

A Comparative Study of Mystical Thought in al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīā-ye Sa'ādat* and Yasawī's *Divān-e Ḥekmat*

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Abstract

Although Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī (450–505 AH) is not regarded as a preeminent mystic, he is a vigorous proponent of mysticism, having developed mystical concepts prior to Ibn 'Arabī. Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī (437–562 AH) is also a significant figure in Sufism (Taṣawwuf) and mysticism ('irfān) in Central Asia, recognized as the founder of the Yeseviye sect, a distinct school within Sufism. Notwithstanding their linguistic, environmental, and cultural disparities, an examination of the works of these two modern figures uncovers significant parallels in their spiritual perspectives. Furthermore, elucidating their distinctions and contrasting their viewpoints helps establish a robust basis for academic inquiry in this domain. This study aims to analyze the mystical perspectives of these two people through the *Kīmīā-ye Sa'ādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness) and *Divān-e Ḥekmat* (The Book of Wisdom) within a comparative literary framework. The study utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on library resources and including content analysis. The imperative for comparative literary studies between Iran and Central Asia emphasizes the significance of this research, which primarily aims to illuminate mystical asceticism, centering on shari'ā as the cornerstone of the mystical philosophies of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī. The research indicates that Yasawī exhibits a greater inclination towards mystical elements and observations

(mushāhedāt) compared to al-Ghazālī, and he utilizes more accessible language in his poetry to convey his concepts more efficiently.

Keywords: Comparative Literature; Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī; Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī; Kīmīā-ye Sa‘ādat (Alchemy of Happiness); Divān-e Ḥekmat (Book of Wisdom).

Literature Review

Although no independent research has been conducted on the study and comparison of the mystical ideas of Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī and Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī in relation to one another, the significant position of Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī in the fields of Islamic literature, theology, mysticism, and philosophy, as well as the unique place of Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī in mysticism, Turkic sects, and Transoxiana, has motivated various studies. In addition to general books written about these two figures, several articles — such as “Some Mystical Recoveries of al-Ghazālī,” “al-Ghazālī, Mysticism and Evolution,” “Mystical Paths and the Heritage of Persian Poetry in Transoxiana,” and “The Summit of the Mystics of Turkestan: The Position of Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī in Sufism and Islamic Mysticism” — have explored aspects of mysticism and Sufism in the works of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī. In the esteemed work *Rashahāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt fī Manāqib Mashāyikh al-Tarīqa al-Naqshbandiyya*, the life, spiritual condition, and disciples of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi are also discussed in detail (Kashifi, 1356 [1957], vol. 1, p. 17 ff.).

Introduction

Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī (450–505 AH) is a distinguished theologian of the sixth century AH, known for his contributions to theoretical and practical mysticism. Ibn Sab‘īn critiques al-Ghazālī for his lack of comprehension of Sufism and for his inconsistent position, whereas Ibn ‘Arabī regards him as a layman in mysticism who faltered owing to excessive dependence on rationality. Nonetheless, the trajectory of Sufism in the sixth century cannot be traced without acknowledging al-Ghazālī and his writings. His most significant contribution may have been the integration of Sufi concepts with the manifestation of the shari‘a, which, according to his status as a religious theologian, attained considerable success in this endeavor. Noteworthy is

his evolution from a mutakallim, a Muslim rationalist theologian and critic of falsafa, prior to leaving Baghdad, to a Sufi who rejected kalām and endeavored to harmonize Sufism with Islamic orthodoxy. Al-Ghazālī, by embracing the methodologies of revelation and observation in Sufism, underwent a phase of practical Sufism characterized by seclusion and asociality between the years 488 and 499 AH, culminating in the work *Kīmīā-ye Saʿādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness). He infused Sufism with the essence of shariʿa inside the realms of shariʿa, fostering a synthesis between the external and internal doctrines of Islam. Consequently, his emphasis on the application of shariʿa is thoroughly evident in his teachings.

Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī (437–562 AH) is regarded as the precursor of Turkic Sufi sheikhs, with the majority of Turkish sheikhs tracing their Sufi heritage to him. Within their lineage, numerous distinguished and illustrious individuals have emerged. (Kashefi, 1356 [1957], vol. 1, p. 18) Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī is acknowledged as a prominent mystic of Central Asia and the progenitor of the Yasawiyya Sufi order in Yesi, located in Turkestan, where the entire tradition is attributed to Turkish Sufi sheikhs. The impact of this command extended throughout Khwarazm and Turkestan (ibid., vol. 2, p. 41). In his youth, Yasawī received instruction from the esteemed Shaykh Baba Arslan, who, as per tradition, is thought to have embraced the spiritual journey following a prophecy from the Prophet Muhammad. Following Baba Arslan's death, and in compliance with his testament, Yasawī traveled to Bukhara, where he finalized his spiritual education and mentorship under Khājah Yusuf Hamadani (ibid., vol. 1, p. 18). After the demise of Yusuf Hamadani, Yasawī, together with Khājah Abdullah Barqi, Khājah Hasan Andaqi, and Khājah Abdal-Khaliq Ghijduwani, was designated as one of Hamadani's four appointed deputies. Each of these men was actively involved in mentoring spiritual pupils, while other deputies remained respectfully committed to Hamadani. Upon departing for Turkestan, Khājah Ahmed Yasawī instructed all his colleagues to adhere to the leadership of Khājah Abdal-Khaliq.* (Jami, 1858, p. 429) Historical and literary records mention the khaniqah (Sufi lodge) of Khājah Ahmed in Turkestan, where Shaykh Ali Lala, a prominent Sufi of the period, is reported to have resided for a while (ibid., p. 501).

