

SAVIOURS OF ISLAMIC SPIRIT

VOLUME 1

By
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Translated by
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**Academy of
Islamic Research and Publications
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I have the greatest pleasure in acknowledging my gratitude to Mr. Abrar Ahmad Khan who took the trouble of going through the manuscript and giving some very helpful suggestions. Likewise, I have greatly benefited from the labour put in by Mr. Muhammad Ghayas Uddin in checking the original references which was really a difficult and tiresome job. My thanks are also due to Mr. S. Maqbool Ahmad, Mr. Wali Ullah and a few other friends who ungrudgingly extended their help in the preparation of the manuscript, printing, etc.

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MOHIUDDIN AHMAD

TRANSLITERATION

The dashes to mark the long vowels. *ā* as in 'far', *ū* as in 'loose'; *ī* as in 'mean' have been retained, leaving other conventional signs. Two more signs, *ʿ* and *ʾ* representing the Arabic *ain* and *hamza* have also been retained. The sounds of *k* and *dj* used in the Encyclopædia of Islam have been replaced by *q* and *j* respectively, which are now in common use. Where the two consonants—*ch*, *dh*, *gh*, *kh*, *sh*, and *th*—have been used, these are to be sounded together, as, for example, *ch* in 'church', *sh* in 'ship' and *th* in 'think'. The sound of *gh* resembles *gz* as in 'exact', that of *kh* is like *ch* in Scottish *loch* or the German *ach* and *dh* gives the sound *th* in 'father'. Wherever the two consonants are desired to give their own sounds separately, an apostrophe has been inserted in between as, for example, in *Ad'ham*, *Is'haq*, etc.

However, where any Arabic word is in common use in English (as, *Cadi*) or its pronunciation is known to the English-speaking people (as, *Ghazali*) no signs have been used.

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PREFACE

A study circle formed under the name of "Jamā'at-i-Dā'wat-o-Tabligh" organised a series of lectures at Lucknow in Muharram, 1372 A. H., on certain important topics for the benefit of its members and others interested in academic and cultural advancement. The subject allotted to me for the discourse was "the History of Religious Preaching and the Revivalist Movement." The disquisition continued throughout the week. I had then jotted down some points as an aide-memoire for delivering these lectures but some of the listeners took down notes which were later on shown to me for publication of the discourse. I then realised that the subject required a detailed treatment as no exhaustive and complete dissertation on this important topic of Islamic history existed. It represented a serious gap in the Islamic literature which had to be filled in. The absence of any work on this subject has produced a misconceived notion even amongst the enlightened circles that the attempts for renovation and renaissance of the Muslim peoples were made from time to time but no continuous attempt at rejuvenating the *Millat* could be looked for in the annals of Islamic history. It is commonly held that Islam did produce towering personalities who possessed a rocking capacity to struggle against the order of the day but barring a few luminaries who were born after centuries, the reformers, leaders, and the 'ulema produced by Islam in the past were of no higher calibre than those born during its age of decadence, and they had hardly any intellectual or academic contribution to their credit. It is erroneously thought that only seven or eight outstanding personages could be claimed as an exception to the barren and unproductive era of Islamic intellectual history.

The ignorance in this regard may not appear to be striking but it has nevertheless its far-reaching consequences. This concept produces a sense of despondency and a sickening atmosphere.

It dashes all hopes in the innate vitality of Islam which has always produced men of redoubtable courage and conviction as cannot be found amongst any other people. There is thus absolutely no ground for any pessimism and despondency in Islam on this score.

The inference drawn by certain people in this regard is, however, not without a cause. Unfortunately we find either a glossary of events with Kings and Emperors as the central figures or biographical accounts of certain eminent luminaries in the vast treasure of Islamic literature but no account of the revivalist movement or intellectual history of the Muslim peoples encompassing the academic and speculative achievements of all those savants who have left an indelible mark on the world of Islam. These scholars have relentlessly fought against the forces of corruption, defended the Islamic precepts and teachings and rejuvenated the spirit of Islamic revival besides making valuable contributions to the intellectual and academic treasure of their people. In fact there is no gap at all in the intellectual history of Islam, it is only in the presentation of the history of its peoples, which needs urgently to be filled in. A history of religious revival and preaching in Islam would also be an account of the intellectual and academic movements which have seen successive ebbs and flows of Islamic reawakening in the past.

However, when the task was taken up, it was realised that an article or a small treatise will not do justice to the subject. It would be necessary to wade through the entire historical literature along with the available works on biography, arts and sciences, translations, etc, and re-evaluate and compile the available material in a particular manner. The leisure required for undertaking a task of this magnitude has never been available to the author, but as the crying need for such a volume impelled me to take up the work, it was not possible for me to write these pages without going through all the available source material.

It might be made clear that my purpose is neither to explain what is meant by revival nor to name the few outstanding personalities who are commonly known as revivalists (*mujaddids*) but to

present an account of the continuous effort made during the past thirteen hundred years for stimulating a spirit of reawakening among the Muslims, and bring into light those eminent savants who rose to the defence of Islam in order to arrest the onslaught of the evil forces, gave birth to various movements for upholding the Islamic morals and values and, finally, whose efforts made it possible for Islam to survive to this day. I would mention several persons in this treatise who cannot be called as *mujaddids* but who had worked for the renovation and regeneration of Islamic faith and practice and the subsequent generations of Muslims have ever remained indebted to them.

In writing these volumes the following points have been kept in view :

- (1) For presenting the view-point of any particular person or a movement started by him, his own writings or sayings have been relied upon. If these have been found inadequate, only then help has been taken from the writings or descriptions left by his friends, contemporaries and pupils. In the latter case more reliable and authentic sources have been given preference without placing undue reliance on those writers who were nearer to him in time ; trustworthy material has been used wherever it could be found, after careful verification of the facts
- (2) In portraying the biographical sketches and character of the personalities mentioned, light has been shed on the intellectual, cultural and academic temperament of the time in order to make a correct assessment of the achievement of the personage concerned in its true perspective. It is necessary to cast a glance on the then prevailing situation before a place could be assigned to any individual in history. Assessment of any character, out of its own context of time and place, according to modern concepts and values might appear to be a work of critical study, but there can hardly be anything more unjust to the personality so evaluated. The success or

failure of any individual can only be judged in the background of the conditions in which he has had an opportunity to strive for a cause, otherwise, the greatest and most eminent person can be depicted as a complete failure in the light of changed circumstances and according to the likes and dislikes of later historians. In fact, no historical figure, Islamic or otherwise, can claim a lasting recognition if it is viewed from a wrong angle.

- (3) Presentation of a few short and sketchy extracts from the writings of any author or thinker hardly does any justice to him for the thought, message and call of the author cannot be presented in a few isolated passages, nor the reader can feel any intimacy with the author by going through small passages. A bit lengthy extracts from the writings of important writers, reformers and thinkers have, therefore, been given so that the reader may himself be in a position to feel the impact of their message and make his own estimation of the personality he has been introduced. The writer of these pages has himself spent considerable time in going through the writings of these masters to feel the touch of the tenor and spirit of their call. The reader can easily discern from these pages the attitude of the author towards these beacons of moral and spiritual guidance and for this I need not apologise to those who would want me to be dryly objective.
- (4) I have not simply given extracts from the works of these masters but also tried to shed light on the priceless qualities of their head and heart, their endeavours to cultivate a living, all-pervading consciousness of the Almighty and, also, their moral excellence. The combination of consummate academic attainments with a burning desire to propitiate God and to earn His pleasure are the mark and symbol of these teachers of the old. The readers of these pages can rightly claim

to be allowed to partake in the efflorescence of spirit and heart instead of simply gaining acquaintance with these men of letters

- (5) The biographical sketches of historic personalities drawn out in these pages are not limited to a presentation of their achievements alone. Wherever their contemporaries or subsequent writers have criticised the ideas or writings of these persons, or an answer to such criticisms has been given, these have also been brought out but detractory and intemperate verdicts have not been included just to make this work appear more critical.

This is the first volume of this series. Originally I had an idea of describing the achievements of Ibn Taymiyah also in this volume and thus wanted to finish it with an account of the first eight centuries after the *Hijrah*. However, Ibn Taymiyah and his attainments were found to be so epoch-making that an exhaustive study of his times and work had to be accommodated in the second part of this work. The third and most probably the fourth part of the book would be devoted to the teachers of India who have been the fountainhead of call to religion and renovation of Islamic thought in the immediate past.

Lastly, the author has no hesitation in acknowledging the fact that the leisure, peace of mind and the wide study required for undertaking a stupendous task of this magnitude has not been available to him. Nevertheless, whatever was possible for him to do, is before the readers, and this too could not have been accomplished without the help and guidance from God Almighty.

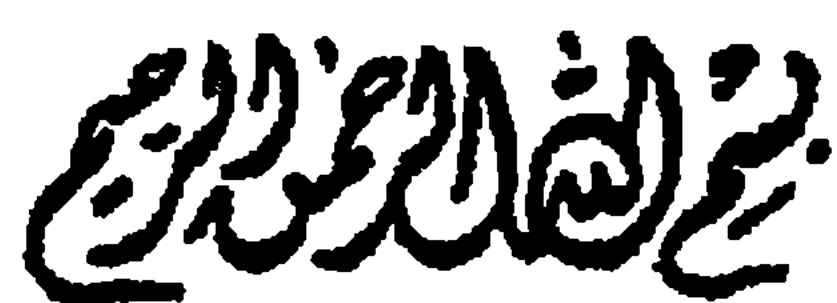
"There is no help save from Allah alone".

Rae Bareilly:

4th Rabi-ul-Awwal, 1374 A.H.

ABUL HASAN 'ALI

Daira Hazrat Shah 'Alamullah



PROLOGUE

THE NECESSITY OF REFORMATION AND RENOVATION AND ITS CONTINUITY IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

Life is Ever Changing :

Islam is the last message of God Almighty ; it has been presented in a complete form before the world, which has been told that .

“This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM”.

(Al-Mā'idah:3)

On the one hand God has been well-pleased to favour mankind with a perfect and final religion ; on the other, the fact is that life is on the move, ever-changing and evolving as someone has aptly said .

Life is ever youthful,

Continuously on the move, zestful.

The religion bestowed by Omniscient God is grounded in a faith in eternal values and transcendental facts, yet, it is also zestful, perpetually moving and sufficing for the transformations of life. God has endowed His religion with the capacity to turn over a new leaf with the changes ringing the world and thus provide human beings with an uninterrupted guidance in every

phase of their life It can help humanity to find its way at every turn and pass. It is not a culture of any particular age or the architecture of a particular place preserved in the shape of archaeological remains, but a living faith, a masterpiece of ingenuity and craftsmanship of the omniscient and Wise Creator.

That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Wise.

(Ya Sin 38)

*the doing of Allah Who perfecteth all things Lo ' He is
Informed of what ye do*

(An Namal 88)

Islamic Age—The Most Fast Changing Era :

In its being given as the last and universal religion, the *Ummah* of Islam had of necessity to be the last, widespread and universal brotherhood so that it may confront all the nations of the world at one time or the other and struggle against such odds as no other people have had to face It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that the time allocated to this *Ummah* should be so fast-moving and ever-changing as the world has not witnessed in its past history

Divine Arrangements for the Existence of Islam :

In order to enable the followers of Islam to meet the time-bound and extremely variable human needs changing according to circumstances, God has bestowed two things upon this *Ummah* First, the precepts and teachings of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Mohammad (may the peace of God be upon him), which can withstand all changes brought about by time and space, and solve all problems posed by the time-bound needs of humanity Secondly, the Lord has taken it upon Himself, and, indeed, history bears a testimony to the fact, that He shall always be raising such beacons of light and learning who will be translating the teachings and precepts of Islam into practical life and thus infusing a new life-blood into the veins of the *Ummah* for its march onwards This religion has been endowed with a peculiar capacity and vitality to produce such men of incomparably high character and

behaviour, as are not to be found in other nations. This is not merely fortuitous, but, in truth and reality, a fulfilment of the preordained arrangement made by God Almighty; for, the *Ummah* always did get a man of the same type and stature that it needed in a particular age

Attacks on Islam:

From the very inception of its career on this planet, Islam had been singled out for such fatal attacks as no other religion would have been able to withstand. There have been religions which had once conquered the then known world but they could not survive under an offensive much less serious than that Islam had to face. Unlike others, Islam not only overcame all its adversaries but was also successful in maintaining its original form and purity. If, on the one hand, Assassins posed a grave internal danger for the faith and spirit of Islam, the onslaught of the Crusaders and the invasion of the Mongols, on the other, were sufficient to efface it completely. Had there been any other religion placed in such an inviable position as Islam, it would certainly have lost its soul and today we would have had to look for it in the pages of history. Islam, however, not only survived in the face of all these internal and external threats to its very existence, but was also able to gain victories in entirely new fields. Islam was continuously called upon to resist the onslaught of innovations, deviations and misguided interpretations of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, foreign traditions, heretical rites of the worship of saints, relics and tombs, speculative thought, materialism, epicureanism and godlessness, and, indeed, it sometimes appeared as if Islam would not be able to weather the storm, but the conscience of its followers always refused to strike a compromise with the evil, and Islam emerged triumphantly on each occasion. In every age, it produced a man of God who attacked these innovations and deviations with the full weight of unshakable conviction and restored the true spirit of the faith; reaffirmed the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet against the heretical rites, customs and foreign influences, propounded the teachings of Islam to

contradict speculative thought and materialistic precepts, raised the banner of revolt in the face of despots and emperors; condemned opulence, luxury and indolence of the rich and enunciated the teachings of Islam as the sole valid source of religious, moral and political advancement. They provided a new driving force, a new life to the Muslims of their time. These scholars of impeccable worth and ability possessed the priceless gift of intellectual, moral and religious capabilities and were beacons of light for their contemporaries. Each one of these was capable enough to expose the manifestations of the *Ignorance* of his age and to bring into light the correct and unalloyed teachings of Islam before the people. This is a clear evidence of the fact that God Almighty has decided to keep this religion alive so that it may ultimately provide guidance to the wayworn humanity. The fact of the matter is that God has ordained that the task entrusted earlier to the prophets and apostles will have to be accomplished by the followers of the last Prophet.

Absence of Revivalists in other Faiths :

We find extremely few persons who have revived and renovated other religions. The absence of such teachers for hundreds or rather thousands of years in other religions is striking enough. There has hardly been any renovator who could pull down the innovations and deviations which had found their way into other religions, restore the original purity, give a call to shed the accretions, decry the foreign elements, rites and customs, wage a war against the inroads of materialistic and pleasure-seeking ideas and enlighten the hearts of his co-religionists by his faith, true spiritualism and a personal example of ennobling sacrifice for his cause.

Christianity can particularly be cited as a case in point. It deviated from its path in the middle of its first century and deteriorated from a monotheistic faith to a polytheistic cult—such an early retrogression is not to be found elsewhere. It became an admixture of the Greek and Buddhist religious thoughts, and, what is noteworthy, this happened through the hands of its greatest mentor and teacher, St Paul (10—65 A.D.). The transformation

was really from one world to another, changing its shape and content to such an extent that only the name and a few rites of the former could survive in the new religion. Ernest De Bunsen describes the mutilation undergone by Christianity in these words :

“The doctrinal system recorded in the new Testament is not that which Jesus Christ has solemnly preached by word and deed. Not in Jesus, but in Paul, the Jewish and Christian dissenter, with his hidden wisdom, with his figurative interpretation of the Scriptures as being full of types and prophecies of future things, lies the principal reason for the existing dissension between Christians on the one side, and Jews and Mahomedans on the other. Following Stephen, the promulgator and developer of Essenic doctrines, Paul has brought the author of Christianity in connection with Buddhist tradition. Paul has laid the foundation to that amalgamation of antagonistic traditions which can be traced in the New Testament-Scriptures, and which has presented to the World an essentially non-historical image of Christ. Not Jesus, but Paul and the later gnostics have framed the principal doctrines which during eighteen centuries have been recognised as the foundation of orthodox Christianity¹.”

During all these years, and even today, Christendom has been treading the path shown by St Paul. It could not produce a man who would have revolted against the antagonistic traditions which were made a part and parcel of Christianity by St. Paul. No body tried for centuries to bring back the religion of Jesus Christ to the point where the exalted teacher and his disciples had left it. At last Martin Luther (1483—1546) raised the banner of Reformation in Germany in the sixteenth century, but even his effort was limited to certain specific issues; the movement did not aim at bringing back the Christendom to the teachings of Jesus Christ nor did it represent a revolt against the wrong direction

¹ De Bunsen : p 128

that Christianity had been forced to adopt. Thus Christianity could not produce any revolutionary, and, at the same time, a successful movement for its reformation for about fifteen centuries. Christian scholars too admit the fact that no mentor or movement could manage to accomplish a reformation of Christianity during the first fifteen hundred years of its career.

J. B. Mullinger writes in his article on "Reformation" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* :

"If, however, we endeavour to assign the causes which prevented the Reformation from being carried even to but partial success long prior to the 16th century, we can have no difficulty in deciding that foremost among them must be placed the manner in which the medieval mind was fettered by a servile regard for precedent. To the men of the Middle ages, whether educated or uneducated, no measure of reform seemed defensible which appeared in the light of innovation"¹

The same writer continues at another place in the same article

"The complete failure of these successive efforts to bring about any comprehensive measure of church reform is a familiar fact in European history"²

And, again

"Not a few, and some very memorable, efforts had been made before the 16th century to bring about a reformation of doctrine, but these had almost invariably been promptly visited with the censure of the church"²

After Martin Luther, no other person raised a voice against the senseless doctrines of the Church and papal supremacy, even to the limited extent that Luther did in the sixteenth century. Christianity thus continued its journey uninterrupted on the path it was forced to tread. At last, the Church lost the influence it wielded on the Christendom and gave place to crass materialism.

1 E B R Vol XX, p 320

2 *Ibid*, p 321

The religion of the West today is nothing but materialism, yet, Christianity has been unable to bring forth a single individual who could have combated the evils of materialism, brought back the West to the fountain-head of true religion, restored faith in true Christianity and upheld the moral and spiritual values against utilitarian, pleasure-seeking norms of the present-day sensate culture. Instead of accepting the challenge of the modern age and finding out solutions to the present problems within the religious view of life and the world, the West appears to have lost all hope in Christianity itself.

Almost the same story was repeated in the East also. Hinduism lost its way by asundering its relation with the Creator of the Universe, giving up its simplicity and depriving itself of the moral and spiritual vitality. It became more an impracticable and complicated system of speculative thought by losing the chord of unalloyed monotheism and equality of mankind, for, these are the two basic tenets on which any religion can flourish, with its roots deep into the soul of man and branches providing shade and solace to the human beings.

Upanishadic writers tried their level best to put a stop to this contamination by totally discarding the rituals that had gained a foothold into Hinduism, and replacing it by philosophical doctrines—a conceptual interpretation of the faith. These elucidations being grounded in pantheistic monism or attaining unity through plurality were acclaimed in the literary and intellectual circles but the masses, who were intellectually at a lower level and yearned for rituals and practical manifestation of the monistic doctrines, remained unimpressed by the idealism of the *Upanishads*. The result was that Hinduism gradually lost its vitality; dissatisfaction and incredulity gained ground and the revolt against the Brahmanic order found expression in Buddhism in the sixth century B.C.

Buddha founded a new religion (if it can be so named, for Buddhism eliminated the concepts of Divinity, Hereafter and requital—the essential ingredients for any religion) which opposed the then prevalent caste system and Brahmanic ritual order, sought

annihilation of human misery through suppression of all desires—the will-to-live and will-to-possess—and commended moral behaviour, right mental attitude, non-violence, kindness and social service. It rapidly spread to south-east Asia and a few other countries.

Buddhism, however, soon deviated from the teachings of its founder. Incorporating into its system the idol worship and ritualism against which Buddhism had started its career, there remained nothing to distinguish it from Hinduism except the numerous categories of gods and goddesses to which the latter owed allegiance. Buddhism was ever willing to adapt itself to the environment of local conditions where it spread, it was divided into numerous sects, incorporated superstitions, complicated ideas and concepts and degenerated into a cess-pool of moral corruption. Prof Ishwar Topa observes in *Hindustani Tamaddun*

“... the Kingdom that was established under the patronage of Buddhism began to present a vast scene of idolatry. The atmosphere in the monasteries was changing and heretic innovations were being introduced one after another.”¹

The degeneration of Buddhism has been described thus by Jawahar Lal Nehru in the *Discovery of India*

“Brahmanism made of Buddha an *avatar*, a god. So did Buddhism. The Mahayana doctrine spread rapidly, but it lost in quality and distinctiveness what it gained in extent. The monasteries became rich centres of vested interests, and their discipline became lax. Magic and superstition crept into popular forms of worship. There was a progressive degeneration of Buddhism in India after the first millennium of its existence. Mrs Rhys Davis points out its diseased state during that period. ‘Under the overpowering influence of these sickly imaginations the moral teachings of Gautama have been almost hid from view. The theories grew and flourished, each new step, each new

1 Dr Ishwar Topa, Vol I, pp 137-138

hypothesis demanded another, until the whole sky was filled with forgeries of the brain, and the nobler and simpler lessons of the founder of the religion were smothered beneath the glittering mass of metaphysical subtleties¹ . . . There were several bright periods subsequently and many remarkable men arose. But both Brahminism and Buddhism deteriorated and degrading practices grew up in them. It became difficult to distinguish the two²

In none of the countries in which Buddhism had spread a person was born during the long period of its rule, who could reform the degenerated Buddhism, infuse the breath of new life into it and bring it back to the teachings of Gautama

Hinduism gradually absorbed Buddhism into itself and finally Sankaracharya banished it almost totally from India in the eighth century by reviving the old Hindu faith. Hardly any trace of Buddhism was left in India, wherever it still survived, it was little more than a decadent, local cult of no importance. On the other hand, Sankaracharya, endowed with intelligence, courage and religious fervour succeeded in eliminating Buddhism from India but he could not or perhaps never intended to revive the ancient Hindu religion in its original and pristine purity by inculcating faith in the unity of the Supreme Being, direct relationship between man and God, equality and social justice. As a result, both the Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, still survive with the sickly characteristics of their decadent state viz superstitious beliefs and rituals, idolatry and caste system. V. S. Ghate, the late Professor of Sanskrit in Elphinstone College, Bombay, writing on Sankaracharya in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* says that 'the greatest object of Sankara's labours was the revival of the system of religion and philosophy taught in the *Upanisads*³'. Sankara, succeeded in putting down the heterodox systems and establishing the doctrine of pantheistic monism, as presented in

1 Taken from Radhakrishnan's '*Indian Philosophy*'

2 Nehru . pp 141-142

3 E R E , p 186

the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagwad Gita*, but he 'did not attack or destroy idolatory'¹ Sankara, condemned all ritualism and *Karama* and at the same time defended the worship of popular gods, which was to him a 'symbolism rather than idolatory'.² Sankara considered idolatory a necessity at one stage of religious growth which is either given up or suffered to remain from its harmlessness when the religious spirit is mature. Thus Sankara 'allowed idols as symbols of the great infinite for those who cannot rise themselves to the comprehension of the one, changeless, non-qualified *Brahman*'²

In this way all the efforts made from the time of Sankaracharya down to Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi to reform the eastern religions proved fruitless to renovate Hinduism and Buddhism in a manner to make them compatible with revelation, religious urge of humanity and the requirements of changing times. These religions have, as a result of this stagnation, succumbed to materialism, the vast areas of human life and behaviour have drifted beyond their reach while they have themselves taken shelter behind temples and shrines, soulless rituals and traditions. Any number of obscurantist movements working for the revival of the ancient Indian languages and culture can be seen at work in the country today but none is capable of giving a soul-stirring call inviting people back to religion by reinterpreting the true content of religious and moral faith in the light of current needs.

No religion can maintain its vigour for long and offer a satisfying answer to the questions of ever-changing life unless it can produce guides and standard-bearers who can infuse a breath of new life into its followers through their personal example of unflinching faith, moral and spiritual excellence, immaculate sincerity, heroic sacrifice, self-confidence, ardent zeal, intellectual eminence and erudite scholarship. Life always poses new problems, temptations of flesh are ever on its side, materialistic urge in man always impels him to take the ways of self-indulgence and

¹ E R E , p 189

² *Ibid*

licentiousness, and, at the same time, we have always had men who were ardent and zealous supporters of the epicurean view and affluent living, materialistic brilliance and worldly success. Therefore, unless a religion also gets indefatigable defenders, renovators and redeemers who can face the challenge of atheism and materialism, it cannot hope to remain a living force for its followers for long.

Defence Against Heresy ·

History bears a testimony to the fact that there has never been a spell, however brief, during the past one and a half thousand years when the message of Islam was eclipsed or its teachings were engulfed by heresy, and the Islamic conscience became dormant enough to accept a contaminated faith. Whenever an effort was made from any quarter whatsoever to distort the tenets of Islam, pervert or falsify its teachings, or it was attacked by sensist-materialism, some one invariably came forward to accept the challenge and fight it out to the grief of Islam's adversary. History records many a powerful movement in its day, which posed a danger for Islam but now it is difficult to find out even the true impact of its thought. Only a few people know today what *Qadriyah* (Rationalists believing in free will), *Fahmiyah* (Determinists), *Itizāl* (Dissenters), creation of the Qur'ān, Existentialist Monism, *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, etc., exactly mean, although these represented, at one time or the other, very important schools of thought and, with the most powerful imperial powers of their day and some extremely learned and able persons at their back they had threatened to stifle Islam. Finally, however, it was Islam which gained ascendancy over these contending forces. These powerful movements are known today as simply different schools of thought and are to be found now in philosophical and dialectical treatises. This tradition of struggle against un-Islam, the spirit to preserve and renovate the pristine teachings of the faith and the effort to infuse people with a revolutionary spirit to re-assert the divine message are as old as Islam itself.

Lost Sources of History :

The responsibility for not bringing to light this memorable chapter of Islamic History does not exclusively rest with the historians. All those persons are equally responsible who refuse to accord recognition to the works not formally categorised as historical literature and catalogued as such in one or the other library. A vast treasure of information on the social, political and historical events of the bygone days is in fact to be found in the religious works which can serve as a valuable source of history. These are the writings of the religious savants and scholars wherein they have laid bare their innermost feelings, given numerous accounts of the incidents they or their contemporaries had come across, quoted their teachers and mentors and recorded proceedings of the profound and heartfelt reunions of their masters and fellows. There are compilations of letters and discourses from which we can gain access to the thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions of their writers. There are also monographs written for the refutation of innovations and deviations or to censure the wayward sections of society. If one could extend his vision to all these writings and had had time to cull out relevant data from these works, a complete and detailed history of Islamic missionary effort could be written to show that the effort to re-kindle the fire of religious ardour and dynamic energy into the followers of Islam has never ceased for a moment and that the Muslims too have never remained cold or indifferent to the call.

Legacy of Islam :

This is a legacy of Islam which we have inherited. But, by legacy we do not mean here a 'bequest', for Islam is a living religion. What we have really inherited is the treasure consisting of the sureness of conviction, and immutable faith, Traditions of the Prophet, higher moral values, canonical laws and the magnificent Islamic literature which has been bequeathed to us by every single individual who ever worked for the establishment of the kingdom of God, braved the dangers of ignorance and materi-

alism, gave a call for the *Din* of Allah, revived the teachings of Islam and filled the people with faith and enthusiasm. In truth and reality, all those persons who have re-oriented Islam through painstaking researches into its original sources and re-interpretation of its doctrines, defended Islam against philosophies and schools of thought incompatible with it; saved it from discord and turmoil, compiled the Traditions of the Prophet or presided over different schools of *Fiqah*; showed to others the path of temperance and moderation, censured the society for its waywardness and made it turn from that path, dispelled the doubts by examining and elucidating the fundamentals of reason and logic, founded the new science of dialectics; carried on the work left by prophets and apostles of God, filled the people with zeal and self-confidence in their own inherent vitality; made the most inveterate enemies of Islam to acknowledge its truth—in short, all those who have pressed their spiritual, moral and intellectual capabilities to the service of the faith and, not unoften, accomplished what emperors and conquerors could never have achieved—have contributed to the legacy now owned by us and deserve our respect and approbation. Had not these defenders of Islam worked with ardent zeal and immaculate sincerity and made heroic sacrifices for the cause held dear by them, we would not have inherited what has been recounted in this volume and which still contains a reservoir of guidance and inspiration for us. We can be rightly proud of these ancestors of ours and present with confidence the story of their work and achievements before other nations

The writer of these pages has endeavoured to depict the picture of these eminent personalities and described what in his judgment can rightly be ascribed as their accomplishment in the field of Islamic revival and renovation



CHAPTER I

UMAR IBN ABDUL AZIZ

Reformist Endeavours of the First Century :

Soon after the *Khilafat-i-Rāshida* (the right-guided caliphate) came to an end and the Umayyad empire, which was more Arab than Islamic, consolidated itself, the need for reformation and renovation in Islam was felt keenly. Customs, traditions and remembrances of the pagan past, which had been discredited and repressed under the impact of the Prophet's teachings and the vigilant eye of the *Khilafat-i-Rāshida*, began to re-assert themselves among the new Arab converts to Islam. The then Government was not organised according to the dictates of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*; its guiding lights were Arab diplomacy, expediency and interest of the State. Arab racialism, tribal pride, partisan spirit and nepotism, regarded as unpardonable sins during the days of the *Khilafat-i-Rāshida*, became the hall-mark of the new aristocracy. The unruly spirit of the Arabs, which had sought asylum in the far off deserts, returned again to re-assert itself; extravagance, pretentiousness and boastfulness took the place of virtuous deeds and moral excellence.¹ *Bait-ul-māl* (the State

1 The then mentality is aptly demonstrated by Abul Faraj Isb'hani in his book '*Aghāni*', in which he has related how two Arab Chiefs of the Umayyad period, Haushab and 'Ikramah, vyingly challenged each other about the quantity of food required to feed the household and guests of each. As Haushab was likely to win in the contest, 'Ikramah purchased several hundred bags of flour, distributed it amongst his tribesmen for kneading and asked them to pile up the dough in a pit which was covered with grass. He then managed to get Haushab's horse pass over the pit. As the poor beast fell into the pit, its neck and head being only visible above the dough, 'Ikramah's fame about the quantity of flour required to feed his tribe soon spread far and wide, and many poets sang of his greatness. (*Ranāt ul-Mathalith* Vol I, pp 176-177)

Exchequer) became personal property of the Caliphs who wasted public money on professional poets, eulogists, jugglers and buffoons. The courtiers of the rulers began to be accorded a preferential treatment which gave them heart to break the law of the land ¹. Music and singing grew almost to a craze ².

The extravagant rulers, surrounded by dissolute parasites who flocked to the capital, demoralised the society and produced an aristocracy resembling the pagan Arab wastrels of the age of *Ignorance* in morals and behaviour. It appeared as if the pre-Islamic *Ignorance* had returned with a vendetta to settle its accounts of the past forty years with Islam.

Religious Teachers of the Ummayyad period :

Although crass materialism had captured the soul of the ruling classes during the Ummayyad period, the masses had still not forsaken the moral values and the deep-seated deference for Islamic teachings. The regard for moral worth and tenets of Islam was due mainly to those scholars of impeccable worth and ability who were held in high esteem by the masses for their moral and spiritual excellence, selflessness, piety, sagacity and beneficence. Outside the governmental circles these persons wielded tremendous influence over the people which acted as a corrective force and saved the masses from falling a prey to the pull of worldly temptations. The person most respected and loved during the period was ‘Alī ibn Husain (Zainul ‘Abdīn). In the simple, pure and saintly life led by him, ‘Alī ibn Husain had no peer. Once Hisham ibn ‘Abdul-Malik, the crown prince, came to the Ka‘aba for *Tawāf* (circumambulation) but owing to

1 The famous Christian poet Akhtal (d. 59/701) once came completely drunk, in the court of Caliph ‘Abdul-Malik Ibn Marwan, wine dripping from his beard and the cross on his chest, but nobody had the courage to remonstrate him. (*Aghāni*, Vol VII, pp 177-178)

2 Once a famous singer of Iraq Hunain, visited Madīna along with his party. Such a large crowd gathered to hear his recital that the roof of the house in which he was singing gave way and Hunain died after receiving severe injuries. (*Aghāni*, Vol II, pp 122-123)

the huge gathering he could not reach the *Hajr-i-Aswad*. He, therefore, sat down to wait till he could get a chance to kiss it. In the meantime 'Ali ibn Husain arrived and the people at once cleared the way for him to make the *Tawāf* and kiss *Hajr-i-Aswad*. Everyone present in the Ka'aba received 'Ali ibn Husain with the utmost deference. At last Hisham, pretending as if he did not know 'Ali ibn Husain, asked who he was. The poet Farzdaq, who happened to be present on the occasion instantaneously composed an introductory ode for 'Ali ibn Husain. It is reported that certain additions were made to this famous ode later on but it is still regarded as a masterpiece of Arabic poetry. It opened with the verse :

Pebbles and paths of Mecca affirm his virtue ;

The House of God knows him well as the environs do.

Other highly reputed religious scholars¹ of outstanding piety during the Umayyad period were Hasan al-Muthanna, his son 'Abdullah-al-Mahadh, Sālim ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abū Bakr, Sa'eed ibn Musay'ib and 'Urwah ibn Zubair. Complete detachment from the ruling circles of their day, immaculate selflessness, unswerving truthfulness, readiness to serve and make any sacrifice for the cause of religion, erudition and moral worth had made each of these persons an ideal of Islamic piety. The demoralisation that had set in owing to the immoral conduct of the ruling elite was undoubtedly on the increase but the moral influence wielded by these persons on the masses was not without a salutary effect, their pure and simple life was a standing reproach to the unprincipled this-worldliness of the rulers, which made people think of reforming their intemperate life

Political Revolution :

Gradually the contaminating influxion of the political revolution deepened and spread out, and, at the same time, there was a

¹ For a detailed description see *al-Zahbi* : Vol I, pp 46, 77, 84 and 53, and *Sifat us-Safwah* · Vol II, pp 44, 47, 49 and 50

marked decrease in the number of religious teachers who could exert a strong and ennobling influence over the people like the pious souls of the preceding period. Now it became impossible to revitalize the people and fill them with the faith and moral worth without a revolution in the State itself.

The Umayyad power was, however, entrenched in such a firm military strength that it was not possible to dislodge it, nor there existed any internal or external force which could dare to challenge it. Not long before two efforts made by Husain ibn 'Alī and 'Abdullah ibn Zubair had proved abortive and one could hardly expect any more armed insurrection for bringing about a political revolution. Autocratic and hereditary form of government had produced a despondency which had left no hope for any change in the prevailing conditions and it appeared as if the fate of Muslims had been sealed for a fairly long time. It required a miracle alone for the Islamic precepts to find an expression again in the political law guiding the community's behaviour. And the miracle did happen at the most appropriate time.

Accession of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Azīz :

The miracle was the accession of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Azīz to the throne in 99 A.H. (717 A.D.). He was a grandson of Marwan and his mother, Umm 'Āsim, was a grand-daughter of 'Umar I, the second Caliph. The Umayyad and the Farooqī families were thus jointly represented¹ in 'Umar II, surnamed as

1 'Umar I had ordered that nobody should adulterate milk by mixing water into it. Once, while wandering about at night to inquire into the condition of the people, he heard a woman asking her daughter to mix water into the milk before the day-break. The girl refused by reminding her mother of the order given by the Caliph. When the mother retorted by saying that the Caliph was not present and he would not know of it, the daughter replied that God is Omniscient even if Caliph was not present. 'Umar I was so pleased with the reply that he asked his son 'Āsim to marry the girl, saying that he hoped that she will give birth to a man who would rule over Arabia. 'Umar II was the daughter's son of 'Āsim. ('Abdul Hakam pp 17-18)

the pious Caliph, who brought about the much-needed revolution.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz was born in 61 A.H. He was a cousin of the preceding Caliph, Sulaimān ibn ‘Abdul Malik and had been posted as Governor of Madīna since the time of Walid ibn ‘Abdul Malik, the Caliph before Sulaimān. The life led by him as Governor was entirely different from that he adopted as a Caliph. He was known as a polished and decorous aristocrat of refined taste. Anybody could tell from the fragrance of perfumes he used that ‘Umar has passed that way. He was all the rage for the fashionable youths of his day. Except for his integrity of character and righteous disposition there was nothing to suggest that he was destined to perform a memorable task in the history of Islam.

But he proved to be a standing miracle of Islam. The very way he ascended to the Caliphate was miraculous; for, nobody could have predicted the dramatic turn that the events took in bringing him to the throne. He could not have hoped to be anything more than a viceroy under the hereditary custom of accession to the Caliphate, but God had willed otherwise. Sulaimān ibn ‘Abdul Malik fell seriously ill and lost all hopes of recovery. He was anxious to leave the throne to one of his sons who were still minors. Shaken with this anxiety he got his sons put on longer dresses, uniforms and armours so that they might appear sizeable, but all his efforts proved fruitless. In his dreadful agony, he cast a pathetic glance over his sons and said: “He is really fortunate who has grown-up sons”. Reja’ ibn Haiwah happened to be present at the time and he promptly proposed ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz as the successor to the throne. Caliph Sulaiman accepted the suggestion and thus by his timely intervention Reja’ rendered yeoman service for the revival of Islam.

Character of ‘Umar II :

Immediately upon his accession, ‘Umar dismissed provincial governors known to be cruel or unjust to the people. All the jewellery and valuable presents brought before him on accession

to the throne were deposited in the State treasury. He was now a completely changed man; he considered himself a successor to Caliph ‘Umar I, son of Khattāb, rather than Sulaimān ibn ‘Abdul Malīk. Slaves of the royal household were emancipated, the royal court modelled after Persian and Byzantine Royal patterns was now marked by an austere and primitive simplicity. He returned to the State not only his ancestral fief but even the valuables and jewellery his wife had received from her father and brothers. He led such a simple and ascetic life as it would have been difficult to find among the monks and recluses much less the kings and emperors. On several occasions he was late for Friday prayers since he had to wait till his only shirt dried up after a wash. Before Caliph ‘Umar II ascended to the throne *Baitul-Māl*, the public treasury, was treated as a personal property of the King from which members of royal family were granted enormous sums, but now they had to be content with the paltry stipends. Once, when he was talking to his daughters, he noticed that the children cupped their mouths while talking to him. On making enquiries he found that since only pulses and onions were available in his house on the day which had been taken by the children, they cupped their mouths lest its smell should offend him. With tears in his eyes, ‘Umar said “My child, would you like to have sumptuous food and your father to be consigned to Hell?” He was the ruler of the mightiest empire of his day but he did not have enough money to perform the *Hajj*. He once asked his servant if he had saved anything so that he could go for the *Hajj*. The servant informed him that he had only ten or twelve *dinars* and thus he could not undertake the journey. After a few days, ‘Umar II received a sum sufficient to perform the *Hajj* from his personal holdings. The servant congratulated ‘Umar II, and said that now he could go for the *Hajj*. ‘Umar II however, replied. “We have been deriving benefit from these holdings since a long time. Now Muslims have a right to enjoy its fruits.” Then he got the entire proceeds deposited in the public treasury.

