The Sufi Path of al-Ghazali*

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Abstract—**The paper deals with the philosophical ideas of the great islamic philosopher Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali at-Tusi (1058-1111), whose activity is connected with the forming of systematic teaching of Sufism and foundation of the theoretical base of Sufism. The authors attempt to show that the essential in the synthesis of al-Ghazali is not the Law of faith, Path to faith or Truth of faith. That unity has remained one of the unclaimed possibilities of revolutionizing of soul and social reformation, something, which was not recognized by his friends. The originality of al-Ghazali's synthesis is not its personal touch or its concreteness but the growth from the Islamic cultural sources, even so, its very source emanates from unity of knowledge and deeds, as a connection of moral words enjoined by equitable deeds.**

Keywords—al-Ghazali; Sufism; Islamic philosophy; knowledge; belief; Islam

I. INTRODUCTION

The instance by al-Ghazali that surprised many of his contemporaries, was his decision to go on "retirement from this world" and to pave a way from "eternal life". This was a leap of a learned moral spirit, which saw in Sufism the true and ideal self-realization. Following the canons of Sufism he retired to solitude and repetence. The former meant not arrogant an rest but rather a new search for the essence of the universe with the Absolute. The latter meant as Sufi an-Niffary said, repetance for everything (essence), that all may receive forgiveness. This period of solitude and repetence, became cocrete display of unity of knowledge and action, reason and morals, reformation and fidelity to holy saints.

The ring of life-total ideological synthesis began with "ihya" and ended with the life of al-Ghazali himself. Between the beginning and the end of the synthesis was the revision of past deeds, and reassessment of his own acts. Fiqh for him ceased to be a science which was once recognised as the canonizing force of social life of a man, enforcing legality, building a basis for "squabbling of science" detailing the basis for law enforcement and eventually reaching a new theoretical form such as ethico-legal systems. In all this, al-Ghazali never rejected the validity of common law and its necessaty and he started safeguarding the right for justice. Obviously, his relationship towards fiqh corresponds to the church members of European free thinkers. He attempted to relieve some of fiqh's power of compulsion, unite law and moral, logic with ethics, good intention and deeds, and the embodiment of justice in law. He longed that all regulation of legal motives to be surbodinated to one ideal priciple, imperative to absolute truth, i.e. not make law an instrument in the hands of faqih which empowers the rich but rather a weapon for goodness. Likewise, kalam stopped to be a means for the defence of popular faith, but act as an ideology which functions as a required minimum, when moral decay arises, the members would turn and compensate for the preservation of "average level" of spiritual unity and prosperious shape. Thus al-Ghazali tried to soften and abolish doctrinal autoauthoritanism and fanatic schism among the prevailing schools.

For al-Ghazali, philosophy stopped to be a declarative medium "material of science" and sinless pillars of truth, and becomes "assembly of science", which were in unparalleled distances away from truth. Conclusions, which are arrived at by means of philosophy, are considered as relative, voidable in the questions of "eternity" of being likewise in the mundane problems.

The criticism of al-Ghazali which was directed to Islamic philosophers was not a "destruction" of philosophy, but a continuation of tradition of antagonism between kalam and philosophy. This kind of criticism could not be completely free of sophistic elements as the later always is present in a considerable share whenever there is a critical instance. But sophistic mastery of al-Ghazali never manifested itself openly in his criticism. The criticism, which tended to substantiate his intellectual efforts with the aim of defeating an opponent in a particular discussion, ended with the deprivation of usefulness of such an effort. The criticism of philosophy led to the destruction of the foundation of kalam exactly as it did to batanists, which had resulted to the idea of perniciousness of any spiritual subordination to the state or any other external forces. Stopping at the abyss of "damnation and excommunication" of philosophers, he excommunicated only himself experience of theorising, which included philosophy, as inevitable "conclusion of conclusions". It is true that philosophy at this time had ceased to have an independent status and became an essential part of his universal ideological alternative in all facets of thought.

Sufism did not represent the sacred top and the limit of knowledge, or a certain ideology of the future but a concrete, live participation of spirit while keeping in fidelity the rationalistic tradition of mind, he found the last refuge in sufism from the intrigues and unity of mind, his self-loving and arrogance of detachment from the unchanging world.

II. THE IDEAL SYNTHESIS OF AL-GHAZALI

Thus, ideal synthesis of al-Ghazali was not a mechanical result of connection of different disciplines but qualitatively new in its unity embodied in Sufi path.

What is essential in the synthesis of al-Ghazali is not the Law of faith, Path to faith or Truth of faith. That unity has remained one of the unacclaimed possibilities of revolutionizing of soul and social reformation, something, which was not recognized by his friends.

