

## AL-GHAZALI'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS RELEVANCE ON CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 A.D.) was one of the most influential Muslim thinkers. A jurist, logician, theologian, and philosopher, he was honored in the history of Islam with title of 'Hujjatul-Islam' (the Proof of Islam). Among his numerous contributions to the renewal of the intellectual life of the 5th Islamic century, he developed a theory of education rooted in his philosophy and aiming at improving the objectives and principles of education. In order to study the educational philosophy of Al-Ghazali and finding its relevance in the contemporary education system in India, the investigator scrutinized the primary and secondary data related to Al-Ghazali and also underwent through various draft reports and commissions in order to find its relevance in contemporary India. Thus philosophical and historical research methods were employed in order to conduct the study. The findings of the study revealed that for Al-Ghazali the purpose of society is to apply sharia, and the goal of man is to achieve happiness close to God. The modern class structure has ignored the fundamental aspiration of man to realize his best self. Man's faith is destroyed; he is deprived of his dignity as a moral being and is controlled chiefly by material forces. This is much against the cherished ideals of the Indian democratic system and therefore, every effort should be made to reawaken and reinductate the true sense of self in the people. The educational thought of Al-Ghazali is very significant today because modern education has lost much of its connection with the values of human life. He emphasized the need for a complete re-orientation of human values to fight against hedonism and commercial fetishes. Any educational system that is sound must be relevant to the existing needs of the people.*

**Key Words:** Al-Ghazali, Educational Philosophy, Relevance.

### Introduction

Al-Ghazali was born in 1058 A. D at Ghazala near Tus, Khorasan (present day Iran). He was born to a Persian family of modest means, whose members had a reputation for learning and an inclination towards Sufism. His father died when he was young, having entrusted one of his Sufi friends with the education of his two sons. The friend undertook that task until the money bequeathed by the father ran out, after that the friend advised the two brothers to enter a *madrasa*, where they would be afforded board and instruction. Al-Ghazali appears to have begun his elementary education at approximately age 7, studying Arabic, Persian, the Koran and the principles of religion. He went on to intermediate and higher education at a *madrasa*, where he studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Koranic exegesis) and hadith (Prophetic tradition). Towards the age of 15, Al-Ghazali moved to Jurjan (a flourishing center of learning at that time, some 160 kilometers distant from Tus) to study *fiqh* under Imam al-Isma'il. The following year, he returned to Tus, where he remained for three years, memorizing and endeavoring to understand what he had taken down from the masters, and continuing the study of *fiqh*. He then moved to Nishapur, where he studied *fiqh*, *kalam* (scholastic theology), logic and philosophy.

Al-Ghazali was one of the most influential Muslim thinkers. A jurist, logician, theologian, and philosopher, he is known in the history of Islam with the title of Hujjatul-Islam (the Proof of Islam) for the role he played in defending Islam against the trends of thought that existed at that time. Best known as medieval Islamic philosopher, he taught law in Baghdad, but in 1095 resigned for twelve years wandered in deserts as a Sufi mystic. In 1106 he returned to teaching, the most renowned Islamic theologian of his time. While resident as a professor at the Nizamiya madrasa in Baghdad, Al-Ghazali made a thorough study of philosophy, particularly Greek philosophy. The basic problem facing Ghazali was that of reconciling philosophy with religion. He resolved this conflict by maintaining that philosophy was correct in so far as it agreed with the principles of (Islamic) religion, and was flawed wherever it was at variance with it. As a prelude to his attacks on philosophy, he wrote a book in which he summarized the fundamentals of philosophical thought as known in his time, *Maqacid al-Falasifah* (The Aims of the Philosophers). That was followed by his famous work, *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers). He summed up his opposition to the philosophers in twenty major points, dealing with God, the universe and man. For Al-Ghazali, the world is a recent creation, bodies are resurrected into the hereafter along with their souls, and God knows both particulars and universals.