‘Umar II never spent more than two *dirhams* on his mess-
ing. If any official came to see him and began talking of the
Caliph’s private affairs, he would promptly put off the candle
provided by the State and ask for his own candle to be brought
in. He would never use the hot water taken from the State
mess or even inhale the fragrance of musk belonging to the
*Bait-ul-Māl*¹.

‘Umar II was careful not for his person alone. He always
exhorted the State officials to be extremely cautious in their
dealings involving the State property. The Governor of Madina,
Abū-Bakr ibn Hazm had submitted an application to Sulaimān
ibn ‘Abdul Malik demanding candlesticks and a lamp-glass for
the official work. By the time the requisition reached the Caliph,
Sulaimān had died and it was placed before ‘Umar II. He
wrote “O Abū-Bakr, I remember the days when you wandered
during the dark nights of winter without candlesticks and light,
and, were you then in a better condition than now? I hope you
have now enough candlesticks to spare a few for conducting the
business of the State.”² Similarly on another request made for
supply of paper for official work, he remarked “Make the point
of your pen finer, write closely and concisely, for, Muslims do not
require such detailed reports which are unnecessarily a burden
on the State exchequer.”²

Extreme cautiousness, moderation, simplicity and unaffected
piety were not the only feature of ‘Umar’s character. He trans-
formed the view-point of his government making the weal of the
people the sole object of administration. Before ‘Umar II the
State was concerned mainly with collecting revenues and spending
it, having nothing to do with the moral guidance and religious
instruction of the people. The historic dictum of ‘Umar II that
‘Muhammad was sent as a Prophet and not as a collector’,³

1 ‘Abdul-Hakam, p 44

2 *Ibid*, p 64

3 Abū Yūsuf, p 75

adequately illustrates the objective he had set before the State under him. In truth and reality, during the entire period of his Caliphate he sought to translate this idea into practice. He always preferred principles, moral dictates and demands of the faith to political expediency and never cared a whit for pecuniary losses suffered by the State if the policy commended by religion entailed it. During his reign the non-Muslims were embracing Islam in ever-increasing numbers which meant a dwindling income from the poll-tax. As the sharp fall in revenues posed a danger to the financial stability of the State, 'Umar's attention was drawn towards it. But his reply was that the situation was eminently in accord with the objectives underlying the prophethood of Muhammad. To another official he wrote "I would be too glad if all the non-Muslims embrace Islam and (owing to the drying up of income from poll-tax) we have to take up cultivation for earning our living"¹ A fixed amount of land revenue was to be remitted by the provincial Government of Yaman every year whether it had a favourable crop or not. 'Umar II ordered that the revenues should be assessed in accordance with the agricultural production every year. He added that he would willingly accept it even if a handful of grain were to be received in pursuance of his order.² He discontinued levy of octroi throughout the kingdom saying that it was prohibited by the Qur'ān.

*O my people ! Give full measure and full weight in justice
and wrong not people in respect of their goods And do not evil in
the earth, causing corruption*

(Hud 85)

'Umar II used to say that people have made octroi lawful by changing its name.³ Barring the few taxes allowed by the Shari'ah, he abolished all taxes and duties levied by his

1 *Manāẓiq*, p 64

2 'Abdul Hakam, p 126

3 *Ibid* p 99

predecessors.¹ All the land and sea routes were opened for trade without any embargo whatsoever.²

Far-reaching reforms were introduced in the administration of the kingdom. Some of the steps taken were Weights and measures were standardised,³ State officials were precluded from entering into any business or trade,⁴ unpaid labour was made illegal,⁵ pasture-lands and game-preserves reserved for the royal family or other dignitaries were distributed to the landless cultivators or made a public property,⁶ strict measures were taken to stop illegal gratification of state employees who were forbidden to accept gifts,⁶ all officers holding responsible posts were directed to afford adequate facilities to those who wanted to present their complaints to them in person, a proclamation was made every year on the occasion of pilgrimage that any one who would bring to the notice of administration any mal-treatment by an State official or prefer a useful suggestion, shall be rewarded 100 to 300 *dinars* ⁷

Solicitude for Moral Reformation :

After the *Khulāfat-ı-Rāshida* came to an end, the Caliphs began to consider themselves simply as monarchs and administrators; they were neither capable nor had the time to bother about the moral and social conditions of their subjects. In fact, the Caliphs were never expected to advise people in religious affairs, take steps for their moral, religious or spiritual advancement or assume the role of a pulpit. This was considered to be the domain of scholars and religious luminaries, *‘ulmā* and traditionists. ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz did away with this dichotomy and proved himself to

1 ‘Abdul Hakam, p 99

2 *Ibid* , p 98

3 *Ibid* , p 99

4 *Ibid* , p 100

5 *Ibid* , p 97

6 *Ibid* , p 162

7 *Ibid* , p 141

by really a successor of the Prophet, as his office implied. No sooner did he ascend the Caliphate, he sent out quite lengthy letters and directives which dealt with more about religious and moral reforms than with the so-called administrative affairs. His edicts embodied a spirit of preaching, religious and moral, rather than the dispensation of government. In his letters he would compare the social and moral condition of people with that in the days of the Prophet and early Caliphate and elaborate the fiscal and administrative system required to bring about an Islamic regeneration,¹ impress on the governors and generals the importance of timely performance of their prayers and presiding at these services,² exhort public servants to inculcate the awe of God and meticulously follow the regulations of the *Shari'ah*,³ charge his officers with the responsibility of spreading the message of Islam in the provinces under them, which he considered to be the sole objective of Divine revelation and the prophethood of Muhammad,⁴ insist on the enforcement of what is incumbent and on the prevention of that which is forbidden, and warn them of the harmful effects of neglecting this obligation,⁵ elaborate the criminal law of Islam and instruct the magistrates to be lenient in awarding punishments,⁶ draw attention towards the deviations and innovations, customs and foreign traditions that had found a way into the life of the people, forbid lamentations and put a stop to the custom requiring women to accompany the funeral processions as well as their public appearance,⁷ denigrate tribal partisanship,¹ and, prohibit laxity in the use of *nabidh* which gradually led to drinking bouts and to numerous other vices.⁸

1 'Abdul Hakam, p 69

2 *Ibid* , p 79

3 *Ibid* , p 92

4 *Ibid* , pp 93-94

5 *Ibid* p 167

6 *Ibid* , pp 80-81

7 *Ibid* , p 108

8 *Ibid* , p 102

Compilation of Traditions :

The study and cultivation of religious sciences did not escape attention of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abul ‘Aziz. Drawing the attention of an eminent man of letters of his time, Abū Bakr ibn Hazm, towards compilation of the traditions of the Holy Prophet, he wrote .

“Reduce into writing whatever traditions of the Holy Prophet you can collect, for I fear that after the traditionists pass away, the knowledge will also perish.”¹

He made a pointed reference to the collections of ‘Umrah bint ‘Abdur Rahmān Ansāriyah and Qāsim ibn Muhammad ibn Abū Bakr which he wanted to be recorded. The task was not simply entrusted to Abū Bakr ibn Hazm but circulars were issued to provincial governors and other notable ‘ulemā commanding them to ‘collect all the traditions of the Prophet of Islam wherever these could be found’ Simultaneously, ‘Umar II also granted stipends to those entrusted with the task so that they could pursue the job whole-heartedly²

‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz was himself a man of learning and he took keen interest in the interpretation of the Traditions and cannon law. In the beginning of his Caliphate he circulated an edict which said :

“Islam has laid down certain limits, duties and obligations. Whoever will follow these, shall be rewarded by a truer content of the faith, but those who do not pursue these, their faith shall remain imperfect. If God keeps me live, I will teach you the fundamentals of the faith and will make you follow these, but if I die earlier, I won’t care, for I am not at all eager for your company.”³

Defender of the Faith :

The unalloyed Islamic thought and spirit of religion that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz tried to infuse among the Muslims

1 Bukhārī Vol I, p 20

2 ‘Abdul Hakam, p 167

3 Bukhārī (*Kitāb-ul-Imān*), Vol I, p 6

and give a practical shape through the State he presided, can be gauged from the letters and edicts he issued from time to time to the different functionaries of his government. These despatches show what a deep understanding of Islam he had without the least trace of pre-Islamic *Ignorance* or the stamp of Ummayyad royalty.

It was once reported to him that certain tribal chiefs and Ummayyad aristocrats had revived the pagan custom¹ of entering into alliances and were giving a call to one another in the name of tribal solidarity during their fights and forays. This custom cut at the very root of Islamic concept of brotherhood and the social order it wanted to bring into existence. Earlier rulers would have been complacent at it or even encouraged the practice as a political expediency but ‘Umai ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, being fully alive to the pernicious implications of the practice, issued an order to Dhahhāk ibn ‘Abdur-Rahmān for curbing the evil forthwith. In it he writes

“Praise be to God and peace unto His Apostle. Thereafter you should know that Allah does not like any religion other than Islam, which he has chosen for Himself and His bondsmen. Allah has been pleased to honour His religion, Islam, with an Scripture, which has made Islam distinct from un-Islam. In it He says

*Now hath come unto you light from Allah and a plain Scripture
Whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh His good pleasure unto
paths of peace. He bringeth them out of darkness unto light by His
decree and guideth them unto a straight path*

(*Al-Ma’ida* : 15-16)

Allah also says

*With truth We have sent it down, and with truth had it
descended*

*And We have sent thee as naught else save a bearer of good
tidings and a warner*

(*Bani Israel* : 105)

1 A pre-Islamic custom under which two tribes took an oath of fealty to help each other in every eventuality irrespective of the justice or otherwise of the cause for which their help was to be sought

“God Almighty endowed prophethood on Muhammad (peace be upon him) and revealed the Scripture to him. Then, O Arabs, as you know, you lived in ignorance, idolatry and impurity, were plunged in poverty, disorder and chaos; fights and forays baulked large in your life, you were looked down upon by others, and, whatever little light of Divine Guidance was available to other nations, you were deprived even of that. There was no perversion and depravity which was not to be found amongst you. If you lived, yours was a life of ignorance and infidelity, and, if you died, you were consigned to the Hell. At last Allah saved you from these evils, idolatry and anarchy, hatred and conflicts. Although many amongst you denied and decried the Prophet of God, he remained steadfast in his endeavour till a few poor people amongst you responded to his call. Fearing the worst, these men always ran for their lives but God gave them asylum, sent His succour to them and gave them strength through those whom He chose to enlighten with Islam. The Prophet of God was to depart from this world and Allah had to fulfil the promise made to His messenger. The promise of Allah never changes but none save a few of the faithful believed in what God Almighty had promised.

He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion, however much the idolaters may be averse.

(Al-Taubah 33)

“In another verse Allah has promised to the Muslims.

Allah hath promised such of you as believe and do good works that He will surely make them to succeed (the present rulers) in the earth even as He caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He hath approved for them, and will give them in exchange safety after this fear. - They serve Me. They ascribe nothing as partner unto Me

(An-Nūr : 55)

“Allah has fulfilled the promise made by him to His Prophet and the Muslims. Therefore, O Muslims, remember that whatever God Almighty has bestowed on you is solely on account of Islam, you are victorious on your enemies in the world and will be raised as a witness unto others in the Hereafter. But for Islam, you have no refuge in this world nor after death, you have nothing to fall back upon nor a source of strength, no protection, no safeguard. And if you are fortunate enough to see the fulfilment of the promise made by Allah, you need to pin your hopes in the abode of the Hereafter, since God has said.

As for the Abode of the Hereafter we assign it unto those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption

The sequel is for those who ward off (evil)

(Al-Qasas · 83)

“I warn you of the disaster that will befall you if you do not act according to the teachings of the *Qurʾān*. The bloodshed and disorder, turmoil and affliction to which you had been exposed as a result of disregarding the guidance provided by the Scripture is recent history. You should, therefore, desist from what has been prohibited by Allah in His Scripture, for, there is nothing more dreadful than the admonition sounded by God Almighty. I have been constrained to write this letter on account of the reports reaching me from the countryside about those who have been recently sent there as stewards and administrators. These are an ignorant and stupid set of persons who are not aware of God’s commandments, they have forgotten the special favour and benevolence of Allah over them or they have rather shown ingratitude for the undeserved favours bestowed on them. I have been told that they seek the help of the people of Mudhar and Yaman, for they think that these tribes are their allies and partisans. Glorified be Allah, Who alone deserves all praise. What an ungrateful and ill-beseeming people these are, and how

inclined they are to invite death, destruction and doom ! They have no eyes to see what a despicable position they have chosen for themselves, nor are they aware how they have deprived themselves of peace and amity. Now I realise that miscreants and ruffians are shaped as such by their own intentions and also that Hell was not created in vain Have they never heard of the commandment of God Almighty ?

The believers are naught else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy

(Al-Hujurat . 10).

And have they not heard this verse too ?

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM

(Al-Maidah 3).

“I have been told that certain tribes are entering into alliances to help one another against their enemies as they used to do in the bygone days of *Ignorance*, although the Prophet has prohibited unconditional alliances for helping each other. The Prophet has said ‘There is no partisanship in Islam’ In the times of *Ignorance*, allies expected help from each other in every unjust cause, no matter whether it led to oppression or wrongdoing, transgression of the commands of God or of the Prophet

“I warn everyone who may happen to read my letter or hear its content against taking any shelter except Islam and seeking amity of anyone except God Almighty and His Prophet. I again warn everyone with all the emphasis at my command and seek to make Allah my witness against these persons, for He has authority over every being and He is nearer to everyone than his jugular veins ”¹

¹ ‘Abdul Hakam, pp. 104-107

The directives sent by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz to the commander of a military expedition illustrate the extent to which he had imbibed the Qur’ānic mode of thought and view-point, and how he differed diametrically from other rulers and emperors of his time. In one of his edicts to Mansūr ibn Ghālīb he wrote :

“This is a directive from the bondsman of Allah and Commander of the Faithful to Mansūr ibn Ghālīb. Whereas the Commander of the Faithful has charged Mansūr to wage war against those who might oppose him, the latter is also instructed to inculcate awe of God ; since, it constitutes the best of provisions, the most effective strategy and the real power. For the sin is even more dangerous than the ruses of the enemy, the Commander of the Faithful bids upon Mansūr that instead of taking fright of his enemy, he should fear transgressing the limits of God. We overcome our enemies in the battlefield only because of their vices and sins, for, had it not been so, we would not have had the courage to face them. We cannot deploy troops in the same numbers as our enemies can do nor do we possess the equipments they have got. Thus, if we equate ourselves with our enemies in misdeeds and transgressions, they would undoubtedly gain a victory over us by virtue of their numerical superiority and strength. Behold, if we are not able to gain ascendancy over our enemies on account of our righteousness, we would never be in a position to defeat them through our might. We need not keep an eye upon anything more than the enmity of our own wickedness nor do we have to hold in leash anything more than our own viciousness. You should realise the fact that God Almighty has deputed wardens over you who never part company with you and they are aware of whatever you do in your camps and cantonments secretly or in public. Therefore, do not put yourself to shame by exceeding the limits of God ; be kind to others, especially as you have left your hearths and homes for the sake of

God. Never consider yourselves superior to your enemies, nor take your victory for granted because of the sinfulness of your foes, for many a people worse than his enemy was granted ascendancy in the past. Therefore, seek the help of God against your own temptations in the same way as you desire the succour of God against your opponent. I would also beseech God's blessings for myself and you.

"Commander of the Faithful also bids Mansūr ibn Ghālib that he should treat his men with leniency. He should not require his troops to undertake toilsome journeys, nor refuse to encamp when they require rest. The troops enfeebled by exertion and long travels, should not be required to face an enemy whose forces and the beasts of burden are taking rest at their own place. Thus if Mansūr does not accord a humane treatment to his men, his enemy would easily gain ascendancy over Mansūr's forces. Verily, help can be sought from God alone

"For giving rest to his men and the beast of burden and also for getting his armaments repaired, the Commander of the Faithful orders Mansūr ibn Ghālib to break his journey on every Friday for the whole day and night thereof. He is also ordered to encamp far away from the habitations which have entered into treaty relations with us, and allow none from his troops to visit their dwellings, markets or gatherings. Only those of his men who are firm in faith and trustworthy and who would neither be ill-disposed nor commit a sin against the people could be allowed to visit such habitations for collection of lawful dues. You are as much bound to guarantee their rights as they are enjoined to fulfil the duties devolving on them : *i. e.* you have to honour your obligations to them so long as they do theirs. You should never try to gain an advantage over your enemy through persecution of those who have come under your protection, for you have already got a share (in the shape of *Jaziah* or poll-tax) in their earnings and you neither need to increase it nor they are bound to pay more.

We have too not cut down your provisions, nor deprived you of anything required for strengthening you. You have been given charge of our best forces and provided with everything required for the job. Now you need to pay attention to the land of polytheists, our enemies, and need not concern yourself with those who have come under our protection. After having made the best possible arrangements for you, we have trust in God Almighty. There is no power, no might, save from Allah.

“And the Commander of the Faithful further directs that you shall appoint only such persons as your spies from amongst the Arabs and non-Arabs who are guileless and trustworthy, for the intelligence received through deceitful persons is hardly of any use. Even if a treacherous fellow passes on to you some correct information, he ought really to be treated as an spy of the enemy and not yours. May God have peace on you.”¹

In another circular letter to the provincial chiefs he wrote

“Verily God has entrusted the charge of administration to me. I have not accepted this responsibility for the sake of riches or sensual delight, feasts or attires, for God had already favoured me with a fortune that only a few can boast of. For I fully realise the grave responsibility of the charge entrusted to me, I have taken upon myself this obligation with a great deal of anxiety and heart-searching. I know I would be called upon to render the account in the presence of God when claimants and defendants would both be present to argue their cases on the Day of Requital—a Burdensome Day, indeed, save for those on whom Allah shows his mercy and whom He protects from the grievous ordeal.

“I bid you to be cautious and God-fearing in all the affairs of the State committed to your charge and ask you to fulfil your obligations, perform that which has been ordained by God and desist from the acts prohibited by the

¹ ‘Abdul Hakam, pp 84-87

Shari'ah. You ought to keep an eye upon yourself and your actions, be cautious of the acts that unite you with Allah, on the one hand, and your liegemen, on the other. You are aware that the salvation and safety lies in complete submission to the Almighty and the ultimate goal of all endeavours should be, by the same token, to make preparations for success on the Appointed Day.

"If you will, you might take a lesson from the happenings around you. Only then I can drive home the truth to you through my preachings.

"May God have peace on you"¹

Propagation of Islam:

The efforts of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz were not limited to the enforcement of the *Shari'ah*, as the law of the land, and reformation of the Muslims only. He also paid attention towards spreading the message of Islam among the non-Muslims, and his endeavours were also successful on account of his personal example of simple life, unaffected piety, unswerving uprightness and immaculate sincerity, Balāzuri writes in *Futūh-ul-Buldān* :

"'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz wrote seven letters to the rajas in India inviting them to embrace Islam. He promised that if they did so, he would guarantee continued existence of their kingdoms and their rights and obligations would be the same as those of the other Muslims

"The name and fame of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz had already reached those lands and when they received 'Umar's despatch they embraced Islam and adopted Arab names."²

"Isma'il ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abi al-Mahājir, Governor of Maghrib (north-west Africa), administered the land with flawless justice and gave a good account of his character and morals. He initiated proselytising activities among the Barber tribes. Thereafter 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz

¹ 'Abdul Hakam, pp 92-93

² Balāzuri, pp 446-447.

sent a letter inviting those people to embrace Islam which was read out in huge gatherings of the natives by Isma[‘]il. A large number of people were converted to Islam and at last Islam became the predominant faith of the land ¹

.. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz also wrote letters to the rulers and chiefs of Trans-oxiana² and exempted new converts to Islam in Khurasan from the payment of poll-tax (*Jaziah*) He also granted stipends and rewards to those who embraced Islam and got constructed rest houses for the travellers ³

Financial Reforms :

The financial reforms embarked upon by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz viz remission of numerous taxes and tithes disallowed by the *Shari‘ah*, did not result in pecuniary difficulties or deficits in the State income On the contrary, people became so much well-off that it became difficult to find destitutes and beggars who would accept the poor-due (*Zakāt*)

Yahya ibn Sa‘eed relates that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz had appointed him to collect the poor-due in Africa When he got the dues collected, he looked around for the needy and hard up persons, but he could not find a single individual who could be rendered assistance. He adds that ‘Umar’s economic policy had made everybody a man of substance and, therefore, he had no alternative but to purchase a number of slaves and then emancipate them on behalf of the Muslim populace ⁴

Another man from the Quraish reports that during the extremely short reign of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz people used to remit substantial amounts pertaining to the poor-due to the State

1. Balāzuri, p 339

2 Countries in Central Asia to the north of river Oxus (*Ma-wara-un-Nahr* in Arabic)

3 Balāzuri, p 432

4 ‘Abdul Hakam, p 69

exchequer for being distributed among the poor, but these had to be returned to them as nobody entitled to receive these charities was to be found. He says that everyone had become so well-off during 'Umar's time that nobody remained in straitened circumstances entitled to receive the poor-due.¹

Apart from the prosperity of the masses, which is invariably a by-product of the Islamic form of government, the more important change accomplished by the regime of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz was the diversion in inclination and aptitude, mood and trend of the populace. His contemporaries narrate that whenever a few friends met during the regime of Walid, they used to converse about buildings and architecture for that was the rage of Walid; Sulaimān was fond of women and banquets, and these became the fad of his days; but, during the reign of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz the prevailing demeanour and subjects for discussion were prayers, supplicatory and benedictory, obligatory and supererogatory. Whenever a few people gathered, they would ask each other about the voluntary prayers one offered for acquiring spiritual benefits, the portion of Qur'ān recited or committed to memory, fast observed every month, and so on so forth.²

The guiding light for 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz and the impelling force behind his endeavours were his unflinching faith, the love and awe of the Supreme Being and conviction of accountability on the Day of Resurrection. Whatever he did was solely on account of the inducement, if inducement it can be called, to propitiate God Almighty. This was the urge and driving force which had made the ruler of the most powerful and extensive empire of the day to lead a life of austerity, forbearance and abstinence. If anybody advised him to raise his standard of living, as his position and office demanded, he would recite the Qur'ānic dictum :

... I fear, if I rebel against my Lord, the retribution of an Awful Day.

(Al-An'ām : 15)

¹ 'Abdul Hakam, p 128

² Tabrī, Vol VIII, p 98

Once ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz said to this servant : “Allah has favoured me with a disposition, insatiable and ambitious ; no sooner do I attain an object I long for, I set my heart upon a still higher objective. Now I have reached a sublimation after which nothing remains to be coveted. Now my ambition aspires for Paradise alone.”¹

Once he asked a certain sage for counsel, who said : “Of what avail would it be to thee, if the entire mankind were sent to Heaven and thou were consigned to Hell ? Similarly, what would thou lose, if thou were awarded Heaven and all others sent to the Hell ?” On hearing this ‘Umar’s qualm knew no bounds and he wept so bitterly that the fire in the chafing-dish in front of him got extinguished by his tears.² Yazid ibn Haushab once said that ‘Umar had so great a fear of God that it seemed as if the Heaven and Hell had been created by God only for him and Hasan al-Basri

If Providence had only granted ‘Umar the span of rule enjoyed by his predecessors, the world of Islam would have witnessed a complete and lasting revolution changing the course of its history. But the Umayyads who had been hit hard during the reign of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and who saw power and influence slipping out of their hands, openly regretted the day when the families of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb and the Umayyads’ had maritally been united. They could not endure the ordeal any longer for it was against their grain, and they soon found a way to get rid of the most virtuous Muslim of their times. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz died in the middle of 101 A H after a rule of only two years and five months. There are reasons to believe that a slave in the employ of the Caliph was commissioned by his family to administer poison to him.³

1 ‘Abdul Hakam, p 61 and *Sifat ur-Safinah*, Vol III, p 156

2 ‘Abdul Hakam, pp 108-109.

3 ‘Abdul Hakam, p 118, Ibn Kathir, Vol IX, pp 209-10 and *Sirat*, p 239

CHAPTER II

HASAN AL-BASRI

Atrophy of Faith and Moral Decadence :

After the death of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, there was a complete reversal of the State policy to the ways of his predecessors. *Jahiliyah* again returned with a vengeance to undo every reform ‘Umar had introduced. Yazid II, who succeeded ‘Umar, and his successors too, took full advantage of the position and power enjoyed by them to gratify the grasping demands of their kinsmen.

Hereditary and despotic rule along with the affluence of Umayyads had by now begun to give birth to a nobility, hypocrite and time-server, spendthrift and libertine, whose morals and code of conduct were not different from the rakes of other nations. Taking after the ways of the then nobility, pursuit of pleasure and gay abandon threatened to become the prevailing taste of the masses. Moral and spiritual transformation, temperate and righteous living emanating from the true content of a faith, constitutes the most valuable heritage of prophetic teachings and a perennial source of vitality to the *Ummah*. But this-worldly attitude of life now threatened to inundate the warmth of spirit, faith and the awe of God thereby causing the failure of spiritual forces and atrophy of moral excellence. It was in truth a moment of great danger for the *Ummah* ; it appeared to be the beginning of the end. The State being callously indifferent to the virtues it ought to have upheld, blatantly nourished and encouraged its representatives who denigrated moral propriety and rectitude. The self-indulgent and luxurious ways of the elite were a standing allurements for the fast spreading vices like opulence, luxury and indolence. The Prophet of Islam had flooded the heart of his followers with reverence, awe, complete submission and a living

relationship with the Almighty but these qualities were now on the wane. It was a deficiency which could have never been redeemed by brilliant conquests or expanding dimensions of the empire, or, rather, as the history shows, the diminution of spirit is an irretrievable loss for any people who are once made to suffer its impoverishment.

Had this reservoir of vitality and dynamic energy been left unattended to be crumbled and smothered by the then social and political forces of profanation, Muslims would have soon become a materialistic and self-indulgent people devoid of any conception of the life-after-death. The Prophet of Islam had repeatedly expressed his anxiety, towards the end of his life, that Muslims might be swallowed by the pleasures of the world like earlier nations. A few days before his demise, the Prophet had apprised his companions of this danger thus.

“I have no apprehension from your poverty and indigence, what I fear is that the world might shower down its affluence and luxuries as it did on the people before you, and you might begin contending amongst you, thereby exposing yourself to the danger of being annihilated like the nations preceding you.”¹

Endeavours to Combat the Evil :

The danger to which the Holy Prophet had alluded was soon to manifest itself but its tide was stemmed by a few indefatigable crusaders of unflinching faith and ardent zeal. Endowed with religious devotion and enthusiasm, these pioneers and standard bearers saved millions in the *Ummah* through their sermons and exhortations, lectures and discourses, disciplines and teachings from being swept away by the flood of coarse materialism, they maintained the continuity of religious and spiritual traditions, teachings and precepts, which was assuredly much more important than the continued existence of political ascendancy. Those who spearheaded the movement to fill in the gap at this crucial

¹ *Salih Muslim*, Vol II (*Kitāb-uz-Zuhd*), p 407.

moment in the life of the *Ummah* and thus saved the world of Islam from acquiescing in an utterly agnostic, characterless and spiritually enfeebled existence, were, Sa'eed ibn Jubair, Muhammad ibn Sireen, Sha'bi and, the precursor of all, Hasan al Basri. Born in 21 A.H. his father Yasār, was an emancipated slave of Zaid ibn Thābit, a celebrated companion of the Prophet, and he was himself brought up in the house of *Umm-ul-Mominin*, Umm-i-Salmah

Capabilities of Hasan al-Basri :

Hasan al-Basri had been gifted with ennobling virtues and brilliant capabilities essential to make his exhortation for revival and renovation of Islam effective in his times. He was distinguished for a disposition, amicable and considerate, winsome and enchanting, on the one hand, as also for his erudite and profound learning tempered with prudence and wisdom, on the other. In his knowledge of the Qur'ān and the Traditions he excelled all the doctors of his time. He has had the opportunity of being an associate of the companions of the Holy Prophet. It seems that he was also a keen observer of the contemporary events and the transformation Islamic society was undergoing ; for, he was fully aware of the ills, deficiencies and mal-practices that had crept in among the different sections of the society, and the measures necessary to eradicate them. He was also an equally celebrated orator inspired by deep ethical feeling. He held his audience spellbound. Whenever he discoursed on Hereafter or depicted the bygone age of the companions of the Prophet, everyone was seen brimming with tears. Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf is rightly renowned for his eloquence but Hasan al-Basri was considered to be an equally good elocutionist. Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', the famous grammarian and lexicographer says that he had not seen orators of greater eloquence than Hasan al-Basri and Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf but Hasan was more elegant speaker than Hajjāj¹. Of his encyclopaedic knowledge Rabi' ibn Anas says that he has had the

¹ *Al-Bustān*, Vol VII, p 44

privilege of being closely associated with Hasan al-Basri for ten years and almost everyday he found something new not heard of earlier in the discourses of Hasan¹ Describing the scholarly attainments of Hasan al-Basri, Abū Hayyān at-Tauhidī quotes Thabit ibn Qurrah

“In his learning and piety, forbearance and temperance, candour and large-heartedness, sagacity and prudence he resembled a bright star He was always surrounded by students seeking instruction in different branches of learning. He would be teaching *Hadith* (Traditions of the Prophet) to one, *Tafsir* (explanation or commentary on Qur’ān) to another, *Fiqah* (laws and theological rules) to a third, expounding a legal opinion to someone else and imparting instruction in the principles of jurisprudence to yet another while continuing his sermons in the meantime for those who came to him for the purpose His knowledge covered an expanse as vast as an ocean, or, he was like a dazzling lustre illuminating every soul around him. What is more, his heroic efforts to enjoin the right and to forbid the wrong, his undaunted champion-ship of the righteous path before the elite, rulers and administrators could never be forgotten”²

The reason why Hasan’s words carried weight with his audience was that he was not simply a preacher or an accomplished orator but that he also possessed a sublimated soul. Whatever he said was heart-stirring because it came from the depth of his heart, his speeches had a magnetism which no other scholar or mentor of Kufa and Basra could emulate Another distinguishing feature of his sermons was their affinity to the prophetic homilies

Al-Ghazalī has written in *Ihya’ ‘Ulum id-Dīn* that there is a consensus of opinion that the teachings of Hasan bore a close resemblance with prophetic discourses as did his own conduct

1 *Al-Bustānī*, Vol VII, p 44

2 *Ibid*, p 5

with that of the companions of the Prophet—a quality which was lacked by other guides and missionaries.¹

The enthusiastic devotion people paid to Hasan al-Basri and the irresistible attraction they felt towards him were the hall mark of his charming personality. He was rightly considered as one of the few top-most guides of the *Ummah*. Thabit ibn Qurrah, a non-Muslim philosopher of the third century (A. H.), was of opinion that of the few eminent personages produced by Islam who could rightly be envied by the followers of other faiths, one was Hasan al-Basri. He adds that Mecca had always been a centre of Islamic piety and learning where accomplished scholars in every branch of learning converged from all parts of the world but even Meccans were dumbfounded by his scholarly attainments as they had never seen a man of his calibre.²

Sermons of Hasan al-Basri :

The discourses delivered by Hasan are reminiscent of the simplicity and moral grit of the Prophet's companions. Speaking of the transitory nature of the world and human life, these sermons stress the significance of the Hereafter and final retribution, develop the meanings of faith and righteousness, inculcate awe and reverence of God and denigrate self-indulgence and licentiousness. In an age of crass materialism, when the rank and file and many of the elite too had taken to the gratification of bodily and sensual desires a haranguing on these very subjects was required. Hasan has had the opportunity of being an associate of the Prophet's companions and, therefore, when he compares the moral degradation of the later Ummayyad period with the simplicity and unflinching faith, moral and spiritual excellence of the earlier times, his description becomes graphic and forceful, sparkling with the fire of his own heart-felt sorrow at the degeneration of the *Ummah*; he castigates, chastises and lashes out at the revolting change. At the same

¹ *Ihya'*, Vol I, p. 68

² *Al-Bustān*, Vol VII, p 44.

time, the consummate diction, incomparable eloquence and unique lucidity of style secured for his sermons a distinguished place in the Arabic literature of the time. Comparing the moral condition of his own times with that of the Prophet's companions and delineating the Islamic ethics, he observes

“Alas, people have gone to rack and ruin through their own fond hopes and daydreams, they talk but do not act; knowledge is there but without endurance, faith they have, but no conviction, men are here, but without brains; a crowd here is, but not a single soul agreeable to one's heart; people come here simply to go away; they acknowledge the truth, then deny it and make things lawful and unlawful at their sweetwill. Is your religion a sensual delight? If you are asked ‘Do you have faith in the Day of Judgment?’ You say: ‘Yes’ ‘But, No, it is not so’ I swear by the Lord of the Day of Requital that your answer is wrong. It's only befitting for the faithful that he should be sound of faith and a man of conviction. His knowledge entails forbearance as moderation is an adornment for the learned. He is wise but soft-hearted, well-dressed and restrained in order to conceal his indigence, never prodigal even if a man of substance, charitable and compassionate to the destitute, large-hearted and generous in giving to the kinsfolk their due, strenuous and unflinching in providing justice to others; never crosses the prescribed limits in favouring his near and dear ones nor does he find fault or cull out the errors of those whom he dislikes. A Muslim is indifferent to revilings and tauntings, frolics and sports, decrivals and backbitings. He never runs after what is not his right nor denies what he owes to others, never debases himself in seeking an apology nor takes delight in the misfortune or misdeed of others.”

“Humble and submissive, devoted and enchanted, as a faithful is in his prayers, he is a messenger of cheer, his endurance is owing to the awe of God; his silence is for meditation and reflection; he pays attention for edification

and instruction; he seeks company of the learned for acquiring knowledge; keeps mum to avoid transgression; and if he speaks, he speaks to spread the virtue. A Muslim is pleased when he acts virtuously; entreats forgiveness from the Lord when he goes astray, complains when he is aggrieved only to make up for the loss sustained; is patient and prudent when an illiterate joins issue with him; proves enduring when ill-treated, he is never unjust and never seeks succour or protection from anyone save God Almighty.

“Dignified in the company of their friends, praising God when they were left alone, content with the lawful gains, grateful when easy of means, resigned when in distress, remembering God Almighty among the indolent and craving the grace of God when among the pious. such were the companions of the Prophet, their associates and friends. No matter what station they occupied in life, they were held in high esteem by their compatriots and, when they died, their spirit took flight to the blessed Companionship on High, as the most celebrated souls. O’ Muslims, these were your righteous ancestors, but when you deviated from the right path, God Almighty too withheld his blessings from you. *Lo¹ Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts, and if Allah willeth misfortune for a folk there is none that can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him.²*

On another occasion commenting on those verses of *Surah al-Furqān*³ which describe the characteristics of the faithful, he says of the companions of the Holy Prophet :

“When the first Muslims heard this call from their Lord, they immediately affirmed it from the depth of their responsive heart. They surrendered themselves implicitly

1 *Ar-Rʿad*, 11

2 *Al-Basri*, pp 66-70

3. Twenty-fifth Surah of the Qurʾān.

to the Most High ; their hearts and eyes, nay, their whole existence, lived under a constant consciousness of the omnipotent power of God Almighty. By God, when I saw them, I could discern from their faces that the unseen realities taught by revelation were not beyond the ken of their perception—as if they had perceived these realities through their senses. They never indulged in futile discussions or vain quibblings. They had received a message from the Lord and accepted it.

“Allah has Himself depicted their character in the Qur’ān thus: *The (faithful) slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth modestly*¹ . . . The word used here for the faithful is symbolic, according to the Arab lexicographers, of their humility yet full of dignity. Thereafter the Lord says: *And when the ignorant address them, they say: Peace.*² It means that they are disciplined and patient and they never answer the arrogant and foolish in the same coin. If anyone joins an issue with them, they do not lose their temper or patience. They spend their days in acquiring knowledge from the learned. As for their nights, God has Himself spoken highly of what they do after the night-fall: *And who spend the night before their Lord, prostrate and standing.*³ Verily, these bondsmen of Allah used to pass the whole night in prayers ; they stood, tears flowing from their eyes, and then fell prostrate before the Lord, trembling with His awe. There was something, after all, which kept them in vigils throughout the nights and made them yield to an implicit submission. The Almighty says that these are the persons who say: *Our Lord ! Avert from us the doom of hell ; lo ! the doom thereof is anguish.*⁴ The word signifying the torment of Hell in this verse is taken by lexicographers

1. *Al-Furqān*, 63.

2. *It. Z.*, 63.

3. *It. Z.*, 64.

4. *It. Z.*, 65.

to mean a chastisement or doom which never comes to a close i. e., it is an affliction which shall never end. I swear by Allah save Whom there is no other Lord, that the companions of the Prophet were really faithful; they acted on what they professed but, alas, you are after your fond hopes. Friends, do not lean upon your airy hopes, for God has never bestowed anything whether of this world or the Hereafter, upon anyone simply because he had longed for it."¹

Thereafter he said (as he often used to remark after his discourses) that although his sermons lacked nothing, they were of little utility for the people who had lost the warmth of their hearts.

