

Sociology of Disciplining Soul and Society: An Analysis of al-Ghazali's Ontological and Sociological Approaches of Self and Social Accountability

Mohd Shafiq Sahimi¹, Shah Rul Anuar Nordin^{1*}, Sajad Ahmad²

¹ Department of Islamic Studies, Centre for General Studies and Co-Curricular
 Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 86400 Parit Raja, Johor, MALAYSIA

² International Islamic University Malaysia,
 Jalan Sungai Pusu, 53100 Gombak, Selangor, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: shahrul@uthm.edu.my
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Abstract

This study examines al-Ghazali's ontological and sociological frameworks for disciplining the soul and society through *Muhasabah al-Nafs* (self-accountability) and *'Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Drawing from his seminal works, including *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, the research explores how al-Ghazali bridges individual spiritual refinement with collective social responsibility, offering a comprehensive approach to holistic governance in both personal and social domains. The research methodology adopted by the researchers is that of qualitative in nature. It will also employ the textual analysis method to explain the position of the said author and his understanding of the concept. The finding reveals that *Muhasabah al-Nafs* serves as an introspective mechanism for self regulation, emphasizing continuous self evaluation. It is not possible to realize a good human resource and an ideal social structure by abdicating the disciplinary models set by Islam. Al-Ghazali's model posits that disciplined individuals form the foundation of a just society as internalized accountability fosters external righteousness. Besides, he has developed a six pronged method of self-discipline and accountability. The present work will focus on how to ensure personality development of an individual through al-Ghazali's ontological framework of *Muhasabah al-Nafs* or self introspection. Sociologically, *'Amr bi al-Ma'ruf* functions as a communal duty, ensuring moral coherence through proactive engagement, social criticism and institutional reform. Al-Ghazali balances persuasion and authority, advocating for wisdom (*hikmah*) and compassion in societal correction. By integrating textual analysis with sociological theory, this paper highlights the relevance of al-Ghazali's paradigms in contemporary discussions on individual and social responsibility, social activism and holistic leadership. It argues that his dual emphasis on self purification and social reform provides a sustainable model for addressing modern social crises, from individual alienation to collective injustice. The study concludes that al-Ghazali's synthesis of spiritual discipline and social accountability remains a vital framework

for fostering virtuous individuals and harmonious societies. The outcome of the study is to provide a pragmatic roadmap for individual and social upliftment of Muslim Ummah in the light of al-Ghazali's ontological and sociological framework.

1. Introduction

Man has been structured with a proper sense of self awareness and social programming. Contrary to Aristotelian monism, self-awareness ensures that each single human being has a defined individuality. Social programming embedded in human synthesis necessitates a proper social structure. This individuality has been maintained also in the physiological make-up of human beings such uniquely carved Retino pattern, amazingly drawn fingerprints, surprisingly developed body odor and other biologically established differences. Man by virtue of his fitrah or natural disposition is a social being which necessitates social structure. Social structure is indispensable for mankind to carry out their obligations and duties. The building blocks of social structure are none other than the humans. So, an interdependent relationship between an individual and society emerges out of this fusion. Human society is the product of onto-epistemological themes of individuals wherefrom social order derives its existential elements. However, the freedom of will, an essential and inherent property of individual human being, to succumb to evil or uphold the scales of virtue put an impact upon the social and individual framework. Discipline of Ethics or 'Ilm al-Akhlaq in Islam covers a wide range of activities of individuals and responsibilities of society to develop a conducive ambiance of social harmony, social solidarity and social organization. It enunciates that human soul or Nafs has been crafted and created by Allah swt in its unique design and pattern. The inherent characteristics of deflections towards good and bad has been meticulously programmed in the essence of soul, which in-turn is a means of test for him (Dalhat & Research, 2015).

Human being is not just a lump of clay or a combination of flesh, bones and blood, a set of hormones responsible for controlling diverse range of emotions and an organic appetite for sex and stomach rather an amazing artefact of the ultimate Manufacturer of this universe i.e Allah swt (Pennock & Genetics, 2003). The natural propensity of discernment, rational and intellectual capabilities and the freedom of choice puts him at the top of creation pyramid. He has not been thrown to the planet as a helpless and choiceless creature but with the sense of accountability of his actions and the eventual reckoning thereof at the day of judgement (Günther & Lawson, 2017). He has been charged with the freedom of will with reference to his concerted and deliberate actions. However, the nature of soul is not less than an enigma and the deflective property towards prohibited things many times push him to the swamp of sins. Man is bound to perform actions and hence requires a sharp vigil of what he performs as has been mentioned in the book of Allah swt and the traditions of the Prophet (saw). The moment a believer neglects his actions and does not watch his behavior properly, there are many possibilities of his getting lost into what has been prohibited for him or overlooking of what he has been obligated to perform. Therefore, self scrutiny, introspection or self assessment carries an important role in Islam. There are many evidences from the al-Quran and Sunnah which unmask the significance of self accountability or introspection in Islam.

