CTATTI / ARTICLES

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AN EXAMINATION OF AL-GHAZALI'S METHODOLOGY IN ATTAINING THE STATE OF CERTAINTY

Introduction

Certainty is the state of definitely known which establishes the concept of beyond doubt or question. In Merriam-Webster dictionary the term certainty is used in the meanings of «assurance, conviction, doubtlessness and sureness». It refers to the «state of mind in which one is free from doubt or the quality or state of being impossible to avoid or evade». In Oxford Dictionary certainty refers to the «firm conviction that something is the case» as we say 'she knew with absolute certainty that they were dead'.

Certainty is an epistemic property of beliefs. It is the acceptance of a fact without any minute confusion and suspicion. A person is certain when he knows something is true, and has no doubts. Some philosophers take knowledge and certainty in a same way and make no difference between these two terms. In this connection, certainty is either the highest type of knowledge or merely superior to knowledge. The term «degrees of certainty» refers to describe how close we are to being certain. Thus certainty is the upper most limit of the knowledge or the state where no doubt exists.

The quest of certainty is as old as the philosophy itself is. Socrates and Plato began to search certainty and laid the foundations for syllogism and geometry. They thought that they could prove the knowledge by proving the geometric deductions for which Aristotle used the logic but later found tiny cracks in his perfect system.

While looking from Islamic perspective, we find the roots of certainty in the Holy Quran in a very unique dimension as the Holy Quran stated that:

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

«And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty» [Al Qur'an, 15: 99]

Likewise the Noble Quran, state of certainty is described by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) while angel *Jib reel* asked about *Ihsan*. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) described the characteristics of *Ihsan* that:

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لاَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

«To worship Allah as if you see Him, for even though you do not see Him, He sees you». [Qazvini, 1997]

Stated that academically, the search for the rational foundations in Islam might have begun by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as he used to prayer continuously: «God! Grant me knowledge of the ultimate nature of things». [Iqbal, 2009].

In Muslim philosophers, Al-Ghazali was the first philosopher who paid such special attention towards the certainty and made it a particular subject in philosophy. He applied several methods and techniques in order to accomplish the state of certainty. The research therefore intended to uncover the Al-Ghazali's experience for the certainty and possible means for its achievement.

Al-Ghazali's life: A Brief Account

Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Al-Ghazali is famous with the title of «*Hujjat ul Islam*» around the globe. He was a prominent jurist, philosopher and mystic of Islam as his contribution reflects the three major dimensions about the concept of Islamic rationality: inquiry on theoretical and philosophical grounds, legislation and mystical vies [Nasr, 2002]. «He was born at Tus, a city in Khrasaan, in Persia, in 450/1058. He got his early education in his own city and went afterwards to *Neshapur* for higher education». Al-Ghazali was a student of al-Juvayni (419-478AH) who earned the title of Imam al-Haramayn. After his death, Al-Ghazali was invited by Seljuq vizier, Nizam al-Mulk who became impressed by him and (in 484/1091) appointed him chief professor in the Nizamiyyah College in Baghdad. After about three years of study, he was able to write his well-known work, Tahafut al-Falasifah, in which he criticized the philosophers and defended Islam against Muslim philosophers, who sought to demonstrate certain speculative views in contrast with accepted Islamic teaching [Watt, 2010].

Then an important event occurred in his life and he passed through a period of skepticism. It was a spiritual crisis «that rendered him physically incapable of lecturing for a time» [Watt, 2010]. When he recovered from this crisis[1] «he began a quest for truth» [Watt, 1952]. He found two ways to achieve truth and certainty. One of them was the way of real sufis. He devoted his greatest work Ihya ulum al-din [the Revival of the Religious sciences] expounding this way. The other way was logic and its ways of reasoning. He wrote five works to expound this method [Watt, 1952]. Al-Ghazali passed away in 505/1111 in the age of 55. He wrote excellent books on different subjects including theology, Sufism, philosophy, and jurisprudence. These books are considered of high value among common Muslims as well as religious scholars.