In 1095 (A.H. 488), at the age of 38, Al-Ghazali suddenly underwent a six month- long spiritual crisis, which may be briefly described as a violent internal conflict between rational intelligence and the spirit, between this world and the hereafter. He began by doubting the validity of existing doctrines and schools (knowledge as such), and eventually came to question the efficacy of the tools of knowledge. This crisis brought on a physical illness which prevented him from speaking or teaching and, having attained the truth by means of the light with which God had illuminated his heart, finally caused him to leave his post and renounce wealth, fame and influence. Al-Ghazali returned to Baghdad in 1097 (A.H. 490) and continued to live the life of a Sufi in the ribat of Abu Saied of Nishapur opposite the Nizamiya madrasa. He took up teaching again for a short time, expounding his *Ihya Ulum ad-Din*. He then went to his birthplace, Tus, where he continued to live as a Sufi and to write. It is apparently during this period that he completed the *Ihya Ulum ad-Din* and several other works of a clearly Sufi nature. After ten years of absence, Al-Ghazali went back to teaching at the Nizamiya *madrasa* at Nishapur in 1104 (A.H. 498), at the request of the Seljuq minister Fakhr ul-Mulk. Near his house he built a *khanqah* or Sufi hermitage, and it was in this period that he wrote *Minhaj al- Abidin* (The Path of the Worshippers), which appears to be a description of his way of life and that of his pupils: renunciation of this world, seclusion and cultivation of the innermost self. And so he continued until his death on 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1111 A.D (14<sup>TH</sup> OF JUMAD SANI 505).

On the day of his death he rose up in the early morning, performed an ablution and after offering prayers, asked his younger brother to fetch him shroud, and when it was presented to him, he kissed it and lying on his back wrapped himself in the shroud like a dead man, he uttered three words and breathed his last. Imam Ghazali wrote nearly 78 books on many subjects like tafseer, jurisprudence, hadith, politics, and education. Some of his famous writings are *keemya-e-saadat* (alchemy of happiness), *Mairajus-Saalikeen*, *Aqeedat-i-Misbah*, and *Ahya-ul-Ulumuddeen*. He is regarded as a reviver and Imam or leader by millions of Muslims today.

### **Educational Philosophy**

AI-Ghazali's philosophy of education represents the high point of Islamic thinking on education, in which his evident inclination towards reconciliation and the integration of various intellectual schools is apparent. Here he achieves a synthesis of legal, philosophical and mystical educational thinking. Ghazali was not primarily a philosopher of education; he was a philosopher of religion and ethics. His educational philosophy based on his personal experience, the philosophy, which he formulated over a period of 10 years, resembles to the philosophy of Plato. He used his personal experience and concluded that the reasons, which he calls sixth sense, can lead us to the truth. Divine revelation (Ilham) is superior to reason but is endowed to only selected individuals called prophets. The reason was given to human beings also has limitations and cannot acquire the absolute truth. Hence, it is obligatory for all human beings to obey the commandments sent to us through prophets from time to time. It is very much clear that the educational ideas of Ghazali are deeply influenced by religious philosophy and research. He thinks that human mind is like a clean slate and the teacher can transform it with the passage of time.

For AI-Ghazali, the purpose of society is to apply sharia, and the goal of man is to achieve happiness close to God. Therefore, education aims to cultivate man so that he abides by the teachings of religion, and is hence assured of salvation and happiness in the eternal life hereafter. He has determined the aims of education in accordance with the Islamic ways of life. According to him the objectives of education is a utility. His utility theory consists of the individual as well as social phenomenon. According to him, the objectives of education are formation, construction, and completion of manners so that man can distinguish between good and bad and abstain from evil. On the one hand, it will formulate the character of individual and on the other hand it will reform the society. So the aim is the betterment of individual and society.