A plethora of scholars have discussed the concept of Muhasabah al-Nafs at length through diverse dimensions like Ibn Abi Dunya has a specific anthology on the subject. The anthology of Ibn Abi Dunya carries specific narrations concerning disciplining of soul without analyzing it or recording his comments. This paper will analyze how Al-Ghazali has dealt with this concept and what his understanding of Muhasabah al-Nafs stands for in the light of his magnum opus Ihya 'Ulum al-Din. Al-Ghazali proved to be an erudite scholar with strong background of secular and religious annals of knowledge. The present research will focus on what the concept and definition of Muhasabah al-Nafs is and how al-Ghazali has lucidly explained the multiple dimensions of the given concept. The authors will also deliberate on the six stages method of al-Ghazali in reference to disciplining the soul of an individual. The present work will help in understanding the requirements of personality development in Islam and how to sustain the realization of standing before Allah swt which is the essence of God-consciousness or Taqwa in Islam. The other important dimension of Muhasabah or introspection is that of a society. The authors will probe into how Al-Ghazali offered the concept of 'Commanding the good and Forbidding the wrong' which serves as a sociological framework for disciplining the society. The research methodology adopted by the researchers is that of qualitative in nature. It will also employ the textual analysis method to explain the position of the said author and his understanding of the concept. It will help the readers to get a vast image of the concept and more importantly how the ideas promulgated by al-Ghazali regarding self assessment of soul and society help to build a better society with sense of accountability within and a tinge of compassion towards other fellow beings without.

1.1 A Brief Sketch of al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, a genius polymath, was born in Tus in 1058 CE. Tus was a part of Seljuk Empire at the time of birth of this great Imam (Smith, 1944). The impact of al-Ghazali upon the later generations of scholarship has been recognized by one and all. His dynamic personality contributed to diverse fields of knowledge and wisdom. He mastered the disciplines of jurisprudence, governance, law, mysticism, philosophy, ontology, eschatology, psychology, hermeneutics, Tafsir and Hadith (Groff, 2007). Ibn 'Asakir says:

Imam Ghazali was born in Tus in the year four-hundred and fifty. He began with some jurisprudence (fiqh) there as a child. He then went to Nishapur where he attended the lessons of Imam al-Haramayn [al-Juwayni]. He strove earnestly and exerted himself until he graduated after a brief period of time. He emerged as the most discerning man of his era and singular amongst his peers. He was assigned to teach and offer guidance to students during the lifetime of his imam, and he also authored works {Griffel, 2009 #305}.

1.2 Works and Epistles of al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali left behind a massive legacy of books and epistles. His books and writings have left an enormous impact upon later scholars and has been an unavoidable source of inspiration, guidance, wisdom and academic excellence. The jurist Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Abdullah al-Husayni al-Wasiti enamoured 98 authored works in his book *al-Tabaqat al-'Aliyyah fi Manaqib al-Shafi'iyyah* {Nakamura, 1977 #306}. Imam Subki mentions 58 works, in *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyah*, authored by Imam al-Ghazali. In *Miftah al-Sa'adah wa Misbah al-Siyadah*, Tash Kubra Zadeh mentions that the total number of his works is 85. He also said:

His books and epistles are beyond being counted and enumerated. No one has been able to identify the names of all of his works. It has even been said that his works are one short of a thousand, and while this would normally be farfetched, one who knows his standing might be inclined to believe it.

Dr. 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi identified al-Ghazali's works in his book *Muallafat al-Ghazali* and found them to be 457 but all of them are not survived {Badawi, 1977 #307}. Some of his important books are as follows:

- The Revival of Religious Sciences (*Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*)
- The Forty Fundamentals of Religion (*al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din*).
- Moderation in Belief (*al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*).
- Warding off the Masses from Natural Theology (*Iljam al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam*).
- Son (*Ayyuha al-Walad*)
- The Commencement of Guidance (*Bidayat al-Hidayah*)
- Expansive Treatment of Juristic Rulings (*al-Basit fi al-Furu'*).
- The Distinction between Islam and Clandestine Unbelief (*Al-Tafriqah Bayn Al-Islami Wa al-Zandaqah*).
- The Incoherence of Philosophers (*Tahafut al-Falasifah*).
- Deliverance from Error (*al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*)
- Concerning Divine Wisdom in the Creation