Yasawī is one of the most famous mystics of Central Asia and the founder of the Yeseviye sect. Yasawī's tomb in Turkestan is a common destination

for spiritual visitors, and the tomb is held in great respect.¹ He is considered one of the most prominent religious figure of the *Kazakh Khanate* and an essential part of the *Khokhand Khanate*², as well as the first mystical poet who, while combining the culture of Sufism with the Turkish language, turned this language into the language of *ṭarīqah* and made it parallel to the Arabic and Persian languages. Yasawī's poems were composed in the national poetic form of the Turks, "*Qushma*" or "*Qushuq*", and their language is in the category of modern Turkish (*Joghatāei*), in which traces of Arabic and Persian are found. The *Divān-e Hekmat* (Book of Wisdom) of Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī includes 134 wisdoms and a hymn with Sufi thoughts taken from the teachings of Khājah Yusuf Hamedāni, which later became more evident in the *Naqshbandiyya* order. In addition to being influenced by Khājah Yusuf Hamedāni, Yasawī "has been influenced by the philosophy of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī and the *Malāmatiyya* of Khorāsān and the *Shī'i* thoughts of East Turkestan, and has influenced later Sufi schools such as *Naqshbandiyya* and *Bektāshī*."³ Some scholars believe that the character whom 'Attār refers to in the *Manṭiq Al-Tayr* (The Conference of the Birds) as "*Pir-e Turkestan*" is Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī:

Pir-e Turkestan announced himself
That I like two things more
One of them is a pied and stepper horse
And the other one is my child
If I find out about the son's death
I donate the horse for this news
Because I see that they are these two things
Like two idols in the sight of a dear soul⁴

The main subject of this research is the analysis of the visible and hidden aspects of Sufism in the personality and works of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī, highlighting its similarities and differences, which are presented in two general headings.

It is worth emphasizing that this study by no means intends to establish a direct line of influence between these two figures. Rather, both Ghazali and Yasawi drew their intellectual and spiritual nourishment from the

¹ Lymer, "Rags and Rock Art: The Landscapes of Holy Site Pilgrimage in the Republic of Kazakhstan", 161.

² Pakatchi, *Sufism in Central Asia*, 541.

³ Makhtumi, "Biography and works of Khājah Aḥmad Yasawī along with the translation of *Divan-e Hekmat*", 8.

⁴ 'Attār, *Manṭiq Al-Tayr*, 348.

same source: the vast ocean of Islam and the profound depths of Islamic Sufism. The parallels in their thought are essentially a natural byproduct of this common heritage. Where their ideas diverge, it is often a matter of their individual interpretations of the mystical path or the specific circumstances of their respective lives. Furthermore, one must consider that their distinct spiritual temperaments, the intellectual makeup of their audiences, and the nature of their personal mystical experiences inevitably gave rise to certain differences in their teachings.

1. Similarities

The similarities between the two mystics are rooted in their attitude towards Sufism and its rituals discussed below.

1.1 The Ascetic Approach to Sufism

If we consider the Sufi sects to fall into two general groups: "One is the group of *ḥāl*⁵ and asceticism (*ẓōḥd*) and austerity and worship and remembrance (*ẓikr*) and thought, and the other is the group of ecstasy and *ḥāl* and dance and *samā'*",⁶ Al-Ghazālī And Yasawī must be categorised in the first group. Of course, a closer look reveals slight differences between the two regarding asceticism, including the implicit acceptance of *Samā'* in *Kimīā-ye Sa'ādat*⁷ and the belief in overt remembrance within the Yeseviye sects.

The method presented by al-Ghazālī and Yasawī regarding their Sufism is based on asceticism (*ẓōḥd*) and piety (*taqwā*). Ascetic Sufism is the oldest form of Islamic Sufism, defined as "removing desire from the object wholly".⁸ In this way, abandoning the soul and the world is the key to reaching God and the Hereafter (*Ākhirah*).

Al-Ghazālī bases religion on four principles from which two must be avoided and two embraced: "Know that the path of the religion is based on the four principles that we have said in the title of being a Muslim: your ego (*nāfī*) and God - the Almighty - and the world and the Hereafter (*Ākhirah*). Furthermore, of these four, there are two to be sought and two to be avoided: avoid yourself and seek God — the Almighty —; avoid the world and seek the Hereafter (*Ākhirah*). Therefore, you should be directed toward God from your ego (*nāfī*) and you should be directed from this

⁵ ḥāl is the spiritual state which a mystic experiences.

⁶ Dinani, *the Book of Wisdom and the Verse of Love*, 89.

⁷ Al-Ghazālī, vol. 1, 473 onwards.

