

Ibn Taymiyah's *al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyīn*: An Assessment

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The manuscripts of Ibn Taymiyah's *al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyīn* are found in various libraries of the world. The most ancient manuscript of this book is, however, found in the *Kutb Khānah Asfiyah*, Hyderabad, which was scribed by one of the disciples of Ibn Taymiyah Mohammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Hasan al-Shafi'i. After making calligraphy of this manuscript, he presented it to the teacher for correction. Hence, we find that Ibn Taymiyah has made several revisions and corrections to it.

Maulana Sayyid Suliman Nadvi has written an introduction to it when it was published in the form of a book. He gives a detailed discussion about the introduction of Greek sciences among the Muslims in it. Ibn Taymiyah differed with the Greeks on several subjects like, definition, species, *fasl*, proposition, effect etc., and has presented views which are very akin to those of modern philosophers of Europe. He wrote two books in condemnation of Greek sciences, one is *al-'Aql wa al-Naql* and the second is *al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyīn*.

This book was received with great fervour by all succeeding generations and academics. Sayuti has made an abridgment of this book, entitled *Jahd al-Qarrehah fi Tajri-al-Nasihah*. This book was published from Egypt few years back. The author of *Kashf al-Zanun* has prominently made a mention of this book.

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Greek sciences evolved under the influence of polytheism and flourished in the lap of Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, polytheistic and materialistic elements were attached to it, which confronted with various Islamic beliefs, and gave rise to such discussions as problem of existence and essence, pre-destination and freedom of will etc. The discussions about the real meanings of the Tawhid took place. On the other hand there were several such issues which were neglected by the Qur'an for being futile, hence the Quran was silent about these matters or at the most alluded to them briefly. For example, the revolutions of the heavens, reality of revelation, quiddity of Angels, etc. were some of such subjects on which we don't find detailed discussions in the Qur'an. But under the influence of Greek philosophy, discussions became rampant on these issues. Though the discussions on these subjects had initially started during the period of the Prophet (ﷺ) itself, but the Muslims were involved in great expeditions and therefore did not pay much heed to these issues. But with their decadence such theories started making their influence to the Muslims. The *fuqaha* (jurists) tried to avoid all such discussions. For example, when Imam Malik was asked about *astawa 'ala-al arsh*, he replied:

Istawa (God's settling on the Throne) is well known, its conditions is not well known. But belief in it is obligatory, and questioning about it is an act of innovation.¹

Thus upto the middle of second century, A.H., two groups of the people i.e. the traditionalists and the rationalists emerged, the latter, however, were dubbed as atheists and the *zinādiqah* by the former and the former, in turn were abused by the latter as ignorants about rational matters. But at that time a group well-equipped with rational tools was direly needed to combat the rationalists and pay them in their own coin. This group came to the fore from among the *mutakkalimīn* (even we can include *Ikhwān al-Safa* in this group) Ghazzali, one of the prominent philosophers of Islam and a towering personality from the scholastic theologians, smashed the vanity of the Greek philosophers and the Batiniyyah. Thought he

attacked the Greek philosophical principles, yet he mixed several of their principles with the Islamic ones and made these at par with the latter. Before Ghazzali, the Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*) were not according a wide acceptance to these philosophical principles in any case. But with the coming of Ghazzali, much emphasis was laid on the study of those sciences of the Greeks by the Muslim even. Ibn Taimiyyah says, for example:

No one among the theoreticians from among the Muslims attracted towards the ways of the Greece. Even the Mutazilites, 'Asharites, Karamites, and the Shi'ites and all others used to dislike it, by explaining its corruption and futility. But Abn Hamid Ghazzali is the first person to have mixed their logic with the principles of the Muslims"²

Ghazzali considers mastery over Greek logic a prerequisite for getting command over religious sciences. He writes in the prelude to *Al-Mustasfa*:

To excel in religious knowledge, one must be fully acquainted with the Greek logic³

Therefore, we find that the Greek sciences couldn't be subjected to the condemnation as would have been befitting to these for their inherent corruption and damage the Islamic fabric of teachings. Even Ghazzali, couldn't perform this uphill task. The scholastic theologians followed Ghazzali for years together. However, after Ghazzali we find the name of Abul Barakat Baghdadi, who went through Aristotle's books directly, and pointed out their technical shortcomings thereto. But this was too an insignificant effort in comparison to the spread of the Greek sciences, in order to arrest the innovative and heretical influences of these sciences.