Fearlessness :

Hasan al-Basri was as much distinguished for his moral courage and unfaltered pursuit of justice as he was in the domain of erudition and oration. He opposed the then Caliph, Yazid ibn 'Abdul Malik,² in his presence when once someone asked Hasan to express his opinion about the two insurrectionists, Yazid ibn al-Muhallab and Ibn al-Ash'ath. Al-Hasan replied: "Don't be a party to the either faction". A Syrian, springing upon his feet, repeated the question "And not even to *Amīr-ul-Mominīn*?"³ Hasan replied angrily: "Yes, not even to *Amīr-ul-Mominīn*".⁴ The intolerable and ferocious cruelty of Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf⁴ is

1. Al-Marwazi, p 12

2 He succeeded 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Azīz and ruled from the middle of 720 to January, 724 A. D.

3. *Tabqāt*, Vol. VII, pp. 118-119.

4 Hajjāj, at one time governor of Hijaz, was 'Abdul Malik's Viceroy over Iraq, Sijistan, Kerman and Khurasan. Being one of the most ardent supporters of the Ummayyads, he did everything to strengthen their Caliphate. His cruelty gave rise to several furious revolts. During his long rule over Iraq, he put to death nearly 1,50,000 men, many on false charges, and some of them were the best of Arab race. At the time of his death, 50,000 people were found rotting in his prisons.

proverbial but Hasan did not hold his tongue from expressing what he considered to be right and just even during the rule of Hajjāj.

Hypocrites :

The lightning success of the Muslim arms and the complete political domination of the Ummayyads over an extensive area had given rise to a class which had embraced Islam for the sake of material gains but had not been able to translate the ethics and precepts of Islam in its everyday life. These people had still to go a long way to ENTER IN ISLAM COMPLETELY as the Qur'ān demands of every Muslim. The younger generation of the Muslims, too, lacked education and training, who had inherited many customs and usages of the pagan past. They had accepted Islam but not surrendered themselves implicitly to the guidance of the revelation in their daily affairs, modes of living, deeds and morals. Quite a large portion of the Muslim society, particularly its elite and the ruling circles had gradually adopted the ways of *Jahiliyah* and, since they held the keys to political domination, riches and position of influence, they were emulated by the rabble of Basrah. Self-indulgence, vanity, jealousy and lust for wealth and power were thus fast capturing the soul of the people.

Some historians are of the opinion that *Nifāq* (hypocrisy) was a passing nuisance which had arisen owing to peculiar conditions obtaining at Madina during the time of the Prophet. They think that the mischief came to an end with the domination of Islam over paganism as the overriding ascendancy of the former left no room for any further struggle between the two. We find many a historian and commentator of the Qur'ān subscribing to the view that after a time there was no need for anyone to join Islam ostensibly but remain secretly disaffected, as the conditions had completely changed and people could openly make a choice between Islam and heathenism.

Those who hold this view, however, overlook the fact that insincerity is a human failing, as common and old as any other moral affection. It is not at all necessary that there should be

two contending forces of Islam and un-Islam to produce hypocrites who might follow the former whilst secretly opposing it. During a period of Islamic predominance too, there is very often a section which is not able to follow its tenets whole-heartedly; it claims to profess Islam but in the recesses of its mind and heart it has a lurking doubt whether Islam is really the sole repository of truth. Such persons do not possess enough moral courage to forsake Islam publicly, or, perhaps, the benefits they derive from the Muslim society or State do not allow them to renounce the religion in which they do not have an unflinching faith. These persons thus remain throughout their life, distracted and irresolute. Expediency is the norm of such persons; in moral behaviour, selfishness, double-dealing, self-adornment, forgetfulness of the Hereafter, timidity before might and authority and eagerness to exploit the poor and the weak, they are lingering remnants of the hypocrites of earlier days referred to in the Qur'ān.

Indication of Hypocrites :

It is an achievement as well as a proof of Hasan al-Basri's insight that he could not only apprehend that hypocrisy still existed in the Muslim society but that it commanded considerable influence in the public life, especially amongst the ruling elite.¹

- 1 Among the religious scholars of the later period, Shah Wali Ullah too subscribed to the view that hypocrisy is found in every age and that the existence of hypocrites is not a phenomenon peculiar to any particular time or place. He believed hypocrisy to be of two types : hypocrisy in belief and hypocrisy in behaviour and morals. The former is now not discernible or difficult to indicate owing to termination of the revelation after the final disseminator but the hypocrisy of behaviour and morals has been rampant ever since. Speaking of his own times he says in *al-Fauz-ul-Kabīr* "Seek the company of the grandees and their associates if you want to see what hypocrites are like. You will see that they prefer their own likings over the edicts of the law-giver. In truth and reality, there is no difference between these persons and the fellows who personally heard the Prophet, yet practised hypocrisy. All such persons act against the dictates of the law-giver after having ascertained the same, so on and so forth. Rationalists too, who harbour many doubts in their hearts but forget the Hereafter, belong to the same category" (*al-Fauz-ul-Kabīr*, pp 13-14)

Someone asked Hasan if hypocrites were still to be found amongst the Muslims of those days His reply was

“If hypocrites desert the streets of Basra, you will find it hard to live in the city”¹

Hasan al-Basri meant that the majority consisted of those people who paid only a lip-service to Islam without allowing its precepts to take roots in the bottom of their hearts or translating its teachings into their moral behaviour. On another occasion he remarked -

“Holiness be to God ! What hypocrites and self-seeking persons have come to have an upper hand in this *Ummah*”²

Hasan al-Basri's estimation of the then self-centered rulers who were least interested in Islam and the Muslims was perfectly correct

In his correct diagnosis of the canker eating into the body-politic of the *Ummah* lay the cogency of Hasan al-Basri's sermons and the call for reformation There were several outstanding pedagogues among his contemporaries but none could arouse the enthusiastic devotion of the people like Hasan His scathing criticism and denunciation of the degenerated state of society in fact shed light on the spirit and content of hypocrisy that had captured the soul of a large section of the populace Hypocrisy was a malady fast taking roots in the Muslim society, Hasan elucidated the character, morals and behaviour of the hypocrites who could be seen in every walk of life—in administration, armed forces, business and trade For the prevalent vices were the lust for wealth and power and an utter disregard for final Retribution, Hasan gave himself up to the condemnation of these very evils and made people think of the eternal life after death With his gift of eloquence he vividly depicted the unseen realities which every hypocrite, indolent and prodigal wanted to be buried in oblivion

1 Faryābi, p 68

3 *Ibid* , p 57

For the call, preachings and sermons of Hasan challenged, indicted and denounced the aims and objects, designs and ambitions, longings and fancies of the age, it became difficult for the then society to ignore or remain indifferent to his haranguing. Innumerable people returned a changed man after hearing the sermons of Hasan and offered earnest repentance for the life of licentiousness and self-indulgence they had led previously ; they made solemn affirmation of loyalty and obedience to God for the rest of their lives. Hasan would urge his listeners to imbibe a true content of the faith and prescribe measures for the eradication of their vices. He spent full sixty years in religious preaching and moral uplift of the people. It is difficult, for obvious reasons, to estimate the number of persons who were reformed and spiritually redeemed during this period. ‘Awwām ibn Haushab says that Hasan performed the same task for sixty years which prophets used to do among the earlier peoples.¹

Death of Hasan al-Basri :

The immaculate sincerity, outstanding piety and the moral and spiritual excellence of Hasan al-Basri had earned the affection of everyone in Basra. When he died in 110 A. H., the entire population of Basra² attended his funeral which took place on Friday, so that for the first time in the history of Basra the principal mosque of the city remained empty at the hour of the afternoon (*Asr*) prayer.³

After the demise of Hasan, his disciples and spiritual proteges continued to disseminate the message of Hasan uninterrupted ; they invited people back to religion, to the unflinching submission to the Almighty and cognition of the final recompense on the Day of Requital. After twenty-two years of Hasan's death ended the

1 *Al-Bustānī*, Vol VII, p 44.

2 After Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, Basra was then the second largest city of the Islamic empire

3. *Ibn Khallikān*, Vol I, p 355.

rule of the mighty Umayyads, giving place to the Caliphate of ‘Abbāsids who shifted the seat of the empire from Damascus to Baghdad.

Revolts Against Tyranny :

Along with the efforts directed towards propagation of the Faith and moral and spiritual renovation, attempts were also made, time and again, to re-organise the Caliphate in accordance with the political law of Islam and thus terminate the monopoly of political ascendancy enjoyed by the Umayyads, and, later on by the ‘Abbāsids. The Caliphate had unfortunately been organised by that time around such racial and tribal loyalties that no call to overthrow the established order could be effective unless it could also lay a claim to the noble lineage and was also backed by tribal fidelity. We, therefore, find that most of the persons who raised the banner of revolt against the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsids belonged to *Ahl-ul-bait*—people of the House of Muhammad—who could fire the much needed enthusiasm for overthrowing the hated administration. Since they represented the religious urge for reform and renovation and also enjoyed the sympathy and support of the religious-minded people, they stood a fair chance to succeed in their enterprise.

After the massacre of Karbala¹ a number of descendants of the Prophet tried to bring about a revolution. Husain’s grandson, Zaid ibn ‘Ali, attempted a rising against Hishām ibn ‘Abdul Malik which failed and Zaid was killed in 122 A. H. Imām Abū Hanīfa, founder of the Hanafite school of jurisprudence, apologised to Zaid ibn ‘Ali for not being able to join in his expedition but contributed ten thousand *dirhams* for the army of Zaid². Thereafter

1. Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and son of Caliph ‘Ali, was massacred along with his followers on October 10, 680 A. D. at Karbala by an Umayyad detachment for not taking the oath of fealty to Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah. The butchery caused a thrill of horror in the world of Islam.

2. Al-Kurdi, Vol I p 55

another descendant of Hasan, Muhammad Zun-Nafs-az-Zakiyah (b. 'Abdullah al-Mahz b al-Hasan al-Muthanna b. Hasan b. 'Alī) raised the banner of revolt in Madina while his brother Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abdullah rose against Mansūr in Basra. Imām Abū Hanīfa and Imām Mālik,¹ both founders of the schools of canon law, pronounced *fatwās* in favour of the validity of Ibrāhīm's claim to the caliphate and the former even extended financial assistance to him. Imām Abū Hanīfa even dissuaded Hasan ibn Qahtaba, a general of Mansūr, from fighting against Ibrāhīm.² These efforts were, however, also doomed to failure and Muhammad met with a heroic death at Madina on the 15th of *Ramadhan* 145 A H while Ibrāhīm was killed during the same year at Kufa on the 24th of *Zul-ka'ada*. All these efforts turned out to be a dead failure owing to the armed strength and well established rule of the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids, yet, they set an example for the later generations to rise in revolt against tyranny and injustice. Despite their failures, the strenuous and uninterrupted efforts made by these heroes of 'Islam who, instead of submitting to the inducements of wealth and power, preferred to shed the last drop of their blood for the cause of justice and righteousness, have handed on a torch to the posterity that will ever keep its glowing spirit bright.

Of the believer are men who are true to that which they covenanted with Allah

(al-Ahzāb · 23)

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- 1 Imām Mālik advised the people of Madina to help Ibrāhīm even if they had taken the oath of fealty to Mansūr. (Al-Kamil, Vol V, p 214).
 - 2 Some historians are of the opinion that the action taken by Mansūr against Abū Hanīfa was not owing to the latter's refusal to accept the post of Chief Cadi, but because of his taking sides with Ibrāhīm (Abū Hanīfa . p. 458)

CHAPTER III

THE TRADITIONISTS AND JURISTS OF ISLAM

The ‘Abbāsids :

The ‘Abbāsids were successors of the Ummayyads, not in political power alone, but also in the “this-worldly” attitude of life, hereditary and autocratic system of government, misuse of public funds for personal ends and rejoicing in the rounds of pleasure and dissipation. If there was any difference between the two, it lay in the Arabian monopoly of high offices of the State under the former whilst under the later non-Arabs came to have an upper hand in the administration. The vices peculiar to the Arabs under the Ummayyads had thus given place to the failings of the other nations. The writ of the ‘Abbāsīd rule ran over such an extensive area that once Harūn al-Rashīd remarked when he saw a cloud

“Whereinsoever thou may ram, but a portion of the produce of thy shower will come back to me”

The annual income of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, as estimated by Ibn Khaldūn, was more than 7,500 *kintars* (7,01,50,000 *dinars* or 31,50,00,000 *rupees*) during the reign of Harūn al-Rashīd and it had increased manifold by the time of Mamūn. The wealth and prosperity of the empire caused an influx into the capital, from the most distant parts, of the servile classes like musicians and singers, poets and jesters, in pursuit of their vocation of providing recreation to the sovereign, princes and grandees as did all sorts of manufactures and artistic creations to please the men of taste¹. Annalists have preserved an account of the marriage of Mamūn which illustrates the wealth and opulence,

¹ Al-Jahiz Vol III, p. 91 and Vol V, 115

pomp and pageantry, fascination and pleasure, surrounding the 'Abbāsid sovereigns :

“Mamūn along with his family, courtiers, nobles, army and civil chiefs, personal attendants, bodyguards and the entire army remained as a guest of his Prime Minister, Hasan ibn Sahl, to whose daughter he was betrothed Hasan entertained the whole company for seventeen days on such a lavish and gorgeous scale that even the meanest of the king's party lived like an aristocrat during the period Upon the members of the King's household and chief officers of the State were showered balls of musk and ambergris, each of which was wrapped in a paper on which was inscribed the name of an estate, or a slave, or a team of horses, or robes of honour, or some other gift, the recipient then took it to the treasurer who delivered to him the property which had fallen to his lot A carpet of surpassing beauty, made of gold thread and inlaid with pearls and rubies was unrolled for Mamūn. As soon as he was seated on it, precious pearls of unique size and splendour were again showered on his feet which presented a fascinating scene on the resplendent carpet”.¹

Some Preachers of Baghdad :

Amidst this life of dissipation and gay abandon there were a few inspired souls who, having detached themselves from all fascinations and immoral demeanours of the then society, had given themselves up to the propagation of the faith, self-purification, education and edification of the religious sciences The life-long object of these mentors was to protect and fortify the spiritual content of the community's faith, to forge a link between the Creator and the created and to expound and elucidate the teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. They upheld steadfastly the traditions of detachment, fearlessness and undaunted championship of the truth, for, the powers that be could neither

¹ *Al-Mamūr*, pp 156-57 also see Ibn Khallikān Vol I pp 258-59

purchase them nor force them to give up the task they had taken upon themselves. Their seminaries were indeed heavens of shelter and safety in a tumultuous ocean of blasphemous materialism, domains of peace and tranquility were these, no less extensive or effective than the temporal kingdoms of the day. If the kings and sovereigns had control over the body and flesh of their subjects, the writ of these mentors put the souls of the people into their hands. There are not a few instances when these men of God were able to hold their own against the most powerful emperors. Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd was once on an official visit to Raqqa when the celebrated traditionist ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak happened to go there. The entire population of the city came out to receive him and no body remained to attend the king. The multitude was so great that a large number of persons lost their shoes in the throng. A maid servant of the Caliph who happened to watch the procession from the balcony, enquired who the celebrity was? When she was told that he was a religious doctor, ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak, from Khurasān, she remarked: “Verily, kingship is his and not of Harūn who dares not go anywhere without guards and orderlies¹”

Baghdad of the ‘Abbāsīd period manifested both the cross-currents, if on the one hand people of every calling and trade, desirous of fortunes and riches, amusement and gratification, had gathered in the city, there was also, on the other, a great influx of religious teachers and the taught from all over the world. Baghdad had become such a great centre of the saints and the learned that the monographs and annals of the period give an impression as if none save the divines and pious souls lived in Baghdad and its environs resounded with the recollection and praise of Allah. This atmosphere of piety and catholicity was due mainly to Sufyān Thaurī², Fudhayl ibn ‘Ayādh³, Junaid

1 Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, p 238

2 d. 161/778

3 d. 187/803

Baghdadi¹, Mā'rūf Karkhi², and Bishr Hāfi³ who had dedicated themselves to the propagation of the faith. The moral rectitude and integrity of these masters, their kind-heartedness and sincerity, detachment and contentment, benevolence and readiness to make sacrifice for others had endeared them to all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. They upheld and gave a practical demonstration of the Islamic morality with the result that countless Jews, Christians, Magians and Sabians who came into their contact embraced Islam⁴.

The Two Urgent Problems:

It was imperative, truly at this juncture of Islamic history, to formulate and strengthen the norms of communal, social and political behaviour of the *Ummah*, in the same way as its moral and spiritual heritage had been protected and nourished in the past so as to ensure that Islam would ever continue to be the guiding light for coming generations. By that time the Muslim empire had become the most powerful and extensive kingdom of the day extending over almost the whole of Asia and parts of Africa and Spain in Europe. New exigencies were arising as Muslims came into contact with the peoples in different lands; problems relating to business and cultivation, poll-tax and land revenue, customs and rites of their vassals and liegemen were awaiting to be solved in accordance with the *Shar'ah* and its jurisprudence. It was simply not possible to set aside or defer anyone of these questions since the Islamic State stood urgently in need of a detailed and satisfactory answer to each of these issues, else it would have adopted Roman or Byzantine laws, codes and regulations for the conduct of its administrative business. Any complacency on the part of the then *'ulema* would have produced the same confusion and waywardness as can be witnessed today under the so-called

1 d 297/910

2 d 200/815

3 d. 227/841.

4 For details see Ibn Khallikān: Vol I, pp 247-51 pp 323-24, Vol II, pp. 127-28; Vol. III, pp 215-17 and Vol IV, pp 319-20.

present-day Islamic States The result might have been even more disastrous since the diffidence or negligence on the part of exegetists and traditionists at that crucial stage would have deprived the *Ummah* of its *raison d'être* for thousands of years if not for all times to come. As a poet has said

“A moment's negligence makes the way a hundred years longer”

One of the two important problems requiring immediate attention was the collection and compilation of the Traditions of the Holy Prophet which had by then been taken down or committed to memory by a large number of traditionists spread all over the Islamic realm¹ The Tradition or the *Sunnah* was a major source of legislation as the details of the law were only hinted at or sometimes not explicitly mentioned in the *Qur'ān*, and thus these constituted the only means of regulating the rules of conduct and safeguarding the Islamic character of the Muslim society In fact, the *Sunnah* comprises a minute record of twenty-three years of the Prophet's apostleship, transmitted by his companions, relatives and friends—the eye-and ear-witnesses. It is also a distinction not enjoyed by any other prophet² Apart from its educational and doctrinal value, the *Sunnah* is a reservoir of guidance for moral rectitude and spiritual uplift, of reverence

1 The collection and compilation of the Tradition had actually been taken up by the successors of the companions of Holy Prophet The active interest taken by 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Azīz has already been referred to in these pages In the second century A H there existed numerous compilations of which those of Ibn Shāhāb Zuhri (d 124 A H), Ibn Jurāh Makkī (d 150 A H), Ibn Is'haq (d 151 A H), Sa'eed Ibn Abī 'Arūba Madni (d 156 A H), Mu'mar Yamani (d 153 A H) and Rab'i ibn Sabih (d, 160 A H) were more celebrated It was then necessary to subject to most minute scrutiny, classify and interpret the Traditions in accordance with the carefully determined norms of criticism

2 In so far as the Prophet enjoyed Divine guidance to give authoritative declarations on questions, moral, social or doctrinal, his Traditions really constitute a record of inspired sayings, and consequently occupy a totally different position to what is commonly understood by traditions in the Christian Church

and awe of God, of infusing people with a dynamic energy to fight the evil; and, it shall ever be producing standard-bearers who will fill the people with the true content of faith, enthusiasm and self-confidence, bring the people back to the fountainhead of Divine guidance and enable them to erase the accretions, deviations and innovations to their beliefs and practices

The other need of the hour was to collect, systematise and make analogical deductions in consonance with the teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, to answer all possible questions of a sacred or secular nature. The Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* provide, undoubtedly, guiding principles which can be applied to every stage of social and intellectual development of human beings, but, life being ever on the move, change is indispensable for human progress. And this is why *Ijtihād* or analogical deduction of legal opinions under the inspiration of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* had become unavoidable to meet the new situations and necessities of the then expanding Islamic community.

Compilation of Hadith (Traditions):

A mention must here be made of the Divine arrangements made for safeguarding the Traditions. For God Almighty had selected for it a nation reputed for its memory, veracity and fidelity, whatever the companions of the Prophet saw or heard from him, they preserved the same with utmost care and transmitted it to the succeeding generations. The memory of the prophets born amongst other peoples was preserved by the latter through sculpture and portraits but the companions of the Prophet of Islam, for whom representation in pictures and engravings had been prohibited, have left such a vivid and lively description of the appearance and deportment of the Prophet which not only dispenses with the need of picturisation but is also free from all its vices.

Assiduity of the Traditionists :

Again, God Almighty provided Islam with hundreds of earnest scholars, peerless in prodigious memory and

intelligence, industry and enthusiasm, erudition and scholarly attainments, for the cultivation and development of the science of Tradition. A large number of these, belonging to the non-Arab stock and coming from distant lands, set off on extensive travels all over the Islamic world in quest of the Traditions. Indifferent to everything else, they devoted themselves to attending the lectures of the great doctors of theology and planning their work for collecting the Prophet's sayings and traditions about his acts and doings. No other science, nor yet a people can claim to have had savants as devoted and zealous, and, at the same time, as meticulous and trustworthy as were the traditionists. They moved heaven and earth to hunt for the Traditions from every corner of the Islamic world. al-Bukhārī set off on his errand at the age of 13 and went all the way from Bukhara to Egypt, Abū Hatīm Rāzī says that he traversed 3000 *farsankh* (9000 miles) on foot and thereafter left counting the mileage; Ibn Haivan of Andalusia (Spain) attended lectures of the doctors of Tradition at Andalusia, Iraq, Hijaz and Yaman wading through the whole of North Africa from Tanja to Suez and then across the Red Sea to Yaman. A large number of traditionists have left accounts of their travels covering Asia, Africa and Europe (Spain).¹ As a matter of fact, it was not uncommon in those days to tread from Andalusia in Europe to Khurasan in Central Asia for the sake of acquiring knowledge from the reputed doctors of theology in different cities.

Dictionary of Biography:

These savants did not simply collect and compile the Traditions but they also made researches in regard to the narrators of the Traditions, their integrity, truthfulness, moral and spiritual excellence. In this way an account of the lives of all those transmitters of the sayings or doings of the Prophet, who had had the promise of "an exalted fame" by the Lord, came to light. All these hundreds of thousands narrators became known to the

¹ *Ulama-i-Salaf*, pp 20/22

posterity since they had handed down a Tradition or part thereof, thereby bringing into existence another science known as *Asma'ur-ryāl*. This branch of knowledge is a living monument of the deep erudition and scholarly attainment, bent for research and the sense of responsibility, intellectual acumen and lofty idealism of the people inventing it. In truth and reality, the *Ummah* can rightly feel proud of their achievement. In his introduction to Hafiz Ibn Hajar's *al-Isābah-fī-Tamīz-is-Sahābah* Dī. A Sprenger has paid a glowing tribute to the savants of the Traditions:

"The glory of the literature of the Mohammadans is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor has there been any which like them has during twelve centuries recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Musalmans were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons, and it would be found that there is not a decennium of their history, nor a place of importance which has not its representatives."

Trustworthiness of the Traditionists:

The traditionists did not simply narrate the biographical accounts of the transmitters of Traditions, they took every conceivable care to record absolutely authentic memoirs in regard to the character and disposition, integrity and prudence, knowledge and retentive memory of the narrators. They gleaned all available information about the narrators gathered from their contemporaries, without any partiality, fear or favour, no matter whether the narrator was a pious and illuminated soul or a ruler. One of the annalists says:

'The matchless courage exhibited by the traditionists in subjecting the narrators of Traditions to an impartial and close scrutiny can justly claim a pride of place in the annals of Islamic peoples. There were numerous caliphs and commanders noted for their despotism,

1 Sprenger: Vol 1, p 1

among the narrators, but the Traditionists assigned them that very rank which they deserved. Imām Wak'ee was a reputed Traditionist but his father was a treasurer under the employ of the State. Therefore whenever Wak'ee had an occasion to relate a Tradition handed down by his father, he accepted the same if it was supported by another reliable narrator and rejected it if nobody in support of his father was to be found. Such a conscientious and cautious lot were these Traditionists."

Mas'ūdī was a Traditionist. He was paid a visit in 154 A. H. by another traditionist, Ma'ādih ibn Ma'ādih, but as the former took the help of his memoirs, Ma'ādih rejected his Traditions on the ground of his weak memory.¹ Ma'ādih was once offered ten thousand *dinars* simply for remaining silent in regard to the reliability or otherwise of a witness. He refused the offer contemptuously saying that he could not suppress an evidence.²

Retentive Memory of the Traditionists :

Most of the traditionists were the elite of Iranian and Turkoman stock—a robust, vigorous and resolute people with a strong retentive memory in whom an ardent desire for acquiring knowledge had been kindled by Islam. Like any other human faculty which grows strong or weak with its use or disuse, retentive memory too can be strengthened prodigiously. Memory is losing its retentive power these days owing to the easy access to printed material, and now-a-days many people would find it difficult to believe the wonderful feats of strong retentive memory performed in the bygone days. History bears witness to many an instance of unimpeachable veracity of prodigious retentive memory which is, however, by no means beyond human experience or unintelligible. The fact is that an aptitude for the subject of study combined with continued application and profound interest in it produces

1 Tahzīb, Vol. XI, p. 130

2 *Ibid*, Vol. VI, p. 211

3 *Ibid*, Vol. VI, p. 431 and *Khutbāt-i-Madras*, pp. 59-60

such a proficiency as appears to be prodigious or rather an intellectual marvel to the un-initiated

When al-Bukhārī¹ arrived at Baghdad, the doctors there thought of a novel device to test his memory. They selected ten scholars who were assigned ten Traditions each and told to relate these to al-Bukhārī after affixing the introductory portion of one Tradition to the text of another.² Each of these persons narrated the Traditions as decided earlier and asked al-Bukhārī to give his opinion about their authenticity. Al-Bukhārī's reply about every Tradition narrated before him was that he had no knowledge of it. Those who knew the reason got a cue while unawares smiled at him. After everyone had narrated the Traditions apportioned to him, al-Bukhārī addressed the first enquirer and rehearsed all the Traditions narrated by him seriatim with the correct introductory portions and their adjunct texts. Thereafter he turned to each questioner and recounted his Traditions one by one. Everyone was dumbfounded at his wit and prodigious memory.³

Popular Enthusiasm :

The selfless devotion and care with which the traditionists addressed themselves to the study of the Prophet's *Sunnah*, aroused a general awareness and enthusiasm among the masses in regard to

1 Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (810-870) was born at Bukhara. When still a youth he undertook the pilgrimage and remained for some time in Mecca attending the lectures of great doctors of theology. Then he set off on extensive travels which throughout 16 years took him all over Islamic Asia. Of a large number of Traditions he had collected, he finally selected 7,275 texts applying the most minute scrutiny. His collection, which is divided into 160 books is entitled *al-Jam' al-Sahīh* (The Genuine Collection) and considered as the first and most authoritative of the *Sihāh Ṣittah* (Six Genuine Books). Al-Bukhārī died in a village near Samarkand where his Tomb is a much visited place of pilgrimage.

2 The introductory portion of a Tradition consists of the chain of narrators who saw or heard any saying attributed to the Prophet, while the text comprises the quotation of the Prophet's words.

3 *Fatah-ul-Bari*, p. 487.

this branch of religious science. People flocked to the lecture of the traditionists in thousands with an avid desire to benefit from these study circles. It is related by the annalists that despite the huge crowds attending the lectures of the traditionists these meetings were more disciplined and tidy than the courts of the sovereigns.

It is reported that the number of persons attending the lectures of Yazid ibn Harūn in Baghdad exceeded seventy thousand persons. Caliph Mu'tasim b'illāh once deputed a trusted counselor to report the number of persons attending the discourse of 'Asim ibn 'Alī, a traditionist who lectured in a grove in the outskirts of Baghdad. His estimate of the attendance was one hundred and twenty-four thousand people. Another annalist Ahmad ibn J'afar says that when Muslim¹ came to Baghdad he convened a meeting at Rahbah Ghassān for dictating the Traditions. Seven persons were appointed to repeat what Muslim dictated. Apart from the persons who came to listen the discourse a large number took down the Traditions from Muslim. The inkpots counted after the dictation was over exceeded forty thousand. Another doctor of repute, Faryābī had to employ three hundred and sixteen persons to repeat his discourses to the crowd attending his lectures. It is estimated that about thirty thousand persons attended his lectures of which ten thousand took down the notes of his dissertations². Al-Faribī reports that ninety thousand persons heard al-Jam'c al-Sahih personally from al-Bukhārī³.

Sihah Sittah :

Unprecedented popular enthusiasm, devotion and ardent desire for the cultivation of religious sciences was helpful in securing an authentic and trustworthy collection of the Traditions which is undoubtedly a valuable asset and a storehouse of guidance.

1 Muslim ibn al-Hayyāj (819-874) was compiler of one of the six canonical collections of *Hadith* called *al-Sahih Muslim* & *Sahih* and al-Bukhārī's work of the same title are the two most generally used of six most authentic collections of Traditions.

2 *Uloom-ul-Salaf*, p. 68.

3 *Fatah-ul-Bari*, p. 492.

for the *Ummah*. Among the compilations of *Sunnah*, *Sahih ul-Bukhari* of al-Bukhari and *Sahih Muslim* by Muslim are held to be of undisputed authority, and the Traditions accepted by both are known as the “agreed ones” signifying a high degree of reliability¹. Other works, held in high esteem but taking their place after the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim, are *Muwatta* of Imam Malik (d. 179 A H), *Jam’i* of Imam Tirmizi, *Sunan-i-Abu-Da’ud* of Abu-Da’ud Siyistani (d. 275 A H) and the collections of Abu ‘Abdur-Rahman an-Nasa’i (d. 303 A H) and Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Majah (d. 273 A H). All the later movements for reformation and regeneration in Islam owe their existence to the endeavours made by the traditionists as no effort can succeed even now without drawing inspiration from these beacons of light.

Compilation of Jurisprudence :

Like the Traditions, the codification of canons regulating the public and private life, amplification of the *corpus juris* and deduction of the rules for giving decisions in legal matters were the problems to be tackled immediately. Islam had set foot on far off lands of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Iran and other countries where its impact on local habits, customs and usages had given rise to many complicated problems. Now, in order to solve these problems in consonance with the spirit of Islam, it required a deep knowledge of the conditions obtaining in these countries, customs and traditions of the different sections of society, patterns of human behaviour, a penetrating intellect and prudence along with a command over the Islamic lore, the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah*, history and lexicon of the Arabs.

1 Shah Wali Ullah writes in *Hujjat-Allah-il-Baligha* “Traditionists agree that all the connected Traditions reported to have been related or performed by the Prophet himself and reported in these two collections are undisputedly correct for the chains of narrators given in these books are complete. Anyone who denigrates these compilations is an apostate and a dissenter” (*Hujjat*, Vol I, p. 133).

The Four Jurists of Islam :

Islam was fortunate to have been favoured again by God with paragons of intelligence and knowledge, earnestness and trustworthiness, who came forward for the service of *Ummah* in this field. Among these men of mark, the four founders of juristic schools, Nūmān ibn Thābit Abū Hanīfā (d. 150 A.H.) Abū ‘Abdullah Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 A.H.) Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204 A.H.) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 A.H.), were highly esteemed scholars noted for their outstanding piety and service to the community, scholarship and understanding of legal matters. These savants dedicated their lives to the noble cause they had taken up, set up a tradition of contentment and resignation and turned their backs upon all the inducements of wealth, power and position. Abū Hanīfā twice refused the high office of Chief Justiceship offered to him by the then Caliph and was cast into prison where he died on account of the corporal punishment inflicted upon him. Mālik ibn Anas was flogged¹ so severely that his shoulder-blade got dislocated. Al-Shāfi‘ī withdrew himself from the world, became indifferent to its concerns and led a life of self-abnegation and sublime asceticism resulting in irreparable loss to his health. Ahmad ibn Hanbal set his face against the official school of the then prevalent theology. He was tried before a court of inquisition and thrown into prison but he steadfastly held to the tradition of orthodox school. Each one of these jurists left voluminous treatises on law and legal dicta as can hardly be produced even through an organised effort. Abū Hanīfā is reported to have elucidated eighty-three thousand² juristic-theological issues of which thirty-eight thousand pertained to acts of devotion and prayer and

1 The point at the issue was whether the divorce given under compulsion is effective or not. The Caliphs in those days used to take the oath of fealty from the populace with an stipulation that if they broke the oath then wives would automatically be divorced. Imam Mālik's legal opinion that divorce given under compulsion was ineffective made the stipulation in the oath of fealty ineffective thus causing a stir in the official circles.

2 *Zuhd Islam* Vol. II, p. 188 and *Al-Makki*, p. 96.

forty-five thousand to transactions, rights and duties owed by one Muslim to another. Another authority, al-Kurdari, writes that the total number of Abū Hanīfā's legal opinions was six lakhs.¹ *Al-Mudawwanah*, the collection of religious and judicial sentences of Mālik ibn Anas, contains thirty-six thousand decisions.² The collection of writings and lectures of al-Shāfi'ī known under the title of *Kitāb al-Umm*, runs into seven bulky volumes. The decisions of Ahmad ibn Hanbal were compiled by Abū Bakr Khallāl (d. 311 A.H.) in forty volumes.³

Disciples of the Four Jurists :

The founders of Juristic schools luckily got successors and disciples who not only compiled and edited the compositions of their masters but also made improvements and additions to them. Among the alumni of Abū Hanīfā was Abū Yūsuf, an eminent legal brain and Chief Justice of Harūn al-Rashīd, who produced a treatise of great erudition like *Kitāb ul-Khiraṭ* on the principles of Islamic economy. His other disciples included illustrious writers and jurists of Muhammad and Zufar's fame who firmly established and popularised the Hanafite school of jurisprudence. 'Abdullah ibn Wahāb, 'Abdur-Rahman ibn al-Qāsim, Ash'hab ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz, 'Abdullah ibn Abd al-Hakam, Yahya ibn Yahya al-Laithi were disciples of Mālik ibn Anas, who propagated the Mālikī system in Egypt and North Africa. Al-Shāfi'ī was fortunate to have Buwaṭi, Muzani and Rab'ī as compilers, editors and codifiers of his legal decisions. Ibn Qudāmah, a research scholar and accomplished writer, was the principal pupil of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. He wrote a celebrated book entitled *al-Mughni* which occupies a pride of place in the Islamic juristic works.

Advantages of Fiqah :

The fact that jurists of redoubtable scholarship were born in the first few centuries of Islamic era bespeaks of the vitality and

1 Al-Kurdari, p. 144

2 *Zuhul Islam* Vol. II, p. 215

3 Shahrāṭi, Vol. II, pp. 261-62

inherent capability of the *Ummah* The endeavours of the jurists supplied a frame-work for manifestation of the Islamic ideals of ethical precepts in day-to-day affairs of the people and protected them from intellectual confusion and social anarchy which has brought many nations to wrack and ruin in their initial stages The jurists founded the Islamic legal system on a firm ground and formulated its canons in such a way that it could always solve new problems confronting the *Ummah* in future and provide a pattern of behaviour in consonance with the spirit of Islam

CHAPTER IV

AHMAD IBN HANBAL

Metaphysics :

Muslims became conversant with the Greek intellectual patrimony in the beginning of the second century A. H. The philosophical thought of the Greeks was nothing more than an intellectual sophistry and a play upon words devoid of any content of reality. The concepts and ideas of man, limited as they are, find expression in his language which is wholly inadequate to delineate the nature and attributes of the Limitless Being. The nature of God, His attributes, His creativeness, and similar other questions do not admit of an analysis and experimentation similar to those of tangible objects nor yet of a rational explanation, if only, because man does not possess the rudimentary knowledge or the basic precepts and experiences in regard to these matters, while the entire structure of his thoughts, ideas and imagination rests on sensory perceptions. Divine revelation through His apostles is, in reality, the only means of acquiring knowledge with certitude in this respect, for it can alone provide mankind with the gnosis of Supreme Being and His attributes. Trust in the prophets, therefore, bespeaks of prudence and sound intellect. Muslims possessed the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* which provided an answer to all intellectual and spiritual questions and left no excuse for plunging into philosophical speculations. The companions of the Prophet, their successors, jurists and traditionists had all taken the same stand. Also, Muslims were in the beginning too much occupied with the dissemination of their faith, the conquests that had brought to the fore numerous problems relating to affairs of private and social

life which had to be patterned in accordance with the ethical norms of Islam, and the compilation of religious sciences. However, with the translation of Greek and Syriac works and a close contact with the scholastics, philosophers and scholars of other peoples, a section of the Muslims began to take interest in the so-called rational and intellectual interpretation of the revealed truth. These people, not content with a realistic and direct answer available in the Scriptures to the spiritual questions, which was in fact more satisfying to an intellect, deep and well-grounded, were attracted by the sophism of philosophical speculation. And the result of their endeavours was that futile controversies pertaining to the nature and attributes of God, eternal or accidental nature of His word, vision of God through corporeal eyes, predestination and free-will were started, although these were neither necessary for theological purposes nor had any utility for cultural or social advancement. These discussions had definitely a dissolving influence on the solidarity of the *Ummah* and were injurious to its grit and tenacity.