⁸ Talmsani, *interpretation of Manāẓel al-Sā'erīn*, 306.

world toward the Hereafter (*Ākhirah*). Moreover, patience (*ṣabr*), fear (*khanj*), and repentance (*tawba*) are all preconditions, and the friendship of the world is one of the causes of perdition, as we have said regarding its cure, and hostility to and separation from the world is the path of salvation."⁹

The necessity of confronting the self to achieve transcendence is one of Yasawī's core teachings. "Yasawī's followers emphasised the use of mysticism and the need for abstention from worldly pleasures and amusements even more than other Sufi groups in the region:"¹⁰

Servant Ahmed, climbing over mountains of ego,
Came closer to the level of Fanna fi Allah,
Exhausted and burned up with the effort,
In this state I cried and prayed to You.¹¹

He also speaks of renouncing the friendship of the world and choosing the friendship of God: "I forbade the friendship of the world and made the friendship of the truth."¹² Furthermore, he also recommends turning away from the worldly-minded people: "turn away from ill-natured worldly-minded people."¹³ Of course, Yasawī's view in this regard is slightly different from al-Ghazālī; Al-Ghazālī sees the world as consisting of three levels, which can be used as much as necessary for food, clothing, and housing,¹⁴ but at times Yasawī even forbids the Hereafter (*Ākhirah*) along with the world.

Becoming Zakir, in gratitude I discovered God,
Rejected and stamped out benefits of both worlds,¹⁵

The discrepancy between Ghazali and Yasawi can be seen as a result of their contrasting perspectives of the universe and its connection to ultimate truth. In this regard, Yasawi—similar to the ascetics of the early centuries—views the material world as a hindrance to intimacy with God and hence promotes the rejection of earthly luxuries. In contrast, Ghazali espouses a more measured perspective: he contends that asceticism does

⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, Vol. 2, 419.

¹⁰ Olcott, "Sufism in Central Asia", 3.

¹¹ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 47.

¹² (Ibid: 30)

¹³ (Ibid: 18)

¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, vol. 2, 145.

¹⁵ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 33.

not necessitate a complete renunciation of the world, but rather the relinquishment of emotional attachment and internal reliance on it.

Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the influence of Ghazali's academic background and social involvement, in contrast to Yasawi's predominant emphasis on practical Sufism. It is logical to conclude that had Ghazali adopted an ascetic, renunciation-focused variant of Sufism akin to that of Yasawi, he would not have been able to maintain the same degree of intellectual and social engagement. Imam Muhammad Ghazali considered societal participation and active social engagement, when pursued with genuine divine desire, as a manifestation of higher *jihad* and a contribution to humanity.

1.2 The Same Attitude towards *Shari'a*, *Tariqah*, and *Haqiqah*

The basis of al-Ghazālī's and Yasawī's mystical ideas is the effort to bring Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) and mysticism (*irfan*) closer to the *Shari'a*. Accordingly, their Sufism has more of a religious flavour. Dedicating half of *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat* to the themes of worship and transactions makes *Shari'a* one of the main axes of al-Ghazālī's thought, to the extent that he considers following the *Shari'a* to be a prerequisite for happiness (*sa'adat*) and prosperity. Therefore, ignoring worship and transactions is equivalent to death and destruction: "Following the *Shari'a* and adhering to the rules are the necessity of the path to happiness (*sa'adat*), and this is the meaning of devotion. Furthermore, whoever transgresses the limits of the *Shari'a* that are at his disposal will perish, and for this reason, God Almighty said: "And whoever transgresses the limits of God has wronged himself."¹⁶

The *Shari'a* also has a special place for Yasawī, as he considers it a path to the *Tariqah*:

The lover who knows the precepts of Shariat,
Must know the requirements of Tariqat,
Completing the path of Tariqat,
Plunges the lover into the blissful river of
Haqiqat, my friends.¹⁷

Yasawī's description of the *Tariqah* is very telling because it stems from his personal experiences and intuitive observations. It is a magnificent, challenging, and long road filled with many obstacles, where many lovers

¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, Vol. 1, 64-65.

¹⁷ Yasawī, *Divan-e Hekmat*, 75.

have died along the way, so it cannot be traversed without the help of a spiritual guide:

There are many ways and obstacles in the *Ṭarīqah*
You cannot walk there until you make His pure love your profession
You can't visit him by sleeping around the clock
With constant sleeplessness, I saw His beauty
The path of *Tariqat* is excruciating cruel,
Turning so many lovers into sand,
The path of Love holds hardships for all,
Asking only the righteous the way, walked the path,
Yes, I.

The path of *Tariqat* is beautifully wide,
The servant who is honoured close to God,
Not seven pits of Hell can break one spark of His,
O friends, satiated with pure souls, Yes, I.¹⁸

Al-Ghazālī's disgust with the sciences of his time caused him to turn to and experience the *Ṭarīqah*: "Then I knew that this path could not be walked with the help of science. One must forget oneself and endeavour on this path with the help of love. The provision of this way is action only; it is not possible to walk on the path of science, but action is necessary."¹⁹

The result of following the *Shari'ah* and taking a step in the *Ṭarīqah* is to reach the truth: "Therefore, *Shari'ah* is the realm of action for servants, and the truth is God's -Almighty- and His chastity only and it is impossible to stay in *Ḥaqīqah* without *Shari'ah*."²⁰ The description of the *Ḥaqīqah* in Yasawī's language is particularly interesting;

Those who touch the essence of *Haqiqat*,
Are left stunned and burning inside and out,
Tears of blood pour from their eyes,
And these tears a gift I give to you, Yes, I.²¹

In general, it can be said that al-Ghazālī's and Yasawī's Sufism were formed in the context of *Shari'ah*, to the extent that al-Ghazālī considers the deeds, outward and inward states of Sufis to be illuminated by the the light of prophecy²² and he regards "the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) as his

¹⁸ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 39.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 73.