Objectives of the Study

This study is particularly designed;

1. To explain the meanings of certainty and its importance in philosophy.

2. To uncover the Al-Ghazali's point of view about certainty.

3. To examine the Al-Ghazali's methodology for the accomplishment of certainty along with its means.

Literature Review

He «was essentially a theologian, a mystic and a jurist, fought sharply against each sect to in quest of truth. Among the things to which Al-Ghazali attached was the problem of certainty as he gave an ample amount of time and effort to attain the errorless knowledge. He described in his auto-biographical work: Almunqidh min al-dalal (Deliverance from Error), how much he suffered in seeking certain knowledge and truth in general [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1340 A.H]. Al-Ghazali was in quest of a method to achieve certain knowledge which he found in logic. It was an objective method and could be applied to every branch of knowledge. He also considered that there was another method or way to achieve certain knowledge, but that was subjective and only a few people could achieve certain knowledge by this way, i.e. the way of true Sufis [Ahmad, 1981].

Certainty in general is «the submissiveness and calmness of mind when it assents to a certain proposition» [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1340 A.H]. It is a common noun used in two different meanings by two groups of people:

1. Certainty as used by the philosophers, theologians [mutakallimun] and their opponents in discussion in general [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1340 A.H].

2. Certainty as used by the 'scholars of hereafter' such as the scholar-jurists, the Sufis and others [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1340 A.H].

According to Al-Ghazali «Certain knowledge is to know that a thing has such and such a quality accompanied by the affirmation that it [the thing] cannot be otherwise. If you attempted to entertain in your mind the possibility of error, or confusion, about it, this [i.e. the possibility of error] will definitely not occur. For, if the possibility of error is attached to it, then it is not certain» [Al-Ghazali, 1969].

Al-Ghazali's Methodology to Accomplish the State of Certainty

Inquiring things and reaching the reality by rational proofs was the nature of Al-Ghazali. He never accepted any idea, thought and dogma without rational or empirical proof. He writes about this quality that he was so eager in the quest of knowledge and real understanding of things. He was bestowed this quality in his instinct by Allah Almighty and not by his own effort or choice [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. One can see his quest for truth that once he had a heart attack due to getting confused in a matter of knowledge and could not talk for a long time [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

To accomplish the goal of certainty, he studied the human nature when he tried to differentiate the natural beliefs[2] and the beliefs which are imposed on an individual by external impact whether from his parents, teachers or society. He argued with the hadith of Holy Prophet [PBUH] that:

«كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ، فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ أَوْ يُنَصِّرَانِهِ أَوْ يُمَجِّسَانِهِ»

«Every child is born with a true faith of Islam (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone) and his parents convert him to Judaism or Christianity or Magianism» [Bukhari, 1422 A.H].

Al-Ghazali in this connection, tried to investigate the factors which make a man unbeliever weather he has born at Fitrah which is Islam according to above mentioned Hadith of Holy Prophet (PBUH). He wrote that He realized an internal quest of knowing the meaning of nature «*Fitrah*» and beliefs which were developed by the parents and teachers. He started analyzing these beliefs critically [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

By careful review of literature, Al-Ghazali's journey for the search of truth could be wisely divided into two phases. **Firstly**: he discarded his presuppositions and made himself impartial by getting rid of previous beliefs and then started to inquire the truth. He wrote about himself that he was daring in mounting from the lowland of

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[1] This crisis lasts about two months, and at its end he was healed – as he describes it – by a light which God cast into his breast and not through proof or argument.

[2] On which an infant is born and is also called *fitrah* according the tradition of Holy prophet (PBUH).

servile conformism to the highland of independent investigation. Moreover «the fetters of servile conformism fell away from him, and inherited beliefs lost their hold on him, when he was still quite young» [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. **Secondly:** From the age of twenty, he started to «scrutinize the creed of every sect and seek to lay bare the secrets of each faction's teaching with the aim of discriminating between the proponent of truth and the advocate of error, and between the faithful follower of tradition and the heterodox innovator» [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. He started this exercise from himself as a skeptic and then studied the existing schools of thought which included *Ilm-e-Kalam* (Theology), *Ilm-ul-hikmah* (Philosophy), *Batiniyyah* (Ahl-e-taleem), and *Tasawuf* (Mysticism) respectively. He was firm in disengaging the truth from amid the welter of the sects, despite the polarity of their means and methods [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

