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**THE ACT OF VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO AL-  
GHAZALI'S THOUGHTS**

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***Abstract***

Violence is recognized as prolonged cruelty, unjust treatment or exercise of authority, whether in matters of religion, politics, intellectual stream or social behaviours. Excessive increase of violence and dangerous types of its expressions has become a challenge to cope up with it in contemporary world. It is thus essential to carefully analyse the act of violence, from various facets, for determining its form in order to aptly deal with the issues i.e. by taking into consideration of its philosophical, social and political aspects and roots. This article aims at analysing the status of various types of violence described in Islamic classical traditions especially in the literary contributions of renowned Islamic philosopher, theologian and spiritualist; Al-Ghazali. This study comprises critical analysis of different ideas and religious conceptions of violence. Descriptive and library research method are adapted to analyse the core issues. Al-Ghazali analyses the inner roots of the problem and suggests the solutions in his specific philosophical style. There were times he treats the committers and the victims as if a doctor is treating his patients and at times he gives the theological solutions to the problem. In his intellectual realm, violence is discouraged, and certain techniques are mentioned to avoid the alarming consequences of anger and vehemence.

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**Keywords:** Violence, Islam, Al-Ghazali, spirituality.



## 1. Introduction

Violence is an unjust treatment or exercise, whether in matters of religion, politics, intellectual stream or social behaviours. Excessive increase of violence has become a challenge in contemporary world. It is thus essential to analyse the act of violence, from various facets, by taking into consideration of its philosophical, social and political aspects and roots. Islamic Spiritual philosophy deals with the issue in a specific manner. In this article the issue is analysed in the light of the viewpoints of the famous spiritualist, Al-Ghazali. Muhammad b. Muhammad Ahmed, Abu Hamid, Al- Ghazali (1059- 1111) was a famous religious scholar, philosopher, having profound knowledge of Shariah and spirituality as well. As the leading scholar of his time, Al-Ghazali campaigns for following the true spirit of Islam i.e. to follow the teachings of Quran and the statements and doings of the Prophet (Peace be on him) and his disciples. Intellectuals and scholars of different faiths and cultures pay special attention to his writings for the appeal of reasoning and intellect. He wrote on multiple subjects of multiple dimensions: moral, social, political, theological, philosophical and spiritual. Ethics is the most mentioned aspect in his writings. Mat (2008, 17) claims that Al-Ghazali advocates its readers to be symbols of piety, morality, modesty, and kindness. He, in the light of Islamic teachings, denounces all types of violence and vehemence in the society.

## 2. Problem Statement

Al-Qaradawi (1998) opines that Islam is entrusted with a sacred assignment to guide humanity to the straight path of fairness, equitability, and prosperity. But unfortunately, due to excessive incidents in the last two decades, the true Islamic ideology has become darkened, and the socio-economic and political life of the (Muslim) Ummah has stagnated. Violent acts in Muslim society, committed by individuals and groups defamed the progressive face of Islam. There are various kind of violent acts with varied consequences. The perpetrator may be a powerful individual or a state. Killings, suicide attacks, sexual harassment, quarrels, robbery and aggravated invasions are considered to be violent crimes, because force or threat of violence is involved in these acts. The graph rate of violent crime is increasing by the day. According to Black et al., (2011) FBI report shows that the violent crime rate increased in the years from 1991 to 2010. Violent crime rate increased at the rate of 1.93 million crimes in 1992. In 2007, an estimated more than a million violent crimes occurred worldwide. The issue should appropriately be tackled to analyse the scientific, philosophical, social and political aspects of violence.

## 3. Research Questions

This paper aims to answer two main questions:

- 3.1. What is violence based on al-Ghazali's thought?
- 3.2. What are the causes of violence according to al-Ghazali?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The present paper aims to:

- 4.1. Discuss what is violence, based on al-Ghazali's thought?
- 4.2. Analyse what are the causes of violence according to al-Ghazali?

The paper is designed to counter and disclaim the widespread misconception that Islam is an intolerant or vehement, religion, which urges its followers to commit violence against the people who do not accept it. It is sheer misrepresentation that Islam teaches vehemence, or it compels the people to accept or it forcefully propagates its message, confines or restricts the women in houses, and so forth. These misconceptions defame the true picture of Islam and have incited clashes among the civilizations of the world. Due to these misinterpretations, Islam and Muslims are blamed and opposed by the western scholarship. Thus, it is urgent and vital to make forceful and lasting efforts at scholarly levels to remove the blames from Islam and its adherents. The paper describes the teachings of Islam about violence with special reference to spiritual thoughts of Al-Ghazali who had an extensive background in Islamic spirituality and thereby considered an authority. His views will be depicted in balanced and comprehensive manner. The article analyses systematically and objectively, the different aspects of Al-Ghazali's thought on violence and extremism. The ideals and values discussed in the article are vitally relevant to the general view point of spiritual leaders of Muslim Ummah.