Muʿtazilism :

The Muʿtazilites, at the head of this group of religious philosophers, were regarded as rationalists and dialecticians since they had made philosophical speculation a touchstone of faith and apostasy. They endeavoured, with all the wits at their command, to reconcile religion with philosophy, faith with the so-called reason, while jurists and traditionists, on the other hand adhered to doctrinal tenets of their predecessors and considered these quibblings not only futile but harmful for the *Ummah*. *ʿIlzāl* did not take root till the reign of Harūn al-Rashīd but in the time of Mamūn, who was very much impressed with the Greek thought and its rationalism owing to his upbringing and for certain other reasons, the star of the Muʿtazilites rose on the horizon. Ibn Abī Duwād an ardent propagator of *ʿIlzāl* and the Chief Justice of the ʿAbbāsīd Empire, exerted his influence to make it a state religion. Mamūn, who was himself a zealous exponent of the Muʿtazilite school, had the impatience of a youth and the

obstinacy of an autocrat sovereign¹ He made it possible for the Mu'tazilites to exercise undue influence over the whole empire

The doctrine of the creation of the Qur'ān² was held as the basic tenet of the Mu'tazilite school which was sought to be enforced by invoking the power and influence of the state, and was made a criterion for determining one's apostasy or adherence to the true faith This brought forth a vehement opposition from the traditionists with Ahmad ibn Hanbal spearheading the opposition movement

Ahmad ibn Hanbal :

Ahmad ibn Hanbal was born at Baghdad in the month of Rab'ī ul-Awwal, 164 A. H He came of an Arab tribe, 'Shaiban,' which was renowned for its courage and endurance, grit and vigour³ His grandfather, Hanbal ibn Hilāl had

- 1 A few examples of his rashness are furnished by his declaration of the preference of 'Alī over the first three Caliphs and of the validity of marriages contracted for a limited period which caused considerable resentment among the masses He had afterwards to retrace his steps on the intervention of Yahya ibn Aktham (*Zuhā Islam*, Vol III, p 165 and *Ibnū Tāfur*, p 45)
- 2 The controversy in a regard to the creation of Qur'ān—its being created or being eternal—was entirely a philosophical speculation, which, even according to the Mu'tazilite historians, served only to shake the faith in the divine origin of the Qur'ān Traditionists, holding the interpretations of the Mu'tazilite school to be wrong and harmful for the *Ummah*, opposed them The Mu'tazilites are commonly regarded as rationalists and progressive but they proved to be the most turbulent sectarians since they endeavoured to stifle all opposition to their creed They filled the entire world of Islam with a rancour and fanned the flame of hatred between different sections of the populace The manner in which they dealt with their opponents is reminiscent of the courts of Inquisition set up by the Christian Church during the Medieval Ages for the repression of the liberal thinkers, and which ultimately gave a death blow to 'Itizāl.
- 3 The famous Commander of Caliph Abū Bakr, Muthanna ibn Hāritha belonged to the same tribe

migrated from Basra to Khurasan and was appointed as Governor of Sarakhsh under the Ummayyads but he was sympathetic to the ‘Abbāsīd propaganda to supplant Banī Hashim, the descendants of the Prophet, in place of the Ummayyads. After his father's death, his mother migrated to Baghdad where Ahmad was born. Although placed in straitened circumstances, his mother took pains to provide him with the best possible education. Ahmad too, being at the end of his tether, learnt to be industrious and patient, resolute and self-restrained. He committed the Qur’ān to memory when still young, studied literature for some time and then enlisted in an office to gain proficiency in the penmanship.

Ahmad was virtuous and of clear conscience from his very childhood. His uncle held the post of an official reporter at Baghdad and used to send despatches to his superiors about the affairs of the city. Once he handed over a bundle of his despatches to Ahmad for being delivered to a courier, but Ahmad threw these away in the river as he thought that these would be containing secret reports about certain persons. While he was working as an apprentice in the correspondence-office, many house-wives whose husbands were out on military duty came to get their letters read out to them and replies written on their behalf. Ahmad would oblige them but he would never write anything which he considered to be undignified or against the *Shari'ah*. It was on account of these distinctive qualities that a foreseeing individual (Haitham ibn Jamil) had predicted that if “the youngman remained alive, he would be a model for his compatriots”¹

In religious sciences, Ahmad paid special attention to the Traditions. In the beginning he took notes of the Traditions from Abū Yūsuf² and then studied for four years under a famous traditionist of Baghdad, Haitham ibn Bashir³ (d. 182 A. H.).

1 *Tarjumatul Imām*, p. 16

2 *Manāqib Imām Ahmad*, p. 23

3 *Ibid*, p. 23

During this period he also received education from ‘Abdūr Rahman ibn Mahdī, Abū Bakr ibn ‘Ayyāsh and a few other reputed teachers of *hadīth*. He was such an industrious and avid student that often he wanted to leave the home for his studies so early in the morning that his mother had to beg him to wait till the call for the morning prayer was heard and the darkness had at least faded away.

After completing his education at Baghdad he set out for Basra, Hijaz, Yaman, Syria and al-Jazīrah for attending the lectures of the reputed doctors of Tradition in these places.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal met Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī in 187 A H while on his first visit to Hijaz¹. He again met al-Shāfi‘ī afterwards in Baghdad when the latter had elaborated the science of jurisprudence into a regular system and developed the doctrine of *ym‘ā*. Ahmad had too acquired such a proficiency by then that al-Shāfi‘ī used to depend on him in regard to the authenticity of the Traditions and often asked Ahmad to enlighten him in this regard.

Ahmad wanted to set off for Ray in Iran for attending the lectures of a reputed traditionist, Jarīr ibn ‘Abdul Hamīd but could not go because of the paucity of funds. He often regretted that if he had even ninety *dirhams* he would have left for Ray. Another incident indicating his high-spiritedness in acquiring the knowledge of Traditions has been related by the annalists. In 198 A H he decided to repair to Hijaz and then, after performing the Hajj, to San‘ā in Yaman for listening the Traditions from ‘Abdur Razzaq ibn Humām. One of his class-mates, Yahyā ibn Ma‘een, also promised to accompany him. However, when they were encompassing the Ka‘bah, they happened to meet ‘Abdur Razzaq ibn Humām. Ibn Ma‘een paid his respects to ‘Abdur Razzaq and introduced Ahmad to him. He also made a request to give them some time for learning the Traditions for him. When ‘Abdur Razzaq had left, Ahmad told Ibn Ma‘een that it was not befitting for them to take advantage of the Sheikh’s

1. Ibn Hambal, p 33

presence in Mecca to listen the Traditions from him. Although Ibn Ma^ccen pleaded that it was a boon from God that the Sheikh's presence in Mecca had saved them from a lengthy journey of two months and the attendant hardships and expenditure, Ahmad refused to listen the Traditions from 'Abdu^r Razzaq without having undertaken the journey to San^cā. He said: "I would feel ashamed before God, if I break the journey undertaken with the intention of learning the Traditions. I would go to San^cā and attend the Sheikh's lectures there". After the Hajj was over, he repaired to San^cā and listened the Traditions handed down through al-Zuhri and ibn al-Mussayyib from 'Abdur Razzaq.¹ In due course of time he acquired a high reputation for his profound knowledge, particularly for his erudition with respect to the precepts, actions and sayings of the Prophet, of which he could repeat over a million. Despite his vast knowledge and prodigious memory, he had a high regard for al-Shafe^ci's intelligence, grasp and deductive method of reasoning. He used to say of al-Shafe^ci: "I have not seen anyone like him". Ahmad learnt the rules of jurisprudence from al-Shafe^ci and later developed his own doctrine of uncompromising adherence to the text of the Traditions as a source of law. Ultimately he rose to be an eminent theologian and jurist, and the founder of one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, which still has adherents in many parts of the Islamic world. Al-Shafe^ci too held Ahmad ibn Hanbal in high esteem. While leaving Baghdad al-Shafe^ci had remarked: "I am leaving Baghdad when there is none more pious and a greater jurist than Ahmad ibn Hanbal".²

Ahmad ibn Hanbal began his discourses on Traditions in 204 A.H., at the age of forty.³ This was perhaps God ordained or a re-echo of the Prophet's call to Islam since he had been graced with the prophethood at that age. Quite a large number of persons used to attend his lectures. Annalists report that five

1 Ibn-Kathir, Vol. X, pp 326-27 and *Manāqib Imām Ahmad*, pp 69-70

2 *Tarjumatul Imām*, p 16

3 Ibn Hanbal, pp 33

thousand or more persons attended his lectures out of which about five hundred used to take down his discourses. People listened to Ahmad ibn Hanbal in pin drop silence for no body could dare to talk or do anything unseemly of the respect of Traditions. The poor were given preference over the rich in his lectures. Al-Zahabi quotes Maiwazi, a contemporary of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, as follows

“I have not seen the poor and lowly being shown more deference anywhere than in the lectures of Ahmad, who used to be attentive to the poor and indifferent to the affluent. He was a man of towering dignity, of simple habits yet grave and never hasty, his countenance signified a weightiness and sublimity. He used to arrive for his lectures after *Asr* prayers, but remained quiet till he was requested to speak.”¹

Ahmad ibn Hanbal was extremely simple in his habits and led an almost ascetic life like the mentors of the old. He never accepted any gift or present offered by the Caliphs or the grandees. If his sons ever asked the reason for refusing these presents, he explained that the offerings were perfectly lawful and even Hajj could be performed from that money. He refused to accept these not because of it being prohibited but owing to the dictates of prudence. He managed to meet his expenses from the income of his ancestral fief or from his own earnings but despite his being financially hard-pressed he was very large-hearted and generous. He often said that if the entire world became a morsel in the hands of any Muslim who fed another Muslim with it, this would not be lavishness. He was not charitable in respect of wealth alone but exhibited the same virtue even when his own-self was involved. Once a man abused and denounced him but soon came back to repent and offer his apology. Ahmad replied that he had already forgiven him before leaving the place where the incident had occurred. After enduring the tortures in connexion with his stand on the eternity of the Qurʾān, he forgave

1. *Tarjumatul Imām*, p. 35, and *Hilyatul Auliya*, Vol. IX, p. 165

all those who were involved in his sufferings including the Caliph under whose orders he had been severely scourged. He used to say "I cannot pardon the innovator in religion but excepting him everyone who took part in my victimisation has been pardoned by me". Often he said, "What advantage would anyone derive if a Muslim was scourged in Hell because of him?"

An incident illustrating the over-flowing charity and kindly disposition of Ahmad ibn Hanbal has been related by Ahmad Qattān al-Baghdādī who says that long after the wounds inflicted by the flogging had been healed, Ahmad ibn Hanbal often had a shooting pain in his back which was caused by a growth developed as a result of the severe scourging. The physician who had treated Ahmad ibn Hanbal told al-Baghdādī that while examining Ahmad when he pressed the spot where the latter had pain, Ahmad simply said "I seek the refuge of God from it". Similarly, when the physician opened the spot to remove the concussion, Ahmad continued to seek forgiveness for Mu'tasim till the operation was over. After dressing the wound the physician asked Ahmad ibn Hanbal "Abū 'Abdullah, when people have to face a calamity on account of someone else, they normally accurse him but you were invoking divine blessings for Mu'tasim?" "I too thought of it", replied Ahmad, "but Mu'tasim is a descendant of the Prophet's uncle and I do not want to cherish a feud with one of the relatives of the Prophet when I face him on the Day of Judgement. I, therefore, decided to forgo my claim against him".¹

Despite his high reputation and profound knowledge, never a word of self-praise was heard from him. One of his associates, Yahyā ibn Ma'een says

"I have not seen a man like Ahmad. I had been associated with him for fifty years but he never showed off his erudition".²

1 *Randha-tul-Uqla*, pp 156-57

2 *Hilyatul Awliya*, Vol IX p 181

Modest as he was, Ahmad never liked to mention his lineage although he descended from a celebrated Arab tribe, and that was considered to be a great honour in those days. Al-Zahabi has recorded an incident related by one of Ahmad's compatriots which throws light on his singular humility.

“‘Arim Abū-No‘amān says . Ahmad ibn Hanbal had asked me to keep some funds in deposit out of which he used to draw amounts in accordance with his needs. Once I said : ‘Abū ‘Abdullah, I know you are an Arab.’ To this he replied . ‘What ! we are destitutes.’ I insisted on a reply but he evaded the answer”.¹

After the persecution Ahmad ibn Hanbal had to undergo for his stand on the question of the creation of Qur‘ān, he obtained so high a reputation for his sanctity that countless people offered prayers for divine blessings on him. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, however, felt terribly worried and uncertain. Once Marwazi, one of his disciples, told him : “A large number of people solemnly invoke the divine blessings on you.”

“How do you say so ?”, Ahmad exclaimed, “I actually fear punishment in the shape of divine benefits that are sometimes conferred on ungrateful sinners”.

Marwazi replied, “A man has come from Tarsūs who says that he was present on a battle-field in Rūm² when he heard suddenly cries raised from every nook and corner of the place imploring benediction in your favour. He further relates that the soldiers fired ballistas as if on your behalf and once it so happened that when a ballista was thus fired, the missile hit an enemy taking position behind a cover on the wall of the fort, cleanly blowing away both the cover and the head of the enemy”.

Horried on hearing this, Ahmad exclaimed, “O God, let this not be a delusive favour from Thee.”.³

1. *Tarjumatul Imām*, p 22.

2. The land of the Byzantians.

3. *Tarjumatul Imām*, p 21

Very often non-Muslims came to meet him from distant places. A Christian physician once visited him in connexion with his treatment. He said, "I wanted to meet you since a long time. You are a blessing not for the Muslims alone but for all the human beings. All of our friends and co-religionists have similar feelings for you".

When the physician had left, Marwazi said, "I hope that the entire Muslim world would be beseeching divine blessings for you".

Ahmad, however, replied, "When a man happens to know his worth, no adulation can deceive him."¹

Notwithstanding his profound humility, Ahmad ibn Hanbal had been endowed with a personality so solemn and overbearing that even the state officials, administrators and soldiers felt over-awed in his presence and could not help paying respect to him. An eye-witness reports that he had been to the Governor of Baghdad Is'haq ibn Ibrāhīm, and several other high-ranking officers but he did not find anyone so domineering as Ahmad ibn Hanbal. He says that he wanted to seek certain clarifications from Ahmad but he found himself in a flutter--the blood knocking in his temples, he was unable to speak in the presence of Ahmad. A reputed traditionist Ibrāhīm al-Harbi (d. 285 A.H.) says :

"I have seen Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It seemed as if his heart was a repository of all the knowledge vouchsafed to human beings, past and present ; he brought forth whatever he wanted and held back what he did not desire to divulge."²

Ahmad ibn Hanbal led a life so simple and frugal that it was envied even by the ascetics. The reign of the first three 'Abbāsid sovereigns of his time, Mamūn, Mu'tasim and Wāthiq, constituted a trial for Ahmad since each one of these was bent on putting

1 *Tarjumatul Imām*, pp 21/22

2. *Ibid* , p 16, and *Manaqib Imām Ahmad*, p 15

him to harm Wāthiq was succeeded by Mutawakkil in 232 A H who held Ahmad in high esteem, but Ahmad was far more afraid of him since he took the favours of the Caliph as a temptation to evil. Often he said that he was able to withstand the sufferings inflicted by the earlier Caliphs, but in his old age, he had to face another trial which was far more severe. The respect and deference, favours and gifts of Mutawakkil could not, however, make any inroad into the contentedness and resignation of Ahmad just as the threats and sufferings at the hands of earlier Caliphs had failed to deter him from the path enjoined by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Once Mutawakkil sent him a donkey-load of gold-pieces but he refused to accept the same. The man who had brought the present insisted on his accepting the money and implored that the Caliph would take ill if the present was refused. At last Ahmad consented to let the bag being placed in a corner. Ahmad, however, called on his uncle late in the night and asked him to advise as to what he should do with the money since he deeply regretted that he had accepted the present, and could not sleep on account of it. His uncle advised him to wait at least till the day-break and then to dispose it of in the manner he liked best. Early next morning Ahmad collected his trusted disciples and associates and asked them to prepare a list of the poor and indigent persons. He distributed the entire amount and then gave away the bag to a destitute.¹

Ahmad ibn Hanbal remained a royal guest, on the insistence of Caliph Mutawakkil, for a few days. During this period he was served with sumptuous dishes, which were estimated to cost one hundred and twenty *dirhams* per day. Ahmad, however, did not touch the food and kept fasting continuously for eight days. He became too weak, and, as it is reported, if the Caliph had not sent him back soon thereafter, he would have probably died.² 'Abdullah, Ahmad's son, says that his father remained with the Caliph for sixteen days. During this period he took only a little

¹ *Tarjumatul Imām*, p. 60

² *Ibid*, p. 61.

parched grain reduced into paste. Mutawakkil had sanctioned stipends for the sons of Ahmad. One of his sons reports that prior to their being stipendiaries, Ahmad had no objection to accepting anything from them but he completely discontinued the practice thereafter. Once, when Ahmad was ill, a physician prescribed water extracted from parched pumpkin for him. Ahmad was advised by someone to get the pumpkin parched in the oven of his son Saleh which happened to be burning at the time, but Ahmad refused to do so.¹ Although he was extremely cautious for his own self, he still felt uneasy in regard to the stipends received by his sons, and ultimately he told Saleh: "I want that you should forego the allowance for you are getting it on account of me"

Ahmad fell seriously ill at the age of 77. The number of people who daily came to see him was so large according to the chroniclers of his time that all the streets of the Bazar near his house were overcrowded and police had to be posted there to control the traffic.² Ahmad was suffering from haematuria and the reason attributed to his illness by the physicians was that grief and anxiety had produced an ulcer in his stomach.³ Marwazi says that Ahmad's condition deteriorated on Thursday. Although he had unbearable pain, Ahmad asked Marwazi to help him perform the ablution. He was so particular about it that he instructed Marwazi to pass his fingers between the toes. On Friday night Ahmad's malady grew still worse and he died the next day, on Friday, the 12th of Rab'ul-Awwal, 241 A.H.⁴

Dispute regarding the Nature of the Qur'ān :

Caliph al-Mamūn applied himself vigorously to the task of spreading the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites about the nature of the

1 *Tarjumatul Imām* pp 63/64.

2 *Ibid*, p 77.

3 *Ibid* p 77.

4 *Tarīkh-i-Kabīr*, Vol II, Part I, p 6; *Tarīkh-i-Saghir*, p 244; and *Tarjumatul-Imām*, p 76

Qur'ān, who held it to be a creature rather than an eternal word of God. In Mamūn's judgment, any deviation from this doctrine was worse than treason, and therefore, he issued a detailed mandate to the Governor of Baghdad in 218 A H severely criticising the dogmatism of the populace, particularly traditionists. He described them as noisy and turbulent sectarians lacking in true faith, unreliable witnesses and reactionaries of the *Ummah*. He ordered that all those officials who did not subscribe to the tenets expounded by him should be dismissed under intimation to him.¹

The royal edict was issued four months prior to the death of Mamūn. Its copies were despatched to the governors of all dominions who were instructed to summon the leading doctors and jurists, under the employ of the State, and to test them in the fundamentals of the doctrine and to dismiss those who did not accept the M'utazilite viewpoint.

Thereafter Mamūn issued another order to the Governor of Baghdad asking him to present before him seven reputed traditionists of the city who were opposed to the doctrine.² When they came, Mamūn questioned them about his dogma regarding the creation of the Qur'ān. Each one of them, either from conviction or as a matter of expediency, expressed his agreement with the views of the Caliph and was allowed to go back. They were also asked to express their views in public meetings convened for the purpose but the masses remained unaffected, holding the orthodox view.

A few days before his death, Mamūn issued a third rescript to Is'haq ibn Ibrāhīm, expounding the doctrine in still greater detail, and enlarging its scope to test all the doctors of religion along with the officials of the State. He made it compulsory for everyone to subscribe to the tenet. Is'haq convened a meeting of all the reputed doctors, asked their views about the royal dogma and reported back their answers to the Caliph. Mamūn was in

1 Tabrī, Vol X pp 284/93 and Ibn Taifūr pp 181/86

2 Ibn Taifūr, p 183

taken a vow that he would not execute him but have him most severely scourged and confined in a dungeon where the Sun never arose. Ahmad, however, did not yield and ultimately he was brought before Mu'tasim. The Caliph ordered Ahmad to be given thirtyfour lashes. A fresh executioner was brought after every two strokes but Ahmad said after getting each whip: "I will accept if you can bring anything from the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah* in your support"

Ahmad's Account of His Sufferings :

Ahmad ibn Hanbal has himself given an account of his sufferings in these words :

"When I reached the place known as Bab-ul-Bustān, a horse was brought before me and I was asked to get upon it. Nobody helped me in mounting the horseback and with heavy chains fastened to my legs, I had to make many attempts. I just managed somehow to save myself from falling down in these attempts. When I reached the castle of Mu'tasim, I was thrown in a small room which was then bolted. There was no lamp in the room and after midnight when I stretched my hands to touch the dust for purification before the prayers I intended to offer, I found a tumbler full of water and a basin. I performed ablution and offered the prayers. On the next day a page took me before the Caliph. The Chief Justice, Ibn Abi Duwād, and a number of his courtiers along with Abū 'Abdur Rahmān al-Shafe'i were present there. Just before I was presented before the Caliph, two persons had been beheaded. I asked Abū 'Abdur Rahmān al-Shafe'i if he remembered what Imām al-Shafe'i had said about *Masah*.¹ Ibn Abi Duwād remarked on this: 'Look here! This man is to be beheaded and he is making enquiries about the canons'. In the meantime Mu'tasim asked me to come

¹ Ritual purification with dust in place of water, when the latter is not available or is harmful for health, for offering prayers

why do you want to get rid of your life. God knows that I have a great regard for you'.¹

One, Ujaif, stroked me with the handle of his sword and exclaimed: 'You want to carry all before you' Another man remarked, 'Don't you see that the *Amir-ul-Mominin* is standing before you', while a third ejaculated, 'Oh, *Amir-ul-Mominin*, you are keeping fast and standing in the sun'. Mu'tasim repeatedly beseeched me to acknowledge his dogma but every time, I repeated my earlier reply at which he flared up and ordered to scourge me harder till I became unconscious. When I regained consciousness, I found that I had been unchained. Someone present there told me that I had been pulled down on my face and then trampled upon. However, I do not know what they had done to me".²

Firmness of Ahmad ibn Hanbal :

Ahmad ibn Hanbal was thereafter sent back to his house. He spent 28 months in imprisonment and got 34 lashes. Ibrāhīm ibn Mus'ab, one of the guards in whose custody Ahmad was kept, says that he had not seen anyone more courageous and brave than Ahmad, for he treated his guards no more than insects. Another person, Mohammad ibn Isma'il, says that he had heard from certain eye-witnesses who said that Ahmad ibn Hanbal was scourged so severely that one stroke was enough to make an elephant cry out. An eye-witness of Ahmad's scourging says that since the latter was keeping fast on the day, he said to him "The *Shari'ah* permits you to acknowledge the tenet of the Caliph in order to save your life. But Ahmad did not pay any attention to me. When he became too thirsty, he asked for some water. A

1 The chroniclers of the time report that Mu'tasim wanted to set Ahmad free, but Ibn Abi Duwād exhorted him and said that if the Caliph forgave Ahmad, his action will be construed as going back on the policy laid down by his brother.

2 Summarised from *Tarjumatul Imām*, pp 41-49

tumbler of ice-cooled water was brought which he took in his hand but returned.”¹

One of the sons of Ahmad relates that his father had the marks of scourging on his body when he died. Abul ‘Abbās ar-Raqqi describes how certain people who wanted to save Ahmad of his sufferings, went to the prison where he was confined and recited the Tradition which allowed one placed in similar circumstances to save his life. Ahmad replied, “But what do you say of the Tradition handed down by Khabbāb which says that there were people of the old who were sawed into two but they did not renounce their faith”. Those people got disappointed with the reply of Ahmad for they knew that he would go through every trial and tribulation for the sake of his faith.

Achievements of Ahmad ibn Hanbal :

The undaunted courage and steadfastness of Ahmad ibn Hanbal gave a death-blow to a sacrilege which had exposed the faith to a great danger. All those who had expressed their agreement, either from fear or expediency, with the views of the Caliphate, were exposed. All such savants were despised and held in contempt despite their erudition and learning. On the other hand, Ahmad ibn Hanbal was received by the people with the most honourable marks of distinction, and affection for him became a mark and symbol of the orthodox school of Islam. One of his compatriots, Ibn Qutaibah says :

“When you find anybody setting his affections on Ahmad ibn Hanbal, you should know that he is a follower of the *Sunnah*”²

Another doctor, Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm ad-Dauraqī held that

“Be suspicious of the Faith of one whom you find irreverent to Ahmad”³

¹ *Tarjumatul Imām*, p 112

² *Ibid* , p 16

³ *Tarīkh-i-Baghdād* Vol IV p 420

CHAPTER V

ABUL HASAN AL-AZHARI

The Crisis of *ʿItizāl* :

Ascendancy of Muʿtazilites—The Muʿtazilites suffered a severe set-back after the death of Muʿtasim and Wathiq, both of whom were ardent supporters of their school. Mutawakkil, the tenth ʿAbbasid Caliph, succeeded his brother Wathiq in 232 A. H. He was against the Muʿtazilites and keen for the restoration of the true faith. He declared as heretic the allegedly free-thinking Muʿtazilites, expelled them from public offices and interdicted discussions on dogmatic questions by them. Yet, *ʿItizāl* had taken roots in the circles of the learned and the philosophers, all over the Islamic world. Although the doctrine in regard to the creation of the Qurʾān had died-out, the Muʿtazilite thought still exercised considerable influence. The Muʿtazilites continued to be vigorous owing to the eminent exponents of *ʿItizāl* who were well-versed in literature, dialectics, jurisprudence and other sciences, and held high offices under the State. They gained ascendancy by the middle of the third century A. H. when it was commonly held that they possessed rationalistic tendencies, were progressive thinkers and seekers after the Truth. This became the prevailing taste which was taken after by the youngmen, students and others who wanted to cut a figure. The Hanbalite school could not produce another savant of Ahmad ibn Hanbal's erudition while the traditionists and the teachers of orthodox school came to regard secular sciences as undesirable intruders into the domain of religion. The ignorance of orthodox theologians in dialectics and other secular sciences began to be regarded as their weakness with the result that the *ʿItizāl* acquired a predominance such as it had never gained before or after that period. It is true that all those

Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī was a successful teacher and writer but not a good debator while Abul Hasan ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī was celebrated both for his wit and eloquence. During the debates on the doctrines of ‘*uṭṭāl*, al-Jubbā’ī used to ask him to contend with the opponents of his school. Thus he soon earned a name for his mastery over the science of disputation and was recognised as a teacher of the Mu‘tazilite school of thought¹. It was expected that he would succeed his god-father and mentor and prove a still more vigorous and eminent exponent of the Mu‘tazilite doctrines. God had, however, willed otherwise.

Notwithstanding the fact that al-Ash‘arī had spent his life in the advocacy of the Mu‘tazilite school whose leadership was about to fall in his lap, Providence had selected him to vindicate the *Sunnah*. He began to see through the intellectual sophistry of the Mu‘tazilite school, its quibblings and hairsplitting, and ultimately realised that the specious reasoning of the rationalists was nothing more than an intricate yet well argued spell of words, ideas and thoughts but really inconsequential in so far as the search for Truth was concerned. It dawned upon him that the source of truth lay only in revelation; the way of the teachers of the old and companions of the Prophet was the only Right Path, and that there was no reason why intellect should not submit to it. Thus getting disenchanted from the Mu‘tazilite doctrines at the age of forty, he developed an intense dislike for the so-called rationalist school. He did not come out of his house for fifteen days. On the sixteenth day he went from his house to the principal mosque of the city. It was Friday and al-Ash‘arī elbowed his way through the thronging crowd of the faithful. Going straight to the pulpit and ascending its steps he started to proclaim:

“Many of you know me. I want to tell those who do not know me that I am Abul Hasan ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī. I was a Mu‘tazilite and believed in their doctrines. Now I seek repentance from God and turn away from my earlier

1. *Tab‘een*, p 117

beliefs, henceforth, I shall endeavour to refute the doctrines of the Mu'tazilites and lay bare their mistakes and weaknesses¹

And from that day on al-Ash'ari devoted himself wholeheartedly to the repudiation of the Mu'tazilites and began propounding the tenets of the orthodox school. With his profound knowledge, penetrating intellect, eloquence, mastery over dialectics and a facile pen, he was able to over-shadow his disputants and uphold the doctrines of the conformist school.

Missionary Zeal of al-Ash'ari:

For he considered it an obligation and a mission enjoined by God Almighty, al-Ash'ari performed the task he had taken upon himself with an untiring zeal. He used to attend the meetings of the Mu'tazilites and search out rationalists to set at rest their doubts about the doctrines of the orthodox school. If anyone raised the objection as to why he met the sceptics and dissenters, who ought to be shunned, he would reply that he could not do otherwise. He explained that the Mu'tazilites were all well-placed in life, held the offices of administrators, judges, and other venerable positions, and, therefore, they could not be expected to come to him. If he too were to sit with folded hands, how would they come to know the Truth, and also that there was someone who could defend the faith with reason and arguments²

Achievements of al-Ash'ari:

Al-Ash'ari was a pastmaster of debates and polemics. He had an aptitude and facility which he used with consummate skill in contending for the religion. No one was better qualified than he for the task as in his knowledge of secular sciences like logic and dialectics he excelled all the Mu'tazilite doctors and could rebut their objections like a teacher answering the questions of

1 *Tab'een*, pp 39-40 and Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, pp 446-447

2 *Tab'een*, p 116

his students One of his disciples, Abū ‘Abdullah ibn Khafīf has left an account of his first meeting with al-Ash‘arī in these words :

“I came from Shīrāz to Basrā Being too keen to meet al-Ash‘arī, I enquired of his address I went to his place at a time when he was attending a debate A band of the Mu‘tazilites was then blurting out questions one after another After they had all finished their haranguing, al-Ash‘arī began his speech He took the objections raised by each, one by one, and set at rest all of their doubts When al-Ash‘arī rose from the meeting, I followed him. He asked, ‘What do you want?’ I replied, ‘I want to see how many eyes, ears and tongues have you got’ He smiled on hearing my answer”¹

The same narrator adds

“I could’nt see why you kept quiet in the beginning’ said I, ‘and allowed the Mu‘tazilites to present their objections It behoved you to deliver lectures and meet their objections therein, instead of asking them to speak out first’ Al-Ash‘arī replied, ‘I do not consider it lawful even to repeat their doctrines and beliefs, but once someone has expressed these, it becomes an obligation for the righteous to refute their tenets’”²

Abul Hasan ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī was the founder of Islamic scholasticism (*kalām*) All the dialecticians of the later ages have acknowledged al-Ash‘arī’s God-gifted intelligence and sagacity, discernment and profundity Cadi Abu Bakī Baqillānī was known to his compatriots by the name of *Lisan-ul-Ummah* (Tongue of the Nation), on account of his eloquence and penmanship Once, when somebody remarked that his writings appear to excel those of al-Ash‘arī, Baqillānī replied that he considered it an honour to be able to understand al-Ash‘arī’s works³

1 *Tab‘een*, p 95

2 *Ibid* , pp 95-96

3 *Ibid* p 126

way unauthorised by God Almighty. Their interpretation is neither supported by reason nor by the Traditions handed down from the Prophet, his companions or their successors."¹

Thereafter, throwing light on the canons of his own school of thought, he says :

"We have a faith in the Qur'ān and the Traditions and, therefore, hold the opinion that these have to be followed ungrudgingly. What has been handed down by the companions, their successors and traditionists has to be accepted completely and with unquestioning submission, for this is the way of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (may God bless him and give him a goodly reward by raising him to higher and sublime regions). We shun those who do not follow the path of Ahmad, for, he was the *Imām*, pious and erudite, whom God Almighty enabled to show the path of righteousness and efface the deviations and innovations, doubts of the sceptics and interpretations of the misguided. May God glorify the adorable and venerable *Imām*."²

The achievement of al-Ash'ari, however, did not consist merely of his defence of the orthodox school, for the Hanbalites and other traditionists had already been seized with the task. The most valuable accomplishment of al-Ash'ari was the formulation of principles which enabled the tenets of the orthodox school to be accepted in the light of reason, i. e. on the basis of logical arguments. He examined the doctrines of the Mu'tazilites and other sects in accordance with the principles of logic and the philosophical terminology evolved by these sects, and brought out their mistakes so as to uphold the beliefs and tenets of the orthodox school.

Al-Ash'ari earned the displeasure of the Mu'tazilites and other misguided sects, natural and inevitable as it was ; but he was also criticised by those rigid Hanbalites and traditionists who

1 *Kitāb-ul-Ilbānah*, p. 5

2 *Kitāb-ul-Ilbānah*, p. 8

considered it a sin to discuss the issues raised by the rationalists or to use the philosophical terms for elucidating the tenets of the faith in the light of reason

Al-Ash'ari maintained that the ultimate source of faith and the key to metaphysical realities were revelation and the teachings of the Prophet rather than human reason, speculation or Grecian mythology. At the same time, he disagreed with the rigid dogmatism of the conformists who thought it prudent to keep quiet about the issues raised by the misguided sects simply because the Traditions handed down from the Prophet did not mention their terminology. Al-Ash'ari held the view that this attitude would be reckoned as a weakness of the orthodox school and would ultimately be harmful to it. Al-Ash'ari also maintained that the attitude of the rigid dogmatists would enable the Mu'tazilites and other misguided sects, through their apparent endeavour to reconcile faith with reason and religion with philosophy, to attract the young and intelligent who were not content to be driven in a common groove. He agreed with the orthodox view that revelation and prophethood were the only sources to be depended upon in so far as the faith was concerned—a view diametrically opposed to the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers—but it was not only lawful but absolutely necessary or even obligatory to take recourse to the logical deduction and prevalent philosophical terminology for evincing the religious tenets. He maintained that it was not at all necessary to avoid the issues pertaining to perception or intellect, which were ultimately grounded in human experience but had unnecessarily been made a part of religious doctrines by the rationalists, in order to prove or disprove the latter with the help of a clever play upon words. At the same time, he considered it essential for the expounders of religion to face those issues and refute the claims of the Mu'tazilites and other philosophers with the help of logic and reason. He did not subscribe to the view that the Prophet of Islam made no mention of the issues raised by the rationalists of later times, either on account of his ignorance or because the Prophet did not consider it lawful to do so. It was so simply owing to

the fact that these questions and the rationalistic modes of thought had not come into existence during the life time of the Prophet. Al-Ash'ari maintained that like the new problems of sacred and secular laws which were brought to the fore by exigencies of changing times, new questions in the realm of faith and metaphysics were also being raised. Therefore, like the jurists who had grappled with the legal problems and solved them through analogical deduction and amplification of canon-laws, the doctors of religion and the scholastics were duty-bound to explain and elucidate the canons of faith in regard to these new questions. Al-Ash'ari wrote a treatise entitled *Istihsan-ul-Khaudh fil-kalam* to explain his view-point in this regard.

Thus, ignoring the approbation or opposition of the either sect, al-Ash'ari went ahead with the task of defending religion according to his own light. This undoubtedly required great courage and intelligence, and, as it were, al-Ash'ari proved himself equal to the task. With his lectures and writings he was able to stem the rising tide of the rationalism, *'aql* and philosophy, and save many souls from being swept away by the wave of scepticism. He inculcated faith and enthusiasm, zeal and self-confidence among the followers of orthodox school through his well-argued and forceful vindication of the faith. Al-Ash'ari's defence was, however, not the least apologetic. On the contrary, he was able to eradicate the inferiority complex that had unconsciously seized the followers of the orthodox creed, and was insidiously undermining their self-confidence. Al-Ash'ari soon turned the tables on the Mu'tazilites who, far from maintaining the force of their onslaught on the orthodox school, found it difficult to withstand the offensive of al-Ash'ari which was made with the full weight of an unshakable conviction. Abū Bakr ibn as-Sairfi says that the Mu'tazilites had caused a crisis for Islam but God brought forth Abul Hasan 'Alī al-Ash'ari to take up the cudgels against them. He was able to overcome them with his intelligence and dialectics. He, therefore, soon came to be regarded as one of the foremost expounders and renovators of the faith, while certain persons like Abū Bakr Isma'ili hold him as

second only to Ahmad ibn Hanbal for his endeavours to uphold and defend the true Faith ¹

Al-Ash'ari's Works :

Al-Ash'ari defended the orthodox school not merely with his sermons, debates and polemics, but also wrote valuable treatises to expose the weaknesses of heretical sects. Al-Zahabi reports that the commentary on the Qur'ān written by al-Ash'ari ran into thirty volumes. Al-Ash'ari is said to have written some 250 to 300 works; a large number of which traverses the main positions of the Mu'tazilites or other non-conformist sects and heretical creeds ². One of the voluminous books written by al-Ash'ari is *Kitab-ul-Fusūl*, comprising twelve volumes, which confutes the doctrines of a number of sects including so-called rationalists, atheists and naturalists as well as other creeds like those of the Hindus, Jews, Christians and Magians ³. Ibn Khallikān has also mentioned some of his other works entitled *Kitab al-Lom'a*, *Kitāb al-Mujaz*, *Idhāḥul-Burhān*, *Al-Tab'een 'An Usūl id-Dīn*, and *Kitāb us-Sharāḥ wat-Tafsīl*. Besides these works on dialectics, al-Ash'ari wrote several books like *Kitāb ul-Qiyās*, *Kitāb ul-Ijtihād* and *Khāḥar-ul-H'āhid* on other religious sciences. He wrote a tract to refute the doctrine of the negation of Traditions reported through more than one source, which was expounded by Ibn ul-Rāwandī. In one of his books entitled *al-'Amad* al-Ash'ari has given a list of 68 books written by him till 320 A.H. i.e. four years before his death. A number of these works run into ten or twelve volumes. The books written by him during his last four years are also by no means inconsiderable. His *Maqalāt-ul-Islamiyyīn* shows that al-Ash'ari was not merely a dialectician but also a reliable chronicler of different faiths. In this book he has recorded the doctrines of a number of sects with a sense of responsibility

1 *Tab'een*, p. 53

2 *Ibid* p. 136

3 *Ibid* p. 128

behoving an eminent historian, for, his explanation of their dogmas agrees with the exposition of these faiths by their own followers.¹

Profound Knowledge and Piety :

Al-Ash'ari was not simply a prolific writer but one profound in knowledge also. Like all other mentors of the old he was unrivalled in moral and spiritual excellence too. A jurist, Ahmad ibn 'Ali, says that he had been with al-Ash'ari for twenty years but he did not see anyone more reverent and godly, shy and modest in his worldly affairs but, at the same time, zestful where the performance of religious duties was concerned.² Abul Husain al-Harwi, a dialectician, relates that for years together al-Ash'ari spent whole nights in vigils and performed morning prayers with the ablution taken at the nightfall.³ The personal servant of al-Ash'ari, Bindār ibn al-Husain, is on record that the only source of livelihood of al-Ash'ari consisted of a fief with an income of seventeen *dirhams* per day, which he had inherited from his grandfather Bilāl ibn Abi Burdah ibn Abi Mūsā al-Ash'ari.⁴

Al-Ash'ari died in 324 A. H and was buried in Baghdad.⁵ An announcement was made over his funeral that the "Defender of the Traditions" had passed away.

