

Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. The history of Islamic contemplation and culture has witnessed diverse conjunctions with different human knowledge especially the exotic reflections.

As we know, the spread of the geographical domain of Islam was accompanied with the attachment of various tribes and nations. Consequently, different thoughts and reflections entered the domain of Islam. Amongst them were the thinking of Indian, Iranian and Greek philosophers and gnostics and the beliefs of Zorastrians, Jews and Christians. The transfer of Greek philosophical books into Arabic gave momentum to the above matter.

In the meanwhile, the Muslims who saw themselves alien to the numerous thoughts and beliefs showed various reactions against these types of beliefs. These reactions can be summarized into three important pivots and inclinations:

A. Some of the Islamic scholars did not pay attention to these exotic elements since most of them did not consider as permissible, any kind of research and investigation in *Ma'arif* (gnostic knowledge) and beliefs; not even with regard to the divine works. They use to remain silent in front of the questions related to beliefs and believed in the literal meanings of Qur'an without any examination and analysis. They suggested this as the only way of solution.

The above tendency has been in vogue mostly among the Ahlul Sunnat¹ and one can count the Hanbalities and Ahlul hadith as those following this view. The slogan of this group was "Asso'aal Bed'ah" i.e. asking questions about religious belief is heresy and forbidden. From among those who belonged to this group, one can name persons like Malik-bin Anas, Muhammad bin Idris, Shafa'ee, Sufyan Sun and in particular Ahmad bin Hanbal.

B. Some others showed a passive reaction before the alien thoughts. They form a wider spectrum. Some reacted through submission and acceptance, and others who enjoyed relative freedom and had the ability to do "*Ijtihad*" by taking possession over the alien elements and adorning them over the foundations of religion gave entry to them in the head stock of Islamic culture.

Transfer and translation of the alien philosophical thoughts into Arabic language has passed three stages: Translation, interpretation and their appropriation and arrangement with the Islamic *Ma'arif* (gnostic knowledge) and establishment of new philosophical orders.

The second and third centuries *Hijri* was a sparkling period for the translation of philosophical books. Among the renowned translators, we can mention the names of Husayn bin Ishaq and his son Ishaq bin Husayn.

The third and fourth centuries can be reckoned as the period of acquisition and interpretation of the works of Greek and Alexandria laws, an endeavour started by individuals like Qavarri, Yuhabin Hailan, Abu Yahya Maruzi, Abu Bashir Mata bin Yunus and Abu Zakaria Yahya bin Adi.

The third period started from the third and fourth century and reached its perfection in the fifth century. One can name "Qandi" and "Faarabi" as the commencers of this period. The climax of this stage can be seen in the works of "Ibn Sina" and "Sahrwardi".

The recent stage has been a dominant one amongst Muslim thinkers. The result has been a mixing of the religious *Ma'arif* (gnostic Knowledge) with non-religious elements in such manner that the system of beliefs has enjoyed much less purity than required. In reality, these thinkers, directly and before coming in contact with the alien culture (through referring to the inspiration and relation about them), had not acquired a faithful and religious system. By having one of the religious *Ma'arif* in hand (a confused one, at that) they would encounter the non-religious belief, strive in comprehending it, and occasionally would write their descriptions.

Thereafter, by taking and accepting them, they strived hard to coordinate these types of beliefs with the religion's *Ma'arif* and fashion them together within one rational system. It can be said that these thinkers, in the threshold of Islamic thoughts and by reaping the benefits of religious *Ma'arif*, have given dept and profundity to the human *Ma'arif*, Greek beliefs and other ancient schools of thoughts and have given new shape to them and presented them in the form of philosophical systems. In this way, that which reaped the maximum benefit was the human philosophies. By getting nourishment from the Divine *Ma'arif*, their weaknesses and feebleness decreased and they were strengthened and prepared for stepping into the field of sciences and knowledge.

On the other hand, the Divine *Ma'arif* sustained a real loss because gradually and systematically it lost its purity and its basic elements were forgotten. In any case, the above course can be named as "the manner of composition and adaptation of divine and human *Ma'arif*" (gnostic knowledge) or "the manner of systems-making on the basis of combination."

C. Another tendency to which we shall now refer is the course that has been referred to by most of the theologians, (especially the holy theologians) jurisprudence and thinkers among the Shias and some parts of the *Ma'arif* too has been acted upon. But on the whole and in the form of one united system, it has been less exposed to public view.