## **5. Research Methods**

Descriptive and library research method is adapted to analyse the core issues and formulate findings and conclusions. The arguments and conclusions are based, firstly, on Al-Ghazali's books especially *Ihya ul Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Islamic Learning) and *Nasihah al-Muluk* (Book of Council for Kings), Secondly on the basic revealed book, the Quran and, the authentic books of Hadith which are the certified reports of verbal instructions and practices of the last messenger of God: Muhammad by his faithful fellows. Full references are furnished to the sources. As the focus of this paper is on Al-Ghazali's thoughts, hence the main arguments are deduced from his writings. Some though, are sourced from books written by other authors on Al-Ghazali's thought pertaining to different issues. In the final paragraph, some conclusions are formulated on how to avoid the acts of violence.

## **6. Findings**

Any specific terminology demands precise elaboration before weight can be assigned to any opinion of the scholars whom discuss the term. As such, in the context of the terminology of violence, the first and foremost prerequisite is to ascertain its definition before further discussions can be had to determine whether or not any particular view of the scholar merits applause.

### **6.1. Violence - Definition**

According to Collins Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003, p.1623) "violence" is a behaviour that involves multiple types of force, intended to harm, damage, injure, or kill people or somebody else. The term is also used for great forcefulness or intensity of feeling or expression of somebody to someone. According to Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, and Zwi, (2002, p.5) the W.H.O. defines "violence" as the worldwide actions of using multiple types of forces or powers, threatening or actual, verses individuals or groups or community, which is often resulted in physical damages, casualties, fatal injuries, deaths, psychological harms, or various types of losses. The main consequences of violent actions are to make someone else feel

frightened, intimidated or diminished. It is often resulted in depression, physical and mental health consequences and social functioning etc. Collective or war violence resulted in deaths, casualties, injuries, hurdles in social and economic development etc. Social violence resulted in injuries, anxieties, depressions, mental and psychological disorders. Religious violence results in wars, clashes of civilizations and other obstacles in political and social development.

## 6.2. Islam's Viewpoint

Islam, recommends moderation, freedom of thought, gentleness, kindness, economy and providence in everything: in belief, worship, actions and laws. Moderation, gentleness or kindness, are not only some general characteristics of Islam, these are the fundamental landmarks. The revealed book of Muslims, The Noble Quran (2016) mentions as follows:

There is no compulsion in where the *Deen* (religion) is concerned. Right guidance (and correct way) has become clearly distinct from the error. So, whoever rejects the false gods (the Devil, the Rebel) and has sound belief in Allah, (he infact) firmly grasped the firmest handhold which will never break. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (2: 256)

The mentioned Quranic injections clearly state that Islam instructs religious tolerance as concerned with the non-Muslims. The verse clearly prescribes that there is no compulsion in religion. The residing subjects in the Islamic state and the other people, following various faiths have an assurance regarding their safety and the liberty of their conscience. Islam requires the rulers to establish the system based on justice, equity and peace. Hamidullah (2010) claims that the victims of racial, religious, political and other persecutions have always found refuge and shelter in the land of Islam. How can Islam instruct its followers to compel the people for accepting faith by means of violence? Coercion and compulsion in converting someone's faith is not logical as faith relates to inner belief of a person.

Shafi (2016, 1/639) opines that some people have reservations about these injections that the teaching of jihad are contrary to these rulings. The author claims that their objections are invalid. Quranic terms Jihad or Qital have been mis-interpreted by the orientalist. They are considered merely the wars against infidels to compel them to convert them from their own faiths and to accept the Islamic faith. Contrary to it Islam commands its believers to collaborate evn in the state of war. In Madinain state, established by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), its non-Muslim inhabitants, whether they were Jews, Christians or pagans were given constitutional security to be remaining on their faiths as it was clearly written "to Muslims their religion" and "to Jews their religion". Even the neighbouring pagan tribes were also included in defensive alliaance and mutual, and they embraced Islam about ten years afterwards. The Islamic injunctions of Jizya, which is a little supplementary tax is paid by that non-Muslim citizens of Islami state who do not engage in military duties. If any non-Muslim subject wants to participate in military duties, is exemted from this supplementary tax. This is another evidence of Islamic manners of justice, peace and non-violent attitudes towards the other faiths.