1.3 Etymology of Muhasabah al-Nafs

The term *Muhasabah al-Nafs* comprises of two words having a diverse range of meanings when taken individually and important concepts in Islam when taken together. *Muhasabah* refers to reckoning, assessment, introspection and accounting {Bab, #158}. The word *Nafs* refers to soul, breath, an individual, same thing and a living creature. However, when these two words are used in accessory structure, it stands for introspecting the behavior, assessment of one's deeds and actions and a conscious effort of disciplining the soul to boost the positive characteristics and over-coming the negative impulses {Manzur, 1997 #409}. In short, *Muhasabah al-Nafs* is a sustained and willful exercise to develop the individual positive capabilities and tap the useful potential of one's soul. The activity has a lasting impact upon the development of a balanced society.

1.4 Legal Status of Muhasabah al-Nafs

The nature of beliefs, practices, deeds, words and over-all activities are legally classified into five categories in Islam. *Wajib* or an obligation, one of the five legal categories of rulings, refers to a ruling which imperatively necessitates an obligation upon a person {Masud, 2006 #152}. As for *Muhasabah al-Nafs*, it is an obligation not an option for a believer. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyyah (1996) says:

Muhasabah al-Nafs is a religious obligation. The proof for this is the statement of Allah: O you who believe! Be ever God-fearing! And let every soul look to what it has forwarded for tomorrow. Thus, be ever God-fearing.

Indeed, Allah swt is all-aware of all that you do (Surat al-Hashr, 59:18). In this sign-verse, Allah swt is telling us: Each of you are to think about the [standard quality] of the works and deeds you are putting forth for the Day of Judgment. Are these deeds righteous, so as to win you salvation [by Allah's grace] on that Day, or are they evil, so as, then and there, to utterly ruin you? Qatadah [the Companion of the Prophet ﷺ] said: "Allah swt reminds us of the imminence of *al-Sa'ah* (the Hour of Judgment) by speaking of it as though it shall come tomorrow." The point of the *ayah* is that the reform of the spiritual heart (*al-Qalb*) is contingent upon the practice of *Muḥāsabâh al-Nafs*, and that neglecting the self and succumbing to its evil promptings and impulses corrupts the spiritual heart {Amin, #310}.

Therefore, there is no room for anyone to neglect the practice of *Muhasabah al-Nafs* with the pretext that it is an optional act as the obligation thereof has been established beyond any doubt.

2. Analysis of al-Ghazali's Explanation of Disciplining the Soul or *Muhasabah al-Nafs*

Al-Ghazali has dealt with the important issue of introspecting ones *Nafs* at great length. It is the concept of self-accountability that binds an individual to be cautious enough in carrying his individual responsibilities. Any negligence on the part of him will have harsh consequences on both the worlds. The journey of man to eternal abode is not easy and there are a lot of dangers and impediments that can potentially hamper or block his smooth journey to arrive at his pleasant destination i.e paradise. It is through the path of self- introspection that the difficulties of journey be changed to the state of ease and comfort. Moreover, the process of self-introspection has diverse social significance besides its eschatological importance. Al-Ghazali says:

Thus, the men of wisdom knew that Allah swt is all aware about them. They will be put to reckoning and will be asked of minutest moments and time-spans. They learnt with certainty that these dangers can be overcome only by consistent introspection and truthful vigilance and having checks and balances of breaths and movements and seeking the assessment of thoughts and minutes {al-Ghazali, 1995 #394}.

The heedless souls over-look or under estimate the importance of introspecting their deeds and acts whereas as sagacious minds and wakeful souls always mind about what they do and think. The negligence on the part of an individual pertaining to his introspection of his personal conduct and behavior has an adverse impact upon his social dealings and interactions {Dretske, 1994 #285}. So, the negligence of self-assessment or introspection will render an individual to despair and destruction on the day of Judgement and spoil his mundane affairs as well. Al-Ghazali enunciates:

And whoever does not hold himself accountable, his regrets will last, his stay (for accountability) will be prolonged during the resurrection and it will lead him to disgrace and abhorrence {al-Ghazali, 1995 #395}.

