

# Al-Ghazzali – As an Educational Thinker

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## Abstract

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*Al-Ghazzali was one of the greatest philosophers, thinkers and educationists. His philosophy of education laid stress upon the development of personality in which one should also know oneself. He wanted such type of education which would help a person to know himself and his relationship with his God and world. Therefore, education must contribute to the all round development of each individual—mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values. All human beings must be enabled to develop independent critical thinking and form their own judgment. We find Al-Ghazzali forestalling Descartes method of doubt, Hume’s skepticism, Kant’s criticism of pure reason and the spiritual empiricism of some of the philosophers of religion of our own times.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Abu-Hamid Ibn Mohammad al-Tusi al-Shafi Al-Ghazzali was born in A.D.1058 in Khorasan, Iran. His father died when he was still at a very young age. But he had the opportunity of getting education in the prevalent curriculum at Nishapur and Baghdad. He acquired a high standard of scholarship in religion and philosophy and was honoured by his appointment as a professor at the Nizamiyah University of Baghdad.

Al-Ghazzali was one of the original thinkers not only in the history of

Muslim philosophy but also in the history of human thought.

He was one of the leading Muslim thinkers who adhered mainly to the Sunnites, Ash-rites and sufis. He strongly opposed the Shi’ites, the mutazilites, the literalists and part of the theories of his contemporary philosophers. He has been sometimes acclaimed in both East and West as the greatest religious authority of Islam after the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him) and is by no means unworthy of this dignity. Muslims have given him the title of the Proof of Islam (hujjat-ul-Islam)

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and armament of religion (Zaynadin). The period in which Al-Ghazzali lived was marked by ferment in religious thought as well as in political conditions. Al-Ghazzali was born and bred in true Islamic environment. He made a determined bid to fight the forces of disruption in Islam at the intellectual level. He adopted teaching as his profession and imparted instruction in Islamic science.

### **HIS PHILOSOPHY**

He was one of the greatest philosophers similar to the Western philosophers like Socrates, Plato Descartes, Kant, Hume and John Lock. He has advocated that revelation is essential to recognise the reality and that is granted to the Messengers of God only by Almighty Allah.

Ghazzali's major contribution lies in religion, philosophy and sufism. A number of Muslim philosophers had been following and developing several view-points of Greek philosophy including the Neo-Platonic philosophy. In philosophy, Ghazzali upheld the approach of mathematics and science as essentially correct. However, he adopted the technique of Aristotelian logic and the Neo-Platonic procedure and employed these very tools to lay bare the flows and lacunas of the then prevalent Neo-Platonic philosophy and to diminish the negative influence of Aristotelians and excessive rationalism.

Al-Ghazzali's ethical philosophy is based on the theory that the fundamental elements of human nature, i.e. reason, self-assertion and a petition must work together in harmony observing the golden mean and under control of reason. In this case, virtues are produced. Further, he says that virtuous life is characterised by supremacy of the rational self and complete surrender to the will of God. Every act of a virtuous man is motivated by the desire to please God and to be near Him.

Al-Ghazzali divides virtues into two broad categories:

- (a) Those which are means to higher ends such as repentance, patience, fear of God and piety, etc.
- (b) Those which are means as well as ends, such as Absolute reliance on God (Twakkul) and thankfulness to God (Shukr).

Al-Ghazzali further says that knowledge has two aspects – the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical knowledge helps in the comprehension of transcendental world i.e. knowledge of God and mysteries of creation, etc. Thus, it includes metaphysics and the sciences. The practical knowledge lies in human conduct. The sciences are of two kinds viz, the religious sciences (Shariyya) and the intellectual sciences or philosophy (Aqliyya). The study of religious sciences is obligatory (Fard-Ain)

for all Muslims. While the study of philosophy and other sciences is obligatory for some people (Fard Ki faya), study of the former is obligatory for all Muslims because they are means of purification of soul which is ultimate end. The study of the latter is not binding on every Muslim if there are sufficient people to study these sciences to satisfy the needs of the community.