Man is born as a tabula rasa, and children acquire personality, characteristics, and behavior through living in society and interacting with the environment. The family teaches the children its language, customs, and religious traditions, whose influence they cannot escape. Therefore, the main responsibility for children's education falls on the parents, who take credit for their probity and bear the burden of their errors; they are partners in everything the children do, and this responsibility is subsequently shared by the teachers. AI-Ghazali stresses the importance of childhood in character formation. A good upbringing will give children a good character and help them to live a righteous life; a bad upbringing will spoil their character and it will be difficult to bring them back to the straight and narrow path. It is therefore necessary to understand the special characteristics of this period in order to deal with the child in an effective and sound manner. Education should make the child aware of the laws of Islam through the study of Quran and Hadith. Thus education should make child firm in religious beliefs. Thus Ghazali formulates the objectives as under:

1. Facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and virtues.
2. Develop all aspects of individual's personality.
3. Motivate learner to promote virtue and forbid evil.
4. Foster the development of god conscious individuals.
5. Advance the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of the family, society and human kind in general.

It is important that boys should begin to attend maktab (elementary school) at an early age, for what is learned then is as engraved in stone. Those entrusted with the education of the boy at school should be aware of how his motivations develop and interests change from one period to another: a fascination with movement, games and amusement, followed by a love of finery and appearances (in infancy and childhood), then an interest in women and sex (adolescence), a yearning for leadership and domination (after the age of 20), and finally delight in the knowledge of God (around the age of 40). These changing interests can be used by educators to attract the boy to school, by offering first the lure of ball games, then ornaments and fine clothes, then responsibilities, and finally by awakening a longing for the hereafter.

In the elementary stage, children learn the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet's companions; they should be preserved from love poetry and the company of men of letters, both of which sow the seeds of corruption in souls. Children must be trained to obey their parents, teachers and elders, and to behave well towards their classmates. They should be prevented from boasting to their peers about their parent's wealth or the food they eat, their clothes and accessories. Rather, they should be taught modesty, generosity and civility. Attention is drawn to the potentially pernicious influence of the children's comrades on their character. They must therefore be advised that their friends should possess the following five qualities: intelligence, good morals, good character, abstemiousness and truthfulness. Education is not limited to training the mind and filling it with information, but involves all aspects - intellectual, religious, moral and physical dimensions of the personality of the learner. It is not enough to impart theoretical learning, but learning must be put into practice. True learning is that which affects behaviour and whereby the learner makes practical use of his knowledge. At times, Al-Ghazali the Sufi overshadows Al-Ghazali the educator: for instance, he advocates cutting the boy off from the world and its temptations in order for him to renounce it, and accustoming him to a simple, rough life in poverty and modesty. And yet the educator quickly reappears, for he feels that once the boy has left the school premises, he should be allowed to play suitable games in order to recover from the fatigue of study, and be freed from the constraints imposed upon him. However, he must not tire or overtax himself at play. Preventing the boy from playing and burdening him constantly with learning can only weary his heart and blunt his mind, spoiling his life and making him so despise study that he resorts to all manner of tricks to escape it.

### Curriculum

Ghazali strongly criticizes the curriculum of his time. He raises the basic question of criteria for selection of subject matter for curriculum. He studied the various curricula in his times and reached the conclusion that more time is spent on religious education and worldly education is completely ignored which is equally important. Ghazali divided his curriculum in two parts;

- Obligatory (*Farz-e-Ain*) Farz-e-Ain is the compulsory, or the early or elementary educational curriculum. *Farz-e-Ain* comprises, Tenets of the Quran, Hygiene, Logic and, reading of the Quran. *Farz-e-Ain* is meant to teach young people how to live their lives in the Islamic society, and how to socialize themselves properly.
- Optional (*Farz-e-Kifaya*) which are studied according to the wishes and capacities of the student. These are in turn divided into:
  - Revealed sciences, of which there are four: the fundamentals (the Quran, *Sunna*, *Ijma* and the teachings of the companions of the Prophet); the branches (*fiqh* and

- ethics); means (linguistics and grammar); and the accessories (reading, *tafsir*, the sources of *fiqh*, annals and genealogy); and
- Non-revealed sciences (medicine, mathematics, poetry, and history).