The age of Skepticism

Al-Ghazali's effort from skepticism to certainty reflects that he was skeptic in his nature and could not satisfy himself with popular and accepted beliefs. First he believed that the knowledge, attained by senses and reasoning is errorless but later he changed his point of view by thinking that the beliefs, based on senses and rationality are just like the beliefs of common people, who believe in appearance not reality. So he got into doubt about the authenticity of these two sources of knowledge and started criticizing them. He took sense data on trial first, and started his experiments on the sight which is the strongest sense among all other senses. He perceived that the sight observes the shadow standing still, not moving and gives the judgment that shadow is motionless. After sometimes it knows by observation that shadow was not motionless and it gradually moved from the point, it was before. In this way sense data made a judgment but reasoning refuted it on the basis of experience. After the examination of sense data, Al-Ghazali decided to rely upon rational data that belonged to the category of primary truths but there was also no assurance of authenticity. The reason was the possibility of another judge beyond the perception of reason, just like the reason refuted the validity of sense data. This experience raised an objection about the reliance upon rational data which made him skeptic and badly affected his health [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Al-Ghazali remained in the state of skepticism for two months and could not solve this mystery as he wrote that «During that time I was a skeptic in fact, but not in utterance and doctrine. At length God Most High cured me of that sickness». Now he relied upon the reasoning with certainty not by constructing the proof but by the effect of a light which Allah Almighty cast into his breast [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Al-Ghazali's Trail of Creed of different Sects

When Al-Ghazali's ailment was cured, he once again started his mission and assumed that the «categories of those seeking the truth were limited to four groups»:

1. The Mutakallimeen, who allege that they are men of independent judgment and reasoning.

2. The Philosophers, who maintain that they are the men of logic and apodictic demonstration.

3. The Btinites, who claim to be the unique possessors of al-ta'lim and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the Infallible Imam.

4. The Sufis, who claim to be the familiars of the Divine Presence and the men of mystic vision and illumination [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

After making these four categories, Al-Ghazali took all of them on trial one after another. He started to inquire the foundations of their beliefs, methodology, and compatibility of their claim with the truth. He keenly examined the science of Kalam, the way of philosophy, teachings of Batinis, and finally the path of Sufis respectively [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Examination of Ilm-e-Kalam

Al-Ghazali began with the science of Kalam and found that Ilm-e-Kalam was invented to preserve the creed of orthodox and to save from the confusions created by innovators. Moreover it was adequate to fulfill its own aim, but not for him [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

While criticizing the Ilm-e-Kalam, Al-Ghazali determined that the theologians accepted the premises either by uncritical acceptance or due to the public consensus or by simple accepting by deriving from Quran and Sunnah. Most of them were engaged to expose the inconsistency of their adversaries. For that the Kalam did not fulfill his requirement as it could not be the cure of his ailment. Furthermore it had no ability to dispel the darkness due to bewilderment about the differences dividing men [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Analysis of Philosophy

After finishing the task of *Ilm-e-kalam*, Al-Ghazali started to study philosophy without taking help from someone and became expert in less than two years. He critically studied philosophy about three years and became so familiar with the measure of its deceit and deception, and its precision and delusion, that he had no doubt about his thorough grasp of it [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. Furthermore he found that the discipline of philosophy has several divisions. Despite of this diversity in classification, all of them had the stigma of unbelief and godlessness. After

dealing with the discipline of philosophy Al-Ghazali pointed out its errors and found it inadequate for himself as it could not satisfy him. Al-Ghazali has also written a particular book on the inconsistencies of philosophy named «Incoherence of philosophy (*Tahafat-ul-Falasif*)», in which he took 20 issues about which Muslim philospher fell into delusion.

He criticized the methodology of the philosopher that «This is that in logic they bring together, for *apodeictic* demonstration, conditions known to lead undoubtedly to sure and certain knowledge. But when, in metaphysics, they finally come to discuss questions touching on religion, they cannot satisfy those conditions, but rather are extremely slipshod in applying them» [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. After getting aware of ups and downs in philosophy he demonstrated its contradictions and argued that «it cannot assure the truth because it does not produce certainty» [Nasr, 2002].