²⁰ Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 499.

²¹ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 39.

²² Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 62.

perfect example and guide"²³ and Yasawī likewise mentions *Shari‘a* as the covenant and path lovers:

The legend of lovers is all in Shariat,
Arif is the corner stone of Tariqat,
Wherever I went, the Desired One was on every lip,
I saw this mystery in heaven, Yes, I.²⁴

1.3 The Same Attitude on Some Sufi Rites

The resemblance between the two mystics reveals significant parallels in their perspectives on several Sufi practices, including remembering, austerity (*riāzat*), and solitude (*ozlat*).

1.3.1 Remembrance

One of the most apparent features of mystics is remembrance, which has a high frequency in the works of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī. Al-Ghazālī considers remembrance to be the cause of closeness to God: "And the Friendship of the Almighty should not prevail over the heart except with knowledge (*ma‘rifā*) and much of remembrance, that whoever loves someone should remember him a lot, and if he remembers him more, he will love him more. Moreover, this is why the revelation came to David (AS): I am your solution, and your business is with me: do not neglect my remembrance even for an hour."²⁵

According to al-Ghazālī, the purpose of remembrance is to make the rememberer (*zākir*) to become annihilated and for the remembered (*mazkur*) to remain: "There is a difference between the one whose heart is fully in love with the remembered and the one who loves remembrance; Rather, it is the perfection that the remembrance and awareness of remembrance be removed from the heart, and the remembered remains only. Furthermore, the principle is that the heart should be emptied of everything but God so that nothing else can be there. Moreover, this is the result of the intense liking (*muhabbat*) called love (*ishq*), and the true lover has all his heart for the beloved, and may he forget His name from the heart because of being occupied with Him fully. Furthermore, when he is so immersed and forgets himself and everything except the Almighty, he reaches the beginning of Sufism, which the Sufis call annihilation and non-existence. That is, everything existing turns into non-existence from

²³ Zarrinkoub, *Escape from school*, 175.

²⁴ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 23.

²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa‘adat*, Vol. 1, 63-64.

His remembrance, and he (*zāker*) becomes non-existent because he has forgotten himself."²⁶

On the other hand, remembrance is one of the most significant rites of the sect that follows Yasawī. This sect "advocated the remembrance of *Jali* (*Jabri*) and for this reason, they have also been called *Alanīyah* or *Jabriyah*."²⁷

One of the famous remembrances of this sect is the "*saw* remembrance", which "is to put two hands on two knees and hold the breath and express *hey* sound and keep the breath away from and doing the same with the back and the head and the back, in the same manner, saying *hey* loudly and continuing to recite in the same way. Just as a carpenter draws his saw on a board, so should the rememberer draw the saw of remembrance on his heart to cleanse and purify his heart with remembrance."²⁸

Yasawī is said to have completed one thousand and one remembrances of God at the age of seven:

At seven arrived to Arystan Bab in Turkestan,

Bowed my head in tears, seeing my state

I started to laugh, In his grace, he taught one thousand and one Zikrs.

Listen to the words of Arystan Bab, Tabarruk²⁹

He believes that whoever considers himself a servant of God will constantly remember Him: "Whoever says that I am a slave, he always remembers God."³⁰ Yasawī asks God to teach him His remembrance: "O God Almighty! Teach me your remembrance."³¹ The remembrance that arises from the soul:

Those performing Zikr 'Hu' day and night without sleeping,

I saw them, befriended by angels, around the Throne.³²

Yasawī is not unaware of false scholars and Sufis either: "The false scholar reads the *Qur'an* but does not act on it."³³ Moreover, questions their ostentatious remembrance:

Whoever bargains with love will be wasted,

Cloaked in light he will launch towards the Lord,

As Manjun whose mind was taken by Leila,

²⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, 255-254.

²⁷ Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, below the entry of Sufism, part two

²⁸ Wali, "Yeseviye is a *Ṭarīqah* from Central Asia", 192.

²⁹ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

³² Ibid., 181.

³³ Ibid.

God knows the Truth in these words.
Servant Hoja Ahmed, releasing the soul accept the path,
Then guide others on the path, Repeating Allah is the path of soul to the Lord,
It is impossible not to sacrifice yourself on this path.³⁴

1.3.2 Austerity and seclusion

Yasawī and al-Ghazālī have the same approach to austerity. The third and fourth sections of *Kimīā-ye Sa'ādat* are about austerity and self-improvement, and Al-Ghazālī presents the method of combating vices in the third section and the method of adorning the soul with the attributes of goodness in the fourth section. In his poems, Yasawī also talks about his austerities: "I endured austerity with difficulty, and I tolerated heart-rending obstacles"³⁵, and he further mentions that reaching a union with God happens if one tolerates the austerity of the way: "the union will not happen if one does not stand difficulties."³⁶

Isolation and separation from people are among the teachings of Sufism to the extent that Najm-e Rāzī lays the foundation of mystical conduct on isolation and separation from people: "Know that the basis of conducting the religion's path and reaching the certainty (yaqīn) is on solitude and seclusion."³⁷ Yasawī, like true Sufis, considers seclusion and escape from people to be a means of salvation:

At forty nine love touched, scorched and seared me,
As it did Manjun, who fled his hearth,
Multiple tests were thrust on me yet patient I remained,
O Lord Almighty, I worship only You.³⁸

It is reported that "Aḥmad Yasawī, when 63 years old, according to tradition, built huts in the corner of his house"³⁹ or based on another narration: "He went to a corner of a well in the *Khānqāh*."⁴⁰ Traces of this event can be found in the *Divān-e Hekmat*:

Almighty Lord decreed with power,
Hearing and heeding, slave Ahmed entered his cell,
At sixty-three, became a true exemplar of the Prophet's way,

³⁴ Ibid., 22.