Farz-e-Ain is the early socialization part of education. Farz-e-Kifaya, on the other hand, is the economic and practical part of education; through acquiring the knowledge of the subjects related to Farz-e-Kifaya, people could earn their living. Al-Ghazali was very much concerned about the moral development of the society. Therefore he has paid much emphasis to this subject, and like Aristotle, Ghazali has also written extensively on the subject of morality in his magnum opus, *Kemiya-e-Saadat* (The Alchemy of Grace). Imam Ghazali has given the details of each and everything thing that a man does in his life from the offering of, eating, clothing to marriage and friendship.

He recommends beginning with the fundamental sciences: the Quran, followed by *sunna*, then *tafsir* and the Quranic sciences. These are to be followed by applied ethics—*fiqh*, then the sources of *fiqh*, etc. Al-Ghazali then divides each branch of knowledge into three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced (primary, secondary and higher), and he lists the books which may be studied at each level of the various sciences and subjects of study. In Al-Ghazali's view, education is not merely a process whereby the teacher imparts knowledge that the pupil may or may not absorb, after which teacher and pupil each go their separate ways. Rather, it is an 'interaction' affecting and benefiting teacher and pupil equally, the former gaining merit for giving instruction and the latter cultivating himself through the gaining of knowledge. Ghazali included industrial education, textile, agriculture, tailoring and hair cutting in the curriculum. This indicates that Ghazali's educational ideas are progressive. Ghazali also stresses the acquisition of philosophy and logic. With regard to poetry, Ghazali advises men not to waste their time with it, even if the composition or recitation of verses is not forbidden.

### **Role Of Teacher**

Teacher should be gentle to students and treat students like he is to treat his own children. He must not shame them through direct criticism; rather he must set an example, and teach through suggestions. The teacher should be flexible with every student, teaching them according to his competence and not too slow as to discourage them. The teachers should take into account the differences in character and ability between pupils, and deal with each one of them appropriately. The teachers should not push the pupils beyond their capacity, nor attempt to bring them to a level of knowledge which they cannot absorb, since that is counter-productive. Al-Ghazali attaches great importance to the climate in which teaching takes place, and to the kind of relations that are desirable; in doing so, he continues and reaffirms the Islamic traditions of education. For him, the teacher should be a model and an example, not merely a spreader or medium of knowledge. His work is not limited to the teaching of a particular subject; rather, it should encompass all aspects of the personality and life of the pupil. The pupil, in turn, has a duty to consider the teacher as a father, to whom he owes obedience and respect.

### Principles Governing Art of Teaching.

Al-Ghazali stresses that teaching should be linked to concrete situations and emphasized the need for various types of knowledge and skills. Whenever a particular knowledge or skill is needed, it should be taught in such a way as to meet that need and be functional. He also stresses that learning is only effective when it is put into practice and is aimed at inculcating the right habits rather than simply memorizing information. The teacher should pay attention to the interconnectedness of knowledge and the relations between its various branches. Finally, he counsels a gradual and patient approach in teaching. With respect to religious education, Ghazali recommends an early introduction to the fundamentals of religion through inculcation, memorization, and repetition, there being no need for understanding at first. A subsequent stage involves explanation, understanding and conscious practice. Thus he recommends the following methods and techniques of teaching:

**Simplifying the lesson:** Teachers should simplify the difficult concepts by stories, tales, etc otherwise his teaching will not be effective.

**Move from Simple to Complex:** This is a very important principle. Some teachers try to teach everything in the very start. This is very dangerous and can create very dull students. Ghazali stresses that teachers should first teach simpler concepts and when the students are motivated towards lesson, then he can introduce complex concepts.

**Proper Planning:** Al-Ghazali stresses the importance of planning and advises that teachers should do his preparation before teaching , for effective teaching.