The originality of al-Ghazali's synthesis is not its personal touch or its concreteness but the growth from the Islamic cultural sources, even so, its very source emanates from unity of knowledge and deeds, as a connection of moral words enjoining by equitable deeds.

Different from other scholars of synthetic studies, al-Ghazali has left behind a heritage of systematic thought that ties and cements a beginning whose foundation certainly is ethics.

There are so many attempts to explain the secrete motives behind the sudden turn of al-Ghazali into Sufism. But most of them have not any serious foundation and just retell the words of al-Ghazali himself which he tells in his famous work "Deliverance from Error" [1]. Some scholars connect this turn with the expostulations of his brother or with the fact that when he was a child his mentor was a sufi [2]. Some scholars suppose that the main causes of such a turn are "the psychological" disorder, which is usual for people with the exalted religious sense or connect this process with the political reality of that period, with his "political cowardliness" and fear of persecutions from the side of 'ismailits (batinits) [3] [4]. Sometimes the true cause of such a turn is regarded as all three variants of explanation which are unified – education, illness and "political cowardliness" [5].

Some scholars seek the last reason of such a turn in the striving of al-Ghazali for the satisfaction of his spiritual demands, in his desire to find the supernatural ability: the Sufi partaking [6] [7]. Some investigators regard this turn only as defense of the faith and dogmata and defense of the rationalistic method of cognition with the help of sensual empirical and psychological method [8] [9]. Finally, some scholars regard this turn as the reflection of "the spirit of the time", since the century, in which al-Ghazali lived and created, strived for security and closeness to the God, the ecstasy and repentance. He wanted to joy the human impotencies and to enjoy the divine inspiration of the adepts of "ishraq". At the same time he strived for the order and authority; he wanted to reply on the political chaos, the eternal absence of the economic and military stability with the help of returning to the primary community" [10].

All these explanations, of course, have the certain foundation. Their weakest point is the absence of vision of the inner unity of al-Ghazali's creative activity with the cultural heritage and the realia of that epoch.

Al-Ghazali doesn't explain in his "Deliverance from the error" the direct reasons of his turn to the Sufism. But he shed the light on some of its aspects, particularly, on his abstract 'pure' logic. We cannot regard all content of his work "Deliverance from the Error" as the final True. The fact is that the development of the ideas, which he exposes in the critical tone, reflects not the real process of his spiritual evolution, but the later evaluation of his own creative work from the point of Sufism. The development of his ideas was realized, as al-Ghazali stresses himself, through the adaptation of the achievements of the basic spheres of the theoretical thought of that period – kalam, falsafa, the ideas of Ismailism and Sufism. All these spheres were presented in the "Deliverance from the Error" as the meaningful "stayings" on the path to the Truth. One can agree with this image of his evolution, but one should remember that it lacks several important details, which are necessary for its understanding – that which characterizes his attitude towards to abovementioned disciplines and the spheres of knowledge.

Firstly al-Ghazali tasted the 'thauq' of the theoretical inspirations not in kalam, but in fiqh. His kalam practice became the natural continuation of the intellectual equilibristics, which was a foundation of erudition of each faqih. The debates with falasifa moved him beyond the range of the religious interests of the sects. Theological reflexion of al-Ghazali was formed in the frame of 'asharia-mu'atazila school, but there was also the influence of other schools. One could conclude that his critics was against all schools of kalam without an exception. The experience of the theological reflexion alloed al-Ghazali to conclude about the unreability of deductions of the mutakallims, and impossibility of the attainment of truth in kalam. It's paradox but this conclusion was mad by al-Ghazali in the process of defense of the theology. Here the source of confusion in the assessments given by al-Ghazali to the theology, its place and functions both in cognition and in the system of social relations. The history of kalam knows many examples when its adherents became its opponents, but there is no example of the fascinated of Sufi with kalam, except for the "case" of al-Muhasibi (d. 857г.). His biography cannot explain the biography of al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali came to Sufism when kalam reached a high level of differentiation into sub-disciplines, currents and schools, and Sufism was already formed in an independent direction of thought with a rich experience of reflection. Kalam helped him to improve the skills of a polemics, apologetics and persuasion. At the same time, kalam, which incorporated the contradictions of religious ideology, deepened in al-Ghazali's consciousness a skeptical attitude towards its cognitive capabilities.

Al-Ghazali in his fascination with the ideological debate sometimes crossed the line separating it from sophisticated sophistry. Like other parties of a dispute, which remained in captivity for ideological bias, he initially did not feel the embarrassment, proving what is obviously contrary to common sense. The "dialectical mind" of the polemics

turned reason into an instrument of apologetics, overcame the determination of reasonable grounds of morality and moral grounds of understanding.