The abhorrent consequences of neglecting the realization of being produced before Allah swt will result into an unavoidable catastrophe. The practical behavior of such an individual will only reflect selfishness and self-centeredness. People of greed and petty interests will handle the bridle of society with no compassion and sentiments of kindness for others. The degradation of values, morals and upright character become the order of social structure {Rokeach, 1973 #312}. Society is formed with groups of individual people and the comprehensive world-view of theirs determine the modes and methods of social and collective behavior {Snyder, 1983 #287}. It is the pattern of thoughts of individual members in a society that culminates at the social order and structure. Therefore, it is immensely important for individual members of society to be charged with the idea of grand reckoning which in turn will be helpful for managing individual and social affairs properly and with the sense of responsibility {Mauder, 2009 #155}. The regular remembrance of grand reckoning on the Judgement Day evokes a sincere interest into the hearts of people to focus more on good deeds as the salvation on Judgement Day are entirely based on purity of faith and sincerity of deeds {Günther, 2017 #288}. Al-Ghazali mentions that the ultimate salvation is not possible without fulfilling the commandments of Allah swt.

They learnt that nothing will ensure their salvation except obedience to Allah swt and for this reason, He commanded them of observing patience and perseverance {al-Ghazali, 1995 #396}.

Al-Ghazali mentions six steps methodology to ensure proper introspection of one's self and deeds. The six steps methodology of disciplining one's soul and personal behavior comprises of:

- *Musharatah* or setting up of mutual conditions
- *Muraqabah* or proper vigilance
- *Muhasabah* or self-reckoning
- *Mu'aqabah*
- *Mujahadah*
- *Mu'atabah*

Al-Ghazali says:

So, they bound themselves, first, in setting conditions with soul, then with monitoring, accountability, punishment, struggle, then with admonition {al-Ghazali, 1995 #394}.

2.1 *Musharatah* or Setting Up of Mutual Conditions

The first step is of setting up certain conditions with soul so as to ensure that there is no negligence on her part. Al-Ghazali strikes an example of two trading partners who enter into a contract to achieve profit through a business deal. Both the partners are responsible for discharging the duties and responsibilities properly to avoid any loss and to realize the profit. If any of the partners neglect his duties, it will impact the nature of growth and profit and hence will culminate at a gross loss. Similarly, one has to enter into contract with his soul so as to materialize the profit in terms of salvation in hereafter. Any lethargy or sluggishness on the part of *Nafs* or soul will have terrible consequences. Therefore, the first step towards the realization of success and salvation in the Akhirah is to observe the duties and commands properly without a least compromise on it.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali says that the two partners in terms of achieving eternal success are reason and *Nafs*. As one partner offers his wealth to his counterpart and demands to achieve profit likewise, Reason demands purification of soul from any impurity or impediment that may potentially impede or slow down his success in the Akhirah/ Hereafter. The success of a believer rests on purification of soul. So, reason extends supportive hand to *Nafs* in the same way as a partner helps out his other partner to achieve the profit.

Similarly, reason is (like) a trader in the path of Akhirah and its demand and profit is 'purification of soul' because it's success can only be achieved by virtue of it... and the reason helps *Nafs* or soul in this trade (of Akhirah) by utilizing it properly and tames it for what ensures its purification {Al-Ghazali, 1980 #398}.

An individual is required to observe conditions in terms of fulfilling the commandments and avoiding the prohibitions. There should not be any kind of negligence on the part of an individual, otherwise he has to face huge loss. Al-Ghazali says:

So, he should address himself: Strive today to replenish your treasury, and do not leave it empty as these are the means of your possession, and do not incline to laziness, meekness and relaxation, so that you will miss out on higher degrees than others can attain, and you will have remorse that stay will with you {al-Ghazali, 1980 #299}.

Hence, it is an imperative upon an individual subject to set conditions for *Nafs* or soul so that his drifts and deflections are disciplined. Al-Ghazali further points out that there are seven parts of body which need to be taken care of in order to discipline the individual soul. These seven parts have to be prevented from any sort of disobedience to Allah swt and being harmful to other members of society. They serve to be the subjects of *Nafs*. These are eyes, ears, tongue, belly, private parts, hands and feet. Al-Ghazali says:

Then, one must resume to address his seven parts of body namely eyes, ears, tongue, belly, private parts, hands and feet and should submit to it as they serve to be the subjects of *Nafs* in this trade and it is by virtue of these organs that the trade be taken to its logical end {al-Ghazali, 1980 #400}.

The next step, after setting conditions, for disciplining of soul is to ensure *Muraqabah* or proper vigilance.