Abū Mansūr al-Maturīdī :

During the same period another theologian, Abū Mansūr al-Maturīdī (d. 332 A. H) emerged in Samarkand to defend the

1 Wensink in his book "Muslim Creed" (p 88) and Orehner in his introduction to *Maqālāt ul-Islamiyyīn*, have acknowledged this fact. (*Al-Ash'ari*, p 64)

2 *Tab'een*, p 141.

3 *Ibid*, p 141

4 *Ibid*, p 142 and Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, p 447

5 Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, p 447

faith against the attacks of the heretical sects¹ Owing to the continuous wrangling with the Muʿtazilites, al-Ashʿari had become a bit extremist in some of his views which were stretched further by his followers. Al-Maturīdī's thought is, however, marked by its moderation. He rejected all such accretions to the Ashʿarite thought which had become a part of it in due course of time, and which left many loopholes unfilled, many questions unanswered. Al-Maturīdī perfected the Ashʿarite system and gave it an intellectually irreproachable form. The differences between the Ashʿarites and the Maturīdites were simply marginal and limited to 30 to 40 issues of comparatively lesser importance.²

Imām Abū Mansūr al-Maturīdī, belonging to the Hanafite school of jurisprudence, had a majority of his followers amongst the theologians and dialecticians of that school just as most of the Shafʿite dialecticians followed al-Ashʿari. Al-Maturīdī was also a man of letters who has left many valuable works refuting the doctrines of the Muʿtazilites, Shiaʿites and Qarmatians. One of his books, *Tawilāt-i-Qurʾān* is an outstanding example of his keen intellect and mastery over rationalistic sciences of the day. However, since al-Ashʿari had to confront the Muʿtazilites in the centre of Islamic world, which also happened to be a seat of the Muʿtazilite school, he came to exert a far greater influence over the intellectual circles. Also, al-Ashʿari was a great original mind who would always be remembered for laying the foundation of Islamic scholasticism.

Later Ashʿarites :

A number of reputed savants of profound knowledge and

- 1 This was the period when as a reaction to the Muʿtazilites attack on orthodox creed, several savants were giving attention to evolution of an Islamic scholasticism for the defence of Islam. Tahāwī (d 321 A H) in Egypt and al-Maturīdī (d 332 A H) in Samarkand took up the defence of religion but in due course of time both these schools of thought were absorbed in the Ashʿarite school.
- 2 Sheikh Muhammad ʿAbd al-Hū who has gone into the matter in greater detail says that the disputed issues were not more than thirty (*Ilān Tay-rīyah* by Mohammad Abū Zuhra p 184).

unequalled agility of mind were produced by the Ash'arite school. They contributed to the development of the school and exerted an immense influence on the minds of the intellectuals and the educated youth with the result that the orthodox school was enabled again to gain supremacy in the Islamic world. In the fourth century of the Muslim era were born such luminaries as Cadi Abū Bakr Baqillāni (d 403 A.H.) and Abū Is'haq Isfrahī (d 418 A.H.) and after them came Abū Is'haq Shirāzi (d 476 A.H.) and Imām ul-Harmayn Abul Ma'ālī 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaimi (d. 478 A.H.) in the fifth century who were held in high esteem owing to their profound knowledge. Abū Is'haq Shirāzi was the Rector of the Nizāmiyah University at Baghdad. He was sent by Caliph Muqtadi-b'illāh as his ambassador to the Court of the Saljukid king Malik Shah. He was held in such a high esteem by the populace that in whichever town he happened to pass during his journey from Baghdad to Nishapur, the entire population came out to greet him, people showered over him whatever valuables they could afford and took the dust underneath his feet out of reverence. When Shirāzi arrived at Nishapur, the entire population came out of the city to greet him and Imām ul-Harmayn carried the saddle-cloth of Shirāzi on his shoulder as a porter's burden while escorting him. Imām ul-Harmayn took a pride ever thereafter on the honour of being able to serve Shirāzi.¹

Imām ul-Harmayn was accorded the highest place of respect by Nizām ul-Mulk, the Prime Minister of the Saljukid King Alap Arslan. He held the charge of Preacher of the principal mosque of Nishapur, Director of the Religious trusts and Rector of the Nizāmiyah University at Nishapur. Ibn Khallikān writes of him:

"For thirty years he remained without a peer in the fields of learning and piety. He was the chief mentor and preacher, exemplar and a man of God."²

An annalist has related an incident which shows the respect accorded to Imām ul-Harmayn. Once Malik Shah, the Saljukid

¹ *Tabqat al-Shaf'eeh*, Vol III, pp. 91-92

² Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, p 342

King announced the appearance of the new moon at the end of *Ramadhan*. Imām ul-Harmayn, not satisfied with the evidence produced in this regard, got another announcement made which said .

“Abul Ma‘ālī (name of Imām ul-Harmayn) is satisfied that the month of *Ramadhan* will continue till tomorrow. All those who want to act on his decision should keep fast tomorrow also ”

When the king questioned Imām ul-Harmayn about his announcement he said .

“I am bound to obey the King in matters falling in the sphere of the State but in questions pertaining to religion, the king ought to have asked for my decision, since under the *Shari‘ah*, a religious decree carries as much authority as the edict of the king. And the matters pertaining to fast and ‘*Id* are ecclesiastical issues with which the king has nothing to do.”

The king had at last to get another declaration made saying that his earlier announcement was wrong and that the people should therefore follow the decision of Imām ul-Harmayn ¹

When Imām ul-Harmayn died in 478 A H , the markets of Nishapur were closed, the pulpit of the principal mosque was dismantled and four hundred of his disciples destroyed their pens and ink-pots as a mark of respect to him. The inhabitants of Nishapur received condolences and expressed their grief on the demise of Imām ul-Harmayn with one another for full one year ²

Nizām ul-Mulk Tusi, the Prime Minister of the then strongest Islamic kingdom of Seljuks was himself an Ash‘arite. He gave great impetus to the Ash‘arite school by providing it with the official backing. The two renowned educational institutions, the Nizāmiyah Universities of Nishapur and Baghdad proved to be a turning point in the Ash‘arite bid for victory over other intellectual movements in the then Islamic world.

1 Alhlaq-i-Jalīl, pp 115-119

2 Ibn Khallikān, Vol II, p 243

CHAPTER VI

DECLINE OF DIALECTICS

Philosophic and Esoteric Schools :

Although the Ash'arites had gained ascendancy over other schools of thought by capturing the educational institutions, religious and intellectual circles, they began to lose their grip in due course of time. A man of al-Ash'ari's dominating stature, of original and agile mind had overcome the Mu'tazilite school and re-established the supremacy of the *Shari'ah* and the Traditions. His achievement can be attributed to his principles of scholasticism as much as to his own qualities of mind and heart, intelligence and learning. His school could continue to have its hold over the people by giving birth to similar illuminating personalities but unfortunately his followers, specially after the fifth century, developed a sense of complacency and were content simply with transmitting what they had learnt from their mentors. They lost all originality which made them generally retrogressive. And those who were not content with treading the beaten path introduced philosophic concepts and terms into dialectics. They were enamoured by the philosophical method of reasoning although it neither provided any conclusive evidence to prove the issues they debated nor it employed an approach so natural and direct as the *Qur'an* did. The method employed was, by its very nature, inconclusive and made their doctrines liable to be refuted.¹ Thus, the dialecticians who borrowed the philosophical terminology, concepts and approach did neither render any help to the orthodox school whom they claimed to represent, nor could they gain the respect of the rationalists and philosophers

¹ For a detailed discussion on the subject see Ibn Taymiyah's *Ar-Radd al-Mantaqi'in*

Popularity of Philosophy :

Owing to the patronage and keen interest of Caliph Mamūn a large number of Syriac, Greek, Latin and Persian works on Hellenistic philosophy had been translated into Arabic. A large number of these were treatises pertaining to the Aristotelian school which were, on the whole, proving harmful to the intelligent yet imprudent youth. These translations also comprised works on logic, physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc. which could have been studied with profit but more interest was shown in metaphysical writings which were nothing else than a collection of Greek mythology cleverly presented as an intricate yet well-argued philosophy. It was a spell of words, ideas and thoughts based on certain assumptions and conjectures, non-existent and unverifiable; it had the genealogy of Heavens and Agent Intellect and horoscopes showing the movement of the assumed First cause, Logos and Nous. For a people endowed with the revealed truth and the knowledge of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, the Alpha and Omega of the Universe, and of creation and purpose of human existence, it was hardly necessary to waste its time on a mythology passed on as philosophy. Nevertheless, the philosophers who were great admirers of Greek logic, physics and mathematics accepted its mythology couched in philosophical terms as if it were a revealed truth. It is rather amusing to see how these people venerating Greek sciences as the fountain-head of classical wisdom also accepted their metaphysical pursuits so avidly. Perhaps they thought themselves to be standing in need of Greek metaphysics and philosophy just as they needed the Grecian empirical sciences.

Arab Philosophers :

The Grecian Philosophy was destined to get in the world of Islam such foremost exponents as Yaḡūb al-Kindī (d. 258 A. H.), Abū Nasr al-Farābī¹ (d. 339 A. H.) and Abū 'Alī ibn Sina²

1. Known as Alfarabius in the Latin West

2. Called Avicenna in Europe.

(d. 428 A. H.), as were not to be found amongst the Greeks themselves. In piety and moral excellence, knowledge and wisdom they assigned such an infallible place to Aristotle which cannot perhaps be claimed even for the Primal Cause. It was really a misfortune of the Islamic world that the major portion of its Hellenistic inheritance comprised the works of Aristotle who, being a free thinker, differed from rather than agreed with the prophetic teachings. It was another misfortune that amongst the Arab philosophers, none was conversant with the languages in which these philosophical works were originally written. They had, therefore, to depend on the translations and commentaries which were either incorrect or presented in a different colour by their translators and interpreters. Aristotle had thus come to wield such an influence over the Arab philosophers that they made his system the basis of their philosophical speculations without any evaluation or criticism of his thought.

Brethren of Purity :

By the end of the fourth century A. H., the speculations of Greek and Hellenistic philosophers had generally been adopted by the rationalist schools amongst the Muslims. It became a craze for every educated youngman who wanted to pose as an intellectual and a progressive elite. *Ikhwān us-Safa* or Brethren of Purity, a kind of secret fraternity like Freemasons, had come into existence in the second half of the fourth century with its seat in Basrā. It was an eclectic, philosophical-cum-scientific school of thought which strove to reconcile religious and ethical doctrines with the standpoint of Greek philosophy. The charter of their aims and objects ran thus :

“The *Shari‘ah* of Islam has been polluted by ignorance and perversion of the truth, and it can now be purified only through philosophy, for, the latter comprises religious tenets and knowledge, wisdom and analogical methods of reasoning. Now, only a synthesis of Greek philosophy and the *Shari‘ah* of the Prophet can achieve the desired objectives”¹

¹ Luthi Juma‘ah, p. 253

The members of the Society had instructions not to waste their time and energy on aged persons for they had settled views, but to seek sympathisers amongst the youth who were prone to accept new ideas.¹

The *Ilāhīyāt* summed up the philosophical and scientific learning of the time in an encyclopaedic collection of 52 Epistles². (*Rasail Ilāhīyāt us-Safā*) dealing with every branch of science, such as physics, mathematics, metaphysics, philosophy, etc. The Muʿtazilites and other rationalists who were sympathetic to the ideas formulated in these treatises gave widest circulation to these Epistles which found their way into the system of Hispano-Arabic philosophy too within a hundred years.³

The Muʿtazilites and Philosophers:

In their effort to rationalise the tenets of faith and to find out a confirmation of metaphysical doctrines such as the nature and attributes of God and the divine origin of the Qurʾān with the aid of human reason which was regarded by them as infallible, the Muʿtazilites had consciously or unconsciously done a great disservice to Islam. Nevertheless, they were religious persons who believed in revelation, were god-fearing, scrupulously followed the religious obligations, enjoined the lawful and prohibited the wrong.⁴ This was so because they were serious about their religion and their rationalistic tendencies did not owe their origin to any external influence.⁵ In view of these features of *ʿaqlīyāt*, it did not produce any movement inclined towards apostasy and atheism, denial of revelation and the Hereafter, or a tendency dangerously tinted with passivity and inertness, nor had the vigour and enthusiasm for faith amongst the Muslims been enfeebled by it.

1. Lutfi Jinnah pp 261-61.

2. *Id.* p. 254

3. *Id.* p. 254

4. *ʿAḥad-Isām*, Vol III p 64.

5. They held that it was a duty of every Muslim to enjoin the lawful and prohibit the wrong. They also maintained that if anyone was in the habit of committing a grievous sin, he would be eternally damned.

Philosophy was, however, quite different from *ʿitizāl*. In so far as philosophy claims to be an infallible source through which one can attain the knowledge of God in the fulness of His essence, it is a rival of revelation; it builds up a system of thought and approach which is opposed to the faith and tenets of a revealed religion. Obviously, therefore, as the philosophy caught the imagination of the people, the respect for religion and the prophets dwindled in their estimation. Not simply the faith in revelation but the ethical norms and injunctions laid down by it for the practical conduct of life began to be viewed from an entirely different angle. Philosophy gave birth to a section among the Muslims who were openly antagonistic to religion and took pride in rejecting the Islamic dogma. There were also philosophers who were not courageous enough to forsake Islam openly. They were content with paying a lip service to it but they had actually lost all faith in the religion.

Batinites :

Philosophy also gave birth to a new schism in Islam which was even more fatal to the spirit of religion and the teachings of the Prophet than the philosophy itself. These were Batinites or the adherents of a theological school of thought so named after *Bāṭin* (inner, esoteric), whose precursors and exponents were mostly drawn from the people who had lost their national kingdoms to the irresistible arms of Islam. They could not hope to regain their lost power and prestige in any open contest against the might of the Muslim people. There were also self-indulgent people or those desirous of commanding a position of power and influence but who found the injunctions laid down by Islam for the practical conduct of life as obstacles in their way. All these persons gathered under the banner of the Batinites for they knew that they could neither gain a victory over Islam in the battlefield nor invite Muslims to renounce their faith. They were aware that any attempt to follow either of these two courses would fire a frenzy of enthusiasm amongst the Muslims for the defence of Islam. They chose therefore an entirely new path to checkmate Islam.

Esoteric and Exoteric interpretations of the Scripture:

The Scripture has clearly laid down the tenets of belief and code of conduct, if only because these are meant to be understood and acted upon by every human being:

And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them.

(*Inshikāh* : 4)

The meaning of this verse is manifestly clear. The Prophet of Islam too had explained the import of Divine revelations and lived up to these precepts so that his followers might not remain in any doubt. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān and its meanings have thus been handed down, from the Prophet, without any break, and have ever afterwards been recognised and accepted by everyone as authentic and genuine, and to which no one raised any objection. The terms, prophethood (*nabīyah*) and apostleship (*rusūlah*), angels (*malā'ikah*), requital (*maqāzat*), Paradise (*ʿJannat*), Hell (*Darakh*), the law (*shari'ah*), obligatory (*fardh*), necessary (*zā'ir*), lawful (*halāl*), unlawful (*haram*), poor-due (*zakāt*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), fast (*roḥ*), pilgrimage (*hajj*) and similar other words convey a concise and definite purport of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies and teachings of Islam. In truth and reality, these teachings and articles of faith have been handed down without any divergence whatsoever and so has been the vocabulary and terminology evolved to signify the former. The two have become so interdependent that one cannot suffer any mutation without a variation in the other.

Whenever the words 'prophet', 'apostle', 'messenger', 'prayer', or 'poor-due' are used, these denote the same exposition as taught by the Prophet and understood by his companions and successors; all of whom acted upon these in a particular manner and transmitted the import of these words which have been handed down by one generation to another. The Bruinites knew that the interdependence of Qur'ānic vocabulary and its meanings form the basis to the exposition of the doctrines of Muslim Faith; these constitute the workings of intellectual and practical life of the Ummah, connecting the later generations with the fountainhead of

Divine guidance which lay in the past. If they could only drive a wedge between the past and the present, asunder the connecting link by rendering the import of Qur'ānic vocabulary ambiguous and oracular, undefined and obscure, then the *Ummah* could be made to give credence to any innovation or deviation, agnosticism or infidelity.

These elements, therefore, began a vigorous campaign to popularise a new type of Qur'ānic exegesis and the *Sunnah's* interpretation which invested the vocabulary used therein with a hidden or mystic sense apart from their open or manifest meanings. It was claimed that the allegoric or enigmatic sense, beyond the range of ordinary understanding and accessible only to the initiate, guided unto a purer knowledge than did the meanings of the Qur'ānic terms understood commonly by the scholars. The masses clinging to the literal sense could never attain the hidden but true content of the revelation. They maintained that the detailed ritual enjoined by the *Shari'ah* was a cold formality meant for safeguarding the spiritual existence of the laity. In other words, the Qur'ānic terminology, like a veil, hid the deep and occult meaning,¹ but when an initiate attains the purer and sublimer knowledge he is set free from the legal obligations of the *Shari'ah*.² They based their claim on this verse of the Qur'ān.

. and he will relieve them of their burden and the
fettlers that they used to wear

(Al-Ā'raf . 157)

After accepting the doctrine of obvious and hidden meanings in principle, it presented no difficulty to explain away the meaning of the terms like 'prophet', 'revelation', 'angels', or

1 *Talbis-o Iblis*, p. 102

2 The Batinites also believed in the suspension of the obligations enjoined by the *Shari'ah*. Sayidna Idris, a Batinite exponent says "Allah conferred prophethood on Isma'il who abrogated the *Shari'ah* of the Prophet Muhammad". Similar views held by Muw'ud-dīn-illah Fatimi, have also been reported.

'Hereafter' in whatever manner one desired. Here is an example of it :

"Prophet is a person illuminated by the Holy Spirit of the Divine Being. Gabriel is not an angel but an allegorical name for Divine grace Requital signifies coming back of a thing towards its origin. Pollution consists of giving out a secret; bathing, renewal of a pledge; fornication, transmission of the secret and occult knowledge to one not initiated; purity, disavowal of all tenets save the Batinite cult; ablution, acquirement of knowledge from an illuminated teacher; prayer, a call to obey the leader; *poor-due*, gradual initiation of the faithful to the hidden knowledge; fast, taking precaution to guard the secret; and *hajj*, seeking the knowledge of true wisdom which is an end unto itself. The knowledge of the occult is Heaven; literal sense, the Hell; and K'abah, the person of the apostle. 'Ali is the gate of K'abah while the Noah's flood described in the Qur'an means a deluge of knowledge in which the unilluminated were drowned. The bonfire of Namrood alludes to his wrath and not fire; Abraham was asked not to offer his son for sacrifice but to obtain a pledge from him; the literalists are Gog and Magog; and the staff of Moses really means the argument and proof furnished by him."¹

The Traitors of Islam :

The Batinite view in regard to the latent and deeper application of God's word or the Prophet's teachings and repudiation of the manifest sense has always been successfully adopted by the traitors and hypocrites. The so-called deeper sense, inter-woven with mystical and philosophical ideas borrowed from a variety of sources, can be made equally adaptable to the requirement of a learned elite as well as the uncritical mind in order to undermine

1. Abbreviated from *Qawā'id-o-Aqā'id* (written by Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Dailami Yamani in 707 A. H.), pp 16-18.

the intellectual, moral, social and religious structure of the Muslim society. It can be employed to secure a split within the body-politic of Islam as, indeed, all the later rebels against the prophethood of Muhammad have taken advantage of this heretical view. All those impostors who have subsequently elevated themselves to the position of a fake prophethood, have first rendered ambiguous the terminology employed by the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. The two cases in point are Bahāism of Iran and Qadiānism¹ of India.

The so-called hidden or mystic interpretation of Qur'ānic vocabulary, an example of which has been given above, could have been hardly acceptable to a person not devoid of common-

1. The Qadiānis too, like the Batinites, have denied the commonly understood meanings of such terms as the 'seal of prophethood,' 'Masīh and his second coming,' 'miracles,' Dajjāl, etc. The Qur'ānic vocabulary has been retained but the import of these terms has been drastically changed as could be seen from the writings of Mīrza Ghulām Ahmad and the commentary of the Qur'ān by Muhammad 'Alī.

Bahāites on the other hand, have even produced a new *Shari'ah* on the basis of their esoteric interpretation. Their *Shari'ah* enjoins fast for one month in a year, but the month is of only 19 days. Instead of beginning the fast from early morning, they begin it from sunrise. The faithful is required to follow the dictates of the *Shari'ah* from the age of 11 to 42, and thereafter he is freed from its obligations. Ablution is not obligatory but simply recommendatory. *Purdah* is not necessary. It is obligatory to visit the house in which Bāb, founder of the sect, was born. Congregational prayer is to be offered only for a funeral. Nothing remains polluted after one accepts the faith of Bahāites and everything attains purity the moment a faithful touches it. Water is never polluted. The law of inheritance differs from that of Islam. (Shakīb Arslan, Vol. IV, p. 315, reproduced from the French Encyclopædia of Islam).

M. Huart has rightly written in his article on Bahāism in the Encyclopædia of Islam that in the garb of Islamic reformation, Bāb founded an entirely new religion whose fundamentals and beliefs are quite different from that of Islam and these have in fact been also presented as such in order to reconstruct a new social order. The same is the case with Qadiānis. Each has a prophet and a new religious order, like their predecessor, the Batinites.

sense ; but, the dialectical quibblings had already produced an atmosphere of intellectual anarchy in the world of Islam, wherein people unnecessarily longed for hairsplitting and philosophical sophistry. The Batinites were, therefore, successful in misleading those sections of the people who, under the influence of Greek philosophy and mythology, were freely applying the terminology like 'Nous' and 'Logos', 'Universal Spirit' and the 'First Cause' to Islamic doctrines, rites, etc. They also gathered round them some who were dissatisfied with the extremism of the orthodox school, while others, in the hope of helping the *Ahl-i-Bait* (the house of the Prophet) or opposing the ruling dynasty lent them a helping hand. With the help of an elaborate occult ritual for initiation of their adherents the Batinites had created a secret yet highly efficient instrument of power which was a cause of concern for the then powerful Islamic kingdoms. Some of the most reputed and ablest personages like Nizām ul-Mulk Tūsī and Fakhr ul-Mulk fell to the terrorism and murderous assaults of the Batinites.¹

Destruction of the religious or political opponents of the Batinites by terrorism and murder had become such a common feature that nobody—not even the kings or highest officials—could be sure that he would remain alive till the next day. Ibn al-Jawzī reports that if anyone did not return to his house in Isfahan before the nightfall, it was presumed that he would have been killed by the Batinites. Apart from the lawlessness, the Batinites had also helped, as explained earlier, the growth of occult and heretical interpretation of the Qur'ānic text and perversion of the accepted tenets of the faith.

In an atmosphere surcharged with the anti-Islamic influences of Batinites and philosophical ideas borrowed from varied sources, a richly endowed thinker was required to save the situation. He had to be a man of outstanding knowledge and intellectual gifts, well-versed in philosophy as well as religious lore, and capable of

1 For a detailed list of personages killed at the hands of Batinites see Nizām ul-Mulk Tūsī pp 560-563

drawing upon the findings of his predecessors with a greater clarity and perspicacity. In order to bring about a synthesis between philosophical objectivity and the religious faith, he had also to be a man of unequalled piety and moral excellence endowed with an unflinching faith, and backed by a mystical illumination in regard to the Supreme Reality, one who possessed a burning zeal for renovation of the faith and who could give a call to uphold the tenets of the *Shari'ah* and the *Sunnah*. Such a man appeared on the scene in the middle of the fifth century A.H., and he was Abū Hamīd al-Ghazālī.

This was the most coveted academic position of the time although al-Ghazali was then not more than 34 years of age. His renown as a savant, teacher and an eloquent speaker spread so rapidly that his lectures began to be over-crowded by an ever larger number of students and scholars. Sometimes in addition to as many as 300 students, hundreds of nobles and chiefs attended his lectures. Al-Ghazali soon came to occupy, on account of his scholarship, intelligence and forceful personality, such a position of eminence in Baghdad that he was regarded a compeer of the grandees and chiefs of the State. In prestige and solemnity, according to a chronicler of his time, al-Ghazali surpassed the nobility of Baghdad including even the Caliphate.¹ In 485 A.H. the 'Abbāsid Caliph Mūqtadi b'Ilāh, appointed him as his ambassador in the court of Turkhān Khatoon, who then headed the Saljukid empire. Another 'Abbāsid Caliph, Mustazhir b'Ilāh, held al-Ghazali in high esteem and it was on his behest that he wrote a treatise to refute the cult of Batinites. He named the Book *al-Mustazhiri* after the Caliph's name.

Al-Ghazali's Intellectual Crisis :

During this period of prosperity, worldly fame and brilliant achievement for which a scholar can aspire, it was only natural that al-Ghazali should have led a life of contentment, as most of the scholars usually do. But for a man of lofty ideals, creative genius and intellectual grit, as al-Ghazali was, it was unthinkable that he should rest satisfied merely with position and prestige. There can be no denying the fact that this very internal conflict and disquietude, the Promethean quest, made him a renovator of the faith. However, history can offer but a few such striking example where one had abandoned a brilliant career, fame and position for the satisfaction of his soul. Al-Ghazali has himself described the deep inner struggle which forced him to give up all the worldly possessions including his teaching vocation, and to

1. *Tabqāt al-Shaf'iyyah*, Vol. IV, p 107.

search after Truth. These were Dialecticians, who claimed to possess insight and wisdom, Batinites, who insisted on a hidden, true and deeper knowledge vouchsafed to them through impeccable *Imāms*; Philosophers, who arrogated themselves as masters of logic and reason; and, Mystics, who laid a claim to be illuminated and favoured with beatific vision. I proceeded to explore the ideas, thoughts and writings of each of these groups but was not satisfied with anyone of them. I studied the writings of the reputed dialecticians and authorities on this science, and myself penned a few treatises. I reached the conclusion that although this branch of learning fulfilled its object, it was not sufficient for my purpose as it argued on the premises put forth by its opponents. The dialecticians have to rely upon a number of premises and propositions, which they accept in common with the philosophers, or, they are obliged to accept the authority of the Qurʾān or the *Sunnah*, or the consensus. But these could not be of much avail to one who has no faith in anything except in the necessary principles of reason, as was the case with me.

"In regard to philosophy, I thought it necessary to make a detailed and critical study of the science before forming my own opinion of it. I had little time to spare from my pre-occupations of teaching and writing since, I had as many as 300 students who attended my lectures. However, I somehow managed to find time for it and after having finished the entire literature on the subject within two years, I devoted one year to reflection on the premises of philosophy. I reached the conclusion that the secular sciences can be divided into six branches. Mathematics, Logic, Physics, Politics, Ethics and Metaphysics. Of these, the first five do not either deny or affirm religion, nor, is it necessary to reject them for the affirmation of religion. The precepts of Physics sometimes do come into conflict with the religious doctrines but these are only few. In this regard one ought to believe that the natural

phenomenon is not self-propelled but dependent on God Almighty. It is true that all those who come across the agility and incisiveness of the intellect of philosophers in these sciences, are generally overawed by them and are led to the conclusion that this would be true of them in every branch of learning. It is, however, not necessary that anyone skilled in one branch should be an adept in another science as well. Anyway, when people see the philosophers denying faith and conviction, they too walk into their shoes. On the other hand, some brainless exponents of Islam consider it their bounden duty to refute whatever the philosophers say and sometimes even go to the extent of denying their researches in the field of Physics as well. A harmful effect of it is that all those who accept the veracity of intellect's search of truth and uphold the necessary principles of reason, begin to have doubts in Islam itself and become sceptics. The only branch of knowledge which comes into conflict with religion is Metaphysics, and it is in this science that the philosophers have generally been misled. As a matter of fact, the philosophers have themselves not been able to follow satisfactorily, in this branch of science, the laws of rigorous argumentation they had evolved for logical reasoning, and that is why there are wide differences amongst them in regard to it. I have, therefore, arrived at the conclusion that philosophy would not be able to satisfy me, for, the intellect cannot by itself cover the entire field of objects and events nor unravel all the mysteries.

"As for the Batinites, I have had an opportunity to make a detailed study of their cult for writing *al-Mustazhiri*. I had found that the veracity of their tenets and doctrines ultimately depends on the teachings of an impeccable and illuminated teacher, the *Imām*; but the existence of such a teacher stands to be verified, and, in truth and reality, both, are, extremely dubious. Now, only Mysticism

remained to be examined and, therefore, I turned my attention to it. Mysticism, too, is of two kinds, intellectual and intuitional. It was easy for me to look into the first and I went through *Qoot ul-Qulub* of Abū Talīb Makki and the tracts of Harith al-Muhāsibī, Junaid, Shibli, Bā Yazīd al-Bustāmī and other mystics. I gathered whatever knowledge of mysticism could be had from the books but, I found that the knowledge of the essence of reality could be obtained not through study of mysticism but through intuition, transport and ecstasy brought about by purification of the heart. I had already attained an unflinching faith, through the speculative branches of knowledge and religious and secular sciences I had mastered, on the existence of Supreme Reality, Prophethood and Resurrection. This conviction was, however, not attained through an experience or argument which could be analysed. It had been firmly implanted in my heart that the eternal bliss could be had only through inculcating the awe of God, renunciation of the material world, whole-hearted attention to the eternal life in the Hereafter and an earnest devotion to God. All this was, however, not possible so long as one did not sever the attachments of position and riches, fame and worldly life.

“I pondered over my own condition. I realised that I was wholly immersed in worldly temptations, its ties and attachments. The vocation of teaching appeared to be a noble pursuit but, as further reflection revealed, I was paying my entire attention to those sciences which were neither important nor beneficial for the Hereafter. I probed into the motives of my work as a teacher, and found that, instead of any sincere desire to propitiate God, I was after honour and fame. I was convinced that I was on the edge of an abyss, and if I did not take immediate steps to retrieve the situation, I should be doomed to eternal fire. Still undecided, one day, I resolved to abandon everything and leave Baghdad; the next day I

gave up my resolution. Six months passed away in this state of uncertainty. On the one hand the pull of temptations asked me to remain where I was, on the other, the Faith gave a call to get up. It cried to me, 'Up! up! Thy life is short and thou hast a long journey to make. All thy pretended knowledge is nought but falsehood and fantasy.' Often my carnal thoughts whispered to me, 'This is a temporary yearning. God has favoured thee with respect and honour. If thou giveth it up and then tries to retrace thy steps and come back, thou wilt not be able to get it back again.' Thus, I remained, torn asunder by earthly passions and religious aspirations, for about six months, until it became impossible to postpone my decision any longer. Then, God Himself caused an impediment. He chained my tongue and prevented me from lecturing. Vainly I desired to teach my pupils who came to me, but my mouth became dumb. The silence to which I was condemned cast me into a violent despair. I lost all appetite, I could neither swallow a morsel of bread, nor drink a drop of water. Gradually I became too weak and at last the physicians under whose treatment I was, gave up all hope of my recovery. They said that my heart was so severely afflicted that no treatment would be of any avail till this affliction was removed. Finally, conscious of my weakness and of the prostration of my soul, I took refuge in God like a man who has exhausted himself and is denied all means. I prayed to Him *Who answereth the wronged one when he crieth unto Him,*¹ and He made easy for me to sacrifice honour, wealth and family.

"I intended to go to Syria but told the people that I would go to Mécça. When the people around me came to know of my decision, they deprecated it deeply for they could not even think of any laudable reason behind my resolve. In their opinion, I enjoyed a coveted place which

1 *An-Namal*, 62

enabled me to preach and disseminate knowledge. The people also began to spread numerous rumours about me. Those who were far away thought that I was giving up my profession at the instance of the administration. On the other hand, those who knew how much government was keen on retaining my services considered it a misfortune that I was leaving the premier academy of Islamic learning. Finally, I left Baghdad, having given away all my fortune and preserving only as much as was necessary for my support and that of my children. I went to Syria from Baghdad and remained there for two years. During this period, I engaged myself in meditation and penance. I practised whatever I had learnt of the ways of mystics and endeavoured to purify my soul, rectify my morals and occupied myself with the recollection of God. For a time I retired to the principal mosque of Damascus. Often, I went into one of the minarets of the mosque and remained there in seclusion for days together. From Damascus, I went to Jerusalem. There too I used to retire into the *Sakhrah*. After having visited the tomb of Abraham, I felt a desire to go for the *Hajj* and visit the Mosque of the Prophet. I, therefore, embarked upon my journey to Hejaz. After the *Hajj* was over, I went to my home town although I had earlier no longing to visit my family. I took care to spend my time in secluded meditation, purification of the heart and recollection of God at my house but the events and happenings, care of dependants and their needs constantly intervened in securing a perfect state of peace and bliss. I was, however, not denied of it entirely and, from time to time, was favoured with the illumination and ecstatic transports. I spent ten years in this manner. What revelations were made to me during this period of meditation could not be described but, I must say for the benefit of my readers that I came to know that the mystics were most truly godly, their life most beautiful, their rules of conduct most perfect, and their morality

sake of undergoing a physical exercise; some to emulate others, and there were others who considered religious practices necessary for gaining certain material benefits. These persons saw no harm in giving up these practices if they could find a way to save themselves from the harm which non-performance of religious observances would have entailed. I realised that I could easily remove their doubts. As a matter of fact, I found myself fully capable of exposing the hollowness and implausibility of their philosophic convictions because of the deep knowledge of speculative sciences. I, therefore, felt an ardent desire to take up this work since it appeared to be the crying need of the time. I said to myself: 'How far dost it befit thee to sit in seclusion? It is an epidemic that is spreading like wild fire and the learned have themselves fell a victim to the same disease. The bondsmen of God have reached the brink of destruction'. But, then, I also thought whether it would be possible for me to accomplish such a huge task. I said to myself: 'The guidance of the Prophet was available in the days of yore, but now if thou invitest men to Truth and the way of God, the world wilt turn thy enemy. How wilt thou, single-handed, struggle against them all, and endure the hardships? This could have been possible under the reign of a pious king determined to assist and promote religion'. Thus I expressed my helplessness before God and decided to spend the rest of my life in seclusion. But, it seems, God had willed otherwise. The king implored me to proceed to Nishapur and fight the growing heretical tendencies. The king had appealed to me so earnestly that my rejection of his order would have certainly made him angry. Then I said to myself: 'One of the reasons for thy resolve having fallen apart, it cannot be right now to remain in seclusion for this would simply mean avoiding discomforts and hardships'. Has not God said:

Do men imagine that they will be left (at ease) because they

*say. We believe, and will not be tested with affliction? Lo! We tested those who were before you. Thus Allah knoweth those who are sincere, and knoweth those who feign.*¹

And God has addressed his Prophet thus although he was the most exalted amongst His bondsmen

*Messengers indeed have been denied before thee and they were patient under the denial and the persecution till Our succour reached them. There is none to alter the decisions of Allah. Already there hath reached thee (somewhat) of the tidings of the messengers (We sent before)*²

"I also sought the advice of a few friends who were illuminated and have had beatific visions. They advised me to give up seclusion. Few of them related the dreams some pious persons had seen which indicated that the step I proposed to take would have far-reaching effects for the revival of Faith. They hinted that in the fifth century which was to begin after a month something remarkable was to happen which would renovate the Faith. It has been foretold in the Traditions that in the beginning of every century God brings forth a man who restores and reanimates the faith of the people. All these tidings gave hope to me. God made it easy for me to set off for Nishapur and I finally made up my mind to renounce the seclusion in 499 A.H. I had left Baghdad in 488 A.H. and thus I remained in seclusion for eleven years. God had ordained it to happen thus, however. I could not have dreamt of giving up honour and fame before I left Baghdad but God had made that easy for me. Similarly, I could never have thought of renouncing my retirement and going back to teach again, but it too was made easy by God"³

Al-Ghazali set off for Nishapur in 499 to resume his teaching vocation in the Nizamiyah University. There was, however, a

¹ *Al-Ankabūt*, 2-3

² *Al-A'rā'īn*, 34

³ Abreviated from *al-Munqidh*, pp 114-116

world of difference between his taking up the teaching profession earlier and for the second time. Earlier he taught to secure honour, wealth and position, but now he considered himself commissioned to exhort people to purify their morals and soul. He explains the difference thus :

“I know that I have come back to my vocation of teaching but it would not be correct to call it a resumption of my earlier occupation. There is a world of difference between the two. Earlier, I used to teach the sciences which were calculated to bring honour, wealth and position, and by my words and actions, I led my students to that direction, but now, I want to teach them the knowledge that helps to renounce wealth and position. God is fully aware that this is my intention, and my only desire is that my present efforts should lead to the purification of my soul and the souls of other people. I do not know whether I would reach my destination or would pass away before the completion of my task. However, I believe, and have an unflinching conviction, on account of the knowledge of certitude which has been revealed unto me, that the real power rests in God alone. It is only He who can save one from evil and profanity and lead unto the path of sanctity and grace. I did not come here of my own accord, it was God who moved me on to this place, I did not begin my work, but God made me to begin it. I beseech God that he may first cleanse and elevate my soul before he causes me to reform and purify the souls of others. May He reveal unto me righteousness which I may follow; and disclose the evil which I may forsake.”¹

Achievements of al-Ghazali:

Endeavours of al-Ghazali for the revivification of Islam were two-fold, as follows.

- (1) He stemmed the tide of philosophy and of the Batanite

1. Abbreviated from *al-Munqidh*, p. 116

evil and began a counter-attack on these movements on behalf of Islam.

- (2) He made a critical evaluation of the religious and moral state of the then Islamic society and proposed measures to reform it.

Encounter with Philosophy:

The efforts made till the time of al-Ghazali to counteract the atheistic influence of Greek philosophy consisted merely of an apologetic vindication of Islamic tenets. Philosophers were then taking the offensive and the scholastics of Islam, the dialecticians, were content with parrying the attack. Philosophy was undermining the very foundations of Islam while Dialectics tried to shield it but none amongst the dialecticians and doctors of religion had the courage to strike at the roots of philosophy. In fact no savant of Islam had tried to make any critical evaluation of the philosophic premises and to beleaguer the aggressor in its own citadel. The tone of the dialecticians, save only that of Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari who did not have, however, to face the philosophers, was apologetic, or, at best, defensive. Al-Ghazali was the first man, who, along with a profound knowledge of religious sciences, made a detailed and deep study of philosophy as well. He then wrote *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* (The aim of the Philosophers) in which he summed up the salient issues of Logic, Metaphysics and Physics. In this book he condensed the philosophical premises dispassionately in an explicit manner. He made it clear in the introduction to this book that Mathematics is a science which does not admit of any difference of opinion but it has nothing to do with the religion; either in the affirmation or negation of the latter. Religion, however, comes into conflict with Metaphysics. The logical syllogisms are sometimes wrong while there may also be differences of opinion in regard to the terminology employed in this branch of knowledge. Physics is sometimes mixed up with facts, uncertain or dubious, for Metaphysics is also included in its scope. Logic merely subserves these sciences by lending its terminology to them.