³⁵ Ibid., 17.

³⁶ Ibid., 31.

³⁷ Rāzī, *Path of God's Bondsmen: From Origin to Return*, 281.

³⁸ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 29.

³⁹ Walī, "Yeseviye is a Ṭarīqah from Central Asia", 166.

⁴⁰ Sanāī, "The Yeseviye Ṭarīqah and its role in the spread of Islam in Central Asia", 88.

Hearing and heeding, slave Ahmed entered his cell.
In life, I died to life, At sixty-three,
I knew, heard and spoke on the Sunnah,
Underground, performed service from the heart,
Hearing and heeding, slave Ahmed entered his cell.⁴¹

With the above explanation, seclusion and isolation from the people are considered one of the traditions of Yasawī Sufism. Al-Ghazālī has also addressed this issue by dedicating one of the ten principles of “Transactions” section to “the etiquette of isolation from people.”⁴² The difference between al-Ghazālī's view and that of Yasawī is that Yasawī endorses seclusion both in word and in deed, while al-Ghazālī adopts a moderate approach and outlines its six benefits as well as six drawbacks: “Know that there is controversy among scholars regarding seclusion and mixing with people and the fact that which is more virtuous... and know that such controversy is also true in the case of marriage, And the truth is that it depends on the features of each person. There is someone who is better off secluding and the other mixing with other people.”⁴³ Thus, the basis of al-Ghazālī's belief in seclusion goes back to the spiritual status of the seeker. Al-Ghazālī's upbringing in society and his academic position seem to play an essential role in shaping his moderate point of view. He considers the first drawback of seclusion to be falling behind in learning and knowledge: “And know that whoever has not learned the knowledge that is obligatory upon him is forbidden to be secluded ... but learning is a great degree of it ... and learning is not in line with seclusion, so learning is more important than seclusion.”⁴⁴

1.3.3 *The Science of Qāl⁴⁵ and the Science of Hāl*

Interestingly, some of the same attitudes between al-Ghazālī and Yasawī have emerged over time, and their attitudes toward the science of *qāl* and the science of *hāl* are among the most prominent.

One of the divisions of human sciences is its division into two general parts: the science of *qāl* or the official knowledge resulting from reason and thought and the science of *hāl* or the true knowledge resulting from discovery and intuition. The formation of the science of *hāl* should be sought in the behaviour and actions of Sufis: “Sufis, like jurists and

⁴¹ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 57.

⁴² See: Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, vol. 1, 434-455.

⁴³ Ibid., 435-436.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 445-446.

⁴⁵ Qāl are the words expressed from a mystic.

ascetics, did not seek a specific science or a specific moral characteristic; Because they were the source of all knowledge and had a set of *abvāl*⁴⁶ For this reason, in the world of mysticism, a science is revealed that "there is a meaning which appears in the heart without any effect on the receiver. Furthermore, there is no joy or sadness or *qabẓ* or *bast* or enthusiasm or awe or movement out of it."⁴⁷

In *Kīmīā-ye Sa'adat* and the *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, there are references to the science of *qāl* and the science of *ḥāl*. Yasawī believes that God has not considered the science of *ḥāl* to be suitable for the people who like the science of *qāl*. "God did not consider the science of *ḥāl* to be appropriate for the people of the science of *qāl*"⁴⁸ Therefore, he longs for a circle of empathetic friends with whom to speak about the science of *ḥāl*:

Where merciful men gather,
There I wish to proclaim 'Ilm Hal',
Backing their Subhat,
Wishing to tack onto them.⁴⁹

Sometimes he had no other choice but to turn to the science of *qāl* and refer to such lofty concepts in that language so that the general public could also benefit:

Mansur replied, "Ana al Haqq"- may all men be truthful,
Mulla said "That is not so", hiding anger in his heart.
"Do not say, Mansur, Ana al Haqq.
As written in the Qur'an,
You become an unbeliever".

The crowd rose up and killed him.

Mullahs comprehended not the meaning of Ana al Haqq,
The crowd live the outer and are denied the inner meaning.⁵⁰

The study of the science of *qāl* and the science of *ḥāl* in al-Ghazālī's life is particularly striking because "al-Ghazālī's Sufism, which in practice was the source of a great change in his life, was entirely due to his philosophical thinking and thinking about the value and limits of science."⁵¹ He himself reports on his forty years of research in the religious sciences: "Know that this person (Al-Ghazālī) ... dived in the sea of religious sciences for forty

⁴⁶ Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-taṣawwuf*, 20.

⁴⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *The Treatise of al-Qushayrī*, 92.