Test of Ahl-e-Taleem's Views

After examining the creed of philosophers, he took Ahl-e-Taleem on trial and showed the wrongness of their dogmas which he had also mentioned in several books: al-*Mustazhir*; The Proof of the Truth, The Detailed Exposition of the Disagreement, *al-Durj al-marqum bil-jadawil*, and The Correct Balance. He, after studying the beliefs and main tenets of Ahl-e-Taleem, established that *Ta'limites* have no cure which saves anyone from the darkness of conflicting opinions. They were incapable of having a sound proof for the existence of infallible imam from whom they take guidance. When Al-Ghazali asked several questions to Batinis about infallible Imam they could not answer a single question and referred him to the hidden Imam by saying that: «There is no alternative to making the journey to him». In fact they wasted their time and lived in search of infallible imam but could not get anything [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Examination of Sufism

Finally, Al-Ghazali started his journey on the path of Sufis. *Allama Iqbal* wrote about the experience of Al-Ghazali that his finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience, and there found an independent content for religion [Iqbal, 2009]. He found that Sufis' path is combination of theory and practice as they do only focus not upon knowledge but equally on actions. The core objective of their knowledge was the purification of lower self from wrong wishes and desires and to get rid of disgraceful habits in order to attain spiritual purification. For this, Al-Ghazali consulted the famous books of mysticism, such as The Food of Hearts by *Abu Talib al-Makki*, writings of *al-Harith al-Muhasibi, al-Junayd, al-Shibli, Abu Yazid al- Bistami,* and others of their masters. After studying the literature of Sufis, it was exposed to him that the objective of Sufis cannot be accomplish by study only, but rather by experience, state of ecstasy and the exchange of qualities [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980]. He, knew without any doubt that there is an immense weight of practicing knowledge to achieve the state of certainty as he argued with the tradition of Holy Prophet (PBUH) that:

«من عمل بما علم أورثه الله علم ما لم يعلم»

«Who will act upon his knowledge, God will bestow him such knowledge which he does not know» [Ibn Tamiyya, 1993].

In this connection he changed his way of living, spent about ten years on the path of Sufis and knew with certainty that Sufis followed the path of Allah, their way of live is the best amongst all categories, they are on the right and direct path, their ethics are best and no one can compete them in terms of intellect, wisdom and ethics. Due to the purification of soul, they attain certain and errorless knowledge and see the angels and souls of prophets, hear voices coming from them and learn the knowledge of useful things from them [Al-Al-Ghazali, 1980].

Research Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the Al-Ghazali's point of view about certainty and errorless knowledge. Therefore descriptive and qualitative research method was used to explore the concept of Al-Ghazali about certainty. In order to discover the Al-Ghazali's perception of errorless knowledge, books of Al-Ghazali were consulted. However secondary sources including research papers, theses, periodicals, were also pulled in as a supportive material which helped in leading towards conclusions. Relevant literature was also taken from Internet after careful assurance of its validity and authenticity.

Findings & Discussions

The review of literature found that Al-Ghazali started his struggle to attain state of certainty from the age of twenty which he continued till the last breath of his life. For that he studied the creed of different schools of thought and critically examined their validity and authenticity. After completing his research, he knew with certainty that Sufis' knowledge is definite, errorless, most authentic, and un-doubtful. He established his thesis by giving the example that the knowledge obtained by following the path of Sufis is comparable to actual seeing and handling: this is found only in the way of the Sufis. Furthermore he declared the path of Sufis as a noble mean to get light of prophecy and the only way to understand the reality of prophecy is the obedience of Sufis' path. He

shared his own mystical experience that he knew the true nature and special characters of prophecy by practicing the path of Sufis. To him, strong belief in prophecy would lead towards the certain and errorless knowledge. And it is understood that beyond the light of prophecy there is no light on earth from which illumination can be obtained.

