

Imam Al Ghazali (1058 – 1111)

Historical Context

- Al Ghazali was born in 1058 AD in Tus, which lies within the Khorasan Province of Persia (Iran).
- He started to learn about Islam at the age of 7 by attending the local *madrassa* (school).
- He studied Arabic, Persian, the Qur'an and the principles of religion.



Historical Context

- He went on to intermediate and higher education at a *madrasa*.
- Here he studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Quran'ic exegesis) and *hadith* (Prophetic tradition).
- Towards the age of fifteen, Al Ghazali moved to Jurjan to study *fiqh*.
- He then moved to Nishapur, where he studied *fiqh*, *kalam* (scholastic theology), logic and, possibly, some philosophy. Al Ghazali was 23 at the time.
- He also began to write and study Sufism.

Historical Context

- At the age of 28 he moved on travelling to meet Nizam ul-Mulk, the Seljuq minister, and remained with him in his 'camp' for six years, during which time he lived the life of a 'court jurist'.
- He took part in political and learned disputes and wrote books until he was appointed as a professor to the Nizamiya *madrassa* at Baghdad, the most celebrated and important centre of science and teaching in the *Mashriq* (Islamic East) at that time.
- He worked there for 4 years.

Historical Context

- In 1095, at the age of 38, Al Ghazali suddenly underwent a six-month-long spiritual crisis; internal conflict between rational intelligence and the spirit, between this world and the hereafter.
- His crisis had two dimensions. He questioned the efficacy of the tools of knowledge; and he questioned his own intentions.
- This crisis brought on a physical illness which prevented him from speaking or teaching, finally causing him to leave his post and renounce wealth, fame and influence.

Historical Context

The Struggles in the Muslim World

- Al Ghazali played an important role in the political and intellectual controversies which were raging in the Islamic world at that time:
 - the struggle between philosophy and religion
 - the struggle between revelation and reason...
 - The struggle between *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and Sufi mysticism.

Historical Context

Philosophy vs Religion

- Ibn al Subki said: “He came at a time when people stood in dire need of replies against the philosophers than the darkest night stands in need of the light of the moon and stars.”
- He wrote the book titled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. He summed up his opposition to the philosophers in twenty major points, dealing with God, the universe and man.
 - However he was not completely against philosophy.
- His stance greatly weakened Greek philosophy in the Muslim world.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Philosophy

- Al-Ghazali resolved the conflict between philosophy and religion by maintaining that philosophy was correct in as far as it agreed with the principles of (Islamic) religion, and was flawed wherever it was at variance with it.
 - He addressed the tension arising between Muslims and the teachings of Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and other Greek writers, as many of their theories are based on un-Islamic assumptions.
- Some have argued that Ghazali killed the progress of science as a result of his attacks on philosophy.
 - However, this is not quite accurate – as Islam's progress continued and even increased after his time.

Al Ghazali's Impact on *Mantiq* (Logic)

- In his books such as *Miyar al-'ilm* (Criterion of Knowledge) and *Qistas al-Mustaqim* (The Just Balance), Al Ghazali argued for the importance of logic.
 - “I would not trust the knowledge of someone who does not know *mantiq* (logic)”
- His contribution was unique – because he derived key logical principles directly from the verses of the Qur'an.
- *Mantiq* entered the curriculum of *madrasas* (Islamic schools) across the Muslim world for centuries that followed.
- Later influential scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Suyuti rejected the science of *mantiq*.

Al Ghazali's Impact on *Kalam* (Theology)

- Before Al Ghazali's time there were great debates and the formation of sects within Sunni Islam.
 - Central to this debate was the role of '*aql* (reason) in theology in particular and religion in general.
 - The *Mu'tazilite* school was of particular concern at the time and Al Ghazali was a proponent of the *Asharite* school.
 - Al Ghazali was able to conclusively refute *Mu'tazilite* arguments using *Asharite* views.

Al Ghazali's Impact on *Kalam* (Theology)

- He helped to shape the criteria of determining orthodox faith and argued against sectarianism and *takfir* (excommunication) – through works such as *faysal tafriqa* (Studies in Islamic Philosophy) and *Ijlam al-awwam 'an 'ilm al-kalam* (A Return to Purity in Creed).
- Through this criteria Al Ghazali helped contribute to the plural nature of Sunni Islam.