⁴⁸ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 52.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁵¹ Zarrinkoub, *Escape from School*, 285.

years until he reached the point where his words were greater than the understanding of the people of the age."⁵² After that, he turned to the science of *ḥāl*: "Finally, I knew that if there is a truth, it is in Sufism only. The lamp of Sufism receives light from the lantern of prophecy, and the enlightenment of hearts is not possible except through this light. Such truths were discovered to me that could not be found except through *ḥāl*. I walked a path that begins with the purification of the heart and ends with the annihilation in God."⁵³

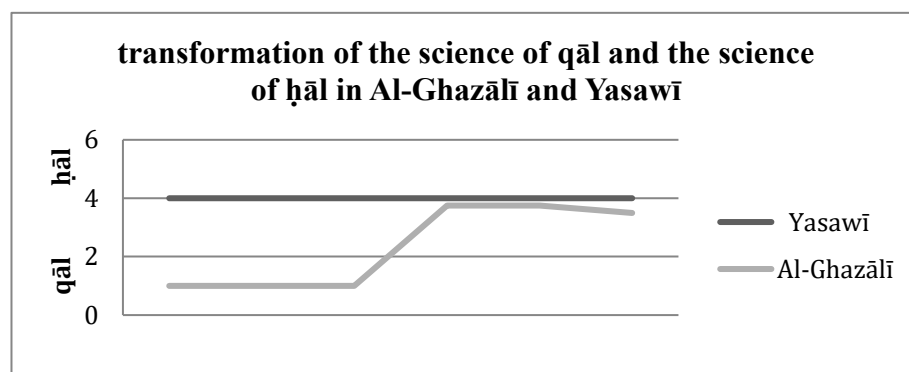
It appears that the primary catalyst for Ghazali's shift from *'ilm al-qal* (formal/scholastic knowledge) to *'ilm al-bal* (experiential/mystical knowledge) was his forty-year immersion in the former. He eventually reached a breaking point, realizing that human reason is inherently limited to the realm of the relative and remains incapable of grasping absolute, infinite truths. This realization precipitated a profound existential crisis and a period of deep skepticism, leading him to doubt even the most fundamental axioms of mathematics and sensory perception. In an attempt to resolve this inner conflict, he gradually turned toward Sufism, seeking a type of certainty rooted in *dhawq*—intuitive 'tasting'—which transcends the constraints of logic.

This fundamental departure serves as one of the key distinctions between Ghazali and Yasawī, a contrast clearly manifested in their respective writings. While Ghazali's *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat* leans more toward religious and ethical discourse than strictly mystical instruction, Yasawī's *Diwan-e Hekmat* is entirely saturated with the immediate experience of the mystic.

If we want to present a diagram illustrating the transformation of the science of *qal* and the science of *ḥāl* in the life and character of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī, it would be as follows:

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 4.

⁵³ Homaei, *Ghazālī Nāmah*, 386.



It can be seen that Yasawī follows a consistent trajectory in the path of science, and al-Ghazālī, despite not paying attention to this science until middle age, eventually turns toward it and joins the mystics.

2. Differences

The main difference between Al-Ghazālī and Yasawī is the type of attitude towards some mystical categories and the language they have used in their works.

2.1 Different Attitudes to Some Sufi Rites

A study of the works of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī shows that their attitudes toward "annihilation and observation (*mushābedāt*)" and "love" were not the same. The main reason for this difference can be found in their distinct practical approaches to asceticism and Sufism in their lives.

2.2.1 Annihilation (*fanā'*) and Observations (*mushābedāt*)

The topic of annihilation is not prominently discussed in *Kīmīā-ye Sa'ādat*, and al-Ghazālī only mentions the issue of annihilation only in relation to remembrance.⁵⁴ He also refers to natural death in the fourth section of *Kīmīā-ye Sa'ādat*⁵⁵, which is distinct from Sufi death. He also alludes to *fanā'* in his discussion of the perfection of *tawḥīd*, according to which, at this stage, the Sufi "sees nothing but the One; he perceives all as that One, recognizes only the One, and through this mode of witnessing, no trace of multiplicity remains" (ibid., p. 531).

In the *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, Yasawī mentions his annihilation at the age of twenty-two:

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīya-ye Sa'ādat*, vol. 2, 255.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 613-638.

At twenty-two I merged with God,
For those who suffered most I healed,
Both lovers false and true, I witnessed all,
Thus I pray to the Divine, Yes, I.⁵⁶
And describes his annihilation in such sentences:

At twenty three, my friends,
Mere pretence of patience and lip service God I gave,
What shall I do, as Judgment Day will find me lost?
Thus I pray to the Divine, Yes, I.⁵⁷

Following this approach regarding annihilation, there are signs of mystical observations in the mystical way of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī. Observation and intuition have been defined as the perception of truth in all things, and "when the seeker reaches this position, he constantly observes the unseen light and effects of observation."⁵⁸ *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error) talks about seeing the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hearing their words in a dream and benefiting from them spiritually: "And from the beginning of the conduct (*sulūk*), observations (*mushahadat*) and revelations (*mukashafāt*) begin until they see in their awakening the angels and the spirits of the prophets, and hear their voices. After that, the [seeker's] state of seeing faces and images rises to such an extent that [the description of its howness] does not fit into the speech, and no speaker can interpret it unless his words have a clear error."⁵⁹ These observations and revelations are also manifested in Yasawī's wisdoms:

At sixteen was gifted communing the el- Arweh,
With a cry of "To you be Tabbaruk," Adam appeared,
Saying "My child" as he embraced and indulged me,
At seventeen I was in Turkestan, Yes, I.⁶⁰

Or:

The spirit of Haqq Mustafa visited, I became Imam,
My servants were angels in my cell,
I cried a lot then Haqq Mustafa rewarded me,
Descending, I grieved, oh Mustafa, Yes, I.⁶¹

2.1.1.2 Love

⁵⁶ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 26.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Wā' ez Kāshifi, *Lobb-e Lobāb-e Masnavī*, 393.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, 63.