Conclusion

In the light of cited literature the study established that Al-Ghazali made extreme efforts and utilized his maxim potential in the quest of truth and certain knowledge. He faced numerous obstacles and challenges but neither had he felt shame nor he disappointed at any stage. Every challenge made him more powerful and gave him a new spirit to do his task efficiently. In his journey in the quest of truth, first he got rid of presuppositions, later studied prevailing schools of thought of his time and critically analyzed their main tenets and doctrine. Al-Ghazali research for the attainment of certainty was not limited to a particular class but he extended the scope of his research to every educated class including Mutakallimeen, philosophers, Batinis, Sufis, worshipers, and even to irreligious nihilist. He, after ten years of research established that Sufis are the only people who have certain and errorless knowledge and they are most pious and intelligent on the surface of the earth. Moreover certain and error free knowledge can only be accomplished by following the path of Sufis and rest of the ways are failed in this regard. Al-Ghazali's work is very unique from others in a way that he provided rational foundations for the mystical experience, uncovered the methodology of Sufis, revealed benefits he received during his experience, and disclosed superiority and different levels of their knowledge.

Recommendations

By keeping in view the above findings and conclusion the study recommended that researchers should take guidance from the methodology of Al-Ghazali in quest of truth. Following few points reflect some suggestions and recommendations:

• The research should not be conducted only on the basis of literature but it is also important to observe on ground practices by taking in consideration existing patters of thought and behaviour.

• Both: theoretical and practical approaches should be employed into research and it must be applied and objective.

• The researchers should be the symbol of passion, sympathy, and humbleness. They should take guidance from the attitude of Al-Ghazali, face every challenge bravely in the quest of truth and must not give up in any situation. Moreover they should utilize their utmost energy to improve the quality of work and get accurate results.

• The researcher should spare himself from all kinds of presuppositions and be impartial from beginning to the findings and conclusions.

• Last but not least, it is very important to work from the rational point of view on he mystical experience as Al-Ghazali laid foundations for it.

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Muhammad Zulqarnain
An Examination of Al-Ghazali's Methodology in Attaining the State of Certainty

This paper encompassed a panorama of certainty and modes of its accomplishment in the light of Al-Ghazali's teachings. The purpose of this research was to explore the view point of Imam Al-Ghazali about certainty and means of its attainment. The method used for the research was descriptive and qualitative. The review of literature revealed that probably Al-Ghazali was the first and only person in the history, who made such an extreme effort in the quest of certainty. First he put away all prevailing beliefs, got rid of presuppositions and then started his struggle in search of truth by studying, observing and critically analyzing the existing schools of thought as each group claimed to be saved. In search of truth, he did not rely upon believers only but equally regarded the opinions of non believers irrespective of their creed and religion. By having a look upon methodological framework, trial of different creeds and experience for errorless knowledge, the research concluded that Al-Ghazali, in the beginning of his journey, believed in two ways (logic & path of Sufis) to attain certainty but later determined that certainty could only be attained by the means of mysticism which in his opinion, is to purify the lower self. Moreover he shared his experience and opened a gateway for further research by providing rational foundations for mystical experience.

Моххамед Zulqarnain
Вивчення методології Аль-Газалі для досягнення впевненості

Ця стаття охоплювала панораму визначеності та способів її досягнення у світлі вчення Аль-Газалі. Метою цього дослідження дослідити точку зору Імама Аль-Газалі щодо визначеності та засобів його досягнення. Метод, який був використаний для дослідження описовий. Огляд літератури показав, що, ймовірно, Аль-Газалі був першою і єдиною людиною в історії, яка доклала таких надзвичайних зусиль у пошуках визначеності. Спочатку він відкинув усі переважаючі переконання, позбувся припущень, а потім розпочав свою боротьбу в пошуку істини, вивчаючи, спостерігаючи та критично аналізуючи існуючі філософські школи, оскільки кожна група претендувала на спасіння. У пошуках істини він не покладався лише на віруючих, але однаково ставився до думок невіруючих, незалежно від їх віросповідання. Оглянувши методологічну базу, випробування різних віросповідань та досвід беззаперечного знання, у нашому дослідженні ми дійшли висновку, що Аль-Газалі на початку своєї подорожі розумів віру в двох вимірах (логіка та шлях суфіїв) для досягнення визначеності. Однак згодом визначив, що визначеності можна досягнути лише за допомогою містики, яка, на його думку, полягає в очищенні нижчого «я». Більше того, він поділився своїм досвідом і відкрив ворота для подальших досліджень, забезпечивши раціональні основи містичного досвіду.

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