2.2 *Muraqabah* or Vigilance

The word *Muraqabah* linguistically refers to supervision, superintendence, surveillance and proper monitoring {Dictionary, 1989 #290}. In Ghazalian framework, it refers to having a proper eye on the conditions set in the first stage. Al-Ghazali says:

When a person recommends himself and stipulates what we have mentioned, then there is nothing left but to watch and ward the *Nafs* when delving into deeds and observe them with a vigilant eye, for if it is left (unwatched), it becomes uncontrolled and corrupted {al-Ghazali, 1980 #301}.

The nature of human soul or individual behavior is that if it is not tamed and trained properly according to the commandments of Allah swt and the Hadith of the Prophet (saw), it crosses all limits of disobedience. Therefore, *Muraqabah* or a constant supervision is necessary to uphold the articles of covenant made at the first stage of *Musharatah*.

2.2.1 Essence of Muraqabah According to al-Ghazali

Each and every state in the path of Allah swt has an intrinsic essence and the essence of *Muraqabah*, according to al-Ghazali is to have a regular feeling that Allah swt sees all my activities and there is nothing hidden to Him of my activities of *Nafs*. This constant realization helps him to observe the condition and doesn't allow him to cross the limits set for it. Al-Ghazali says:

Know that the essence of *Muraqabah* is to have realization of (watchfulness of) Allah swt always and paying one's attention to Him {Al-Ghazali, 1995 #401}.

As mentioned earlier, the level of spiritual stations varies from person to person. Al-Ghazali further classifies the two levels of those having entered into the second stage of *Muraqabah* based on their levels of closeness to Allah swt and peity.

2.2.2 Level of Muraqabah

As a matter of fact, the levels of piety, knowledge and sincerity varies from person to person, so varies the levels of *Muraqabah*. There are two levels of *Muraqabah*, maintains al-Ghazali namely:

(a) Level of *Muraqabah* of *Muqarrabeen* or those closest to Allah swt.

Muqarrabeen are closest servants of Allah swt and occupy a very high position in the sight of Allah swt.

(b) Levels of *Muraqabah* of *Wari'een* or righteous

Wari'un refers to those servants of Allah swt who besides observing the commandments of Allah swt, stay away from the prohibitions of Allah swt and do refrain from doubtful matters as well.

We can confide from Ghazalian framework of *Muhasabah Nafs* that individual progress and performance helps in elevating the levels of citizens in a society. The two groups mentioned erstwhile shows how through a proper sense and practice of disciplining soul, a refined and polished human resource can be achieved. It is this refined human stuff that will culminate in the formation of a balanced society upholding the values of social justice and lasting progress.

The stage of *Muraqabah* necessitates to observe main three domains of activities so that a person is promoted to the next stage of *Muhasabah*. Al-Ghazali says:

So Allah swt commanded every servant to watch himself when he is actually intending to do a deed and striving with the limbs, so he should stop to assess the intention and striving until it is revealed to him with the light of knowledge that it (deed) is for Allah swt, so he goes on with it or is it for the desire of the soul, so he fears it and restrains the heart from thinking about it and worrying about it {al-Ghazali, 1980 #401}.

2.3 Muhasabah or Self-Reckoning After The Deed

Muhasabah or self-reckoning is a concerted process of transformation of soul. In modern psychological jargon, it applies to a process of examining one's behavior, perceptions, emotions and thoughts and subsequent judgements {Dretske, 1994 #291}. It confides one's cognitive and emotional states and a sustained assessment thereof. In Islam, an individual is required not to let events go unassessed as it is the nature one's deeds, behavior, dealings with people and everything he does intentionally that will determine his status in the hereafter. Therefore, the station of self-reckoning makes a person responsible and sensible of what he does in his individual capacity or to people in society in general.

Here, al-Ghazali reminds a person of first station of *Musharatah* in which a set of conditions have to be outlined and subsequently observed. In his trade deal with *Nafs*, he should introspect all his deeds at the end of each day so as to assess whether he earned the profit or faced the loss. Al-Ghazali enunciates:

Know that just as the servant has time at the beginning of the day to stipulate himself in it as a way of recommending the truth, so he should have at the end of the day an hour in which he demands the soul and holds it accountable for all its movements and gestures, just as the merchants in this world do with partners at the end of every year, month, or day out of concern for the worldly profit and for fear of losing it {al-Ghazali, 1980 #401}.

An individual's conscious, meaningful and selfless efforts not only make him to be beneficial for himself rather beneficial for all members of a society.