Ibn Taymiyah seems the first Muslim thinker who subjected the Greek

sciences to a critical scrutiny. He came out with his original and creative conclusions about the subject. He studied the Greek sciences directly from Aristotle's works and reached the conclusion that even the books of philosophy which seem ostensibly harmless from religious point of view, or the seemingly neutral principles of the Greek philosophy are fraught with numerous mistakes and flaws. Therefore, he attacked their basic positions and principal propositions. Moreover, he separated Islamic propositions which were mixed up and reconciled with the Greek sciences thereto, which in the opinion of Ibn Taymiyah, was a case of combining together of polytheism and monotheism. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyah also makes mention of the atmosphere in which Greek sciences flourished. He strongly opposed the trend of comparing the sayings of the philosophers to the teachings of the Prophets. He even objected to the practice of placing these two side by side, as was generally done by the philosophers. His criticism was not confined only to the negation of the Greek philosophical and logical principles, but tried to present a paradigm of rational principles and argumentative demonstrations in contrast to the former which led once again to the rejuvenation of the Qur'anic way of thinking.⁴

We can say that far from being negative, Ibn Taymiyah's attitude towards logic was reasonably sensible as well as constructive. He agreed that a part of it was not only correct and useful but even instinctive to a man endowed with reason. At the same time he contended that it also included fallacious arguments which were not needed at all.⁵

He argued with severity against the syllogism of Aristotle that proceeded from general principles, but he preferred the inductive method of reasoning which he held to be an easier and surer way of attaining certain knowledge.⁶

In the introduction to the *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyyīn*, Sulaiman Nadwi writes:

If you go through this book carefully you would find several discussions on philosophical and logical issues which have been touched upon for the first time by Ibn Taymiyah. Some of his views

are in harmony with the analysis of the reasoning process put forth by the Western philosophers. To give an example all the earlier Muslim philosophers had followed the Aristotelian view that the universe forms the basis of knowledge, and for that reason, they have all disregarded the particulars and inductive process of reasoning. Certain Western writers claim that Mill was the first philosopher today the foundation of modern logic by formulating the principles of inductive reasoning (although Ibn Taymiyah had worked these out hundred of years before Mill).

The way Ibn Taymiyah analysed and amplified the intricate problems relating to denotation of terms, genus, division, causal connection, syllogism, inductive process and a priori reasoning and proved the validity of the views set forth by him bear witness to the originality. So far as the theory of casual connection is concerned, he brought out exactly the same doctrine as propounded later on by Hume in his writings. As everybody knows that doctrine of causation is one of those difficult problems of philosophers which has made many a mind to falter from the right path and led them to scepticism and agnosticism. This book contains a number of enquiries which speak volumes of Ibn Taymiyah's intellectual gifts and literary attainments.⁷

Suliman Nadvi, while highlighting the importance of *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyin*, says:

He (Ibn Taymiyyah) has written a whole volume *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyin* in refutation of Aristotle's system of logic. A perusal of the book gives the reader the impression that in reality he was the first founder of Mill's system of logic and the forerunner of Hume's philosophy.⁸

He says further:

Ibn Taimiyah's *al-Radd 'ala al-Mantaqiyyīn* deserves full attention of all lovers of Islamic Sciences. It is worthy of publication when the book comes to be translated into European language, the world will clearly realise that research of the Muslims was not simply "yoked to Aristotles chariot, but that has paused at his fountain merely to quench their thirst on the way to the ultimate goal of truth.⁹

While introducing the Greek logic and its scope, Ibn Taimiyah says:

These scholars claim that logic constitutes the criterion of discursive knowledge which saves one from committing mistakes in the same way as the rules of meter and rhyme helps in lyrical composition or the etymology and syntax in the learning of a language or else mechanical instruments in asserting the hours of the day. But this is not correct, for, the knowledge is achieved through perception and rational faculty endowed to human beings by God. Its acquisition does not depend on the rules formulated by another person. It might be necessary to imitate the Arabs for learning Arabic language for the simple reason that it is the dialect of a nation which has to be heard and copied, but that cannot be true of discursive knowledge.¹⁰

But Ibn Taymiyah does not accept this contention of the philosophers and says:

The people before the inception of Greek logic possessed knowledge about the reality of things; likewise there have been

nations after it which have endeavoured to reach the truth of the matter without taking its help. Among every nation one can find sages who reach the core of realities without learning Aristotelian logic. A little reflection by these people would convince them that they attained the knowledge possessed by them without recourse to this man-made science.¹¹

He does not agree with the view that logic is a useful subject, which is very beneficial for making one's point of view well demonstrated. According to him the endeavour of the logicians amounted to mere "wastage of time and energy, and unnecessary mental exercise and bragging which led people to useless disputation."¹² Even the logicians too often become "incapable of expressing their ideas freely. It bridles their tongue and pen by restraining them from exercising their minds independently."¹³

In *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyyin*, we find that Ibn Taymiyah holds that the logicians have based their argumentation on mediate (*nazari*) and immediate (*ghair badhihi*) principles and propositions and then attempted to reach immediate perceptions (*badhiyat*) and observations (*mushahidat*).