### **HIS EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

Al-Ghazzali has propounded his philosophy of education on the basis of his personal experience. His philosophy is very much similar to the philosophy of Plato. His philosophical thoughts and ideas had a considerable effect on education and his writings served to introduce logical thinking into the education thought. He has advocated that revelation is essential to recognise the reality and that is granted to the Messengers of God only by Almighty.

According to Al-Ghazzali, it is the prime duty of Muslims to reach reality through knowledge in accordance with Holy Quran. It is necessary to have religious vigour. He considers human mind as a simple slate that the teacher brushes. The understanding of Quran concerns not only the meaning and significance of its verses but also several broad problems related to it as a whole.

Al-Ghazzali's concept of knowledge represents the nature of knowledge in Islam. He believed that man has been endowed by God with all the powers needed

for the acquisition of knowledge of ultimate reality. This knowledge was derived through the intellect which is the innate rational faculty of man and which distinguishes him from animals. The highest form of knowledge is spiritual knowledge. This knowledge depends on intuition as well as effort. When man acquires this knowledge it is necessary that man should control his lower faculties, such as appetite, anger and self assertion.

Al-Ghazzali's aim of education was the development of character which includes the promotion of moral and ethical qualities such as obedience, humility, simplicity abhorrence of vice like pride, love of wealth and lying means, complete surrender to the will of God, reliance on God and thankfulness to Him.

The most important aim of education was to instil in the minds of the pupil the belief and ideas for which Islam stands. Al-Ghazzali entrusted the responsibility of training of the children to parents and teachers and they are held responsible for the shortcomings of the children under their charge.

Education is to draw out, not to cram, to unfold the capacities of the growing mind, strengthen the reasoning faculty, create an interest in the surrounding universe, in a world to excite a love of knowledge and impart the means of acquiring it. No educational system operates in a vacuum; it works in a given social, political and ethical milieu and supplies the required trained

manpower to community to run its profession.

The distinguishing feature of Islamic education is the place it gives to the Holy Quran and Hadith (Sunnah). The Holy Quran is the complete and final revelation so that it suffices for man's guidance and salvation and there is no other knowledge except based upon it and pointing to it that can guide and save man.

Al-Ghazzali makes it clear that intellect is the source and fountain head of knowledge as well as its fountain. Knowledge springs from it as the fruit from the tree, light from the sun and vision from eye.

True knowledge in Al-Ghazzali's views is knowledge of Almighty Allah, his books, his Prophets, the kingdom of earth and heaven as well as the knowledge of Shariah.

Al-Ghazzali had determined the aims and objectives of education in accordance with Islamic way of life. According to him, the objective of education is utility. His utility theory consists of individual as well as social phenomena. The objective of education is formation, construction and completion of manners so that man can distinguish between good and bad and abstain from evil. It will formulate the character of individual and reform the society.

The concept of curriculum by Al-Ghazzali is dynamic and flexible. He accepts spiritual as well as material curriculum for the students. If we go through procedures of teaching of Imam Ghazzali, we find that these

very procedures have been suggested by modern western educational experts also. Imam Ghazzali has suggested that teachers should have full command over the subject matter when they go to the class. They should teach the lesson with active co-operation and participation of the students. He emphasised the importance of previous knowledge of the students. Teacher should have love and sympathy for his pupils and should be embodiment of good manners and may emulate his example and thus, indirectly he should mould their personality. Teacher has to practice what he preaches.

Imam Ghazzali has also given great importance upon physical education of the child because physical health is required for mental health. He advocated for proper physical growth and development of the children. Imam Ghazzali was in agreement with the saying "sound mind in a sound body".

## CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be safely said that Imam Ghazzali had given thinking to the educational philosophy and problems in his days. Al-Ghazzali made major contribution in religion, philosophy and sufism. He discussed in detail the issues like reality or truth, human nature, mind and knowledge etc. His point of view and suggestions are very much similar to those which are presented by western thinkers and educationists.

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