## 6.3. Mercy and Moderation

Islamic texts call upon Muslims to exercise mercy, moderation kindness, and tenderness, and to refute all types of extremism and violation: *ikrah* (compulsion), *Adrar* (ruin, destruction), and *'udwan* (aggression,

assault). Islam strictly forbade to the kill the innocent people even in the battlefield. So, the killing of non-combat, who do not participate in any way in the military activities against the Muslims, is strictly prohibited, since they are incapable of creating sabotage or disorder. Quran asserts the Prophet to invite the people to the Way of Almighty (i.e. Islam) with logic, good reasoning, and sincere counselling and negotiate with them in soft manners. Zahid Aziz (2007, p.29) elaborates that “wisdom” is the ability to use your reason and knowledge, foresight, and the intelligence to persuade according the mind-set and social background of the addressee. To consider his previous affiliations and mental approaches and having profound knowledge of his religious beliefs. To address him in soft manner and herat touching tone, so that he may not fell that the speaker is considering me inferior or ignorant. Wisdom require to satisfy the addressee about your viewpoint, removing all the doubts and unseen fears. He should realize that you are the real well wisher, don’t have any personal motives and addressing him only for the well being and real success, to be achieved in both the worlds. “Beautiful exhortation” includes encouragement and warnings, together with such incidents that soften the heart, not to cause humiliation and resentment in the hearts of the people. Arguing in the “best manner” is to avoid the approach that could be annoying or insulting for the addressee and consequently resuted in angre and hatred between the parties. Quran requires the human beings to assess arguments, weigh proofs, consider implications, and reach proper conclusions. Ideally humans will see this capacity in each other as well and conduct themselves accordingly. Muslim scholars long attempted to maintain this high standard when preaching the other or when debating each other. They stressed that debating parties must aim at showing the truth in their arguments, not showing off their superiority.

The said Quranic directions vividly describe that Islam does not like any violent actions or beahaviors in preaching its message to the followers of other faiths, rather guiding its preachers to be kind to humans and give reverence to their beliefs, ideas, practices, rites and rituals, creating harmony, equality, peace and stability in the world. The Islamic texts alert us to the fact that violence, vehemence and anger may crop up as an insignificant action. These could not be tolerated in any matter, whether personal or collective. The severity, sternness and hardness are allowed in very limited issues in religious scriptures: In war conditions, where the commanders use military strategies to overcome the battlefield. The same permission is also confined to many limitations. The other occasions are the implementation of legal punishment in accordance with Islamic laws where no one is authorizing to wipe out it as it is the verdicts from Allah Almighty. Islam’s viewpoint in certain issues is clear, and all the moderate commentators of Quran and Hadith and the religious scholars and theologists have interpreted in the same way.

#### **6.4. Al-Ghazali On Violence**

Gianotti (1998) analysis that Al-Ghazali, although is an ardent and consistent upholder of traditional thought in religious beliefs, he however employs a wide variety of genres and techniques, from dogmatic explications and allegorical representations (indeed for the generality of believers) to brief flashings of mystical disclosure (intended for a more restricted, more advanced audience). He claims that Al-Ghazali’s mysterious habit of speaking differently to different audience is mentioned by some of his critics, as Ibn Rushd says that he was everything to everyone, he adhered to no one doctrine in his books but was an Asharite to Asharites, a Sufi with Sufis, and a philosopher with philosophers.

In the article, focus would be on Al-Ghazal's specific writings, based on the basic resources of *shariaḥ*, and that are addressed to traditional group of different religions. As *Iḥya ul Ulum ud din* (Revival of Islamic Learning) is the basic source to know Al-Ghazali's thought especially on different aspects of religious, social and spiritual life, as such the book is the source to dig on his ideas on the certain issues. The discussion will focus on refutation to political, militaristic, family and sexual violence according to Al-Ghazali' thought.