Al-Ghazali then wrote another book entitled *Tahāfut al-Falāsafah* (Incoherence of the Philosophers). In this book he criticises, from an Islamic point of view, Physics and Metaphysics of the philosophical school and brings out their weaknesses and contradictions in a lucid and forceful language. We find al-Ghazali expressing himself self-confidently, in an elegant and incisive style. At places he employs a satirical diction which was not only effective but perhaps necessary to bring back the self-confidence of those who had been overawed by Philosophy. We find the author self-reliant and indomitable, attempting to demolish the reputation of the teachers of philosophy, he speaks of the Greek philosophers and guides as his equals and points out their mistakes in a manner none had dared before him. In order to save the situation for Islam it was imperative that someone should be able to strike at the foundations of philosophy instead of merely defending the faith. Al-Ghazali rose to the occasion and this book bespeaks of his endeavour from cover to cover. In the introduction to *Tahāfut al-Falāsafah* he writes

“Now-a-days we see people who appear to arrogate themselves as intellectually superior to the populace. These people look disdainfully on religious practices for they have learned the awe-inspiring names of some of the Greek Philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. They have learnt from the eulogistic writings of their admirers that the Greek doctors of the old had made far-reaching discoveries in the fields of Mathematics, Logic, Physics and Metaphysics, and that these teachers were peerless in qualities of heart and head, but that they had rejected the faith and its doctrines. The Greek masters regarded religion as a man-made dogma without any content of truth. Now, following in the footsteps of their mentors these elements have too rejected religion so that they may be taken as an intelligent, liberal and smart set of fellows. Simply to feign themselves as elite and intellectuals, these persons denigrate religion, and it is why I thought of bringing to light the mistakes committed by the Greek philosophers in

their writings on Metaphysics I also intend to demonstrate how the premises and principles, notion and observations of these philosophers are not a whit more than child's play or, indeed, a laughing-stock¹

After giving a detailed description of the genealogy and horoscope of the Greek philosophic-cum-metaphysical concepts like Logos, Nous, the First Cause or the intermediate agents between the Primal Cause and His creation, al-Ghazali becomes more trenchant and lively in his criticism of the philosophers. He writes .

"Your doctrines and details thereof are simply assumptions and conjectures, or, to be truthful, obscure reflections overcast with darkness. Nobody would doubt the insanity of a man who even dreams of such nonsensical things"²

Again, he says .

"I really wonder how even a brainless fellow can swallow such inconsistencies, much less those philosophers who are ever inclined to hairsplitting in logical disputations."³

He expands this idea at another place where he writes

"In venerating the Agent Intellect, these persons have completely overlooked to accord the reverence and awe due to God Almighty. They have made Him an ineffective diety, a simple essence, dealing with the universals and having no knowledge of the particulars. He bears a distinction from a lifeless entity only in so far as He possesses His own consciousness (and who knows that the lifeless objects are devoid of all consciousness). Verily, God misguides those who forsake the path of Divine guidance and deny His revelation.

I made them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation⁴

1. *Tahāfut al-Falāsafah*, pp. 2-3

2. *Ibid* , pp 29-30

3. *Ibid* , p 33

4. *Al-Kahf*, p 51

“Those who have misgivings about the omnipotence of God Almighty think that divine things can be subjected to their thought and imagination. Being presumptuous of their intellect they hold that it is not necessary to follow the prophets of God. That these persons should propagate, under the cover of philosophy, such ludicrous presumptions which others would be ashamed to dream of, is indeed natural and reasonable.”¹

Effect of the Incoherence of Philosophers :

The courageous criticism and, to an extent, the denigration of Philosophy by al-Ghazali began a new chapter in the history of Islamic scholasticism which was later brought to a successful completion by Ibn Taymiyah.

Tahāfut al-Falāsafah caused an stir in the ranks of philosophers who had to suffer an irreparable loss on account of it. However, after al-Ghazali there arose no philosopher worthy of note for one hundred years. At last, Ibn Rushd,² a great admirer of Aristotle and a spirited defender of philosophy wrote *Tahāfūt al-Tahāfut* (Incoherence of Incoherence) by way of rejoinder to *Tahāfut al-Falāsafah* by the close of the sixth century. Many scholars are of the view that if Ibn Rushd had not put up the defence on behalf of philosophy, it would have been crippled by the hostile criticism of al-Ghazali. Philosophy was granted a fresh lease of life through the efforts of Ibn Rushd for another one hundred years.³

Attack on Batinites :

Besides philosophy, the crisis caused by the Batinites movement had received attention of al-Ghazali during his first stay in Baghdad when he wrote *al-Mustaz'hiri* at the instance of the then Caliph. Al-Ghazali has made a mention of this book in his

1 *Tahāfut al-Falāsafah*, p. 31

2 Known as Averroes in the West

3 Lutfi Jum'ah, p. 72

autobiographical account of the search for truth entitled *al-Munqidh min ad-Dhalāl*. Al-Ghazali perhaps wrote three other treatises entitled *Hujjat ul-Haq*, *Mufsalul-Khilāf* and *Qāsim ul-Bāṭiniyah*¹. Two more books on the subject *Fadhayah al-Ibāhiyah* and *Mawahim ul-Bāṭiniyah* have been mentioned in the list of al-Ghazali's writings. No one else could have encountered Batinites so successfully as al-Ghazali did, for, he was fully aware of the ways of mystics besides being a savant of both the secular and religious sciences. Taking shelter behind the terminology drawn from philosophy, their cult of "esoteric meanings" was a combination of sophism and conspiracy. For a man like al-Ghazali it was comparatively easy to smash this snare of Batinites. His effective answer to the challenge of Batinites made it a discredited sect ever after him.

Al-Ghazali's evaluation of Social Conditions :

The second remarkable achievement of al-Ghazali was his evaluation of the religious and moral state of the society from an Islamic viewpoint which awakened the spirit for re-Islamisation in the community. *Ihyā' 'Ulūm id-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences) was the result of his endeavours in this regard.

Ihyā' 'Ulūm id-Dīn :

Ihyā' 'Ulūm id-Dīn occupies a distinguished place among the few literary works which have had a lasting effect in moulding the moral and spiritual life of the Islamic world. Hafiz Zain ud-dīn al-Iraqi (author of *Alfiyah*), who brought out a collection of the Traditions quoted in the *Ihyā'*, is of opinion that it is the foremost literary composition of Islamic peoples.² 'Abdul Ghāfir Farsi, a contemporary of Al-Ghazali and a disciple of Imām ul-Harmayn, says that no book like it had been written before.³

1 Al-Ghazali has mentioned the names of these books in his another book *Jawāhir ul-Qur'ān*, p. 26.

2 *Tārīf al-Ihyā'*. Vol I, p. 14.

3 *Ibid*, p. 15.

Another reputed scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Gāzrūnī, remarked that if all the sciences were effaced completely, he could revive them with the help of the *Ihyā'*.¹ Hafiz Ibn al-Jawzi differed from al-Ghazali on many issues, but he has acknowledged the popularity and matchless sincerity of the *Ihyā'* and has written a summary of it under the caption *Minhāj ul-Qāsidīn*. The *Ihyā'* was written at a time when al-Ghazali had returned home after more than ten years of seclusion and meditation in search of the truth. He now wanted to disseminate his message of reform and rectitude. In reflecting the tremendous sincerity and heroic sacrifice, heart-felt certitude and ardent zeal of the author to revivify the true faith the *Ihyā'* presents an striking example. Shibli Na'omani writes in *Al-Ghazali*.

"In Baghdad he felt an irresistible urge to embark upon the quest for truth. He proceeded to study each religion but still remained dissatisfied. At last he turned to mysticism but it was something to be experienced in the recesses of one's heart rather than to be studied, and the first step towards it was purification of the heart and transformation of the self. The pre-occupations of al-Ghazali, however, left no room for it. What honour and fame, sermons and debates, had to do with the purification of heart and soul? Obviously, it was a path that lead to wilderness.

"At last, donning a mendicant's habit he left Baghdad and took to wandering. After a long period spent alternately in complete seclusion and meditation, he had an access to divine manifestation. He would have spent the rest of his life lost in beatific visions, but witnessing the contamination of religion and morals all around him—a malady from which the laity and the elite, the savant and the illiterate were suffering alike—he began to give expression to his experiences and convictions. He could not bear with equanimity the degeneration of the mentors

1. *Tarīf ul-Ihyā'*, Vol I, p 15.

of faith into a cess-pool of crass materialism. He wrote the book in these circumstances. As he himself writes in its preface -

“I found every one hankering after the material gains. People had become forgetful of the eternal salvation, while the doctors of religion, who were guides to the right path, were not to be found any longer. There remained only those who had lost their soul to worldly temptations. These people had led every one to suppose that knowledge consists simply in the debates and arguments by which they spread their fame, or else ornate sermons, by which they held the people spell-bound, or else legal opinion, by which they sat in judgement to settle the disputes of others. The knowledge that was required to illuminate the path leading to the world-to-come had thus completely disappeared. I could not endure this state of affairs and had ultimately to sound the alarm.”¹

Al-Ghazali's critique of the Society :

Al-Ghazali's object was to bring about a moral and spiritual transformation of the people of his time, he wanted to create for the purpose an awareness of the ills and weaknesses the Muslims as well as their religious and intellectual leaders were suffering from; to tell them how the devil of earthly passions had taken hold of the different sections of society, and, to let them realise what factors were responsible for diverting their attention from the true content of faith to its outer forms, rituals and customs, thus making them oblivious of the eternal life and the will and pleasure of God. In order, therefore, to achieve the end he had in view, al-Ghazali undertook a detailed analysis of the intellectual and moral approach of the then society towards life and the world; highlighted the vices of different sections; defined the aims and the methods necessary to achieve those objectives; delineated the individual and communal obligations of the people;

¹ *Al-Ghazali*, pp. 48-49.

brought out the distinguishing features and differences between secular and religious sciences ; invited the attention of the affluent and ruling classes towards their shortcomings; criticised the unjust laws and rules promulgated by the state; and exhorted them to give up their un-Islamic ways, customs and usages. It was thus the first detailed sociological study in Islam which brought out courageously and poignantly the social and moral ills of the society and suggested measures for its reform and transformation into a healthy community.

The Religious Preceptors :

Al-Ghazali held the religious doctors, the '*Ulema*', responsible for the all round religious and moral degeneration of the Muslim peoples. To him, religious doctors were the salt of the earth ; if they went astray, nothing could keep the people on the right path. An Arab poet has expressed the same idea in these words .

"O ! teachers of Faith, you are the salt of the earth.

If the salt gets contaminated, what is there to purify it again."¹

Complaining that the prevailing widespread vices were accountable to the negligence of religious teachers, al-Ghazali writes :

"The third reason, which really constitutes an incurable disease, is that the patients there are but no physicians are available for their treatment. '*Ulema* are the physicians but these days they are themselves confined to the sick-bed and unable to cure others "²

The same reason has been attributed by al-Ghazali for the waywardness of the rulers and kings.

He writes :

"In short, the debasement of the people proceeds from the corruption of their rulers, who get perverted on account of the demoralization of the doctors of religion. Had

1 *Ihyā*, Vol I, p 54

2 *Ikid* , Vol I, p 54

there been no self-seeking Cadis and religious scholars, the rulers would not have become so depraved, for, in that case, they would have had to be mindful of the warnings of the ‘*Ulema*.’¹

The neglect of the then ‘*Ulema* to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, as the savants of the old used to do, was severely criticised by al-Ghazali. He deplored the timidity of the religious teachers of his time who were not courageous enough to uphold what was right in the face of kings because they had been infected by the love of wealth, power and honour. After citing numerous instances where the ‘*Ulema* had fearlessly stood against the injustice of powerful despots and tyrannical rulers, he says in the *Ihyā*’:

“This is how the learned enjoined the right and forbade the wrong. They did not care at all for the pomp and glory of the kings for they used to put their trust in God alone and were confident that He would protect them. They were ever willing to lay down their lives for the sake of a righteous cause, if God so desired. Whatever they said was taken to heart, for, their intentions were pure, their immaculate sincerity moulded even the hard-hearted brutes; but, now, the earthly temptations have made them dumb, and even if they speak out it has no effect because they lack sincerity. They can be effective even now if they cultivate selflessness, detachment and earnestness. People have become depraved because of their rulers; and, the rulers, because of the ‘*Ulema*, who have been demoralised on account of their love for wealth, power and honour. One who has been infected by worldly temptations cannot admonish even the lowly and the poor much less the elites and kings.”²

Most of the religious scholars of his day, as Ghazali pointed out, had given themselves up to the hair-splitting of juristic issues

1 *Ihyā*’, Vol II, p 132

2 *Ibid.*, Vol II, p 312.

and cavilling of real or imaginary problems. In social gatherings and religious meetings, royal courts and scholarly seminars specious contentions of a juristic nature had come to be regarded as an inevitable intellectual diversion. It had become such a rage in those times that in their craze to arm themselves for a knock-out victory in the debates and disputations, the scholars were neglecting all other branches of learning including even the religious sciences—the knowledge necessary for spiritual and moral rectitude or for the preparation of the life in the Hereafter. Al-Ghazali protests against this state of affairs in the *Ihyā'* in these words :

“If any scholar-jurist is asked about the virtues and vices like patience and thankfulness, fear and awe, envy and malice, hypocrisy and deception, contentment and earnestness or how to avoid hankering after the praise and respect by others, he would not be able to give any answer although he ought to know these as the preparation for life in the world-to-come depends on them. On the other hand, if you ask him about *liḥā'n*, *zihār*, *sabaq* or *ram*, he will give out a detailed description of each although one seldom comes across these issues, and, if anybody does need a juristic opinion on these matters, he can easily obtain it in every town. These scholars thus devote their entire time and energy in learning and teaching the details of similar insignificant issues but remain oblivious of the knowledge essential for a religious teacher. If these scholars are ever asked about it, their reply is that they are engaged in acquiring a religious knowledge which constitutes a communal obligation (*Fardh-i-Kafāyah*) enjoined by the *Shari'ah*. They are really keeping their own-selves in dark and deceiving others, for, as everybody knows, he who wants to acquit himself of a communal obligation should first discharge the obligations enjoined on him personally. Also, there are many other communal obligations which claim a preference, as, for example, we have many non-Muslim physicians in the city whose evidence is not

acceptable under the *Shari'ah* in religious matters requiring medical opinion. But we do not find any scholar turning to the study of medicine. Students overcrowd the classrooms of the sciences pertaining to jurisprudence, logic and dialectics although there are hundreds of jurisconsults who are ever willing to let one have their legal opinions. I fail to understand how these scholars can defend their engagement in a communal obligation which is being already performed by numerous 'Ulema, while disregarding another obligation which is not being attended by anyone. Is there any reason for it except that the study of medicine cannot help them to secure trusteeship of the charitable trusts, enforcement of the wills, guardianship of the orphans and management of their property, appointment to the posts of judges and official jurists, respect and honour in governmental circles or a precedence over their compatriots, friends and foes?"¹

At another place in the *Ihya'*" he writes -

"There is not a town in which several matters do not assume the position of joint or communal obligations, but there is none to look after these nor any scholar pays any heed to them. Take, for instance, the study of medicine. There are a number of towns in which there is no practising physician whose evidence is admissible in law, but the scholars lack all interest in this profession. Similar is the case with the obligation incumbent on all Muslims to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong (but it is being overlooked by everybody)"²

Al-Ghazali laments over the general lack of interest in and apathy of the people towards the tenets of faith and calls attention towards the need of spreading literacy and disseminating the knowledge of religion. After emphasising the paramount need for spreading religious knowledge he continues -

"For anyone who is solicitous of his religion, the

1. *Ihya'*, Vol I, p 19

2. *Ibid.*, Vol I, p 38.

teaching and spreading the knowledge of the faith, which is also a joint obligation, is such a serious occupation that it would not permit him to go into unnecessary juristic details and waste his time in any scholastic hair-splitting or similar other trivialities”¹

Al-Ghazali explained why the wrangling over disputed issues had come to assume such an importance among the pedagogues of his time who, in due course, had begun to devote their time and energy to those fruitless quibblings. Tracing the history of these vain disputations he writes :

“The Caliphs succeeding the Prophet of Islam, were scholars and jurists, competent to give juristic opinions in all matters and they seldom required the help of other companions of the Prophet in this task. The learned among the companions, therefore, occupied themselves with the studies and orisons leading to salvation in the world-to-come. If they were ever asked for any legal opinion, they would refer the question to another jurist and remain absorbed in the recollection of God. Numerous instances of this kind have been preserved by the annalists. Thereafter, undeserving and incompetent persons came to preside over the Islamic commonwealth. They were also incompetent to give legal opinions or settle the disputes of the people and, therefore, they had of necessity to depend upon the jurisconsults in the administration of justice. The scholars among the descendants of the companions of the Holy Prophet generally followed in the footsteps of the scholars of the old ; they were aware of the true content of the faith, were selfless and detached, and hence they avoided the company of the rulers and kings. The Ummayyad and the ‘Abbāsid Caliphs had to look round for them and implore them to accept the offices of jurists and judges. The plebeian masses of the time, who witnessed

1. *Ḥyāṭ*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-38.

the solicitations of the kings and disdainful indifference of the devout scholar-jurists, thought that the study of juristic sciences was the easiest way to acquire riches and honour as well as to gain an access into the entourage of the nobility. These elements, therefore, themselves applied for the governmental offices and manoeuvred to win the favour of rulers and administrators in the hope of achieving worldly success. Some of them gained their end while others licked the dust but even those who did succeed had to humble themselves by applying for these offices. They had to come down from the exalted place of scholars to that of plebeians. Another result of it was that the scholars who were earlier implored to accept these offices began to offer themselves as candidates, earlier they were honoured for their selfless detachment from the ruling circles but now they lost their respect by becoming the henchmen of the kings and rulers. A few scholars were, however, an exception to it in every age.

“The analogical deductions drawn up on legal or theological questions in accordance with the principles of jurisprudence and the teaching of the *Shari‘ah*, were needed primarily to meet the requirements of administration and justice during the earlier times. In due course, however, the nobles and administrators too cultivated an interest in these matters and they began to encourage the scholars to discuss these issues in their presence. In view of the interest taken by the nobility in these discussions, people began to devote themselves to the study of dialectics, numerous treatises came to be written on the science of disputation; rules were evolved for these debates and gradually the wranglings were turned into an art of logical syllogism. These persons tried to justify their endeavours on the ground that their aim was to protect the scripture and the *Sunnah* and to oppose the innovations and deviations. Those who were earlier engaged in giving legal opinions had also made a similar claim that they intended to serve the faith and the

people by helping them to settle their disputes.

“A few rulers and administrators of the later times, undoubtedly, looked upon the dialectics and disputations with disfavour for they thought that these polemics gave rise to academic orthodoxy and quarrelsome disputes, and not unoften even to violent strife and blood-shed. On the other hand, there were also nobles and chiefs desirous of finding out which of the two schools of Islamic jurisprudence, Hanafite or Shafe‘ite, was nearer to the right path. These elements encouraged discussions and debates on juristic issues. The scholars belonging to their entourage, accordingly, put aside all the dialectical quibblings on other issues and took up the controversies between these two juristic schools, overlooking the differences of opinion between other jurists such as Mālik ibn Anas, Sufyān Thaurī and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, simply because their masters were not interested in their differences. Laying a claim to the refinement and amplification the *corpus juris* of Islamic law, and to formulation of the principles of analogical deduction, these scholars compiled innumerable dissertations on the subject, cultivated logical syllogism and developed it into a science of ratiocination. They are still preoccupied with this vocation and only God knows to what extent they would go. Thus, the reason for undue interest taken by the scholars in these controversies and contentious reasonings is what we have stated above. If the nobility or the powers that be were to take interest in the juristical differences of the schools other than those of Abū Hanīfa and al-Shāfe‘ī, these people would immediately start quibbling over the questions relating to those schools. And, they would still claim that their aim is simply to acquire knowledge and to seek the pleasure of God.”

After tracing the origin of contentious debates, al-Ghazali sets forth in some detail the ill-effects springing from these

1 *Ihyāʾ*, Vol I, p 38

wranglings. He also describes his own experiences since he had himself earlier taken a keen interest in such polemics.¹

The vocabulary employed to denote the new sciences then being cultivated was also creating a misunderstanding. Words or phrases occurring in the Qur^ʿān, Traditions of the Prophet or the sayings or works of his companions were being widely used for the new sciences being evolved in those times. To give a few examples, the word *fiqh* (legal theology) was being commonly used for the intricate and hypothetical details of legal questions as well as for the differences in legal opinions in regard to such issues, *ʿilm* (knowledge) was a common term employed to describe all sorts of learning, religious or secular. The scholasticism or logical syllogism was known as *tawhīd* (Unity of Godhead) *tazkīr* (recollection or act of devotion to God) was the name assigned for all sorts of lectures replete with fantastic tales while *hikmat* (wisdom) denoted occult and uncommon practices. With their indiscriminate use the peculiar sense conveyed by these terms in the context of the Qur^ʿānic text and the *Sunnah* had come to be associated with these new sciences as well. Thus, the Qur^ʿānic verse *so that they may understand religion* and the Tradition *God grants understanding of religion to those who intend to be virtuous* were applied to the unforeseeable legal quibblings, the Divine tidings that *those granted wisdom (in religion) have been bestowed a great favour* was appropriated to philosophy and scholasticisms of the fifth century, and the verse of the Qur^ʿān *remember God, for ye may be one of the devoted* was employed for the vile sermons of the ignorant and misguided preachers. Al-Ghazali explained how these words were being used out of their context to mean something which these terms were never intended to convey. He traced the original meanings of these words and phrases which had not only been lost owing to their misuse but which also differed widely from the sense conveyed during his times.² The analysis made by al-Ghazali was as much instructive as it was

1 *Ihyāʾ*, Vol I, pp 40-43

2 *Ibid*, Vol I, pp 28-34

helpful in removing the misconceived notions created by the careless and indiscriminate use of religious terminology which was being employed as a vehicle for the furtherance of the new sciences.

Critique of the Rulers and Kings :

Al-Ghazali held that alongwith the religious scholars, kings and rulers, administrators and nobles were also responsible for the widespread moral and spiritual degeneration of the people. 'Abdullah ibn Mubārak had also expressed the same feeling in regard to the kings and nobles two hundred years before al-Ghazali in his famous verse saying

“And who pollutes religion excepting the kings, nobles and the priestly order ?”

Unmindful of his personal safety al-Ghazali stood up against the unjust ways of the powerful despots and autocratic rulers who considered themselves above every law. It was a common practice amongst the scholars in those days to accept donations or stipends granted by the then kings. Al-Ghazali was, however, courageous enough to denounce these awards as unlawful. He declared that these grants were, at best, doubtful and at worst, prohibited. He writes

“The revenues accruing to the kings these days are mostly prohibited, for they seldom have a lawful income, or, if they have any, it is only paltry.”¹

Again he says

“The income of the kings in our times is either entirely prohibited or its major portion comes under this category. There is nothing surprising in it because we find now-a-days no trace of the lawful sources like the poor-due, spoils of war, etc. No income from these sources generally reaches the king. Among the lawful sources, only poll-tax remains now, but numerous unjust means are employed in the recovery of these dues, which are not

1. *Ihya'*, Vol II, p. 120

allowed by the *Shari'ah*. The officials of the State exceed the prescribed limits both in regard to the amounts to be recovered and the persons to be assessed for the poll-tax. The conditions laid down for assessment of this tax are also disregarded. Apart from these sources of income, the coffers of the state are also filled with riches extracted from the Muslims far in excess of the tributes of the lands held by them, confiscations, illegal gratifications and similar other taxes which are collected even more mercilessly than the poll-tax¹

Al-Ghazali maintained that since the riches amassed by the kings was either unlawful or at least of a doubtful nature from the view-point of the *Shari'ah*, it was advisable that no grants or donations out of it should be accepted by a scholar. Such an income, he held, was not conducive to the spiritual advancement of the recipient. He further argued that instances of scholars accepting royal grants in the past could undoubtedly be cited but that was a world altogether different from that of his own times. In this connection he writes

“The despotic rulers of the past, because of being nearer in time to the right-guided Caliphs, were at least conscious of their tyrannical ways and hence they were ever eager to win the favour of the companions of the Prophet and their associates and descendants. Since these rulers of the old were anxious that their favours should be accepted by the devout scholars, they made these presentations of their own accord and without any strings attached to their donations. They even expressed gratitude for the acceptance of their grants. The religious savants, on the other hand, accepted these presentations only to distribute these among the poor and the needy. At the same time, these mentors of the old never sided with the rulers in the furtherance of their political ends. They never paid visits to kings and chieftains nor did they ever

1 *Ihya'*, Vol II, p. 122

encourage the latter to call upon them. It was not unoften that they warned the kings for their irreligious actions or even cursed them for their tyrannical ways. Thus, these scholars accepted the presentations of the then rulers because there was no danger of any harmful effect to the faith on account of it.

"The kings now-a-days have, however, only such scholars on their pay-rolls whom they hope to win over to their side for certain ulterior motives or those who would be willing to act as their entourages and sing their praises. The vices flowing out of the acceptance of such favour are many: first, the recipient has to endure humiliation; secondly, he has to pay visits to the donor; thirdly, he has to be lavish in his praise for the grantor, fourthly, he is required to help the donor in realising his ends; fifthly, he has to dance attendance on the ruler like other courtiers; sixthly, he has always to express gratitude and assure the donor of his help, and, seventhly, he has to hold his tongue over the tyrannies and misdeeds of the kings. The rulers now-a-days would not extend their help to anybody who is not willing to accept even one of these conditions, no matter whether he be an erudite scholar of al-Shāfi's fame. It is because of these reasons that it is not lawful now for anyone to accept donations from the kings, even if one knows that the latter have derived their income through lawful means. There is thus absolutely no justification for accepting grants out of the revenues which have been mobilised through prohibited or even doubtful means. Now, if anybody still unashamedly accepts the donations from these rulers and quotes the companions of the Prophet and their successors as a precedent, he perhaps considers the angels to be peers of blacksmiths, for, he cannot avoid waiting upon the rulers or even their chiefs and officials and playing second fiddle to them. And, these are all sins.

"I have now explained the sources of lawful and unlawful income accruing to the kings. If, however, anybody

still deems it practicable to obtain a grant drawn out of lawful revenues, and he also deserves the same or gets it without in any way asking for the same or having to please the king or his chieftains, or else the donation does not depend on any service to be rendered in return thereof, then it may be lawful to accept the same, but I would still advise that it is preferable to refuse it if only on account of the evils likely to follow in the wake of its acceptance.”¹

Al-Ghazali did not merely advise to forsake the donations and grants from the kings, he went even further to stress that one ought completely to disassociate oneself with them and hate their tyrannical and despotic ways. He writes in the *Ihya'*:

“Secondly, one should be so completely cut off from the kings that he may never come across them. It is obligatory and, indeed, safety lies in it that one should hate them for their tyranny. He should never entreat God’s blessings for them nor praise them, nor else seek acquaintance of their courtiers. One should not even desire to know anything about them.”²

We are living in a democratic age when freedom of speech and expression is more or less assured in almost every country of the world. It is rather difficult to visualise the amount of courage al-Ghazali had had to muster, and the grave danger to which he exposed himself by openly preaching disassociation with the rulers or advising refusal of their grants, and criticising them for their tyrannical and un-Islamic policies in the social, political and fiscal matters. For the despotic and autocratic rulers, as the kings generally were in those days, even the slightest criticism of the state or its policies or officials was a sufficient mark of treason, and the heads of eminent scholars and reputed personages rolled on the ground at the lightest displeasure of those tyrants. However, throwing all considerations of personal safety to the winds, al-Ghazali preached

1 *Ihya'*, Vol II, pp 122-123

2 *Ibid* Vol II, p 128

and practised what he considered to be right and never faltered from the duty of severely admonishing the arrogant kings of his time. Sultan Sanjar, the son of Seljukid King Malik Shah, was the Governor of Khurasān. Once al-Ghazali happened to see him in his court. Addressing Sanjar, he said before his courtiers :

“It is indeed regrettable that the necks of the Muslims are breaking under the crushing burden of thy tyranny, while those of thy horses are over burdened with expensive harness.”¹

Muhammad, the elder brother of Sanjar, succeeded his father Malik Shah. Al-Ghazali wrote a detailed letter in the form of a treatise exhorting him to inculcate the awe of God, fulfil his obligations as a king and work for the betterment of his people.

Administration was generally in the hands of ministers in the times of al-Ghazali. He, therefore, paid more attention to them than to the Seljukid kings for bringing about reforms in administration. He wrote detailed letters and directives inviting their attention to the mismanagement, maladministration, inefficiency, illegal exhortions and high handedness of the State officials. Al-Ghazali reminded them of their responsibility before God and invited their attention towards the fate earlier tyrannical rulers and administrators had met, as a consequence of their oppressive administrative policies. The letters written by al-Ghazali to the then ministers of Seljukid kings mirror his personal courage, the desire for exposition of truth and effectiveness of his pungent mode of expression.

In one of his letters to a Minister, Fakhar ul-Mulk, he wrote :

“You should know that this city (Tūs) had been laid waste by famine and tyranny. Everyone was scared by the news of your presence in Safra’in and Damaghān; cultivators sold their produce and hooligans behaved nicely with the populace. Now that you are far away, the fear has taken flight from these elements. The bully has again taken heart and the farmers and grocers are

1. *Al-Ghazali*, p. 24.

indulging in black-marketing. Anybody sending you a report contrary to what I have stated is not your well-wisher. . . . Verily, the solemn invocation of the oppressed in Tūs would surely be answered by the Lord. I counselled the Governor of Tūs but he did not pay any heed to me until an example was made out of him by the divine justice. . . . My solemn admonitions would undoubtedly appear distasteful to you but I would not have dared to write this letter, if I had not cast away all temptations of earthly favours out of my heart. Pay heed to me for you would not be counselled like this by anyone after me. Only those can admonish you who do not allow their selfishness to conceal the Truth.”¹

In a letter to Mujir ud-dīn, another minister, he says

“Now that the tyranny has reached its limits, it has become incumbent on you to succour the oppressed. I was a witness to this state of affairs for a year or so, I then migrated from Tūs in order to avoid casting a glance over those ignoble oppressors. Now that I have returned to Tūs, I find that the oppression is still continuing.”²

After inviting the attention of Mujir ud-dīn to the despicable fate met by earlier ministers, al-Ghazali continues

“The ministers, before you, met a fate which none had met before them. But now I see oppression and destruction which I had never witnessed earlier. You may not be pleased with this state of affairs but when these oppressors will be called up on the Day of Requital, everyone responsible for their tyranny, even in the remotest possible way, will be asked to render an explanation for it. The Muslims of this place are extremely aggrieved. The officials have collected quite a substantial amount from the populace, many times more than the money sent by you for distribution among the poor, but it has not been remitted

1 *Makṭūbāt*, pp. 36-38

2 *Ibid*, pp 62-63

to the king. These people have misappropriated the entire amount."¹

Other Classes of the Muslim Society :

Al-Ghazali had also made a deep study of the religious and moral life of the other sections of society besides the scholars, kings and chieftains. He has left a detailed description of numerous innovations and deviations, customs and rites, in short, all aspects of mundane life which had somehow or the other found a place in the life of the different sections of the then society. It is remarkable that apart from being a profound scholar of religion, al-Ghazali was also such a keen observer of social life that no aspect of the life of the people escaped his attention. He has devoted one section of the *Ihyā'* to such customs as violate the dictates of the *Shari'ah* although they do not apparently seem to do so. In this section he leaves untouched no aspect of individual or social life—from the mosque to the market and from the baths to the social gatherings—and enumerates the practices which are prohibited and ought to be given up.²

Another section of the book deals with those people who were suffering from one or the other misconceived notions which impeded the improvement of their character. This section is concerned with the people who were suffering from different types of self-deceptions, weaknesses, fallacies, illusions and paradoxes. The survey includes the affluent, nobles, scholars, mystics and similar other classes of rank and distinction, exhibiting a keen insight into their mental and emotional life which can be expected from an expert psychologist only. His study reveals the elements of misgivings and illusions of which the people concerned would have themselves been hardly aware

The scholars in al-Ghazali's time had generally developed an extremism in the cultivation and practice of their different branches of learning which had obscured from their view the

1 *Makūbāt*, p. 67.

2. *Ihyā'*, Vol II, pp 294-299.

essence of the true faith. Jurists were stretching their legal quibblings too far to include all sorts of futile juristic issues, dialecticians deemed it worthwhile to engage in specious reasoning and irrelevant polemics, traditionists busied themselves with unnecessary researches into the terms and phrases used in the Traditions and their derivatives; while mystics considered it an act of devotion to commit the writings of their masters to memory. Al-Ghazali vigorously criticised all these people and brought out succinctly the misconceptions under which they were labouring. Summing up the discussion in this regard he writes :

“The secular sciences pertaining to mathematics, medicine and other useful arts do not produce so much self-deception among their students as is born out of the religious sciences. This is because nobody ever thinks of these branches of learning as a means of attaining salvation in the Hereafter; whereas, the study of religious sciences is itself, apart from its aim and the ultimate result desired of it, very often taken as leading to salvation.”¹

Alongwith the religious scholars, al-Ghazali brought the pious and the mystics too under the focus of his criticism. In highlighting their mistakes and misconceptions, self-deceptions and the show of assumed piety, al-Ghazali disclosed how a number of devotional practices were really unimportant and worthless, and that the motive behind several of these devotional acts was not a sincere desire to serve God but simply to satisfy one's ownself or others, or else to seek respect and honour.²

Turning to the affluent and well-to-do sections of the society al-Ghazali has made certain pertinent observations of far-reaching importance.

“There are many amongst the men of substance who are too liberal in spending their wealth on the performance of *Hajj*. They set out for the pilgrimage regularly year after year as if they have none hungry or in want amongst

1 *Ihyā'*, Vol III, p 343

2. *Ibid*, Vol III, pp 345-350

their neighbours. ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd truly said that during the later times quite a large number of persons would perform the *Hajj* unnecessarily, simply because they would find it easy to travel and would have enough to spend, but they would return from the *Hajj* without any recompense for they would not help their fellow-travellers whom they would find in trouble.

‘Abū Nasr Tammār relates that somebody informed Bishr ibn al-Harith of his intention to set out for the *Hajj*. Bishr asked, ‘What have you got to meet the expenses?’

The man replied, ‘Two thousand *dirhams*.’

‘And what is the purpose of your journey’, demanded Bishr again, ‘Do you want to make a show of your piety, visit the Ka‘aba or seek the pleasure of God?’

He replied, ‘To seek the pleasure of God.’

‘All right’, said Bishr, ‘but would you agree, if I tell you a method whereby you would attain the pleasure of God without having to go all the way for *Hajj*? You would undoubtedly spend the money you have, but you would also be satisfied that you have done something that would be liked by the Lord.’

After the man had given his assent Bishr told him, ‘Then you should distribute the amount you have set aside for the *Hajj* among ten insolvent persons so that they may be able to pay off their debts, or to paupers who may live on it, or to the orphans or persons in indigent circumstances. If you like, you may give the entire amount to a single person because rendering help to the poor or the needy or any one in trouble is better than performing a hundred voluntary *Hajj*s. Now you should do as I have told you but if you have any hesitation, tell me about it.’

‘The truth is’, the man rejoined, ‘that I want to undertake the journey.’

Bishr smiled and remarked: ‘When the money is obtained from prohibited or doubtful sources, the insinuating-self of man urges him to gratify its desires which it

often brings forth in the garb of virtuous acts to deceive him. God Almighty has, however, decided that He would accept the deeds of only those who fear him.”¹

“Another group among the moneyed but niggardly persons is more interested in such devotional acts on which nothing is to be spent. They like to keep fasts, offer prayers or recite the Qur’ān. These persons too are deceiving themselves because stinginess has captured their souls. They ought to spend their money in order to cure themselves of the malady but they keep themselves busy in the acts which are really not required of them. These elements are like the man who is about to be bitten by a snake and of which he would undoubtedly die, but he keeps himself busy in preparing a syrup for relieving his cough. These miserly persons do not stand in need of the aforesaid devotional acts as that foolish man would not be cured of the snake-bite by his syrup. Once somebody told Bishr that a certain wealthy person was profusely keeping fasts and offering prayers. He replied, ‘The poor fellow is doing the work of others but has given up his own. He was required to feed the hungry and help the poor. Instead, he is forcing his ownself to remain hungry and is trying to help himself by offering voluntary prayers. Along with this, he is also busy in accumulating as much wealth as possible so as to exclude the poor from it’.”²

In regard to another self-deception from which people generally suffer, al-Ghazali says

“There are still others, both among the well-to-do and the poor, who are victims of self-deception for they consider it sufficient enough to attend the religious discourses and sermons. They regularly attend such gatherings and think that it is propitious to listen to these discourses even without acting on the counsel of the preachers. These

1 *Ihyāʾ*, Vol III, pp 351-352

2 *Ibid*, Vol III, p. 352

persons are deceiving themselves because the merit of these sermons lies simply in their exhortation to adopt the righteous course. But if the sermons create no urge for virtuous action, then they are simply valueless. Anything used as a means for achieving an end has importance because of its objective and if it cannot somehow be helpful in achieving the object, it becomes worthless. But these persons are led astray by the merit of listening to such discourses, unduly emphasised by certain preachers. Often such listeners are found in a melting mood or even in a flood of tears during the discourses but they never make up their mind to tread the righteous path. If these persons are told something dreadful, they begin to implore God and seek His protection, but they appear to think that it is all they need to propitiate the Lord. It is nothing but self-deception. Such a person is like a patient who consults the physician simply to gain knowledge of the prescription but he can never regain his health by it. Or, else, he resembles one who is hungry but cannot fill his belly merely by learning the name of different types of edibles.