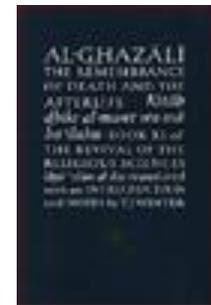
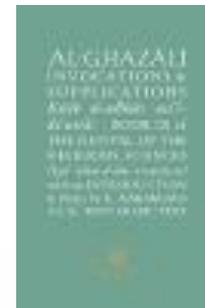
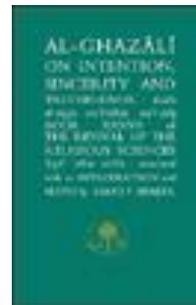
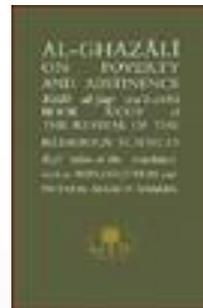
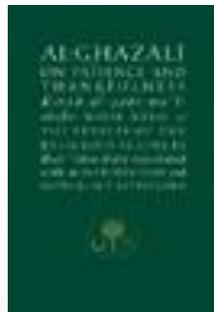
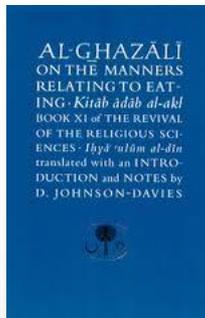
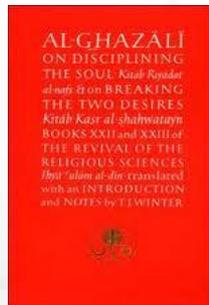
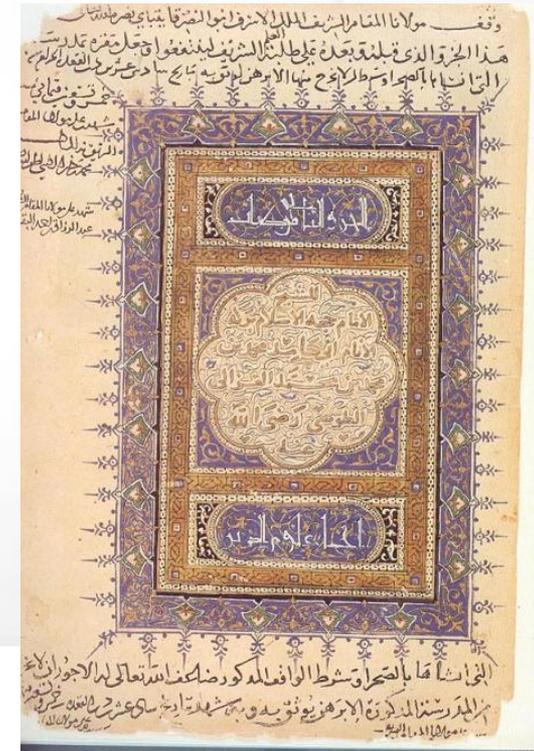
Historical Context

Reason vs Sufism

- Al Ghazali spent nearly two years in seclusion and wandering between Damascus, Jerusalem and Mecca.
- In the end, he came to appreciate Sufism and revelation (inspiration).
- It was during this period that he began work on his most important book; *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences).
 - 4 volumes
 - 1500 pages
 - Deals with devotional practice, social customs, the causes of spiritual decline and the means of salvation.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

- Al Ghazali sought and succeeded in creating a synergy of scholarly knowledge and evidence to support Islamic teachings.
- He however gained a greater in-depth understanding of Islam and inspiration through Sufism.



Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

- Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism that seeks to rid oneself of the ego, will and self-centred actions and thought in order to seek God's pleasure.
- As a result of his support, Sufism gained momentum in mainstream Islam. Sufism for Al Ghazali bridged the gap between the current transient world and the world of the hereafter.
- Al Ghazali reconciled *Shari'a* and Sufi mysticism at a time when Sufism was being rejected as being un-Islamic.

Al Ghazali's Impact on Sufism

- Al Ghazali's *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (four volumes) is one of the most widely read books in Islam
- It has become one of the most influential books of all time.
- It was translated into Latin and Hebrew and influenced many of the scholarly texts that are still used today in Christianity and Judaism.

In Summary

- The influence of Al Ghazali on Islamic thought may be summed up as follows:
 - He defended Sunni Islam against the tenets of philosophy and sectarianism.
 - He contributed to the weakening of all philosophy which was in contradiction with Islam.
 - He introduced several principles of logic and philosophy into the disciplines of Islamic law and theology.
 - He reconciled *shari'a* and Sufi mysticism (Islamic law and Islamic spirituality).
 - Today his works still form major parts of curriculums in Islamic studies around the world.

Resources

- Al Ghazali The Alchemist of Happiness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D4I6vVMITc>

- Dr. Timothy Winter: The life and works of al-Ghazali

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMWEggenO3c>

- Ghazali.org website

<http://www.ghazali.org/>

Presented By
Zuleyha Keskin
zkeskin@isra.edu.au