**Affection:** The teachers should avoid the use of force. He should be like a father to his students and should use love and affection instead of corporal punishment. Use of force can lead to bad habits among students. Teacher and students should also have good social relationship.

**Avoid double standards:** Teacher is like a guide to students. He should not be a hypocrite and should breed good qualities like, honesty, good etiquette, good moral character etc.

**Abilities of students:** Ghazali stresses that while teaching the abilities of students should be kept in mind. Concepts, which are above the mental level of the students, will not make the teaching effective.

### Code Of Ethics For Students

Al-Ghazali proposes a 'code of ethics' whereby students should:

- a. Ensure that they are spiritually pure before they undertake the quest for knowledge;
- b. Respect the rights of their teachers and behave in a civil manner towards them;
- c. Beware, especially at the beginning of their studies, of paying too much attention to doctrinal controversies;
- d. Master the fundamentals of the praiseworthy sciences (linguistics, *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and *kalam*), and then specialize by studying one or more of those sciences in greater depth;

- e. Choose useful subjects in which to specialize, especially those that are conducive to salvation in the hereafter;
- f. Study each subject thoroughly before going on to another, bearing in mind the logical sequence and inter-connection of the various disciplines;
- g. Have as their main goal in their search for knowledge the cultivation and perfection of the innermost self in this world, and closeness to God in the hereafter, rather than the attainment of high office or the acquisition of wealth or fame.

### **Relevance Of Educational Philosophy Of Al-Ghazali**

Abu Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali has an important place among Muslim thinkers of social and political thought. His honour lies in the skill of dialects and philosophy. In addition to Islamic world, Western thinkers of social and political thought also recognize his grandeur and get guidance from his thoughts in many problems. Al-Ghazali's writings on education constitute the high point of thinking on the subject in the Islamic world. The theory of education which he elaborated is the most complete edifice relating to the field; it clearly defines the aims of education, lays out the path to be followed, and the means whereby the objectives can be achieved. From the 12th to 19th centuries, Islamic thinking on education was heavily influenced by al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali's major contribution lies in the refinement of speculative and metaphysical thought. Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education represents the high point of Islamic thinking on education, in which Al-Ghazali's evident inclination towards reconciliation and the integration of various intellectual schools is apparent. Here he achieves a synthesis of legal, philosophical and mystical educational thinking.

The modern class structure has ignored the fundamental aspiration of man to realise his best self. Man's faith is destroyed; he is deprived of his dignity as a moral being and is controlled chiefly by material forces. This is much against the cherished ideals of the Indian democratic system and therefore, every effort should be made to reawaken and reinductate the true sense of self in the people. Al-Ghazali's message in this context is very significant particularly because of its applicability to solve the complicated issues of the nation. The educational thought of Al-Ghazali is very significant today because modern education has lost much of its connection with the values of human life. He emphasized the need for a complete re-orientation of human values to fight against hedonism and commercial fetishes. Any educational system, which is sound, must be relevant to the existing needs of the people. In this context philosophy of Al-Ghazali is relevant as for him the objective of education is utility. His utility theory consists of individual as well as social phenomenon. According to him the objectives of education are formation, construction, and completion of manners so that man can distinguish between good and bad and abstain from evil. On the one hand it will formulate the character of individual and on the other hand it will reform the society. So the aim is betterment of individual and society. He was in favour of providing for the harmonious development of the individual and betterment of society as a whole.

“An ideal system of education should enable individuals to know and develop to the fullest their physical and intellectual potentialities and promote their awareness of social and human values, so that they can develop a strong character and live better lives and function as responsible members of the society. It is by transforming human beings that social transformation can be brought about”.

Al-Ghazali's thought stressed on the all-round development of personality and stressed that the changing interests of an individual in different stages of development should be kept in consideration while imparting education to the child. It is quite evident that the idea of Ghazali on the development of the individual personality is very much in line with the National policy of education and its recommendation. "In our national perception education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to all round development, material and spiritual" (NPE 1986).