⁶⁰ Yasawī, *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, 25.

⁶¹ Ibid., 30.

Love (*ishq*) has been defined as a level beyond liking (*muhabbat*): "When liking (*muhabbat*) reaches its zenith, it is called love (*ishq*): love is excessive liking, and love is more special than liking because all love is liking, but not all liking is love."⁶² Until the fifth century, in the works of Sufis, there was more discussion over liking than loving. Al-ghazālī, in the ninth principle of *munjiāt* of *Kimīya-ye Sa'adat*, mentions "liking", and with this explanation that what the seeker achieves is the fruit or obedience of God Almighty, Such friendship is considered as the highest *maqām*, or even the goal of all *maqāms*.⁶³ He distinguishes between love and liking: Friendship means the desire of temper for something pleasant. Sometimes that desire is strong, and that is called love."⁶⁴ Whenever encountered in Al-Ghazālī's works, "the discussions of love in these sources always emphasise worship (*'ibādah*)."⁶⁵

On the other hand, the importance of love for Yasawī is found in nearly every wisdom contained in his *Divān-e Hekmat*:

When I speak the mysteries of Love to the lover,
He gets it and is eager to leave, without regret, my friends,
Seeking solitary solace in the desert,
Renouncing ties to family and friends, my friends.
What can lovers do when the heart pines for Love?
Strangers laugh and throw stones,
Calling me crazy, a vagabond, throwing stones in my face,
In gratitude I praise Allah, my friends.
Without Love there can be no spirit or faith,
Rasulallah spoke, so treasure its meaning,
Where is the listener aware of what I say?
Speaking to ignorance hardens their attitude, my friends.
The pearl of Love is hidden in unfathomable oceans,
He who spares nothing to seek His presence, becomes His lover,
Those indifferent on the way, imagining they are in love,
Will sell their belief for pennies, my friends.⁶⁶

The reason behind this difference in approach is that love, for Ghazali, is a gentle inclination of the heart—an intimate, inward affection that always develops within the boundaries of proper religious conduct. In *Kimīya-yi*

⁶² Suhrawardī, *Collection of Persian works of Sheikh Isbraq*, 268.

⁶³ Al-Ghazālī, *Kimīya-ye Sa'adat*, vol. 2, 569.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 572.

⁶⁵ Lumbard, *Ahmad al-Ghazali, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love*, 141.

⁶⁶ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 72.

Sa'adat, Ghazali appears less as a mystic overwhelmed by spiritual ecstasy and more as a religious and ethical scholar, one who cannot fully accommodate the intensity and rapture of mystical love, nor step beyond the limits of reason and sacred law.

Yasawi, by contrast, understands the Divine through a kind of direct tasting—*dhawq*, ecstasy, and unmediated spiritual vision. This mode of knowing carries him into a realm far wider than the confines of rational thought, a realm whose essence is love itself. Perhaps for this very reason, Mansur Hallaj, the emblem of uncompromising mystical love, occupies a prominent place in his works, where the story of Hallaj's execution is invoked repeatedly:

Mansur epitomised total Love - 'I am Truth',
Jibrail accompanied him and said - "I am Truth,"
Jibrail came and guided him on the path,
Hanging on the gallows, he saw the Face of God,
Yes, I.⁶⁷

With this description, it is clear that al-Ghazālī was satisfied with a more superficial engagement with love and did not allow it to permeate his words and writings as Yasawī did.

2.1.2. Differences in Practical Spiritual Discipline

A closer examination of the ideas and spiritual practices of these two eminent figures also reveals certain distinctions in their approach to ascetic discipline. Among these are Ghazali's implicit approval of *samā'* (spiritual audition) in *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat* (Ghazali, 1390/2011, vol. 1, p. 473 ff.) and the Yasawiyya order's emphasis on *dhikr-i jalī* (audible remembrance of God). Some Sufis defended the practice of *samā'* through particular arguments, and Ghazali was among those who accepted such reasoning. One of the more striking arguments is attributed to Bākhazrī, who writes: "For those who experience *wajd* (ecstatic spiritual states), *samā'* can serve in place of food and becomes its substitute, providing them with the same strength that food ordinarily gives. There are devotees who break their fast only once every two or three days. When their souls grow hungry for nourishment, if they hear *samā'* they fall into ecstasy. For them, it becomes the equivalent of food, drawing strength from that audition and paying little heed to bodily nourishment. Their hearts, filled with the joy of that

⁶⁷ Ibid., 35.