“Being attentive to the preachers and hearing the details of doctrines and devotional practices would likewise be of no avail in the life-to-come unless it makes you change your life and pattern it in a manner that it may inculcate awe and remembrance of God. If the sermons do not produce this effect and do not make you weary of this-worldliness, then these will be produced as an evidence against you in the Hereafter. Verily, if you think that simply listening to these sermons would be enough for your salvation, you are deceiving yourself.”¹

Purpose of the *Ihyā*

*Ihyā*² *‘Ulūm id-Dīn* is not merely a book of criticism. One of the objectives underlying this book is to reform and Islamise the

1 *Ihyā*, Vol III, p 352

Muslim society. Al-Ghazali really intended to produce a work which might be self-sufficient not only for the education and discipline of the seekers after truth but that it might also be an adequate guide-book for the educators and preachers, serve as an encyclopædia of Islamic sciences and may be used as a manual of injunctions for the Islamic way of life. He succeeded in making the book a compendium of Islamic beliefs and practices, measures required for purification of the soul, disciplines of moral conduct and cultivation of a mystical awareness of the truth. The book also presents an striking example of its effectiveness. Many of us would have shared the experience of Shibli Na‘omani who says that “every word of this book has a magnetic effect on its reader, it takes hold of him and pulls the strings of his heart. This over bearing effect of the *Ihya’* is perhaps because it was written by al-Ghazali at a time when he was himself filled and deeply impressed with a feeling of higher awakening.”¹

The inner experience of unseen realities giving an insight into the higher realms, through which al-Ghazali had himself passed, and which is reflected in the *Ihya’*, sometimes makes its readers disenchanted with the world. It creates a longing for solitude and penitence, contemplation and devotion and produces an awe and reverence of God peculiar to the mystic way of life which is often harmful for the health. The writer of these pages has himself experienced these feelings while going through the *Ihya’* for the compilation of this book. It is perhaps for this reason that the mentors of mystic disciplines do not advise the novices to go through the *Ihya’* in initial stages. Perfect moderation and temperance can indeed be had only through the study of the Traditions and the biography of the Prophet and the company of a religious teacher who has modelled his life in accordance with the teachings of the *Shari‘ah*.

Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazali :

Besides being an eminent scholar, jurist, dialectician and a

1. *Al-Ghazali*, p 48

mystic, al-Ghazali was also a propounder of the Islamic ethics. His studies in ethical philosophy fathom the mysteries of head and heart and exhibit a penetrating insight into the eternal values of life. In fact al-Ghazali has left such an indelible mark on the subsequent thought that no study of Islamic ethics and ethical philosophy can be deemed complete without a mention of al-Ghazali's thought and his writings on the subject.¹ The *Ihyā'* is a masterpiece of al-Ghazali on this subject too in which he, like a true thinker, sets out to examine the innate psychological dispositions and impulses actuating ethical behaviour.

Yearning for Honour (Jāh):

Under the caption "Why man has a natural longing for honour (Jāh) and why it seldom leaves even the heart of a penitent," al-Ghazali writes in the *Ihyā'*

"One must know that exactly for the same reason which makes wealth dearer to man, he inculcates the love of Jāh. Just as gold is liked more than silver, even if the two be of the same value, Jāh claims precedence over riches. As you know, gold and silver have no attraction in themselves for these can neither satisfy hunger nor can be put on. These are just as good as any other metal, but these have an allurements because they serve as a means of satisfying the desires held dearer by man. Similar is the case with Jāh which means winning and dominating the heart of others.

"However, despite the fact that Jāh and wealth equally share the fancy of man, the former claims precedence over the other for reasons more than one. There are three conspicuous reasons for it. The first of these is that Jāh can be a means for attaining riches while the latter may not be helpful in commanding the respect of others. Anybody winning the hearts of others wins their services and

¹ *Tārīkh ul-Akhlāq*, p. 200, also see *Falsafat ul Akhlāq*

belongings too as people are always desirous of making presentations to those whom they love and revere. On the other hand, if an undistinguished plebeian somehow gets hold of a treasure, he cannot win the respect of others merely by getting rich. *Jāh* is, thus held dearer than wealth.

“Another obvious reason is that there is always a danger of losing wealth. It can be stolen or taken away forcibly, kings and tyrants can confiscate it. It also needs to be guarded and kept in boxes and strong-rooms, but once a man wins the heart of anyone, there is no danger of its being lost to thieves, robbers, or plunderers. It is indeed the most well-guarded treasure. The treasure of heart, on the other hand, is immune from all these dangers.

“The third reason for holding *Jāh* dearer is that it goes on increasing by itself without requiring any effort to be made for it. When people begin to venerate anyone on account of his knowledge or virtuous actions, they sing his praise thereby widening the circle of his followers. It is thus only natural that everybody should hanker after fame and honour. When the fame spreads to other towns and lands, the number of admirers too increases with it. As against this, wealth does not increase by itself. These are the manifest reasons for giving preference to *Jāh* over wealth. One can also find many other reasons for it.

“Now, it can be argued that if what I have explained here is correct a man should like to have riches or *Jāh* only to the extent of fulfilling his desires or meeting his wants, for, he holds these dear only for achieving these ends. But, the fact is that the covetousness of man knows no bounds and he goes on accumulating possessions and riches till the limits of his needs are left far behind and he presents the spectacle of one alluded to in the Tradition which says *If a man has two valleys filled with gold, he would long for the third.* Similarly, a man is always anxious that his *Jāh* should go on increasing till his fame reaches the far off

lands, although he knows that he would never step into those countries and meet their inhabitants

“The answer to the question posed earlier is that, in truth and reality, love of *ẓāh* produces an intoxication which can hardly be eradicated. There are two reasons for this. One of these is manifest and can be conceived by everyone. But the other one being related to a peculiar trait of the human-self, is so subtle and latent that it would be difficult even for the most intelligent to grasp it fully. It can be understood only by those who are endowed by the brilliance of mind and have a deep insight into the psychological nature of man.

“The first of the two causes is that man always feels an innate uneasiness on account of the fears and doubts in regard to that which he holds dear and accordingly wants to ward off all dangers, real or imaginary, from it. As a poet has said: ‘To fall in love is to fall in a thousand anxieties.’

“Man is never satisfied, no matter whatever provisions he has made to meet his necessities. The doubt that he might lose his possessions, later on, always assails his heart and this makes him sad and anxious. This anxiety can be removed only in case he gets something which can be a substitute for the possessions which he fears to lose. Again, on account of his self-love and eagerness for a long life, he overestimates his necessities for the future, and wants adequate resources to counterbalance the imaginary perils to his means. He is always worried about the supposed hazards which might make him lose his resources. The only effective remedy he can think of against these risks is to have so much estate and effects that if he somehow loses a part of it, he may be able to manage easily with the remaining assets left with him. The doubt and fear in regard to future security never allow him to be content with his existing belongings and he yields to the desire of possessing the fortunes of the entire world. The Prophet

of Islam has very rightly said that the longing for two things viz , for knowledge and wealth is never satisfied The desire for *Jāh* or winning the hearts of men is also insatiable precisely for the same reason.

“Another reason, and a more cogent one than the first, is that the Spirit is a command by God. The Qur’ān says . *They will ask thee concerning the Spirit. Say . The Spirit is by command of my Lord*¹ The command by the Lord means that it is a secret which can be experienced by the illuminated masters through beatific visions but cannot be divulged. The Prophet of Islam too did not disclose the reality of Spirit but, without going into its reality, one can find out that the heart of man has four-fold predispositions The first of these is a beastly inclining towards eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, etc. The second pertains to what may be called a ferocious leaning towards killing, injuring and hurting others The third element of human nature is devilish having a predisposition towards deceit and fraud Along with these propensities, there is another one relating to the divine nature of man which seeks expression in the divine attributes like beneficence, dignity, grandeur, respect and glory The heart of man has numerous similar predispositions which cannot be gone into in any detail here, but, as stated, one of the important inclinations of the heart, owing to the Spirit being a command by the Lord, pertains to the quality of perfection. And, what this perfection is? It consists of being unrivalled in perfection and owning an existence not dependent on another for anything

“Man is thus naturally inclined towards perfection since it is a divine quality—a quality which does not admit of any peer or rival, for that would really constitute a defect in perfection The perfection of the sun lies in the fact that it is the only sun Likewise, the perfection

¹ *Bani Israel*, 85

of *Being* is enjoyed by God Almighty alone for there is no perfect *Being* besides Him. Whatever exists besides Him is simply His creation and cannot exist on its own. Thus, in very truth, nothing exists without God, for, sharing any quality with Him presupposes an equality which is a defect for the unrivalled perfection of God Almighty. Just as the sun illuminates everything in this world without losing its perfection, God also bestows existence to everything. It is on Him that the existence of everything depends in this universe. Unrivalled perfection is thus a divine attribute to which man has a natural predisposition. Some of the mystics have observed that in the recesses of his heart everyman nourishes the same feeling which found expression from Pharaoh when he said *I am your Lord, Most High*. It is because of this reason that man finds it more pleasing to become an object of homage and reverence than to become himself a devotee or a worshipper. This is a natural human instinct which is alluded to in the divine revelation which says that the *Spirit is by command of my Lord*.

“Man cannot, however, attain absolute or unrivalled perfection, but his desire for it persists because he derives a sort of satisfaction from it. Absolute perfection is the end and not the means of achieving anything else. The fact is that every man adores his self as well as its absolute perfection, he shudders at the idea of death simply because he sees the annihilation of his self and of its perfection in his death. Absolute perfection, on the one hand, demands complete independence from every thing for its existence and, on the other, dependence of every other existence on it. If, however, that be not possible, the next best course desired by it is to dominate others. Man desiring complete perfection has, thus, a natural inclination towards predominance over others. Domination over others is gratifying to the self and a means of achieving perfection. It consists of the capacity to be effective and the ability to make others

change their will. Accordingly, man wants to dominate over every other being but the latter consists of objects, some of which do not admit of any change in accordance with the human will, as, for instance, the Supreme Being and His attributes. There is another category of objects which undergoes change but not in conformity with the human desire, and these are the heavens, planets, angels, *jinn*, devils, mountains, oceans, and the like. The objects falling in the third category such as land, its elements, minerals, plants, animals and also the hearts of men, are liable to change under the influence of human will. Now, the objects of the first two categories being outside the scope of human influence, man endeavours to acquire knowledge of these objects, for, acquiring the knowledge of anything is also a means of gaining domination over it. You see the keenness of some people to have an insight into the reality of the nature and attributes of God, angels, heavens, planets, stars, oceans and their wonders. This is also a way of acquiring some domination over these. You would have seen that if a man cannot himself manufacture something that catches his fascination, he wants at least to know how it had been made because this gives him some satisfaction. A man who cannot himself invent a game like chess or any other device, wants at least to know how it is played or used and how it was invented. He finds his ignorance vexatious and the knowledge enchanting since he wants to make up some of his own deficiency through his knowledge.

“Of the earthly things over which man desires predominance in order to utilise them according to his wishes, there are two sub-divisions, firstly, those pertaining to body, and, secondly, those belonging to spirit. The first comprises possessions and belongings, wealth and resources on which man wants complete domination. He wants complete authority to use these in whatever manner he desires because authority is necessary for perfection.

dominance is one of the attributes of God reflecting His qualities of overlordship, paternalism, etc. Man has a natural inclination to hold these dear to his heart no matter whether he ever needs them for meeting his personal requirements or not. Similarly, man wants to have slaves, who would be under his domination, or to force even free people to accept his predominance, so that he may command their homage and services. It is not necessary that he should always win over their hearts because domination by force is more often as much effective as winning over the heart of a man. It is, therefore, natural that man sometimes desires to attain predominance through brute force because it expresses his authority over others—an attribute of perfection to which man is predisposed.

“The most precious of all earthly possessions, then, falling under the second category, is the domination and winning over the hearts of men. The perfection of domination lies in the authority exercised by a man over the hearts of others who are ever willing to comply with his bidding. The hearts of men can best be dominated by creating love and reverence which is born out of a conviction about the perfection of qualities in the person adored, for, perfection of qualities is a divine attribute to which man has an inherent inclination. The heart of man, therefore, desires to attain perfection either through knowledge or authority. Riches and *Jāh*, being the two potent means of acquiring this authority, are cherished by the heart of man. And, since knowledge and authority are limitless, man endeavours to gain knowledge of everything and command authority over every existence. As the Prophet has alluded to the dissatisfaction of the learned and the wealthy—the desire of man for domination over things beyond his authority—ever goes on increasing.”

I Abbreviated from *Iḥyāʾ*, Vol III, pp 241-244

Critique of the Self:

The most effective part of the *Ihya'* is where al-Ghazali expounds the significance of purifying one's own soul and reforming the morals for achieving blessedness. His exposition covers the fleeting nature of the terrestrial world, eternity of the world-to-come, significance of the faith and righteous action, cleansing of the spirit and eradication of the vices of heart which he deems to be the inner bases of all grossness in human conduct. The graphic description of the vices and virtues by al-Ghazali and his exhortation for adoption of the course leading to salvation bear the mark of an eloquent speaker, a prudent mentor and a philosopher with an incisiveness of intellect and a penetrating insight into the inner recesses of human soul, mind and spirit. He is fully aware of the different types of human weaknesses and delineates each of these, sets forth their causes and traces their origin, and thereafter proceeds to suggest measures for subjugation of the earthly appetites and impulses out of which these vices are born. The treatment of the ethical issues by al-Ghazali does not produce a mere religious discourse. His essays are inspiring, employing a rich and expressive language which has since cast its spell over hundreds and thousands of people and reformed their lives. The fourth section of the book deals explicitly with the critique of the Self and the method of self-examination. He tells us how one should make an assessment of one's own vices and inclinations towards it, and prepare oneself for the life-to-come. Under the caption "Self-criticism" al-Ghazali writes

"O' *Nafs* (Self), is it the right course that when a Jew tells thee that a certain thing is injurious for thy health, thou dost not take it and preferest to curb thy desire, but, thou, completely disregardest the commands of Divine revelation and the directives of the prophets whose truthfulness is established by miracles? Is it not surprising that thou attachest more weight to the opinion of that Jew although he is liable to form an erroneous opinion on account of his limited knowledge or wisdom? Thou throwest away thy garment without the slightest hesitation,

if even a child informs thee that a scorpion has got into thy clothes. Is it that the tidings of the prophets, scholars, saints and the mentors about the life-to-come, the Hell and its blazing fire, its torments, its bitter thorn, its scorpions and reptiles do not deserve even as much credence as the information given by a child? Or, is it that the reptiles of the Hell shall cause thee lesser pain than the sting of an earthly scorpion which gives thee trouble for a day or even for a shorter period? This is certainly, not the way dictated by prudence. If the beasts were to know of thy foolishness, they would laugh at thee.

“O’ *Nafs*, thou knowest what is to happen after death and hast also a faith in the life-to-come, but thou still dost not want to act righteously and desirest to ignore the Hereafter. Death is marking time to come upon thee and impound thy soul without any warning. Even if a hundred years were given, one shall never reach the destination, if one discontinues the journey to bask in the sunshine. And, what dost thou think of a man who goes abroad for acquiring knowledge but continues to postpone his studies in the hope that he would learn everything within the last few months before returning home? Thou wouldst, undoubtedly, laugh at this man since he hopes to acquire all knowledge and wisdom in such a short time, as also on a man who cherishes a desire to be appointed as a jurist without studying law. If thou hast presumed that the endeavours made during the old age are more fruitful, then, how dost thou think that this is not the last day of thy life? Why dost thou not then address thyself to the task just now? Has God told thee that He would allow thee some more time to make preparations for thy salvation? If not, then what is it that is preventing thee from making haste and prompting thee to postpone thy decision indefinitely? There is no other reason save that thou art finding it difficult to subjugate thy impulses and earthly desires, for that would involve an effort on thy part. Dost

thou, then, wait for that day when it would be made easier for every man to conquer his desires? Verily, such a day shall never come since God has not created it at all. The Paradise being surrounded by things unpleasant and unwelcome, shall never be agreeable to the indolent self which always wants to postpone the day's work to the next day. Dost thou know how many tomorrows have been turned into yesterdays. would it not be even harder to accomplish tomorrow what cannot be done today? Take the instance of the passion for sex. If it is not curbed today, it cannot be rooted out tomorrow, or else, it is like a tree which a man wants to uproot but being unsuccessful in his attempt, postpones the task for the future. This man knows it well that with the passage of time, the tree will take root more firmly while he will become older and grow weaker. Obviously, this man would not be able to accomplish in his old age what he could not do in the prime of his youth. To put a bridle on the passions is really as difficult and troublesome as to train a wolf.

"O' *Nafs*, thou appearest not to know these facts of common experience but claimest to be wise and prudent! Verily, there appears to be none more foolish than thee! Thy passions, thou mightest plead, do not allow thee to be steadfast in virtue while the troubles and afflictions make thee abandon the path of patience. If this is correct, why dost thou not seek the pleasure that is everlasting, pure and sublime, and which can be had in the celestial Abode of Bliss alone. If thou art a slave of thy desires and mad after pleasure, it is even more desirable for thee to curb thy fleeting predilections, for sometimes one morsel taken by a man prevents him from taking his food for days together. Suppose a patient has been directed by his physician not to take cold water for three days so that he might recover from illness. Now, tell me, what does thy intellect dictate? Should this man abstain from cold drink for three days to regain his health or, should he,

disregarding the result, satisfy his craving for cold water? Dost thou not know that the pitifully short duration of life vouchsafed to thee in this transient world is relatively even more short-lived, when compared to the eternal life in the Hereafter, than the three days of that patient as compared with the rest of his life? Is it that the endurance required for controlling the earthly passions is more agonising than the torments of indefinite duration in different portals of the Hell? How wouldst thou be able to put up with that everlasting torture when thou findest it so distasteful to bear this temporary unpleasantness?

“I find that thou art unable to restrain thyself just for two reasons. The first of these is a sort of concealed infidelity while the other is nothing but stupidity. Thy concealed infidelity comprises lack of conviction about the Day of Requit and recompense of thy deeds in the world-to-come. Thy stupidity, on the other hand, makes thee oblivious of the designs of God and asks thee to depend upon His mercy disregarding the fact that the benefits conferred on the obstinate sinners are really snares to trap them. Still, thou wouldst not trust His beneficence for a piece of bread or a handful of grains nor follow even the express commands enjoined by Him! The Prophet has said: *Prudent is he who resorts to self-criticism and endeavours to prepare for the life after death while stupid is he who allows himself to take after the ways of flesh and still remain hopeful of divine favour.* Alas, thou shouldst have been aware of the snare of thy passions and shouldst not have allowed thyself to be duped by the Satan. Thou hast been asked to take care of thyself and be charitable unto thee. Thou shouldst not waste the sojourn of thy life in this transient world. If thou lovest a moment of this life, thou wilt lose a substantial portion of thy fortune in the Hereafter, which can never be regained. Therefore, take advantage of thy health before thou fallest ill, of the recess before thou art pre-occupied; of the riches before thy indigence; of the youthful zest

(the creation and the raising of) a single soul Lo! Allah is Hearer, Knower.¹

As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it.²

As He brought you into being, so return ye (unto Him) ³''⁴

Critics of the *Ihyā'* :

Ibn Taymiyah's verdict on the *Ihyā'* is that on the whole it is a well-written book employing an elegant style⁵ At the same time, Ibn Taymiyah criticises it for four reasons The first of these is that al-Ghazali's thought shows definite traces of Greek philosophy In delineating the Unity of God, prophethood and the final recompense al-Ghazali has, maintains Ibn Taymiyah, introduced numerous concepts which were held by the then philosophers Even if al-Ghazali opposed the philosophers, he gave scholasticism a philosophical foundation. Ibn Taymiyah being emphatically opposed to philosophy found some of the writings of al-Ghazali unpalatable from a purely religious view-point

The second ground for criticism of the *Ihyā'* is that al-Ghazali employs a syllogism which is not fully in keeping with the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* The third reason given by Ibn Taymiyah is that the book contains many concepts and teachings of those treading the path of mysticism and their claims in regard to gaining insight into the divine truth Ibn Taymiyah disagrees with al-Ghazali in regard to the latter's views on mysticism. The fourth reason for disagreement of Ibn Taymiyah is that the *Ihyā'* contains many Traditions of doubtful authenticity.⁶ Despite these shortcomings pointed out by him, Ibn Taymiyah writes about the *Ihyā'* :

“Notwithstanding these defects, the *Ihyā'* contains the teachings of numerous illuminated mentors and mystics, and their experiences in regard to the purification of self

1 *Luqmān*, 28

2 *Al-Anbiya*, 104

3 *Al-Araf*, 29

4 *Ihyā'* Vol IV, pp 356-358

5 *Fatāwah*, Vol II, p 194 .

6 *Fatāwah* Vol II, p 194 and *At-Taj al-Makallal*, p 388

and the intuitive knowledge, which are identical with the canons of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* and can thus be acceptable from a theological point of view. It is because of this reason that the scholars hold different opinions about the *Ihyāʾ* and all of them are not opposed to it.”¹

Ibn al-Jawzī has also criticised al-Ghazālī for making use of unauthentic and weak Traditions. He is of the opinion that this was because al-Ghazālī was not a traditionist.² Hafiz Zain ud-dīn al-ʿIrāqī later collected all the Traditions mentioned in the *Ihyāʾ* and classified these according to the accepted norms and examined the authenticity or otherwise of each Tradition. Ibn al-Jawzī has also pointed out certain mistakes made by al-Ghazālī in regard to the historical events mentioned by him in the *Ihyāʾ*. Al-Ghazālī was, however, not a scholar of history or Traditions.³

Ibn al-Jawzī maintains that al-Ghazālī has mentioned several examples of mystics or the methods resorted to by them for penance and self-purification which cannot be held permissible under the *Shariʿah*, much less to be recommended for being followed by the people.⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, however, acknowledges the effectiveness of the *Ihyāʾ* and the valuable contribution it has made to the subsequent Islamic thought. He has also summarised the *Ihyāʾ* in a book entitled *Minhāj ul-Qāsīdīn* (Path of the Truth-seekers) in which he has deleted the portions objectionable from his point of view. This work of Ibn al-Jawzī, however, lacks the inspiration and effectiveness so characteristic of the *Ihyāʾ*.

Al-Ghazālī and Dialectics :

A man of al-Ghazālī's outstanding intellectual gifts could not continue to tread the beaten path of earlier dialecticians nor could he be content with the position of a mere commentator. Unfortunately, the science of dialectics, which had been evolved for the defence of religion and which had to keep itself abreast

1 *Fatāwah*, Vol II, p 194

2 *Al-Muntazam*, Vol IX, pp 169-170

3 *Ibid* , Vol IX, p 170

4 *Ibid* , Vol IX, p 169

with the current developments in other branches of learning, had lost its vigour by the end of the fourth century. The Ash'arites of the time had taken to the path of rigid dogmatism insisting on the acceptance of not simply their tenets and beliefs but also the canons devised by al-Ash'ari and Abū-Bakr Baqillānī without the slightest modification or improvement. They considered it heretical to employ a logical syllogism not used by the earlier teachers of their school for the defence of religion. Al-Ghazali pressed his knowledge of philosophy for upholding the religious beliefs and dogmas and, indeed, devised entirely new canons for rational exposition of these matters which were more effective than the arguments of the Ash'arites. In regard to the matters like divine attributes, prophethood, miracles, religious practices, punishments and rewards in the Hereafter, and the Day of Requitā he brought forth entirely new arguments, more convincing to a rational mind, than those employed by his predecessors. He did, in fact, lay the foundations of a scientific scholastic system, thus infusing a new blood in the old Ash'arite school. The modified doctrines of the Ash'arite school eventually became, thanks to al-Ghazali, the most popular system of scholasticism in the entire Islamic world, but, since al-Ghazali held divergent views from al-Ash'ari and other eminent scholars of that school on several issues, many ardent followers of the Ash'arite school looked down upon al-Ghazali's thought with misgivings and disfavour. Some of the Ash'arite zealots even accused al-Ghazali of breaking away from the orthodox faith and adopting heretical tenets. After the compilation of the *Ihyā'*, the Ash'arite scholars became so critical of al-Ghazali that one of his friends wrote a letter to invite his attention towards the matter. Al-Ghazali explained the position in some detail in a booklet with the title *Faṣal al-Tafarruq Bain al-Islām wal-Zandaqa*. He writes in it

“Dear brother, a group of people envious of me is busy in censuring my writings, for, in their opinion I have expounded views contrary to those held by the teachers of the old, or the founders of the scholastic school. They think that even the slightest deviation from the orthodox Ash'arite

Personal experience and a comprehensive insight into the speculative as well as religious sciences led al-Ghazali to the conclusion that scholasticism has only a limited utility which may sometimes be even harmful in particular cases. He ultimately came to regard dialectics as a medicine which should not be administered to the healthy people who needed only adequate nourishment through their food. And, this could be provided amply by the Qur'ān. He maintained that the Qur'ān contained a superior logic as its arguments are quite satisfying to the people possessing common-sense. In his last book entitled *Ilyām ul-^cAwām* ^c*an-^cIlm il-kalām* (The Restraining of the commonalty from the Science of Dialectics) al-Ghazali observes .

“The Qur'ānic arguments are like food which provide nourishment to everyone while the logical system built up by the dialecticians is similar to a medicine which can be administered profitably to a few only, and may even have harmful effects for others not requiring it. Or, else, the Qur'ānic reasoning resembles water which can be taken both by a weak child and a robust youth while dialectical argumentation is like a rich food which provides nourishment to the latter but is indigestible and even harmful for children.”¹

Continuing further on the evil effects of dialectics, he writes .

“The indiscriminate practice of dialectics by its votaries provides an irrefutable argument against that science. Since the time it was popularised, it has given rise to many evils which were not to be found during the times of the Prophet's companions.”²

Al-Ghazali's refusal to return to Baghdad:

Al-Ghazali was prevailed upon by Fakhr ul-Mulk, the son of Nizām ul-Mulk, who had become a Vazier of the Saljuq Prince Sanjar, to return to Nishapur in the month of Zul-q^cadah, 499 A.H.,

1 *Ilyām ul-^cAwām*, p 20

2 *Ibid*

and resume the chief professorship at the Nizāmiyah University. Fakhr ul-Mulk was assassinated in the beginning of 500 A H by a Batinite emissary and al-Ghazali abandoned the profession of teaching shortly thereafter. He returned to his native town Tūs, and founded a small institution for the teaching of his local disciples and the cultivation of a religious life.

The then Saljuq Sultan appointed Ahmad, the elder son of Nizām ul-Mulk, as his Vazier in 500 A H, who again made a request to al-Ghazali to resume his post at the Nizāmiyah University, Baghdad, which had only been provisionally filled in. As a matter of fact, there was nobody in the entire world of Islam who could replace al-Ghazali. The Nizāmiyah University at Baghdad was the premier institution of those days and occupied a pride of place in the educational and religious academics of the 'Abbāsids. Everyone felt the loss suffered by the Nizāmiyah on account of al-Ghazali's retirement and was anxious for his return to teaching in Baghdad. Qwām ud-dīn Nizām ul-Mulk, who was the Grand Vazier of the Saljuq King wrote a personal letter to al-Ghazali expressing the desire of the then 'Abbāsīd Caliph that he should return to Baghdad. In this letter he wrote

"I solicited the orders of the Caliph in this matter but these were not granted until Sadr ud-dīn¹ took it upon himself that the wishes of the Caliph shall be communicated by him personally to *Khwaja-i²-Ajal*, *Zain ud-dīn*, *Hujjat-ul-Islam*, *Farid uz-zamān*,² Abū Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, who is peerless and up to whom everyone looks for guidance."

In order to impress that all the courtiers and the chiefs of the Caliphate were anxiously awaiting the return of al-Ghazali, all the high officials of the Caliph's court signed the letter. In yet another letter Ahmad wrote to al-Ghazali: "Although scholars

1 Sadr ud-dīn Muhammad the grandson of a Nizām ul-Mulk, was Vazier of the Saljuq Prince Sanjar, in whose dominion lay Tūs the native town of al-Ghazali.

2 Titles conferred on al-Ghazali.

3 *Al-Ghazali*, p. 27.

would go to the place whereupon you happen to be present for acquiring knowledge from you, it appears reasonable that you should choose for your residence a place which is not only the metropolis of the Islamic world but is also easily accessible from all parts of the empire. And such a place is obviously Baghdad.”

In reply to the royal edicts and the letters from his well-wishers al-Ghazali sent a lengthy reply giving the reasons for not returning to his teaching profession in Baghdad. He pleaded that one and a half hundred students who were receiving education under him in Tūs, would find it extremely difficult to go all the way to Baghdad with him. His family which was not with him earlier in Baghdad would have to face unnecessary hardship if he again migrated from Tūs. He also said that in Baghdad it would not be possible for him to remain unconcerned with the polemics and debates which had become the prevailing taste of the court life, while he had taken a vow at the *Muqām-i-Ibrahim* that he would never enter into such futile controversies. Other reasons given by al-Ghazali were that he did not like to visit the Caliph nor accept any remuneration from the Caliphate, but it would be difficult for him to do without either of these in Baghdad as he did not possess any landed property in the capital which could support his family. The ‘Abbāsīd Caliph as well as the Saljuq King tried their best to persuade al-Ghazali to return to Baghdad but he refused to comply with their requests.¹

Death of al-Ghazali:

Al-Ghazali spent the rest of his life in further studies like a student. He had not been able to pay as much attention to the Traditions as he had to the religious and secular sciences. He, therefore, tried to make up the leeway by studying the *Sahīh* of *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*² under a reputed traditionist of the time, Hafiz ‘Amr ibn Abī al-Hasan al-Rawāsī. He even obtained the diploma of having studied the two books under al-Rawāsī. As the

¹ Al-Ghazali, p. 27

² The two authentic collections of the Traditions

annalists report, he spent most of his time during this period in the study of the Traditions. One of his biographers, Ibn 'Asakir records

“During the last days of his life, al-Ghazali addressed himself whole-heartedly to the study of the Traditions. During this period he preferred the company of religious scholars, and studied the *Sahih* of *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*, which are deemed to be the most authentic collections of the *Sunnah*”¹

Al-Ghazali wrote another book on legal theory, known as *al-Mustasfa*, just a year or so before his death. This work of al-Ghazali is still considered as one of the three outstanding contributions on the subject; the other two being *al-Mu'tamad* of Abul Husain al-Basiri and *al-Burhān* of Imam-ul-Haramayn.

Al-Ghazali died at Tābrian on the 14th of Jamādi al-Ukhra, 505 A H at the age of 55 years. Ibn al-Jawāzi has given a graphic description of al-Ghazali's death, as told by Ahmad al-Ghazali who was an eye-witness of his brother's remarkable death.

“It was Monday. He got up in the morning, made his ablutions and performed the dawn prayers, he then asked to bring his shroud, taking it he kissed and laid it on his eyes with the words, ‘I submit to the command of my Master’, then he stretched out his feet, facing the *Qibla* (the direction of Kāba). When people saw him he had already passed away.”²

Two Outstanding Qualities of al-Ghazali:

Immaculate sincerity and indomitable courage are the two most impressive qualities of al-Ghazali which have been acknowledged by all—friends as well as his foes. His writings breathe an almost tragic urgency of his message. Ibn Taymiyah differs from al-Ghazali on many issues but he has absolutely no doubt

¹ *Tab'een*, p. 296

² *Ithāf-us-Sa'āda*, Vol I, p. 11

about the sincerity of al-Ghazali's purpose ¹ The reason behind effectiveness as well as immense popularity gained by al-Ghazali's works was his earnestness and selfless devotion for the Truth which made him abandon the most coveted post at the Nizāmiyah University, led him to spend a decade in seclusion and contemplation and, finally, gave him the courage to turn down the invitations of emperors and resist the temptations of riches, honour and glory. He has written that the evil which gets out last from the heart of a righteous man is the love of honour. Al-Ghazali's life before his demise bears testimony to the fact that he had attained this stage of self-purification and moral rectitude.

Al-Ghazali was fired with an adventurous spirit and a lofty idealism which enabled him to set his heart upon an ever higher objective. His work on jurisprudence and theory of law was a beacon of light for the scholar-jurists for many centuries to come. Contrary to the pattern of education followed in al-Ghazali's time, he studied secular sciences after acquiring mastery over religious learning. He engaged himself in the intensive study of philosophy and other speculative sciences of the times and soon acquired such a proficiency in these subjects that he was able to challenge the competence of reason which could not be adequately met by the philosophers for one hundred years.

In making a personal search for the truth his efforts were in no way meaner than his accomplishments in the field of intellect. He turned to the path of mysticism for purification of self and gaining spiritual strength under a reputed spiritual mentor of the time, Sheikh Abū 'Alī al-Fārmadī (d. 477 A. H.). He abandoned everything he had, spent a decade in solitude and contemplation and was favoured with illumination and beatific visions.

Al-Ghazali's endeavours for the revival and revivification of Islam were not limited to the reformation of the Muslim society alone. Shibli Na'omānī has given an account of the efforts made by him to establish a truly Islamic state in Spain. He says:

"Al-Ghazali was not satisfied with the then existing

¹ *Fatāwā*, Vol II, p 194

Muslim states which had degenerated into secular governments. He held the view that unless a new State was established in accordance with the Islamic principles of polity, the Muslim society could not be Islamised. He could not, however, spare time for this stupendous task from his pre-occupations of contemplation and penance, purification of self and rectitude of morals. However, after the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm id-Din* was brought to light and its copies were taken to Spain in 501 A.H., the then king, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfin, ordered to burn them.¹ Al-Ghazali sadly learnt of the incident but shortly thereafter a young man, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Tūmart by name, arrived from Spain to study under him. Muhammad² came of a distinguished family, reputed for its long record of eminent warriors. While he was studying under al-Ghazali he had made up his mind, either of his own account, or, most probably, under the influence exerted by

1 *Ithāf us-Sa'āda*, Vol 1, p 10

2 Ibn Subkī has given some interesting details about Muhammad in *Tabqāt us-Shaf'iyyah*. He says that Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah belonged to Western Africa. In his youth he first studied locally and then travelled in the East to study jurisprudence and dialectics. Noted for his simplicity, he strictly followed the dictates of the *Shari'ah*. Returning to Egypt after completing his education, he began preaching to the people to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. However, he earned the hostility of the local population owing to his uncompromising attitude and was eventually turned out of the place. He then returned to his native land via Alexandria. He arrived in Mehdiah in 505 A. H. and commenced to preach reform among the Berber tribes. He went to Bajayah and then to Morocco on his errand, where he came into conflict with the members of the royal family. 'Alī ibn Yūsuf Tāshfin summoned him to his court where he was asked to explain the reasons for criticising the King. Undaunted by the pomp and glory of the royal court he replied, "Is not wine sold freely in this town? Do not people misappropriate the income of the trusts meant for the orphan?" The king was so impressed by his speech that he burst into tears. Muhammad gradually gathered an enormous following round him and before long formed an extensive kingdom with the help of a Berber tribe Masāmdah. (*Tabqāt al-Shaf'iyyah*, Vol IV, pp 71-74)

al-Ghazali, to overthrow ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf in order to set up a truly Islamic State in Spain. Although al-Ghazali agreed with him, he asked Muhammad about the means as well as the help he hoped to muster in his venture. Having satisfied himself about the project, al-Ghazali allowed Muhammad to proceed with his undertaking. In regard to al-Ghazali’s blessings for the enterprise of Muhammad, Ibn Khaldūn says ‘As people are generally aware, he (Muhammad) met al-Ghazali and consulted him about his venture. Al-Ghazali approved of his suggestion since Islam had grown weak in the whole world and there was no king who could unite the entire *Ummah* for upholding the cause of Islam. However, al-Ghazali first enquired Muhammad about the means he had for organising the uprising and bringing it to a successful end’.

The kingdom established by Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Tūmart, known as *al-Muwahhidīn*, lasted for a pretty long time. The reign of ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf Tāshfīn, which was notorious for its widespread tyranny, had given encouragement to the laxity of morals among all the classes of society. Abduction and rape of women belonging to respectable families by the king’s legionaries had become a common feature of the day. The royal family, descending from a recently converted Berber tribe called *Mulassamīn*, followed a curious custom. Their men always wore a veil while their women moved about unrestrained and unveiled. Muhammad ibn Tūmart, after achieving power, did not himself ascend the throne but chose a capable and learned young man by the name of ‘Abdul Momīn who succeeded the last *Mulassamīn* king Tāshfīn, son of ‘Alī ibn Tāshfīn in 540 A.H.

‘Abdul Momīn and his descendants ruled over the empire of Morocco strictly in accordance with the wishes of Muhammad ibn Tūmart and al-Ghazali. Ibn Khaldūn has given an account of the rule by *al-Muwahhidīn* in these words ‘During their rule ‘*Ulema* were held in high esteem

and all the affairs of the State were decided in consultation with them. Justice was made available to the weak and the poor, tyrannical officials were severely punished, ruffians were held in leash, mosques were constructed in royal palaces, the frontier posts were fortified and strengthened and fresh conquests were made' ”¹

Impact of al-Ghazali:

In intellectual and spiritual attainments, brilliance of his mind and the totality of knowledge he had mastered, there have been only a few personalities comparable to al-Ghazali. His epoch-making writings were the harbinger of a vigorous intellectual movement and a source of inspiration to the subsequent generations. Al-Ghazali did in fact leave such a deep imprint on the pages of Islamic history that his impact on the subsequent Islamic thought has always been acknowledged both by his admirers and critics. His writings are still held in high esteem and profitably studied by those who yearn for purification of the self and mystic communion with God.