Al-Ghazali stressed the teaching of Koran and the sayings of the Prophet's companions as they present a holistic view on the present world and the hereafter. Children must be trained to obey their parents, teachers and elders, and to behave well towards their classmates. Learning the basic fundamentals of religion and basic etiquettes of life comprise the essence of his philosophy and these values are most relevant in the present contemporary society, as man has lost a connection with the world and hereafter. Many of the problems of the present contemporary society will be overcome if we learn the basic fundamental principles of Islam; in this context his philosophy is highly relevant as this will help in the inculcation of traits like modesty, generosity, morality, truthfulness and civility. Education is not limited to training the mind and filling it with information, but involves all aspects - intellectual, religious, moral and physical dimensions of the personality of learner. It is not enough to impart theoretical learning; learning must be put into practice. True learning is that which affects behaviour and whereby the learner makes practical use of his knowledge.

Ghazali's philosophy of education gives more emphasis on the development of spiritual, moral and social values. His thought basically evolves from Quran and Sunnah and the essence of his thought in the development of character which includes development of moral and ethical qualities such as obedience, humanity, simplicity and abhorrence of pride, love of wealth. His philosophy of education can make us understand the methodology of inculcating the value education. In our multi-dimensional society education should foster universal and eternal values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people. In this context the following sub phrases under value education on page 36 of national policy on education 1986 modified in 1992 are quoted here under: "The growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus the need for a readjustment in curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of social and moral values."

Al-Ghazali desired that type of education which is for the welfare of whole community; for the awareness and prosperity of the community as a whole. Al-Ghazali in his concept of curriculum clearly stressed on those subjects which emphasize learning to include subjects like agriculture science, weaving, mathematics, arithmetic, medicine etc. His philosophy on the whole lay emphasis on the development of personality in which one should know oneself; he quotes a Hadith, saying: 'One who knows himself knows his God'. Therefore, Ghazali wanted such type of education that can help a person to know himself and his relationship with his God and the world. Education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibilities, and spiritual values. The above curriculum and subjects which were emphasised by Al-Ghazali are very much in relevance to 21st century as he prescribed rational subjects to be included along with religious subjects. The Janardan committee 1992 emphasised that value education has profound, positive content, based on our culture heritage, national and universal goals. The tenth year plan 2002-2007 emphasised that value based

education will be imparted which will focus on respect for elders and tolerance for other beliefs. Thus from University Education Commission to National Policy of Education and Sariprakasha committee, Janarden Reddy committee all have stressed value education through which there will be promotion of character and moral development this was also the aim of Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education which stresses upon the religious education for spiritual development, at the same time Al-Ghazali emphasized upon natural sciences and technological sciences for the welfare of the society. In Al-Ghazali's view, "The teacher is like a landlord who has surrendered to the teacher the barren wastes of his soul for tilling and cultivating." The teacher is generally compared to a luminous body, relating to light and illuminating the darkness of other soul. Ghazali mentioned that "a person has three fathers: one who begot him, another who fostered him, and a third who educate him, and the last is the best of all." It is obvious from this that Ghazali bestowed high profile to the teacher in reconstructing the system of education and community at large. He emphasized that teacher should develop his students character; he himself should have such a character that the students will be able learn from and imbibe his good qualities. The Report of Delor's Learning The Treasure Within (1993), has recommended that education be organized around the four icons of learning which, through out a personal life, will in a way be the pillars of knowledge. These icons are expressed regarding four catchy titles: Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to be, Learning to live together. The icons are beautifully called the four pillars on which the modern education needs to be rebuilt. These four pillars of education are not naturally exclusive as they have bearing on one another. Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education does encompass almost all the four pillars of education. Al-Ghazali is of the opinion that education is unending process, i.e. education starts at the cradle and ends at the grave.

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