spiritual discovery, take flight toward the Truth, and with this sustenance and strength they are able to carry on for several more days.” (Bākhazrī, 1383/2004, p. 185) The practice of dhikr-i jalī has often been regarded as appropriate for the initial stages of the spiritual path (see: Hamadani, 1370/1991, p. 118). It appears that the intellectual and spiritual level of Khoja Ahmed Yasawī’s disciples played a direct role in adopting this vocal form of remembrance. At the same time, some Sufi sources offer explanations for the perceived limitations of dhikr-i khafī (silent remembrance). As Qushayri remarks: “It has been said that silent remembrance cannot be carried by the angels to the heavens, for they have no awareness of it; it remains a secret between the servant and God Most High.” (Qushayri, 1374/1995, p. 353)

2.1.3 The Used Language in the Works

Because Yasawī’s wisdoms were written to teach Sufism to his followers, they are expressed in the simplest form and do not employ elaborate verbal or spiritual devices. For this reason, what has made these wisdoms enduring—and perhaps richer—is the sanctity of their words and the religiosity of their subjects, rather than their artistic value or the strength of Yasawī’s language.

Al-Ghazālī’s goal in writing *Kimīā-ye Sa’adat* is close to that of Yasawī’s, but *Kimīā-ye Sa’adat* focuses more on religion and ethics than on mysticism. The style of this book is similar to the mystical prose of its predecessors, such as *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, which is based on “brevity and not using synonymous words and sentences and bringing *Qur’anic* arguments and not bringing Arabic and Persian poetry for evidence and allegory and observing the principles of Persian sentence structure”⁶⁸. Of course, it should not be forgotten that due to the purely mystical nature of Yasawī’s wisdom, its language also tends towards *Shatḥ* expression; however, the superficiality of language is more tangible than its *Shatḥ*:

Beholding the Face of God, my spirit flew to Heaven,
Like Moses witnessed, my body on fire,
Like Manjun, who fled his native home,
Descending, I grieved, oh Mustafa, Yes, I.⁶⁹

Or:

At six, did not hang around, avoided people,

⁶⁸ Bahār, *Stylistics*, vol. 2, 174.

⁶⁹ Yasawī, *Divān-e Hekmat*, 31.

Raised myself to heaven where angels gave their lessons,
Broke earthly ties, cut all connections.
So it was at sixty-three I went underground.⁷⁰

In a broader comparative context, Ghazali is most accurately regarded as a prototypical scholastic of his era. This shapes the entire educational framework of his *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat*, wherein he utilizes a strict academic register to classify religious and ethical themes for his audience. Yasawi, however, diverges by adapting his wisdom for the layperson, endeavoring to render profound mystical truths into an accessible language to ensure they connect with a broader audience. Ultimately, his work prioritizes the expression of personal, visionary experience over logical arguments, necessitating the language of intuition rather than syllogistic reasoning.

Conclusion

The emergence of al-Ghazālī and Yasawī occurred in an age when Sufism and mysticism followed a common path, and there was no clear boundary between them. On this basis, the common ground between the two can be found in their mystical asceticism, which sought to bring mysticism and Sufism closer to Islam. The geographical context of the emergence of these two figures is also worth considering, which shows that the people of Khorāsān and Transoxiana (*Mā Warā' an-Nahr*) at that time were spiritually prepared to embrace the teachings of Sufism.

The results of the study and comparison of al-Ghazālī's and Yasawī's mystical ideas based on *Kīmīā-ye Sa'adat* and the *Divān-e Ḥekmat*, are summarized as follows:

- A. Al-Ghazālī and Yasawī's *Ṭarīqah* is an ascetic one, with the difference that Al-Ghazālī believes that the world can be used as much as necessary, but Yasawī advises renouncing the world entirely - and sometimes Hereafter (*Ākhirah*).
- B. Al-Ghazālī and Yasawī regarded the Shari'ah as the basis of their mystical ideas and tried to bring Sufism and Mysticism closer to it.
- C. Al-Ghazālī's transformation moves from the science of *qāl* to the science of *ḥāl*, while Yasawī possesses the science of *ḥāl*, which he attained through the *Ṭarīqah*.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

D. Yasawī affirms seclusion by word and deed, but the basis of al-Ghazālī's belief in seclusion depends on the seeker's status. On this basis, being in the midst of people is at times preferred to seclusion.

E. The Divān-e Ḥekmat is full of mystical experiences, but Kīmīā-ye sa'ādat deals primarily with religion and ethics than mysticism.

F. Al-Ghazālī is content with a superficial treatment of love in Kīmīā-ye sa'ādat, whereas it constitutes one of the central principles of the Divān-e Ḥekmat of Yasawī.

G. The theme of annihilation is one of the central topics in the Divān-e Ḥekmat, whereas it is less prominently addressed in Kīmīā-ye Sa'ādat.

H. Al-Ghazālī's mystical observations and revelations are theoretical in nature, but those of Yasawī stem from his personal experiences.

I. The language of the two books is simple, unpretentious, and devoid of verbal and spiritual devices due to their educational purposes. However, in some cases, the language of the Divān-e Ḥekmat tends toward shatḥ.

The last point is that if in some of the comparisons of this research, al-Ghazālī appears overshadowed by Yasawī, the main reason is that al-Ghazālī had mastery over most of the sciences of his time, whereas Yasawī focused solely on practical Sufism.

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