But this method, according to Ibn Taymiyah, is unnatural and futile. Because mediate (*nazari*) principles themselves are dependent on details, how can a rational and argumentational system be established on their basis and how a common man can avail this principle.

According to Ibn Taymiyah, in contradiction to it; the Qur'an bases its argumentation on the immediate (*badhiyat*) and observations (*musahidat*) and then argues on the validity of mediate (*nazari*) and immediate (*ghair badhihi*) matters. This method seems natural and easy to be followed and every person, common and elite can avail of it equally.

al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyyin consists of four subjects and there are subsections in each chapter.

In the first discussion the logician's theory that immediate concepts (*ghair*

badihi) can't be known without a definition has been illustrated. In the second discussion it has been stated that definition (*ḥadd*) will not provide us with the concepts of things. In the third discussion this argument has been rejected that judgements (*tasdiqāt*) can't be known without syllogism (*qiyās*). In the third discussion the logician's theory that syllogism (*qiyās*) provides knowledge of judgements (*tasdiqāt*) has been rejected.

In the introduction to the book Ibn Taymiyah has expressed his views and scholarly experiments relating to the principles and propositions (*usūl wa musallamāt*) of the logicians and the crux of which is as follows:

I used to think always that an intelligent man does not need Greek logic, and a dull man and unintelligible person cannot avail it. But I used to cherish the belief from very beginning that the propositions (*qazaya*) of logic are correct. But after sometime, I realised that even in the proposition of logic, there are mistakes and flaws; and I used to note down these points.¹⁴

Ibn Taymiyah then gives the resume of the logical discussions. Here he writes:

The logicians start their discussions with the definition (*ḥadd*) and its various forms of demonstrative syllogisms (*qiyās-i-burhāni*) and its various forms. They say knowledge either consists of concept (*tasawwur*) or judgement (*taṣḍīq*), and each of these will either be immediate (*badihi*) or mediate (*nazari*); because all knowledge cannot be immediate (*badihi*) and mediate (*nazari*) at one and the same time, as it will lead to a continuous process of premises and conclusions. Therefore, the concepts (*tasawwur*) and judgements (*tasdiqāt*); which are immediate (*nazari*), need some cause and means to be reached at, and immediate concept will be rendered comprehensible by a

means of definition (*ḥadd*) by the logicians, while as the mediate judgement (*tasdiq-i-nazari*) is known by way of syllogism (*qiyas*).

Ibn Taimiyyah explains definition (*ḥadd*) and its various kinds and the five universal principles while explaining the different forms of definition by their help and also provided details about the proposition, which constitute syllogism (*qiyās*). Then there is a separate discussion on each topic of the book.

Coming to the first discussion, we find that it is related to the negative aspects of the definitions and concepts i.e. the mediate (*ghair badihi*) concepts cannot be known, according to Ibn Taymiyah, without a definition. He puts forth eleven arguments in this regard:

(1) Any proposition (*qaziya*) whether negative (*salabi*) or positive (*iejabi*) if not immediate (*badihi*), needs an argument and demonstration (*dalil wa burhān*), especially negative propositions warrant an argument in their favour, because to say anything about it without an argument, is to say something without knowledge. Therefore, the basic principles of the logicians is:

The mediate (*ghair badihi*) concepts cannot be acquired without a definition."¹⁵

The negative proposition (*qaziya sallabi*) is mediate (*ghair badihi*), but the logicians have not provided any argument for this negative principle. It means when their basic principle is without a demonstration and argument then how can science of logic become a means and a way to science and knowledge. Though the logicians claim:

"That logic is a science well-defined to safeguard human mind from committing the mistakes and errors relating to the thinking processes (of a man)"¹⁶

But according to Ibn Taymiyah, these all principles of the logicians are rooted in conjecture and figment of human imagination, which has nothing to do with demonstration or knowledge.¹⁷

2. According to Ibn Taymiyah whatever the groups of people who are found in the world, whether scholars, businessmen or architects, all have devised certain principles and rules in accordance with the requirements of their respective professions and assignments. They have learnt these by their experiences and dealings and avail these in performance of their respective duties. We know that none among them requires logic in the technical sense of the word, neither its expertise nor its principles and branches.