2.4 Mu'aaqabah al-Nafs or Punishing The Soul Upon Deficiencies

The fourth stage is that of punishing the soul upon deficiencies and negligence or, in Ghazalian framework, *Mu'aaqabah al-Nafs*. Whenever there appears a kind of lethargy or negligence on the part of *Nafs* to avoid an obligation or commit a prohibition, it needs to be corrected. If the foible and flaw has been rendered unchecked, it will grow more eager and daring in disobedience. The relentless nature of *Nafs*, in terms of crossing the limits set by Shari'ah, qualifies it to be within the bounds of *Nafs Ammarah* or evil-commanding soul {Ciocan, 2019 #233-34} This type of soul is highly noxious in the sight of Allah swt and has been declared to be of derogatory levels. Therefore, it is an imperative to hold the *Nafs* accountable for all its faults and foibles. It needs to be punished so that it is tamed to the obedience of commandments.

2.5 Mujahadah al-Nafs or Endeavors for Taming Soul

Mujahadah is the fifth stage of disciplining the soul. It refers to a perpetual struggle against the carnal self. The words *Jihad* and *Mujahadah* have been derived from the same root which means struggle. The word *Jihad* is usually referred to 'fighting in the path of Allah swt whereas the word *Mujahadah* is preponderantly used for overcoming the negative impulses and characteristics of *Nafs* and furthering up the positive qualities thereof. The basic objective of *Mujahadah*, according to Islam, is to raise the level of soul from *Nafs Ammarah* to *Nafs Mardiyah*, which is the highest level of soul. The highest level of *Mardiyah* is subservient to different levels of *Mujahadah*. The stage of *Mujahadah* follows right after the fourth stage whereby a person finds himself lagging in servitude of Allah swt or practicing the prohibitions. So, he needs to expedite in doubling the efforts by increasing the quantity and maintain the quality of acts of worship. Al-Ghazali says:

It refers to a condition when a person introspects himself and finds that he has committed a sin, he should punish it with the aforementioned penalties. And if he finds her delaying due to laziness in any of the virtuous acts or any of the remembrances, then he should discipline her by making the burdens heavy on her and obliging her to diverse forms of devotion to make up for what she (*Nafs*) missed out and compensate for what was neglected. This is how industrious servants of Allah swt used to practice {al-Ghazali, 1992 #403}.

The activity of *Mujahadah* is a subjective domain of an individual whereby he has to maximize his efforts of devotion to please the Lord according to the prescribed format of Shari'ah. It is through the process of *Mujahadah* that an individual is able rise above from lowly selfish interests to lofty selfless services to mankind. The *Mujahadah* is an uphill task aimed at training the *Nafs* and in the Quranic context 'a steep mountain path' or '*Aqabah*' describing the difficulties that stand in the path of Allah swt.

Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri highlights the importance of *Mujahadah* as:

"Remember that anyone who doesn't make efforts at the beginning of his journey in the path of Allah swt, will never be able receive the fruits or benefits of this path... it is a grave error to think that he will be able to achieve anything without sustained striving and regular efforts on his part" {al-Qushayri, #317}.

As *Mujahadah* is an inward struggle against the carnal temptations of *Nafs* so is it the outward striving against the evils of the society. Corruption, fraud, waywardness, bribe, promiscuity, human rights violations, injustices, tyranny and selfishness are different evil elements of society that need to be struggled against so that the dream of an ideal and just society can be translated into reality.

2.6 Mu'atabah or Reprimanding The Soul

Al-Ghazali places *Mu'atabah* at the six and last level. The word *Mu'atabah* stands for constant reproachment and reprimand of *Nafs* so that it is warned against the commission of prohibitions and humbled down against any feeling of arrogance after performing the good deeds. When a person observes the demands of previous five stages

and makes sure not to be negligent or heedless in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of aforementioned stages, there is a possibility of developing a feeling of 'being special' or 'being obedient servant' which in turn may trigger an element of haughtiness within. The practice of *Mu'atabah* helps a person to counter the negative feelings of arrogance or self-conceit.

The six-stage methodology of disciplining the soul has a far-reaching impact upon the personal development of an individual. The practical roadmap, offered by al-Ghazali, helps in producing the productive and qualitative human resource which in-turn help in building a balanced social order and society. The inhabitants of Muslim world need to incorporate this onto-reformative method to address the challenges of corruption, greed, selfishness, atrocities, injustice and wayward behavior.

3. Al-Ghazali's Stance on Disciplining Society

The concept of human society is as old as mankind itself. The relationship between man and society is intrinsically and innately interconnected. Human society is a living phenomenon beyond any doubt. What society is? Or how is it defined? There is a plethora of definitions defining the contours of society. Strayer (2015) defines it as 'people who live in a definable community and who share a culture'. The definition put forward by Strayer seems to narrow down the scope of a society to cultural practices alone.