Reformers after al-Ghazali:

Despite al-Ghazali's successful encounter with the scepticism of philosophers which had threatened a spiritual chaos in Islam, the moral and spiritual disintegration of the masses by the end of the fifth century had become so widespread that it required a popular movement for the regeneration of the simplicity and directness of the faith. What the *Millat* needed was an illuminated and inspired mentor who wielded influence among the populace, one who could hold them spell-bound and fill them with faith and enthusiasm, zeal and self-confidence. The autocratic governments of the past four hundred years had had definitely a dissolving influence on the spiritual and moral life of the community. These had produced a class which, although claiming to profess Islam, had the aggrandisement of the self,

¹ *Al-Ghazali*, pp 210-213

acquisition of material success and pursuit of wealth, power and honour as its ultimate end. Iranian and Hellenistic cultural influences had, on the one hand, made inroads into the Muslim society while, on the other, paganism of the pre-Islamic *Jahiliyah*, was again reasserting itself. The ostentatious, conceited and dissolute manners of the elite, grandees and retinues of the emperors had become a model for the commonalty. Unmindful of the humble and poor who led a discontented and frustrated life, those who had the money to squander were busy in their own pursuits of pleasure. The affluent were gradually losing all the good qualities like humanity, generosity and benevolence while the poorer classes were incurring the loss of qualities like patience and contentment, confidence and self-respect. Torn between a moral crisis, on the one hand, and social injustice, on the other, the Muslim society was threatened with disintegration. What this critical situation demanded was an invigorating call inviting the people back to the faith, cutting asunder the pulls of worldly temptations and benefits, rekindling the desire for salvation and blessedness, achievement of the true knowledge of God and inculcating an ardent desire to submit oneself to His command. It was necessary for it that the true meaning of *Tawhid*, the Unity of God Almighty, along with an awareness of the fleeting nature of the earthly pleasures and the inefficacy of the power and riches were driven home to the people.

The fifth century after *Hijrah*, on the other hand, also saw a diffusion of arts and sciences in the world of Islam. We find during this period some of the greatest intellectual leaders brought forth by Islam—Abū Is'haq Shīrāzī (d. 476 A. H.) and al-Ghazali (d. 505 A. H.) in the field of religious sciences, Abul Wafā ibn 'Aqeel (d. 513 A. H.) and 'Abdul Qāhir al-Jurjāni (d. 471 A. H.) in jurisprudence and literature, Abū Zakarya Tebrezi (d. 502 A. H.) in grammar and lexicography and Abul Qasim al-Hariri (d. 516 A. H.) in literature. Each one of these was a pioneer in his own field and every one of them remained unrivalled for centuries to come. During such a period of intellectual awakening no religious mentor could have hoped to achieve any success unless he was

himself well-versed in all the prevalent sciences. It was essential that the person should be as much acclaimed for his literary distinction and brilliance of mind as for his moral and spiritual excellence. This was, indeed, necessary if he was not to be brushed aside contemptuously by the learned and elites as an illiterate fanatic. Thus, these were the qualities demanded of a man who could fill the hearts of the people with faith and knowledge, cure them of their scepticism, provide solace to the spiritually distressed and fire them with a burning desire for moral and spiritual uplift.

The Two Saints of Baghdad :

God Almighty brought forth two outstanding personages during this period who devoted their life for the religious and spiritual revivification of the Muslims. These were ‘Abdul Qādir Jīlānī and ‘Abdur Rahmān ibn al-Jawzī. The fields of their activities were different but both of them deeply impressed the life of the Muslims in their times. It was also a blessing from God that both of them had Baghdad, the metropolis of the then Islamic world, as their centre, and were endowed with a long life to accomplish the task to which they had addressed themselves.

And, it is also a matter of pride for the Hanbalite school of jurisprudence that both of these luminaries belonged to that very school.

CHAPTER VIII

SHEIKH ABDUL QADIR JILANI

‘Abdul Qādir was born in Gilān¹ in 470 A H. He was an Arab by descent, being the tenth descendent of Hasan ibn ‘Alī, but belonged to Iran by migration of his ancestors. He came to Baghdad in 488 A H at the age of 18 years. It was perhaps not merely fortuitous that he arrived at Baghdad to acquire education almost at the same time when another reputed teacher, al-Ghazalī, was leaving the city in search of truth². Although inclined to penance and cultivation of religious observances from an early age, he addressed himself whole-heartedly to acquire education under the most reputed teachers of the time such as Abul Wafā Ibn ‘Aqeel, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Baqillānī and Abū Zakariya Tebrezī. Thereafter, he turned to mysticism and was guided in its tenets and practices by Sheikh Abul Khair Hammād ibn Muslim al-Dabbās³ and Cadi Abū Sa‘eed Makhramī,⁴ and was allowed by the latter to initiate others in the mystic order of his mentor.

1 Gilan or Jilan and also known as Vailam, is a north-western province of Iran, south of the Caspian Sea and north of the Elburz chain. It is bounded in the east by Tabristan or Mazandran, and its northern limit is marked by the juncture of the Kuri and the Araxes, its political boundary with Russia is marked by Astara stream. It is one of the most beautiful areas in Iran. (E I S Vol II, p 170)

2 *Ibn Kāthīr*, Vol XII, p 149

3 She‘irānī writes that most of the mystics belonging to Baghdad were his disciples. He died in 525 A H. (*Tabqāt ul-Kubra*, Vol I, p 134)

4 His name was Mubarak ibn ‘Alī ibn Husain. As reported by Ibn Kathīr, he was a traditionist and mystic belonging to the school of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. He died in 511 A H.

Popular Enthusiasm :

After completing his education of religious sciences as well as the training in mystic disciplines, ‘Abdul Qādir began his career as a teacher in the seminary of his teacher Cadi Abū Sa‘eed Makhramī. In his sermons which were delivered in the premises of the same institution, there was soon such a rush of people that extensions had to be carried out in the building of the institution. It appeared as if the whole of Baghdad assembled in his congregations. At the same time, he claimed such an attention and deference from the people attending his lectures that even the kings would have envied it. Sheikh Muwaffaq ud-dīn ibn Qudāmāh, author of the *al-Mughni*, records that he had not seen a man more revered for his piety and religious learning than ‘Abdul Qādir. The king, his chief and ministers attended his sermons along with the rank and file and used to sit in a corner without any fanfare. Scholars and jurists rubbed shoulders with the students. The enthusiastic devotion of the people coming to his lectures can be well imagined by the fact that often as many as 400 inkpots were counted, which were brought in to take down the notes of his sermons.

Moral Excellence :

Notwithstanding the implicit reverence cherished for ‘Abdul Qādir by the people, he was always modest, humble and unpretentious. He often left his work to attend to the needs of a child, a destitute or a slave girl. Never evading the company of the poor he even washed their clothes or performed similar other personal services for them, yet he never stood up in the honour of any person of the rank or the elite¹. If the Caliph ever paid a visit to him, the chroniclers of his time report, he deliberately went inside his house so that he might not have to stand up to welcome the king². He used to come out of the house after the

1 *Tabqāt ul-Kubra*, Vol I, p 127

2 *Ibid*, Vol I, p 128

Caliph had seated himself. ‘Abdul Qādir never paid back the courtesy call to any vazier or the king.’

Those who have seen ‘Abdul Qādir have paid a glowing tribute to his moral excellence and large-heartedness, modesty and hospitality, generosity and goodness of his heart. One of his contemporaries who has had the opportunity of enjoying the company of ‘Abdul Qādir says that he had not seen a man more polite, large-hearted and charitable than Sheikh ‘Abdul Qādir. Despite his erudition and eminence, he respected his elders, met the youngsters with a good grace, always saluted first, hailed the poor courteously with deference but never stood up to welcome the grandees or nobles, nor did he ever pay a visit to any minister or governor.²

Another contemporary of ‘Abdul Qādir, Hafiz Abū-‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Yūsuf al-Barzālī reports :

“His prayers were readily answered Being extremely tender-hearted, he would burst into tears (if anything sorrowful or touching was mentioned to him). More often he was to be found immersed in meditation and recollection of God. He was soft-hearted, courteous, cheerful, generous and compassionate Being the offspring of a noble family, he was also highly reputed for his profound knowledge and piety ”³

The testimony of Muḥī ud-dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Hāmid al-Baghdādī, a jurist-scholar of those times runs as follows

“Always disposed to avoid things unseemly and indecorous, he only pressed for the desirable and befitting He would boil with indignation if the Divine commandments were overstepped but remained listless to the wrongs and ill-treatments to his own person He would never seek revenge save for the sake of God Almighty, nor, send back

¹ *Tabqāt ul-Kubra*, Vol I, p 127.

² *Ibid* , Vol I, p 127

³ *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p. 9.

a beggar without giving him something If he had nothing to give he would part with the clothes he had been putting on.”¹

‘Abdul Qādir took pleasure in feeding the poor and spending freely to meet the needs of the destitutes Ibn al-Najjar reports that ‘Abdul Qādir often used to say “If I were given treasures of the whole world, I would spend it all on feeding the poor.” Sometimes he said “It seems that I have a hole in my hands I cannot keep anything with me If I had a thousand *dinars*, I would spend every single shell before the daybreak”² He had given instructions to his servants that as many guests as possible should be invited for the dinner. During the dinner he always sat with the poor and lowly, chatted with his students or enquired about the welfare of those who did not happen to be present there His behaviour was so affectionate that everyone who met him gained the impression that ‘Abdul Qādir had the highest regard for him. He overlooked the faults of others and if anyone stated something on oath, he readily accepted his statement He never gave out the secrets of others nor stated anything before others that might put someone to shame.³

Reassurance to the Dejected:

The annalists of his time agree that quite a large number of miracles⁴ were worked by ‘Abdul Qādir⁵ Sheikh-ul-Islam ‘Izz ud-dīn ibn Abdul-Sālam and Ibn Taymīyah are of the view

1 *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p 9

2 *Ibid*, p 10

3 *Ibid*, p 9

4 Miracle stands both for *Mu'jizah* and *Karamāt* and denotes an act contrary to the usual course of nature However, the former (*Mu'jizah*) is a term used only for the miraculous acts caused by God to confound the adversaries of a prophet and to make them acknowledge the truth of prophethood *Karamāt*, on the other hand, is a wonder wrought by God through a saint or man of God for the good of the people as well as in proof of his sainthood Miracles worked by the saints are, however, of a lower order than those of a prophet

5 *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p 167 and *Jalāl ul-‘Aīn*, p 130

that ‘Abdul Qādir was a worker of incessant miracles but his miracle of miracles was filling the heart of the despaired and broken-hearted with faith, hope and enthusiasm. He infused a breath of new life, zeal and self-confidence into countless persons through his powers of speech and the spiritual power of his heart. He was, in truth, a blessing for the world of Islam for he renovated and revived the true content of the faith and tapped the sources of moral and spiritual strength for a religious renaissance¹ Sheikh ‘Amr al-Kaisānī reports that there was hardly a sermon delivered by ‘Abdul Qādir after which a number of Jews and Christians did not embrace Islam, marauders and robbers did not repent for their sins and heretics and apostates did not renounce their mistaken beliefs.²

Al-Jubbā’ī relates that ‘Abdul Qādir once told him that he wished to lead the life of a recluse in the wilderness but God had willed that people should derive benefit from him. And, it was a blessing granted unto him that more than five thousand Jews and Christians embraced Islam and about a hundred thousand sinners and criminals repented for their misdeeds on account of him.³

Teaching and Missionary Activities:

Gifted with divine grace and illumination, ‘Abdul Qādir was ever conscious of the purification of spirit and rectitude of morals, yet he did not lose sight of the importance of teaching and disseminating the correct doctrines of the faith. Being a follower of the Hanbalite school of *Sunni* theology, he endeavoured, like his mentor, to root out innovations and deviations from the orthodox faith and practice. Because of his forceful defence of the strict orthodoxy, reports Ibn al-Sam‘ānī, the traditionist and their followers came to be held in high esteem by the masses.

‘Abdul Qādir used to take daily a class each of the Qur’ānic

¹ *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p 8

² *Ibid*, p 8

³ *Ibid*, p 8

exegesis, Traditions and Jurisprudence in which he also explained the differences between various juristic schools of Islam. The classes were held in the morning and evening, while ‘Abdul Qādir listened to the recitation of the Qur’ān after the mid-day prayers and thereafter dictated *fatwās* on religious or legal questions referred to him. In formulating his answers ‘Abdul Qādir generally followed the Shafē‘ite and Hanbalite schools of jurisprudence. His juristic-opinions were highly praised by the jurist-scholars of Iraq for these provided a striking example of the acuteness of his intellect ¹

Once the question referred to him was that a man had taken an oath that he would perform a religious observance in a manner that nobody else in the whole world would be able to share the privilege with him but, if he failed to fulfil his undertaking, this would mean an irrevocable separation between him and his wife. The scholars were astounded by the strange oath taken by the man and could not suggest an observance which could be performed by him alone in the whole world. ‘Abdul Qādir, however, replied that the man should be allowed to circumambulate K‘āba alone seven times to perform the lesser *hajj*. Everyone agreed that this was the only authorised religious observance which he could perform alone at a time when no body else would be engaged in the same prayer ²

Certitude of Knowledge:

Profound knowledge of the religious lore and meticulous observance of the Traditions of the Holy Prophet, aided by the grace of God, had unveiled the mysteries of celestial world to ‘Abdul Qādir, who had reached the stage where discrimination between truth and untruth, divine intuition and demoniacal imposition is born in a man. He had acquired the certitude of knowledge that the *Shar‘ah* of the Last Prophet was perfect and

¹ *Tabqāt ul-Kubrā*, Vol I, p 126.

² *Ibid*, p 126.

unchangeable, and that any claim made contrary to the divine edict was simply a satanic suggestion. ‘Abdul Qādir himself relates an incident that he once came across. He says

“Once I saw a dazzling light which filled the entire sky. Then a human frame appeared therein and said, ‘O ‘Abdul Qādir, I am Lord, thy God. I have made everything prohibited lawful unto thee.’ I replied, ‘Get away from me, O Devil.’ As soon as I uttered these words, the lustre in the sky turned into darkness and the human frame began to fizzle out into smoke. Then I heard someone saying, ‘Abdul Qādir, I had misled seventy mystics with this device, but God saved thee on account of thy knowledge and piety.’ To this I rejoined, ‘No. It was simply a grace of God.’ After ‘Abdul Qādir had related the incident someone asked, ‘How did you know that it was the Satan?’ ‘Since he told me’, replied ‘Abdul Qādir, ‘that he had made the things prohibited lawful for me’ ”¹

He used to tell his disciples that if any action transgresses the commandments of God, then it is surely an imposition by the Satan. In such cases one should return to the tenets of the *Shari‘ah*, inculcate an unflinching faith, and firmly reject the temptations of self-indulgence, for, whatever is not permitted by the *Shari‘ah* is decidedly misleading.²

Trust in God :

The unfailing and penetrating vision into the *Tawhīd* or Unity of God had conferred upon ‘Abdul Qādir that sublime piety which produces an absolute resignation in the will of God. He explains the state of resignation in these words

“When a man finds himself in a trouble, the first endeavours to get rid of it. If he fails, he seeks the help of others, such as, kings, officials, grandees or the rich, or,

¹ *Tabqāt ul-Kubra*, Vol I, p 127

² *Ibid*, Vol I, p 127

physicians in the case of an illness. When this effort also fails him, he turns to God with invocations and praises, and not unoften with tears and lamentations. In other words, he does not look for the assistance of others so long as he can obtain the requisite help from his own self, similarly, he does not implore God if he can get the help from His creatures; and, finally, when he does not get any help from that source too, he surrenders completely to God Almighty. It is only at this stage that man seeks the help of God with prayers and invocations, lamentations and tears but God does not accept his entreaties till he gets tired of these too. Then, being completely dejected and broken-hearted, he is permeated by an illumination of spirit which makes him indifferent to the causes and effects. Now he has a sublimated soul, unconscious of everything save the Divine Being and aware of the true content of *Tawhîd* (Unity); he has now a certitude of knowledge that save God nothing has any power to do or undo a thing, to Him belongs the power to move a thing or keep it stationery, to promote or debase, to benefit or harm, to give life or bring death, to give honour or indignity, or to make affluent or indigent. The man is now like a ball in the hands of a player, or a child in the lap of a nurse, or else a corpse in the hands of those who bathe it; for, these are completely at the mercy of those who possess them. Likewise, the man thus loses his identity in the will of his Master, immersed in his higher-self he has no comprehension of anything save the acts of his Lord, nor does he witness or hear or think anything else. If he seeks anything, it is the craftsmanship of the Supreme Creator, if he hears, it is His voice, if he comprehends, it is by the knowledge vouchsafed by Him, and if he is enlivened, it is only by His nearness. Thus, in the state of total absorption, he gets peace only through the grace and blessings of God, he detests to depend on anything save his Lord, he surrenders himself completely before the will of God, acquires the

knowledge of mysteries hidden from the senses through intuition and illumination of heart; and overflows with the gratitude of the Lord for His countless blessings.”¹

Love of Humanity :

The love of humanity, in general, and the affection for the *Ummah*, in particular, was symptomatic of ‘Abdul Qādir’s sublimated soul and indicative of his close affinity to the successors of the Prophet. In one of his sermons he delineated the object and the mental states of different types of persons visiting a market. Coming to the last category, he perhaps describes his own feelings in these words:

“ And there is the fifth man whose heart is filled, when he enters a market, with the awe and reverence of the Almighty to seek His blessings for those present in the market. He becomes oblivious of everything else save his benediction for the people; he remains immersed, from the time of his entry into the market till he comes out of it, in the solemn invocation of divine blessings and in repenting for the sins of those who happen to be there, and thus he hardly gets any time to see what they are selling or buying. His heart bleeds and eyes shed tears over the ingratitude of man while his tongue remains busy in thanking God over what He has bestowed unto his bondsmen.”²

The Times of ‘Abdul Qādir :

‘Abdul Qādir spent 73 years of his life, in Baghdad. When he came to Baghdad, Caliph Mustazhir b’Illāh Abul ‘Abbās (487-512 A. H) was the reigning monarch after whom four other ‘Abbāsid Caliphs, al-Mustarshid b’Illāh (512-529 A. H), al-Rāshid b’Illāh (deposed 529 A. H), al-Muqtafi l’ Amr Illāh (530-555 A. H) and al-Mustanjid b’Illāh (555-565 A. H) succeeded to the throne one after another.

1 *Futūh ul-Ghaib*, (Lecture No 3), pp 11-13

2 *Ibid* , (Lecture No 72), p 175

... "This was one of the most troublous times of the 'Abbāsid rule when the Caliphs and Saljukid Kings vied with each other for maintaining their supremacy. The former being shorn of their temporal power were prevailed upon, sometimes with their permission but not unoften through coercion, by the Saljukid Kings to accept their domination. This also sometimes engulfed the Islamic world into fratricidal conflicts in which the Muslims shed the blood of one another

Several such incidents took place during the reign of Caliph al-Mustarshid. He was a brave and wise administrator who won numerous battles but he was finally defeated by the Saljukid King Mas'ūd in 529 A H. Ibn Kathīr, giving an account of the Caliph's defeat writes

"The Sultan (Mas'ūd) gained victory and the Caliph (al-Mustarshid) was taken prisoner. Baghdad was ransacked which plunged the city into sorrow. The people dismantled the pulpits of the mosques, gave up attending congregational prayers and women came out lamenting for the Caliph and other captives. The people in other parts of the country followed suit with the result that Malik Sanjar had to ask his nephew to reinstate the Caliph. Mas'ūd acted on the advice of his uncle but the Caliph was assassinated by the emissaries of the Batinites while he was on his way back to Baghdad."

These heart-rending incidents were witnessed by 'Abdul Qādir. He saw the Muslims engaged in internal strife and bloodshed. The ghastliness of these feuds and forays, the cruelty, savagery and treachery of those who engaged in them, and the miseries they inflicted upon their foes for the transitory pleasures of power, position and riches made him extremely sad. It is true that he had nothing to do with these struggles for power, he was, nevertheless, alive to the miseries inflicted on the people and evil effects of the unsettled conditions during his times. Through his sermons, therefore, he endeavoured, with the seriousness of purpose

1 Ibn Kathīr, Vol. XII, pp 207-208

and ardent zeal characteristic of him, to give a call for moral propriety and rectitude of the self he vividly explained the transitory nature of the world and its fleeting pleasures, the need for coveting the eternal bliss and preparing for the life-to-come, and the importance of evoking faith and correct mental attitude consisting of right conduct in speech, livelihood and ethical behaviour.

Sermons of ‘Abdul Qādir :

The discourses of ‘Abdul Qādir had a magnetic effect which is still discernible in them. ‘Abdul Qādir is at his best in *Futūh ul-Ghaib* and *al-Fatah al-Rabbānī*. In describing the love and unity of the Divine Being he appears to be inspired by higher sources. The reader can still find the spirit of sincerity and enthusiasm running through these sermons.

Following in the footsteps of the Prophet, his successors and the illuminated saints of the old, ‘Abdul Qādir touched on the current problems of his days, analysed the reasons for the miseries and maladies of the people and provided answers to their doubts and deficiencies. Along with this, the tremendous sincerity and earnest zeal for the welfare of the people fired his haranguing with a frenzy of enthusiasm and magnetic effect capable of pulling the strings of the heart.

Unity of the Divine Being :

The forces of worldliness had become so strong during ‘Abdul Qādir’s time that the entire social and economic life of the community appeared to be woven into the context of political situation then obtaining, people had developed a tendency of depending upon the kings and nobles for realisation of their worldly ends and had begun to treat them as ultimate dispensers of benefits and harms. In order to counteract this mistaken tendency of the people, he says in one of his sermons

“This entire creation is like a man who has been imprisoned and chained by a king whose dominions are vast and countenance awesome. The prisoner has been

hanged from a pine tree beneath which overflows a river, wide and deep. The king is seated on an elevated chair, having arrows and bows, javelins and spears by his side. He hits the captive with whatever weapon he desires. Now, would it be prudent for anyone witnessing the scene to divert his attention from the king and expect harm or favour from the captive instead of the king? Would not such a man be deemed a fool or even mad? Oh God, I seek thy refuge from blindness after having been given eyes, from being cast off after getting near Thee, from regression after being promoted to Thy favour, from being misled after obtaining Thy guidance and from apostasy after having been granted faith.”¹

In another sermon he asks to instil the love of God to the exclusion of everything else besides Him.

“Keep your eyes fixed on Him who is looking at you, keep yourself before One who keeps Himself before you, love Him who loves you; hark unto Him who calls you, seek help from Him who can save you, take you out of the darkness of ignorance, cleanse you of the impurity of your soul, and redeem you from the baser-self and misleading temptations, despair and timidity. Your earthly desires are like your foolish friends who keep you off the righteous path and deprive you of the things, pleasing and desirable. How long would you remain slaves of your desires, temptations, greed, pride, in short, this transitory world? How long would you remain forgetful of the Hereafter and of your Creator, the Fashioner of everything, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden; everything is touched within His grasp from which emanates the love within your heart, the peace and solace, blessings and favours.”²

Again, he throws light on the same topic in another lecture

“The entire creation is helpless. Nothing can do good

1 *Fulūh ul-Ghaib*, (Lecture No. 17), p. 49

2 *Ibid*, (Lecture No. 62) p. 157

or harm to you. It is only God who lets a thing be done by you, or, in other words, the will of God finds expression through you or somebody else. God has already destined whatever is to happen to you; whether it be beneficial or harmful, and, the destiny cannot be changed. Those who are faithful and virtuous set an example unto other creations. There are a few among these who have so purified their heart that their interior and exterior selves have become one, even if they have riches, their desires never seethe with the worldly attachments. Verily, only those are courageous, valiant and powerful who have purified their hearts and attained this stage of illumination. Unto these alone belongs the kingdom of Heaven and Earth for they have cleansed their heart of everything save God; they are like a soldier who guards the door of his heart, with the sabre of *Tawhid* (Unity) and the *Shari'ah* in his hand, to bar the entry of all creations to a place reserved for the Creator. Since they have attuned their hearts to the ultimate source of power, the *Shari'ah* beautifies their exterior while *Tawhid* and the wisdom of God's knowledge decorate their interior."¹

Explaining what is meant by the false objects of worship, he says

"You put your trust in your own self, in others, in your wealth, in your rites and customs, in your trade and business, or in your rulers; but, in whatever object you place your reliance, it becomes, to say the truth, your object of worship. If you fear someone, or expect harm or favour from him or else deem him as an intercessor with God, then he is the object of worship for you."²

On another occasion, 'Abdul Qādir vividly described the jealousy and pride of God and His abhorrence of all associates, as

1 *Fatah al-Rabbānī*, (Lecture No 13), p 89

2 *Ibid* (Lecture No 20), p. 137

also the wisdom lying behind the loss of the things adored and loved by man

“You often complain, as you would ever do, that you have to suffer the loss of whatever you set your affections on. The object of your fancy, if it is a human being, either separates or dies. If it is wealth that you care for, you incur losses or are deprived of it. Then, should I tell you, that God is in love with you, and He is jealous too¹. He has created you for Himself but you want to be enraptured by others¹. Have you not heard what God has said. *He holds them dear who love Him, and also, I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me*¹. And, are you not aware of what the Prophet once said. *When God loves anyone, He places him in trouble but if he puts up with it with endurance and forbearance, God then sets him apart for Himself*. Requested to elucidate what he meant by ‘setting apart of a man’, the Prophet replied *God deprives him of his possessions and progeny*. This is so because it is natural for a man to love his offsprings and possessions and thus his love which should have been for God alone is divided between the Creator and the created, between the Eternal and the finite.

“God is, however, extremely Proud and Mighty and therefore He destroys whatever threatens to become an associate in the love for Him. It is only then that the heart of the man whom He loves gets attuned to Him. And, then, this man can claim to enjoy the distinction of what has been described thus by God. *He holds them dear who love Him*. It is the stage when the heart of the man is cleansed of all idols and associates (of God) such as the offsprings, riches, pleasures and desires. It has now no yearnings, no longings left—worldly or otherwise, not even those relating to piety and miraculous powers, stations and states, nearness and remoteness, the heart becomes a bottomless vessel in

1 Adh-Dhariyat, 56

which nothing can be kept God Almighty being extremely Proud and Jealous makes the heart of His beloved incapable of nourishing any other desire, He shrouds the heart of His devotee with His awe and a gasp of admiration, and guards it with His Glory and Might so that nothing can get inside this heart, nor can the possessions and riches, family and progeny, friends and relations, piety and miraculous powers do any harm to it. None of these finds a place in the heart of such a man nor, then, God remains, jealous of them. Whatever is granted thereafter to this man is a gift or reward from his God so that he may be of help to those who are around him or visit him¹

Refuge of the Broken-hearted :

The Muslim society in the time of ‘Abdul Qādir could broadly be divided into two classes. The first of these comprised the men of substance who were deficient in faith and virtuous behaviour. As against this, there was another class, poverty-stricken and down-trodden, but endowed with faith and a spirit of righteousness, moral strength and uprightness. These people, sometimes, feeling disconcerted and broken-hearted, viewed the affluent with jealousy and mistrust, and regarded themselves as deprived and discarded. ‘Abdul Qādir holds out hope and cheer to these people in one of his sermons. He says

“O’ empty-handed beggarly fellows, the world would appear to be at logger-heads with you, you are barefooted, unclothed and unfed, broken-hearted and ill-starred, evicted from every place and deprived of your longings and fancies. But do not say that God has reduced you to poverty, turned the world against you, abandoned, maligned or persecuted you, did not assign the portion of earthly pleasures due to you, or did not bestow honour and fame upon you. Nor is it proper for you to complain that God has granted his

¹ *Enūsh ul-Ghurb*, (Lecture No. 32) pp 84-86

favours to others, made them reputed and honoured, although they belong to the same faith as you do and are the progeny of Adam and Eve like you

“It is really so because you are like a fertile land on which God is sending down the rains consisting of endurance and resignation, conviction and faith, knowledge and grace. The tree of your faith is taking roots, sprouting forth its branches, its shade closing over you, pushing out new shoots and fruits, getting higher and bigger without your providing any fertilizer to it. God Almighty knows what you really need. He has, therefore, assigned a befitting place for you in the Hereafter. He has made you a lord in the life-to-come where His bounties are countless, inconceivable and unheard of. As God has said, nobody knows what delights have been stored for your eyes in the Paradise. This shall be your recompense for the faithful performance of what has been enjoined unto you, and your endurance, resignation and submission to the will of God

“As for those who have been well-afforded in this world, they have been placed in easy circumstances for they are like a barren land, rocky and sandy, which neither stores nor absorbs the rains, and it is difficult to implant the tree of faith in it. It has, therefore, to be provided with fertilizers so that the weak saplings of their faith may get nourishment and push out the shoots of righteous action. Thus, if the wealth, honour and fame are taken away from them, the tree of their faith shall waste away and its leaves and fruits shall wither although God intends to make it strong. Therefore, my poor brethren, you ought to know that the faith of the wealthy does not have deeper roots, it lacks that strength which has been endowed to you, and it needs the riches and earthly prizes for its nourishment. If these gifts were to be taken away from them, their faith will give place to blasphemy and they shall join the ranks of infidels, apostates and hypocrites, unless, of course, God

bestows on them spiritual light and illumination, endurance and resignation to strengthen their faith.”¹

Worldly Pleasures :

‘Abdul Qādir did not preach asceticism nor did he exhort to give up the worldly possessions. What he emphasised upon in his sermons was that these should be made use of by a man to the extent he needs them but he should never allow himself to become a slave of his desires and temptations, nor should he hold the earthly gifts dear to his heart. Explaining the purport of the Tradition which runs: *Verily, the world has been created for you, and you have been created for the Hereafter*, he says :

“Do not try to obtain your share of the worldly gifts in a way that you have to keep standing before it like a beggar. You ought to be like a sovereign who keeps himself seated while the gifts are presented before him. This world acclaims those who stand and wait at the door of God Almighty but it demeans those who wait upon it. Therefore, get your share of the worldly benefits without demeaning yourself or compromising your dignity, and this is what Allah expects of you ”²

In another sermon he says -

“It is perfectly lawful to lay hands on the world and its gifts, to possess it or even to accumulate it for a commendable purpose, but it is forbidden to set your heart upon it. You may allow it to stand at the door of your heart but it is prohibited to allow it to get inside the door, for it shall not bring any honour to you ”³

Critique of the Kings :

‘Abdul Qādir did not sermonise and admonish the populace alone ; he fearlessly performed the duty made incumbent by the *Sharī‘ah* : i. e. of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong , and,

1 *Futūh ul-Ghaib*, (Lecture No 25), pp 65-67

2 *Fatah al-Rabbānī*, (Lecture No 21), p 145

3 *Ibid* , (Lecture No 51), p 363

whenever he considered it necessary, he publicly denounced the actions and policies of the kings, nobles, and officials. He bitterly criticized the faults of the great ones without the slightest consideration of their power or position. Hafiz ‘Imad ud-dīn ibn Kathīr, a historian of his time, has made a mention of it in these words:

“He admonished all—the caliphs, vaziers, kings, jurists, elite and the laity—to adopt the righteous course and to forsake the things forbidden. He openly criticized, unsparingly, everyone to his face in his discourses.

“He used to denounce the authorities sternly if any tyrant was appointed to a public office by them. He never cared for anyone if he saw the commands of God being overstepped.”¹

Ibn Kathīr writes that when Caliph al-Muqtafi l’Amr Illāh appointed Abul Wafā’ Yahya, a man notorious for his cruelty, as a Cadi, ‘Abdul Qādir admonished the Caliph in these words:

“You have appointed a man notorious as the ‘Most Tyrant’ to rule over the Muslims. What would your answer be tomorrow on the Day of Judgment, before the Lord of the Worlds, the Most Merciful?”²

Ibn Kathīr further says that when the Caliph came to know of the admonition of ‘Abdul Qādir he burst into tears and immediately dismissed Abul Wafā’ Yahya from the office.

‘Abdul Qādir also vigorously condemned this-worldliness of those scholars, jurists and saints who were prepared to accept an office or to act as entourage of the rulers. He held this class responsible for the waywardness of the kings and ruling chiefs. In one of his addresses he rebuked these elements thus:

“Ah, you are the fellows who have misused your knowledge and wisdom. What have you to do with your predecessors? You are enemies of God and His Apostle, you are no less than the robbers, tyrants and hypocrites!”

¹ Ibn Kathīr Vol. XII, p. 252 and *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p. 8

² *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, p. 8

How long will you persist in your pious fraud ? How long will you continue to don this shroud of assumed piety for the sake of your kings and rulers ? How long will you remain a slave of power and position, passions and desires ? Verily, you and most of your kings are tyrants and traitors unto God and His bondsmen O' God, our Lord, either degrade these transgressors and humiliate them or make them repent for their sins; either mortify the tyrants and efface them from Thy earth or let them mend their ways¹

On another occasion he addressed a religious scholar in these words

"Are you not ashamed that your avarice has forced you to serve these tyrants and crave for the emoluments declared unlawful and prohibited by the *Shari'ah* ? How long shall you hold on to your mean pursuits ? The kingdom of the rulers to whom you are playing a second fiddle shall shortly be no more and then you shall be presented before God Almighty who is Eternal, Omnipotent²

Concern for Moral Rectitude :

Extremely solicitous of eradicating the moral laxity and viciousness produced by ever increasing opulence, luxury and indolence in the metropolis of Islam, 'Abdul Qādir sometimes came out with the most severe criticism of the then society giving expression to his heartfelt misery over the sinful ways of the people. This was the impassioned appeal made by 'Abdul Qādir in one of his sermons

"The edifice of Faith built by the Apostle of God is being demolished, brick by brick, and now it is about to fall to pieces. Come, O' mankind, to rebuild what has been dismantled and renovate what has been laid waste. Until this task is completed, we have to work jointly as a team

¹ *Fatah al-Rabbānī*, (Lecture No 51), p 363

² *Ibid*, (Lecture No 52) p 371

Come to my aid, O' Sun, O' Moon and O' Stars ''¹
 Again, in another sermon he says

"Islam is shedding tears Its wail of woe is on account of the blasphemous hypocrites and innovators who are practising a pious fraud by attributing things that do not belong to Islam

"Look at your predecessors They lived like you but enjoined the right and prohibited the wrong But you have forgotten them altogether so soon after their death '¹

"Do you not know that even dog is faithful to his master ? He guards his fields and the cattle, is pleased to see his master although he does not get more than a few crumbs in the evening You are favoured with the bounties of God but, quite the other way, you are neither thankful to Him nor you dutifully perform the task assigned to you Instead, what you do is to break His commands and transgress the limits of the *Shar'ah* ''²

Reform and Renovation :

The impressive sermons of 'Abdul Qādir were a source of inspiration to innumerable persons in Baghdad These enabled thousands to offer earnest repentance for their sins but in order to build up a movement aiming at a widespread and permanent reform of the social, moral and spiritual life of the people, it was necessary to find out a way whereby more durable relations could be fostered between the mentor and the disciples and, at the same time, arrangements could also be made for the religious education and training of the latter As it were, the discourses did not provide a permanent link between the speaker and the audience People came to these meetings, listened to the sermons and left to come back again or not, at their sweet will Many of them persisted in the way they had been treading along without paying any heed to the call of the reformer to purify their souls and to rectify their moral behaviour

¹ *Fatah al-Rabbānī*, p 649

² *Ibid.*, p 661

Religious seminaries and educational institutions too did not provide an answer to the problem because of the vast population of Muslims and the mundance pre-occupations of the people. The problem of making arrangements for a continued and concerted effort for the education and training of the people in religious tenets and practices, and infusing a breath of new life in the vast numbers spread over far off lands defied a solution in the absence of a truly Islamic State. The foremost business or rather the end of the Caliphate was, in the words of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz, to guide the people in moral rectitude rather than to collect revenues for the conduct of administration. The then Muslim States were, however, not only indifferent to this fundamental objective but were also extremely allergic to any movement or criticism on this score which could pose a threat to their political supremacy. Thus, these governments being suspicious of all efforts made for the resurgence of Islamic spirit, and, erroneously taking these as movements designed to build up political leadership, lost no time in crushing them.

In these circumstances there was no way left to revivify the religious spirit and fill the people with an enthusiasm, zeal and self-confidence for reintroduction of the precepts of religion in their daily life. The only alternative left was to call upon the people to take an oath of allegiance for the purpose. Following in the footsteps of the Apostle of God, it had become necessary that a guide of spiritual and moral excellence should obtain an oath, or the *ba'it*, as it is called, from the people willing to offer sincere penitence and undertaking to lead a virtuous life in future in accordance with the directions of their mentor. If placing oneself under the instruction of an inspired guide meant that he was fairly started upon in his journey to the end of purification of spirit and moral rectitude, the oath of allegiance enjoined a much more onerous responsibility on the mentor himself. The guide or the spiritual teacher had to lead the wandering soul of the disciple taking the *ba'it*, stage by stage, from cleansing of his spiritual impurities, renouncing the love of worldly temptations and desires, wealth and honour, infusing an spirit of moral uprightness.

correct ethical behaviour, following the teachings contained in the Qur^ʿān and the Traditions, to the illumination of the pupil's soul. This was, in truth, what the *ba^ʿu* meant and by which the inspired souls tried to infuse into their disciples, through preaching and personal example, loving care and unalloyed sincerity, an inner vitality of spirit and strength of moral integrity. As the experience shows, the reformers and renovators of faith did succeed in revivifying the true faith and tapping new sources of popular strength in their own times, through this tried and infallible method which just copied the procedure and technique followed by the Prophet of Islam. Innumerable persons have been provided with an opportunity of not only adopting a virtuous life through this method but have also been led to attain even the stage of "Divine Acquaintance" and "Love" by the inspired guides and teachers, of whom the mentor *par excellence* was Sheikh Muḥi ud-dīn ʿAbdul Qādir Jilānī. The history of peoples subscribing to the faith of Islam will bear a witness that no guide with an illuminated soul had been more successful than ʿAbdul Qādir in bringing about a revival and resurgence of the true Islamic spirit. At the same time, the method followed by him is still the easiest and most effective way of filling the people with faith and enthusiasm aiming at the reformation of their lives in accordance with the tenets of Islam.

A few divines and mystics had employed the method of *ba^ʿu*, as the annalists report, before ʿAbdul Qādir but none had achieved the success as he did. With his profound knowledge, intellectual gifts, charming and loving personality and spiritual excellence he renovated the system of *ba^ʿu* and founded a new mystic order known as the *Qādirīyah*. ʿAbdul Qādir elaborated and systematised the mystic practices, made these more wide-based and developed to make them more harmonious with the tenets of the *Sharīʿah*. Countless people were guided through this path of self-discipline, devotion to God and virtuous living during the life time of ʿAbdul Qādir, and after him, his disciples propagated the *Qādirīyah* order in almost every Islamic country. The branches of the order were founded in Yaman, Hadhramaut, India, Indonesia