This path is an analytical encounter with the religious authorities and the human view. In this course, the religious *Ma'arif* and the human belief will be examined and discussed in three stages: Acquisition and explanation of religious world-view in the form of one united system, well-reasoned, and on the basis of becoming learned in religious sources. The second stage is recognizing and interpreting the human world-views. The third stage is comparing the religious theologies with each of the human world-views and separating them from each other.

The above course can be named as “the greatest Fiqh” and “the way of segregation in Islamic beliefs” or “the related discourse.” On the one hand it engages in obtaining knowledge in the most basic religious matters, and on the other hand it resorts to separating the religious *Ma'arif* from the non-religious one. In this method, talk is not about contravention and confutation, problems and answers, and correctness and incorrectness. Rather the discourse is in perceiving the *Ma'arif* and separating them from each other.

The author, by confessing to the paucity of means in this research, applied the above method to the most fundamental and the highest form of religious *Ma'arif* i.e. recognizing the fundamentals of knowing God. This is a small step on a great path. Of course, in this research, benefit has been derived from the views and confirmations of great Jurisprudents and exegetists too. On the whole, it is expected from concerned thinkers and Islamic scholars that they do not withhold their useful guidance, and help the author in reaping the benefits of their instructions.

2. There is no doubt that until today various methods have been born of culture and civilization. These methods, from the viewpoints of policy, principle and consequences, possess common and contrasting points. Therefore, judging about a particular reflection does not necessarily embrace the other reflective systems. Rather, it involves only their common points. However, without the least doubt, the Greek philosophy due to the influence which it had on other schools of thought possesses significance and importance such that makes it distinct and superior from the others. Although other reflections before the Greek culture found its existence in other places like Iran, India and China, none of them had exerted influence on other civilizations and sects to the extent Greece had, such that Greece has come to be known as the fountainhead of human views.

It is by favour of the above point that the importance of recognition and separation of “Greece and religion” will become clear. By “Greece” is meant the reflections of Greek philosophers, in particular Socrates, Plato and especially Aristotle.²

By “religion” is meant the divine religions i.e. the collective teachings which the Divine Prophets presented on behalf of Almighty God to the people for their guidance, like the religion of Islam, and of the Jews and Christians. In as much as the religion of Islam is the final and most perfect of all the religions and the Holy Qur'an has remained immune from the calamities of deviation, our emphasis is more so on Islam and our testimonies too are from the Qur'an.

3. Undoubtedly, the “*Fitrah*” (innate nature) or the natural “*Ma’rifat*” (knowledge about God) is one of the fundamental structures of religious *Ma’arif*. Regrettably, not enough attention was given to this in past philosophical and theological discussions.³

In recent years too, while some have embarked upon that, often we see insufficient and weak reasons have been set forth in proof of God. The claim to this is that “*Fitrah*” (innate nature) is a part of religious theological logic that, along with the other parts, collectively shows the true path of “knowing God” in the logic of divine religions. What this book has intended to prove is this that the Compassionate God has not abandoned the most basic matters related to belief and has not left its affairs to the various *Ma’arifs* (gnostic knowledge) and to the human contradictions. Rather, right from the first step of search of religion, He has helped and shown the path.

4. It is necessary here to have a general outlook and a brief review over the discussions of this book.

In the first section, while comparing briefly the “*Usul*” (principles) prevailing over the Greek reflection on the one side and the basic foundation of divine religions on the other side, we shall reach the conclusion that the real differences of these two inclinations should be linked in their roots and essence. A deeper investigation will take us towards this concept, that the real foundation and the corner-stone of differences of these two schools of thought (with regard to the *Ma’rifat* of God) will return back to one basic and foremost principle of ‘collateral proof’ (not acceptable proof).⁴

In the Greek reflection, the prevailing inclination is this: that every knowledgeable matter has been manifested as a mental complication and naturally the mind should undergo an autopsy with the knife of logic and philosophy so that henceforth it is either approved or rejected. The concept of God and proof of His existence too, like other mental concepts, is an unknown and irresolute affair which one has to achieve with mental labouring, and after passing through various stages of examination and discussion. It is clear that except for some specific group of people and thinkers for all the others, this rational behaviour is forbidden and restricted. (Plato has emphasized this matter).