Society is a manifestation of collective consciousness of individuals in a particular community. Society is not just a cluster of human beings living in a particular region rather an abode of human journey harboring an array of cultural ethos, social institutions, economic structure, political spectrum and a code of moral rules arranged in an interconnected manner which together forms the basis of worldview.

As mentioned earlier, al-Ghazali mastered the various fields of knowledge including study of society. He elucidated the concepts of society, social institutions and the role thereof to shape the model of just and beneficial society. His sociological discourse seeks the interconnectedness of soul, society and social institutions {Ayubi, 2019 #218}. He believes that the positive and negative characteristics of soul has been all set to pose a challenge to overcome the animalistic tendencies and to further up the rational and spiritual propensities. The basic objective of disciplining the soul is to achieve over-all well-being of an individual which culminates at a balanced model of society. It is an imperative for personal development of an individual and inception of a harmonious and just society to seek the path of self-discipline and the realization of grand accountability on the day of Judgement {Tabrani, 2016 #99}.

Al-Ghazali stressed upon having the checks and balances of certain important aspects and institutions to build a harmonious society wherein all institutions and agencies are required to work for the proper upliftment and comprehensive advancement of society. He explains how to make the social institutions accountable for the proper and progressive advancement of society and making all state machinery beneficial for mankind. Al-Ghazali emphasizes upon the framework of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* or commanding the good forbidding the evil. While highlighting the vital importance of sociological framework of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar*, he enunciates:

There is no doubt that it... is one of the solid pillars of Islam (on which each and every article of faith rests). It is for this important purpose that Allah swt sent all Prophets. If it is overlooked, ignored or forgotten and methods and practices are set aside, the very purpose of Prophethood is totally defeated and rendered meaningless. Thereafter, the inner conscience, which is the capital wealth of man, will fade away and degenerate. Indolence and dullness of mind will prevail. The path to evil and arrogance will be rendered open and barbarity will be the order of the day in the whole world. Human relationship will break down. Civilization will be ruined. Mankind will be reduced to miserable moral destitution. But, the vivid realization of all this (cataclysmic catastrophe) will come only on the day of judgement {Zakariya, 2004 #304}. behavior.

4. Sociology of Disciplining the Governing Elite/ Governance and Administrative Structure

Of various important institutions of a society, governance and administration of proper justice with equitable opportunities to all citizens is of immense importance. We will see in the Ghazalian framework of sociology of 'commanding the good and forbidding the wrong how better governance and an impressive administrative structure can be achieved. Though there are other important institutions as well however, governance and administrative structure surfaces as a backbone of any society. Therefore, the present study will specifically focus on how to have a better system that is responsible for a better society in terms of taking account of governance and administrative services. The engineers of this important institution of society are those of 'governing elite'. they serve as a regulatory force to maintain the order of the society. The notion of governing elite stands for a diverse mechanism of how to run the affairs of citizens/ subjects in a given region. The underpinnings thereof are based on the notion of 'public welfare' and facilitating the basic and advanced needs of people according to the teachings of the al-Quran and Sunnah.

In Islam, the concept of governance is translated in to the form of Caliphate. However, there is a huge difference between the secular connotation of it and religious underpinnings of Caliphate. The former draws its soul n substance from unlimited freedom of human choice and hence setting aside all the notions of religious guidance. On the other hand, the Caliphate is an institution based on the mandate of the al-Quran and Sunnah. Man has been described as the vicegerent of God on earth and hence, he owes a huge responsibility of delivery of justice in all walks of life {Sulaiman, #320} .

The vast storehouse of resources and revenue are at the disposal of the ruler which has the potential strength to distract him and put all resources and revenue for his personal use unfairly and unjustly. There are regular threats of nepotism hanging over him. In many cases, the ruler fails to observe his responsibilities and succumb to his greed and avarice. In the recent years, the unprecedented corruption, political instability, strengthening of capitalist class and sufferings of masses have become the order of human society {Cockcroft, 2012 #159}.

Therefore, it is incumbent to set a mechanism of assessment for rulers so that the resources and revenue are utilized in best possible way in a given region. Al-Ghazali has offered the sociological framework, based on Islamic concept of ruling and governing, and mentioned ten basic qualifications for the ruler which qualifies him to be the head of the state. He classifies ten qualities into two categories namely innate or natural (*Khalqiyyah*) and acquired (*Khulqiyyah*). In the first category are an adult, sound intellect, freedom, male, descent from Quraysh and good hearing and sight. The second category comprises of *Najdah* (helping nature), *Kifayah* (adequacy), *'ilm* (knowledge) and *Wara'* (righteousness)'.