### **6.5. Refutation to Political Violence**

Arendt (1972) elaborates that the state requires the authority to use the force through police or military power to regulate the violence and enforce law and order in specific territory, even commits a number of atrocities to civilians, raising their voice for having basic human rights and protesting against the unjust policies of the government. To him, non-military violence can be regulated or reduced by enforcing and abiding by the laws of the country. In civil societies, some amount of violence, exercised through the police power, is regarded permissible. Some governments exercise brutal type of violence against their political opponents. Al-Ghazali (1964) refutes all kinds of political violence. *Nasihah-tu-al-mulook* (Book of Council for Kings), basically, comprises on the codes of conduct for the Muslim rulers, stating the policy points about the political, social and ethical issues regarding good governance, so one can find numerous advices and suggestions about different types and aspects of violence and vice versa. He advises the Government to govern the country with justice and piety. He warns the rulers about accountability by the God Almighty, as He is the real Master, indeed. .... And all creatures and living being are in His control and under his sole authority. His commands are valid and obligatory for all creatures. Al-Ghazali (1964) stresses on the point that the government should be governed justly, no unjust oppression is allowed in this regard. He states the principles of justice and fair treatment towards the citizens under ten points. Al-Ghazali (1964) elaborates that political authority or power can become great blessings if it used justly, fearing from God Almighty, as the rulers would be the most answerable persons in the court of God Almighty ; the rulers who do not care for these revealed commandments, do not apply kind and just treatment to the subjects, treat in tyrant and cruel manners, Al-Ghazali (1964) expects a ruler (as in his age a ruler held absolute powers) to be as just and God-fearing, as were the caliphs of the Prophet, far from all kinds of violence and oppression in religion, politics, social and commercial, physical and mental. Rulers who exercise power or control in a cruel, unreasonable, or arbitrary way, are responsible for every conduct of (violence and vice versa) by their God on High, punishment will be given to offenders in proportion to their crime, and the rulers are also answerable for the oppression and violent acts of the people against one another. Al-Ghazali (1964) required the governments to not be content with acts of injustices neither from individuals nor from officials or law-enforcement agencies, but must discipline soldiers, forces, civil servants and officials and take actions against violation of human rights committed by them. The authorities, specifically will be judged, as they are accountable not only for his own unjust (and vehement) deeds but also about those of his staffs'. All the ferocities and aggressions committed by the staff or by his family members will be accounted against the ruler, whether they are political, social or commercial.

## **6.6. Militaristic Violence**

Wallensteen (1993) defines militaristic violence as battles and operations between or among conflicting groups that relates to government policies or territorial issues and where armed forces are used to maintain law and order in the country by state agencies. According to a report issued by Institute for Conflict Management (2018) approximately 63,554 fatalities are reported in terrorist's violence in Pakistan from 2002 to 2018. Al-Ghazali (1964) rejects all kinds of militaristic violence, their armed conflicts with the forces, resulting in security force personnel and civil casualties and damaging the infrastructure of the state. In *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Islamic Learning), Al-Ghazali suggests that the rulers must be obeyed to avoid bloodshed, whether commit injustices against their subjects, as the opposition and armed resistance can be resulted in grave consequences and bloodshed in the country. To him rulers must avoid, use of unnecessary military power in civil protest. Al-Ghazali (1964) is in view that people (whether individual or in groups) should follow the rulers in true spirit and mutiny is strictly prohibited. According to him, obedience, and law-abiding (to the constitution of the state and government policies) is a (form of) obedience to Almighty God. He believed it foremost significant that army officers, civilian servants, and religious scholars must extend cooperation and mutual understanding to run the affairs of the state and should give due regards and adherence to the just rulers.

## **6.7. Family Violence**

Family and intimate partner violence often occurs in the home and among the concerned persons. It is common in public, and all communal groups regardless of gender, race, religion, class, nationality or socio-economic status, are affected by it to some extent. The victims face physical, mental and psychological troubles for themselves and for other family members and relatives and bear multiple losses. According to Black et al., (2011) in the United States, an average of 20 people experiences intimate partner physical violence every minute. This equates to more than 10 million abuse victims annually. Al-Ghazali (1964) condemns the family violence in which the households are targeted by the family head. He requires the family head not to be harsh, hard or ferocious but to be kind, and charitable to his own family and dependence and treat them tenderly. In his book, he advises that Islamic teachings bound the spouses to know about their mutual bindings and rights and fulfil these in true spirit, show mercy, kindness, and forbearance to one another and through this get God's pleasure.

## **6.8. Sexual Violence**

Another type is called sexual violence, that is, an attempt to obtain sexual act including fornication and rape etc. Many women around the world reported experiencing this type of violence. Al-Ghazali (1964) articulates sexual violence as a great sin and he mentions many tips to prevent it. The scholar narrates an anecdote that a citizen of Samarqand who tried to rape a noble woman passing by his house. The woman, being weak and helpless at that time do not lose her conscious and tried to awake the man's noble spirit by warning him about the grave consequences of this unlawful action. The woman asked him to first answer her question if he possessed her unlawfully and then she became pregnant by him and then she gave birth to a child, what do he think about the child's parenthood? If the child would ascribe to him or it would be bastard? She, after some discussion persuaded the man to release her and give up such type of action and

at last she succeeded. The author requires of the women to adopt some measures to recognize and avoid potentially sexual abusive situations, so that they may not be harassed by the men of bad wishes.