Moreover, the renowned erudite scholars of Fiqh, Hadith, and other stalwarts who have displayed extraordinary excellence in their fields of specialization were hardly conversant with logic or its alphabets. On the other hand, they were acquainted with the individual concepts of their subjects and the judgement (*tasdiqāt*) fully. But they never felt any need for logical definitions, its conditions or implications. It means, in other words that actually no section of people need logical principles in their scholarly enterprises. They are rather able to acquaint themselves with the singular and complicated processes of knowledge and information which relate to the specific nature of their jobs and arts in order to perform their activities properly and effectively.

3. The claim of the logicians that nothing can be known without definition seems technically amendable to several criticisms. For example, the logicians have provided with definitions (*ḥadd*) of various things, but there is a great difference and contradictions too. Man has been defined as speaking animal (*ḥaywān-i nātiq*), but this view can be attacked on several grounds. In the same way the definitions which were given about noun by the logicians, have also been made target of various objections. Ibn Taymiyah says that it was under the spell of the Greek sciences that the latter jurists, physicians, grammarians and other people

belonging to various other disciplines, were caught in the cobweb of contradictions when they tried to give definitions about their respective subjects. "If the concept of things depended on definition (*hadd*), in that case it will amount to the claim that so far man has not gained any right concept of anything (as nothing has been defined properly so far)."¹⁸

Since judgement (*tasdiq*) depends on concept (*tasawwur*), therefore when we don't have knowledge of simple (*mufradāt*), then how can we have knowledge of complex ones. Since whole knowledge of man depends on *tasawwur* and *tasdiq*, it amounts to be saying that if the statements of the logicians are accepted in this case, then human beings have not gained any true knowledge of anything so far and nor can they get acquaintance with the ways and means of knowledge. In that case, it will lead to a great sophistry in the view of Ibn Taymiyah. "This is the great sophistry (we are led to by) the logicians".¹⁹

4. From among the existents, the things about which we can have a concept, are of two varieties, either these will be conceived with the external senses, for example, taste, colour, air etc. or internal senses, in this all the internal sensations (*ahsasāt*) are included e.g. hunger, satiety, love, hatred, happiness, grief, knowledge and ignorance etc. etc. Sometimes man conceives these matters in a clear and explicit manner and sometimes freely, but he never needs any logical definition, as these concepts evade definitions. The logicians make some positive assertions i.e. that through definition (*ḥadd*), we have the knowledge of concepts (*tasawwurat*). But Ibn Taymiyah has condemned this positive assertion even and discussed this matter extensively.

He discussed the views and methods of the *mutakallimūn* of Islam and the logicians in about twenty pages of the book. Here the quote from a passage from Ghazzali's book *Miyār al-Ilm* and rejects it. He criticises Ghazzali from the logical point of view also on account of this quoted passage. In this discussion an important dimension about the *Shari'ah hadūd* finds a place.

According to him the definition (*ḥadd*) can give some benefit in approaching the defined in order to facilitate the differentiation between it and the other as the

name (*ism*) facilitates the differentiation of the named (*mussama*). This is really the view point of all Islamic scholars (*'ulamā*) and scholastic theologian (*mutakalimīn*). For example, Abul Hasan al-Ashari, Qazi Abu Baker, Ibn Foral Qazi Abu Yaala and Imam al-Harmayu hold it. Even there is no difference of opinion on this matter the Mutazilites and Shiites as all of them hold that 'the reality of anything and its definition is the name of the characteristic which differentiates it from others'.²²

Ghazzali, who accepted the Greek principles in this regard, couldn't explain logical definition (*mantaq-i ḥadd*) and had to confess at the end:

It is beyond the competence of the human beings to recognise the reality of things outside definition (*ḥadd*). Though in rare cases some people may understand and know the reality of anything sometimes²¹

Even the four specific conditions (*ḥadud*) can't be comprehended by human mind easily, which are produced by the essential and necessary differentiation of genus (*jins*) and differentia (*farq*). He had to himself accept at the end that "when its explanation was found difficult, the *mutakalimūn* confined their attention to differentiation or specification (*tamiz*), i.e. they said that definition (*ḥadd*) is a complete and comprehensive term which creates a differentiation (*tamīz*)".²²

The third discussion of *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyyīn* pertains to judgment and syllogism (*qiyās*). There we find that the discussion revolves round the two aspects negative and positive. In the negative aspect of this discussion he rejects the principle of the logician that "the knowledge of any judgement or compound proposition is not possible without syllogism".²³

The discussion is spread over about 150 pages and covers even the other Islamic themes and their Quranic methodology of argumentation. He criticise in this connection Ibn Sina and holds that whatever Ibn Sina has discussed about

theology metaphysics (*Ilahiyāt*), Day of Judgement (*Ma'ad*) and *Shari'ah*. The source of it all is found in the teaching of the Batiniyyah and the Ismailis. Therefore, it was very natural according to Ibn Taymiyah that Ibn Sina committed blunders and mistakes while discussing such matters. He discussed, in this way, the logician's principles in detail and claimed that the corroborative reports and experiments can't become evidence (*hujjah*) for others.