Though a few of these ten qualities, like male and being of Quraysh, are a pre-requisite of an Islamic state and in Malaysian context, male has been lapsed with that of concept of Sultanate. The Sultan, a male apex authority, has been accepted as the constitutional head of state as in case of Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Brunei etc. As for being of Quraysh is concerned, it is not of primary pre-requisites rather falls in secondary requirements. All these qualities do reflect a strong sense of seriousness for the welfare and well-being of the masses.

Whenever there appears any discrepancy, corruption, misuse of power, nepotism, promoting injustice and choking the channels of justice or any other flaw that disturbs law and order, it is an imperative that rulers be reminded of their responsibilities through the sociological framework of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* or commanding good and forbidding wrong.

Al-Ghazali mentions four steps of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar*:

We have mentioned the levels of commanding good. First is to give good advice, then admonition followed by strictness in speech, fourth is to use force to prevent him from evil and compel him to follow truth by beating and punishment.

These are general steps and methods to practice *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* or commanding good and forbidding wrong. However, when it comes to rulers, *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* or commanding good and forbidding wrong only first two steps should be put to use as enunciated by al-Ghazali:

Of all such steps, the first two steps i.e good advice and admonition have to be used with rulers.

The Quranic frame-work of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahyu 'an al-Munkar* or commanding good and forbidding wrong for dealing the corruption (intellectual, theological or social) of rulers is to adopt a soft and sober way. Any form of strictness, roughness and rude behavior may prove to be counter-productive.

Al-Ghazali cites the reason that if other methods i.e strictness and coercion be used with rulers, it may give rise to anarchy and social unrest. Since, the rulers control the bridle of power, so it won't be wise any way to put the wealth and life of people to danger and jeopardy. Al-Ghazali says:

As for preventing by force, this is not allowed for any one of the subjects to do with the authority for that stirs up strife, incites evil and the forbidden things that result from it will be of greater (disaster). As for roughness in speech, such as saying: O oppressor, oh who does not fear God, and the like, if it stirs up strife and the evil of which extends beyond others then, it is not permissible. But if he only fears for himself, then it is permissible and even recommended.

The scholars of Islam and legal studies i.e Jurists form a unanimous opinion that it is not permissible for any individual or a group of people to rise in revolt against, technically referred to as *Khurooj*, the established authority of Muslims as it will trigger an anarchy and disorder in the society. However, if there appears any discrepancies or corruption on the part of ruling class, the best and authorized way is to give admonition and good advice.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, al-Ghazali's ontological and sociological framework of disciplining the soul and society stresses upon the character building of an individual and development of a just and balanced society. Society is an abode of different individuals and groups of people. Individual souls are the building blocks of any human society. Allah swt has uniquely crafted his characteristics and properties. The two opposite forces of good and evil have been blended together within the human ontological synthesis. Allah swt granted free will to each individual with regards to his inherent characteristics. When a person focusses properly upon strengthening the positive characteristics and makes relentless efforts of overcoming the negative traits, he emerges out to be an essential asset for human society. He utilizes all his potential in the upliftment of mankind. His noble qualities of selflessness, altruism, sympathy, munificence, sincerity and integrity, truthfulness, moral uprightness turn out to be the beacon light for the progress of mankind. Al-Ghazali's ontological framework of *Muhasabah al-Nafs* ensures a proper and sustained introspection to boast up these positive characteristics. On the other hand, if the human *Nafs* is rendered unchecked and sans introspection, the relentless negative features thereof will be no less than a disaster for himself and society. If the sense of accountability has been set aside, the ferocious elements of greed, corruption, miserliness, excessive love material objects, bribery, ostentation, envy, jealousy, pomp and show, atrocities, injustice, lavishness and moral corruption will be the order of the society.

In the same vein, al-Ghazali emphasizes upon holding social institutions responsible for delivery of justice and smooth functioning of society. His sociological model of 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil' serves as an important tool of introspection or *Muhasabah* of social institutions. The human society has developed a lot of negative traits over a period of time which is reflected through the rampant spread of corruption in different social institutions including the political one. Al-Ghazali's ontological and sociological framework of disciplining the soul and society will help induce a sense of accountability and responsibility among the individual subjects of any given society. It will serve as a practical roadmap of streamlining the positive potential and human capital into the larger benefit of mankind.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

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