Following in his work "Inconsistency of philosophers" the practice of theological disputes, al-Ghazali showed that the main principle of criticism of philosophers is the identification of internal paradox and logical failure of their ideas. He was going to present a positive alternative to philosophers' ideas in the book "Foundations of dogmatics", but then al-Ghazali was not able to realize the limitations of this "positivity" [11].

Criticizing the incoherence of the philosophers and their opponents-mutakallims, al-Ghazali in his "Incoherence of philosophers" ironically warned the latter that "the eccentricity is better for salvation, rather than invalid resourcefulness" and "blindness is better for salvation than a crooked mind." The words "invalid resourcefulness" and "crooked mind" are referred to the mutakallims and contain a statement of the limitations of kalam in the debate with philosophy, in defending their own ideas. Further, al-Ghazali went in line with the rationalist tradition, which put before him the problem of the equivalence of evidence, i.e. the possibility of the assumption of the equivalence approval and denial of anything.

During the theological discussions, al-Ghazali has repeatedly resorted to what he called in his "Inconsistency of philosophers" by the method of opposition of paradoxes to paradoxes. Coming to the conclusion of the sophistical nature of the assumptions of the equivalence of evidence, al-Ghazali develops an antidote for the sophisticated theology. According to him, the gnoseological basis for the assumption of the equivalence of evidence is in the inability to use the apparatus of logic, as well as in the desire to postulate the coexistence of "equal" schools of kalam. Recognition of the impossibility of achieving a "single" truth is neither proof nor a way of coming to it [12].

However, al-Ghazali's criticism of kalam does not mean a complete and categorical denial of its necessity. The development of kalam was connected with its initial objective: the protection of the beliefs of the crowd. In the works "Ihya 'ulum al-din" and "Gems of the Quran" al-Ghazali compared mutakallims with the security guards of the caravan of pilgrims performing hajj.

Al-Ghazali's attitude to philosophy reflected his experience logicalisation of faith. In "Deliverance from Error" he pointed out that kalam at a certain stage of its development was raised by him to the level of the science of finding the truth and the essence of being, i.e. close to philosophy. However, it would be wrong to say that the turn of al-Ghazali to the study of philosophical subjects was the direct result of the awareness of the blind nature of the kalam. He criticizes the philosophy from the standpoint of kalam as a philosophical theology, and after "Inconsistency of philosophers" he did not stop writing one of the largest works in the field of kalam - "Moderation in dogmas".

The ideological evolution of al-Ghazali was very spontaneous. Describing various categories of seekers of truth, whom he met during the process of his development, al-Ghazali says: "the mutakallims are pretending to be persons", who are competent in judgment and understanding; batinits claim that they are the adherents of the indisputable teaching and differ from those who adopt knowledge from the infallible imam; the philosophers claim that they are the adherents of logic and evidence; the Sufis declare themselves the adherents of Sufi visions and revelations [13]. It is clear that al-Ghazali's attention is drawn to the cognitive aspects of their teachings. He wrote about what "saved him from delusions" and was not trying to describe a real path of his spiritual evolution. His dislike of philosophy is a philosophical struggle that was initially waged from the perspective of kalam and gradually led him to overcoming the latter's tendentiousness.

We cannot notice before Ghazali's coming to the Sufis any consideration and re-evaluation of his relationship with kalam, philosophy and batiniya. His first ideological and cognitive crisis took the form of total skepticism and was the beginning of the search for "the true nature of things" and "the essence of knowledge". It should be noted that skepticism is a prerequisite for all kinds of decisions that have no identical consequences. The probability of transformation of the skepticism of the thinker is mostly determined by the details of his educational formation, the conflicts of the cultural environment motivations and objectives of the thinker.

III. CONCLUSION

If the ideological development of al-Ghazali was deepened within the framework of the rationalistic traditions of fiqh and kalam, and the conflicts of cultural life widened the range of his gnoseological crisis and argued the need for reliable knowledge, its goal was to overcome these parties.

Skepticism, approved by al-Ghazali in search of the authentic knowledge, is a philosophical skepticism. It is not the result of "anti-philosophical spirit" of the cognizing spirit. However, it is rather acceptable to speak about some anti-philosophical motives of al-Ghazali before his work "Intentions of philosophers". But his following experience of controversy with the philosophers led to "cleansing" of those reasons. It can be clearly seen in the "Intentions of philosophers" and "Incoherence of philosophers".

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