According to Ibn Taymiyah the information received from the corroborative reports (*mutawātarāt*) and experiences (*tajrubāt*) are not confined to only the people who have acquired these but the other people also benefit from their utilitarian and informative aspects and share the benefits also. In this case the claim of the logicians that all the people equally share sensible information (*hisiyati Maalumāt*) is a mere sophistry and also their assertion that the informations received from the collaborative reports and experiences are limited in their benefit to the specific persons only.

Here it seems very pertinent to mention that as there are ways and means to know sensibles in the same way there are methods for ascertaining the corroborative reports and experiments and when these methods are used, such results and consequences will naturally ensue, which are very beneficial for our lives. After discussing this issue from a realistic point of view, Ibn Taymiyah elaborates it from the religious angle as well. He says that "to deny a corroborative report (*tawātur*) amounts to an act of blasphemy and atheism and it is the basis of infidelity rather."²⁴ The reason, perhaps, for this claim of Ibn Taymiyah seems to be the problem of miracles which are attributed to the Prophets or their teachings, which are still there in the world and these are dependent on the corroborative reportage (*tawatur*) and narrations, which in other words is tantamount to denouncing all religious knowledge if these are denied or not considered trustworthy.

After this Ibn Taymiyah has discussed the polytheistic ideas of the Greek philosophers. He starts here his discussion by the following statement.

The polytheism of the philosophers is worse than the polytheism of Arabs of the age of ignorance (*Jahiliyah*).²⁵

Because at least the generality of the pagans accept that the universe has a Creator and by His command and pleasure, the important affairs of the universe are going on. They also accept that nothing or no one from His creatures is His equivalent and no creature is eternal. They don't worship idols considering them as God, but under the consideration or expectation that they will become a means of intercession and nearness to God. The Arab pagans, however, considered the angles as the associates of God, but at the same time regarded them as created beings:

These ideas and views about God are false and erroneous, but still from there it is indicated that these people at least considered the creation and power particular with the Essence (*Ma'āt*) of God. But according to the philosophers, the concept of God is that "only one can emanate from One."²⁶

To the question that who has created this universe (the earth and the heavens) they have responded with the chain of divinities, i.e. ten intelligences. They conjecture that God created first intelligence, and when He completed its function; then the first intelligence created the second intelligence. In this way this process continued till tenth intelligence. The tenth intelligence has created all the creatures of the earth and the heavenly bodies in their view. In this whole process of emanation God has been given a lesser status and powers than that of the tenth intelligence. It is evident that these philosophers have rendered God more powerless than any group of the pagans of the world ever had done. He has rather been robbed off all the powers and the authority. Ibn Taymiyah even quotes the views of the philosophers:

God does not do anything by His will and power, He is neither the knower of particulars, nor capable of bringing any change in the affairs of the world. The world is the emanation of an emanating principle, which goes on without the will, power and knowledge of God."²⁷

These views, according to Ibn Taimiyah, are cherished by the pagan philosophers but the philosophers who believe in Revelation and the Prophethood have done a

favour of replacing the ten intelligences by the angles.

It shows Ibn Taymiyah has thus, objected to the theories of the philosophers and the theologians, including Ghazzali as he holds that almost all principles of Greek logic apart from the theology are erroneous and futile. He bases everything concerning knowledge on observation and experimentation in contradiction to the deductive and rational first principles of the Greeks. He thinks that despite Ghazzali's pompous titles of books, he was responsible for bringing into theology the erroneous and fallacious views of the philosophers and the logicians. He considers Greek logic to have been an invention of a single human being and it is not required by people for understanding religion social relations, or commercial dealings. Logic itself, in his opinion, does not fulfil the requirements of self-sufficiency and self-authentication. He, in real sense of the word, is the first Muslim critic of the Greek logic who has evaluated the positive and negative dimensions of this subject in *al-Radd 'ala al Mantaqiyyin* and comes out with the profound inductive insights which are found in the revealed texts of the Qur'an in comparison to Greek propositions and dimensions and methods. That is why Allama Maulana Shibli Noamani has rightly considered Ibn Taymiyah as the '*mujadid*' who fulfils its all essential requirements. For having the great creative genius he has envisaged the most recent philosophical and logical theories in his critique of the logicians and emerges the forerunner of David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell, Susan Stebbing, Bradley.

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