### **6.9. Causes of Violence**

Zahid Aziz (2007) researches that a basis of the act of violence is uncontrollable wrath, irony, greed, ill mindedness and excessive annoyance. In recent years international media has highlighted largely the issues of Muslim “anger” on the un-justices and atrocities faced by their fellow-Muslims in different parts of the world. This anger is said to be resulted in unjustifiable violent moves and engagements by extremist groups with disregard for taking lives of innocent people and in this way supposed to vent their rage and frustration. If indeed anger is the cause of these unjust actions, then the most significant point for a Muslim to analyze is, what our religion instructs to behave when one is angry. Zahid (2007) elaborates that the Holy Quran indicates the hall marks of the true Muslims that they do not be flame up with rage and do not cross the limitations. They are supposed not to be restrainers of their anger and pardoners of mankind. Closely allied to the foregoing is the virtue of *sabr* ‘patience’, which, in the Quranic view, counts among the distinguishing marks of the true believer. It means one’s having sufficient strength to the soul to remain patient of whatever befalls and not to be quick to manifest most violent agitation. Forgiving and pardoning people even to those who rebuke, taunt or mock on you, not taking revenge for personal reasons, is a quality that is considered very high in human morals. Besides, its merit in the life-to-come is much, higher. So, the practice required is to forgive them and in fact do good deeds to them. Al-Ghazali (2015) hence, requires the humans to control their wrath and anger. In his writings, he has given the details of the harms and consequences of anger and violence. To him, the hidden pride in the mind of every oppressor or disobedient man is disguised by anger. Control over anger is the criterion for a political, social and religious leader. A man of excessive anger loses his sense of right and wrong. Violence, based on anger, destroys the soul and faith of a believer. Offenders of unfair violence will be answerable on the day of resurrection and they will be avenged from the victims. Al-Ghazali (1964) mentions several quotes in which rulers are advised to deal with patience and kindness. For that, Al-Ghazali narrates Quranic verses, comments from the renowned scholars and saints, narrations of the prophets, the statements and stories of the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and finally the anecdotes and then personal analysis. He recounts their merits and rewards to be followed by the believers. Al-Ghazali advises the persons, having authority to offer pardon to their weak, defenseless subjects and subordinates, as most holders of authority lose their temperament and ready to react harshly against their opponents. They do not have the courage or patience to face unexpected situation. Al-Ghazali (1964), alternatively, advises the oppressed and the victims of violence to be patient, as they will be rewarded paradise by the God Almighty. The author advocates the application of justice in all spheres of life. To him justice is to put in order oppressive innate character, disposition, wrath and irritation, and of not letting insight and conscious become the prisoner of tyrant character, wrath and irritation. Al-Ghazali states the negative implications of anger and hatred. To him anger causes unawareness about the positive impacts of intellect as the intellect and insight are bestowed from the God Almighty, and that wrath and anger are from the Satan, the Evil.



## 6.10. Strategies

Al-Ghazali (1964) is of the view that the persons having authoritative powers should be of certain characteristics, in which having forbearance, compassion, tolerance and avoiding anger, vehemence, revenge and violence are the basic ones. According to Al-Ghazali 'the faith, good health and security are the blessings of Allah.' Injustice, oppression and violent acts of the rulers' cause insecurity, and the social and economic destruction of the country and its inhabitants. He discourages violence of powerful individual on the weak. It is forbidden even on animals, as the writer narrates a tradition transmitted by Muslim bin Hajjaj (2016, 3/16) in which the Holy Prophet states that Allah Almighty likes compassion and leniency in all human actions. Even when a man intends to slaughter an animal then he should sharpen the blades of the slaughtering instrument, so that the animal: the living creature can be released from pain sooner. In the light of al-Ghazali, there can be formulated several strategies that should be implemented to prevent different types of violence. Civil society should learn the spiritual thoughts of Al-Ghazali and propagate public and professional awareness campaigns.

## 7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that world peace and prosperity, are directly connected with the individual and collective behaviors of the human beings. The study examines the major types of violence and it is proven that violence and compulsion are usually based on social pressure, anger, harshness of mind, intolerance and bigotry, and all these are incompatible with religion. The study confirms that the teachings of Islam command Muslims to live in peace and order with non-Muslims, whether they are living in Muslim states or in non-Muslim countries, existing in the world community of countries. Violence, in any kind, is strictly prohibited and the behaviors of true believers do not encourage injustice or violent acts against any individual whether one is foe or friend, Muslim or non-Muslim. Al-Ghazali analyzes the core issues and refutes the individual and collective violent acts in theological and logical manners. He discusses various strategies to prevent the occurrences of violence. This thorough study shows that his thoughts give rise to significant positive effects on the readers.

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