The principle of collateral proof in its turn relies on two other foundations. One is imagining God in the mechanism of abstraction and separation, and the other is its confirmation with a definite method, which Aristotle succeeded in explaining for the first time. By making use of the matter of abstraction of collective concepts and the way of combining concepts and jurisdictions he was able to explain the method of rational collateral proof. In the first section this logical method will be evaluated and analyzed and in the second section the kind of its functioning in theologies and ‘knowing God’ will be revealed.

In the second section the Greek philosophy and its theologies will be discussed in five stages. These stages are the period of fantasies, the beginning of philosophy, the philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The real emphasis is on Plato and especially Aristotle and thus while examining the fundamental of their theologies we shall, in contrast, briefly refer to the religious fundamentals.

On the other hand, the inclination towards the divine Prophets and the *Ma’rifat* of God is rooted not as

one rational affair and that too unknown and uncertain, but as one clear mysticism and *Ma'rifat* in the heart and innate disposition of all the human beings. Thus, if at times, this *Ma'rifat* (knowledge about God) lacks the required divulgence and manifestation, it is due to inattentiveness or human negligence and external hindrances and factors where the tarnished dust settles over the mirror of *Fitrah* (innate nature) and deprives man from remembrance. Therefore, the cornerstone of the upright religion consists of the norm of “innate definition”.

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

On this basis, the divine Prophets put the innate *Ma'rifat* into operation through elegant methods. These methods were ‘reminding’ and notifying the very same *Ma'rifat*. Therefore ‘reminding’ was the real path of the divine evangelists, and is the second stage from the stages of divine theology (knowing God). However, in as much as man is the bearer of free-will and power and is in the position to express gratitude and submission before God or turn away and express obstinacy in front of these “reminders,” so in the third stage of divine theologies the matter of “submission” is set forth.

In this way, the first stage from the stages of guidance and belief is given to man and he finds readiness and honour in entering in the next stage of the journey to God and the path of bondage.

These three stages (definition, reminding, and submission) form the logic and the real fundamentals of religious theology (knowing God) which will be discussed in order in the third Chapter of this book.

-
1. We say this because the matter of deviation of the Akhbarit never manifested in the form of beliefs of the Hanbalites. Basically in the history of culture of Shias you will never come across a religious scholar who will reckon discussion of beliefs and its defence to be as heresy and or will adopt silence before the questions and doubts related to beliefs. The Akhbaris who in deducing the commandments (Ahkams) and the independent reasoning (Ijtihad) and its logic were denying Ilim al-Usul (Methodology), have themselves narrated traditions from Imams ('a) that consists of the deepest form of Islamic Ma'arif (gnostic knowledge and beliefs). Nevertheless, while coming across such traditions they never resorted to deriving independent reasoning, comparing or analyzing and for this reason they were close to the above tendency. (The matter of differences between Hanbalites and Akhbarit and the defects of these two schools of thoughts are out of the scope of our discussion).
 2. From among the inclinations which we often come across in the study of Greek culture is the inclination towards “mysticism and intuition” and its necessities, among them being the belief in “unity and Existence.” This aspect of Greek culture which reached its climax through ‘Platonism’ is out of scope of our discussion. But in continuation of this discussion we do intend to earmark a section regarding the comparison of the ‘Greek mysticism’ with the “religious Ma'arif.” If the opportunity is provided, this Section too will be presented to the respected readers in the future.
 3. Some of the exegetists, scholars of hadith, theologians and jurisprudents long ago presented useful discussions about innate Ma'rifat (knowledge about God) under the concerned verses and traditions. However in the conventional philosophical and theological discussions of the past, this has either not been discussed at all or has not been seriously mooted.
 4. We do not use the term ‘acceptable proof’ from this account: that in the logic of religion too it occupies a place and that

position is argumentation and disputation. In the second stage of the third section of the book while setting forth the discussion, appropriate rationalization and notification has come in the discussion of argumentation and disputation and we shall discuss about the place, condition and form of argumentation and reasoning in religion. Basically, most of the religious Ma'arif are not built upon the philosophical, sensory or experimental satisfaction and it is due to this that the Philosophical and experimental sciences are not having the ability to reject and deny them. This is because some types of of Ma'arif have a deeper outlook than the human sciences. On the whole, the human sciences have the ability to prove and approve the religious Ma'arif through different ways. In particular, one can make use of them as a matter of support to the religious Ma'arif in the position of "argumentation and disputation" at the proportionate circumstances.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/fundamentals-of-knowing-god-in-greek-philosophy-and-divine-religion-reza-berenjkari/introduction>