliphate in conducting the government. For example in the Naṣīhat al-Mulūk he states :

1. The ruler should first of all understand the importance and also the dangers of the authority entrusted to him.[47]

2. The ruler should always be thirsting to meet devout ᶜUlamā and to ask them for advice.

3. The king should understand the he must not be content with personally refraining from injustice, but must discipline his slave-troops, servants and officers and never tolerate unjust conduct by them; for he will be interrogated not only about his own unjust deeds but also about those of his staff.[48]

4. The holder of authority should not be dominated by pride; for pride gives

rise to the dominance of anger, and will impel him to revenge.[49]

5. The ruler should figure that he is the subject and that the other person is the holder of authority; and that he should not sanction for others anything that he would not sanctiion for himself.[50]

6. The ruler should not disregard the attendance of petitioners at his court and should beware of the dangers of doing so.

7. The ruler should not form a habit of indulging passions.[51]

8. The ruler should make the utmost effort to behave gently and avoid governing harshly.

9. The ruler should endeavor to keep all the subjects pleased with him.[52]

10. The ruler should not give satisfaction to any person if a contravention of God's law would be required to please him; for no harm will came from such persons displeasure.[53]

He mentions still other things which should be considered by the government in exercising its authority. He cites the saying that four are incumbent on kings : (1) to purge the realm of ignorable men; (2) to keep the realm prosperous through close co-orperation with wise men; (3) to respect (the opinion of) pious men and pay heed to experienced persons and elders; (4) to increase (the prestige of) the realm by decreasing the number of bad men.[54]

al-Ghazal also emphasizes the importance of consultation (sura) in government. But he mentions this advice only to perform a good government. He does not relate it to any possibility that the sultan or caliph be democratically chosen. He cites Q.3 : 153 (:"And consult them in the matter." Q. 20 : 30 - 33.), while discussing the need for the prime minister (wazir) in running the government.[55]

al-Ghazal advises further that the king ought to observe three principles in his treatment of the wazir :[56] (1) not to punish him in haste when vexed with him; (2) not to covet his wealth when he grows rich; and (3) not to refuse him a (necessary) request when he makes one. Similarly, the king ought to grant three facilities to the wazir : (1) to let him see the king whenever he wishes; (2) not to listen to talk by slanderers against him; and (3) not to keep secret from him.[57]

The nature of al-Ghazal's theory now becomes much clearer : a) The caliphate comprehends the necessary power to accomplish the maintenance of order of the community, b) It represents of symbolizes the collective unity of the Muslim community and its historical continuity, c) Deriving its functional and institutional authority from the Sharica, it is the only legitimate form of government in Islam. Therefore, there are three aspects of the caliphate which correspond to al-Ghazal's theory : (1) utility; (2) ijma; (3) the objective of the Prophet.

Conclusion

al-Ghazal felt justified in validating the government of the Sultan. He was willing to make concessions regarding a limited number of the Shari'a regulations in order to preserve the religious life of the community. In contrast, he indeed did not consider much the possibility of every Muslim to be a khalif, since al-Qur'an also emphasizes this possibility. There are several verses, which indicate this phenomenon. For example, Q. 49 : 13, in

which stated that the noblest is the best in conduct. There are still many different verses which indicate similar meaning.

The Caliphate is the religious institution as well as the political institution of Islam. al-Ghazāī has a multilateral conception of the caliphate. There are three main elements of his conception : the caliph, the sulṭān and the 'ulamā; each corresponding to some aspects of the authority behind Islamic government, and each performing a function required by that authority. al-Ghazāī argues for the independence of the 'Ulamā, and he urges them to resist the blandishments of the Sulṭān. In fact, al-Ghazāī seeks to explain the political conditions of his own time in terms acceptable to traditional Sunni thought. He does not discuss this theory how it should be, based merely on Qur'anic value.

al-Ghazāī envisages a multilateral rather than a unitary government. He also associates the caliph with sulṭān. This is really different from al-Mawardi's theory, which lays down one man-government. al-Ghazāī does not specify any caliph functions or suggest that the caliph is under a contractual obligation toward the Muslim community to fulfill such functions. al-Ghazāī's argument shows clearly that he did not expect that any of the military, administrative or religious functions of government would actually be exercised by the caliph; they would be exercised by Turks, the wazīr, the secretaries, and by the 'ulamā.

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16. Macdonald, "The Life of al-Ghazali," 93. Op.cit.,

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19. Ibid., 107. See also Watt, *Islamic Philosophy,* Op.cit., 89.

20. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, 89. see also Encyclopedia of Islam vol. 2, "al-Ghazali" by W. Montgomery Watt, Loc.cit., 1039.

21. Macdonald, "The Life of al-Ghazali," 290-291. see also al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Cairo : Maktabat al-anjilu al-Misriyat, n.d.).

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24. See W. Montgomery Watt, "The Authenticity of the works attributed to al-Ghazali," *Royal Asiatic Society* (1952), 25-45.

25. Unfortunately this book is still manuscript and there is not available in the Islamic Studies library of McGill University. Also see 'Abd. al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Muallafāt al-Ghazālī* (Kuwait : Kitābat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1977). in which the author examines the authenticity of each book : Hāva Lazarus Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazālī* (Jerussalem : The Magnes Press, 1975), where the author explains the covabulary and method used by al-Ghazālī.

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30. Ibid., 54.

31. Ibid.

32. al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqāt* (Cairo : At-Tijāriya, n.d.), 95. from medieval, 39. See also Amir Hasan Siddiqi, *Caliphate and Sultanate in Medieval Persia* (Karachi : Jamiyat-ul Falah Publication, 1969), third ed., 147.

33. al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtiṣād*, 105.

34. Ibid., 106.

35. Ibid., 109. See also Leonard Binder, "al-Ghazālī's Theory of Islamic Government," *The Muslim World*, 45 (1955). 230.

36. Ibid., 107.

37. Ibid., 108.

38. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 2 (Miṣr : al-Maktabat al-Tijāriyah al-Kubrā, n.d.), 124-126.

39. al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, op.cit., 107.

40. al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, op.cit., 106.

41. al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, trans. Counsel for Kings, by F.R.C. Bagley (London : Oxford University Press, 1964), 14-31. See also al-Mawardi, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyah* (Miṣr : al-Sa'ādah, 1909/1328 H), 4.

42. al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 106.

43. al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 106. Loc.cit.

44. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 125

45. al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 107. Op.cit.

46. al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīhat*, 45.

47. Ibid., 14

48. Ibid., 23

49. Ibid., 25

50. Ibid., 28-29

51. Ibid., 29

52. Ibid., 30

53. Ibid., 31

54. Ibid., 85

55. Mozaffari, *Authority In Islam*, 13.

56. To understand the word and the usage history of wazir see S.D. Goitein, "The Origin of the Vizierate and its True Character," *Islamic Culture*, 16 (1942).

57. al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, 106-107.