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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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# The Principle of *Wasatīyyah* as a Higher Objective of the *Sharī‘ah*: A Historical Survey

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Adibah Abdul Rahim\*\*

**Abstract:** Early and modern scholars have deliberated extensively on the principle of *wasatīyyah* with its various interpretations. Yet, the term has not been perceived through the *Sharī‘ah* point of view, and there is no study which directly relates it with the objectives of the *Sharī‘ah*. This paper, therefore, examines the necessity of *wasatīyyah* from the perspective of the *Sharī‘ah*. It aims at highlighting the principle of *wasatīyyah* as one of the objectives of *Sharī‘ah*. In doing so, the Qur’ānic and prophetic texts dealing with the principle of *wasatīyyah* along with the views of early and modern scholars are examined. In addition, this paper also examines some approaches of *wasatīyyah* by Muslim reformists. They demonstrated the different manifestations of *wasatīyyah* and its significance in accordance with the needs and circumstances of the society. Based on the significance of *wasatīyyah*, this paper concludes that it can be considered as one of the fundamental principles of the *Sharī‘ah*. In other words, the principle of *wasatīyyah* should be acknowledged as a higher objective of the *Sharī‘ah* which must be obtained at both the individual as well as the collective level.

**Keywords:** *wasatīyyah*, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*, the concept of moderation, justice.

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**Abstract:** Para ilmuan lampau dan moden telah membahaskan secara terperinci tentang prinsip *wasatiyyah* dan mereka telah menganalisa prinsip tersebut dalam pelbagai interpretasi. Walaupun prinsip *wasatiyyah* telah dibincangkan secara mendalam namun ia tidak dibahas dari sudut *Sharī'ah*. Justeru itu, kajian ini menilai tentang kepentingan prinsip *wasatiyyah* dari perpektif *Sharī'ah*. Kajian ini cuba menekankan prinsip *wasatiyyah* sebagai salah satu tujuan *Sharī'ah*. Bagi membahaskan isu ini, kajian merujuk kepada ayat-ayat *al-Qur'ān* dan *hadih* berkenaan *wasatiyyah* termasuk pandangan para sarjana Islam lampau dan moden. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga menilai pendekatan *wasatiyyah* yang diguna pakai oleh para reformis Islam. Mereka memaparkan manifestasi *wasatiyyah* mengikut keperluan dan keadaan masyarakat semasa. Berdasarkan kepentingan *wasatiyyah* yang dibincangkan, kajian ini mendapati bahawa prinsip *wasatiyyah* seharusnya diiktiraf sebagai salah satu objektif utama *Sharī'ah* yang patut dicapai samada di peringkat individu mahupun masyarakat.

**Katakunci:** *wasatiyyah*, *maqāsid al- Sharī'ah*, konsep moderasi, konsep keadilan.

## Introduction

Man by nature finds it difficult to put himself into a state of *wasatiyyah* as he is challenged by his desires. The inclination towards any human trait is part and parcel of human instinct. Certain instinctive characters of man and his temperaments are not proportionally bestowed by God whereas some qualities are at a higher rate, some others are at lower rate. This variation makes men different from one another. The basic nature of men is variably imbalanced and disproportioned. It is hard to see a person with proportionally balanced character. It is impossible to have all sorts of skills in a single person. Although humans possess enormous potential distinct from other creatures, all these potentials and qualities are not necessarily being manifested in his personality in a balanced way. Therefore, *wasatiyyah* becomes one of the important prophetic missions, that is, putting the human traits in proper order and balance and bringing equilibrium in life.

## The Prophet's Mission of *Wasatiyyah*

Keeping a balanced and moderate approach in all walks of life is part of disposing the higher ethical value of justice. In fact, moderation

and balance are the branches of justice in which its derivatives such as balance, the middle way, and moderation are altogether deeply interconnected and interdependent. Therefore, *wasatiyyah* and justice are inseparable in most of cases (Hashim Kamali, 2015) and both principles are hard to apply. Absolute justice is a quality which is generally deemed impossible to be accomplished perfectly by men. The manifestation of absolute justice would only be realized by God on the Day of Judgment and this world might not represent the place for real justice. Similarly, the absolute realization of *wasatiyyah* would not be sufficiently manifested by men, though he is instructed to do so.

Although man is ordained to be moderate and justly balanced as much as possible, by his shortcoming he is not likely to carry out the complete realization of justice. On this basis, one of the important agendas of the prophets was imparting justice in society. The Qur'an mentions that "We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice." (57:25).

This verse indicates that bringing balance and moderation between extreme tendencies is part and parcel of the prophetic mission. People have always been tended to incline towards something in excess or tended to be heedless and reckless in their life. Thus, it was the role of the Prophet (S.A.W.) to correct the innate human qualities in its right place and right degree. Once Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) openly proclaimed that his mission of prophethood constitutes the molding and perfecting of human character as he said, "I was sent to perfect the noblest morals." The Prophet (S.A.W.) himself is the exemplary manifestation of perfect human character. Each and every noble manner and character has appropriately been accumulated in his personality. The Qur'an testifies this as Allah (S.W.T.) mentions "And indeed you are of a great moral character" (68: 4). Sayyed Hossein Nasr describes the Prophet (S.A.W.) as "the universal man par excellence and also the quintessence of all that is positive in cosmic manifestation" (Nasr, S.H, 1974: 208). All aspects of the Prophet's (S.A.W.) life have become a perfect model to be emulated by the humanity.

As part of his mission, the Prophet (S.A.W.) had to bring a proportion of balance among a people with different habits including his companions. Each and every companion of the Prophet (S.A.W.)

had inclined to one or another character. They had never been balanced in their character and skills. Unlike the Prophet (S.A.W.), their moral and personal qualities had not been proportionally conglomerated in their life. For example, Umar was excellent in governance and just in character. Meanwhile Abu Bakr was the symbol of patience and willpower, and Usman was known for his modesty and humility. In this sense, the human qualities among the companions had not been combined proportionately. Therefore, they would not be considered as moderate and balanced in its right sense. They had, at divergent levels, noble character and manners. This is why the quality of justice which is seen in Umar cannot be found in Usman's character. Significantly, the companions were varied in their nature and character. The community in which different companions with different nature and qualities combined together made it justly balanced or *ummatan wasaʿta*.

### **The Historical Significance of *Wasaʿiyyah***

Since the Islamic community has been acknowledged as *ummatan wasaʿta*, or the justly balanced community, it has a special historical significance as a community of moderation. The advent of the Prophet (S.A.W.) with the mission of professing a moderate way of life, in one way, was a historical response to the imbalanced and immoderate approaches of two earlier communities which seriously deviated from the right direction due to their extreme approach towards the religion.

The opening chapter of the Qurʾān, *al-Fātiḥah*, clearly illustrates this point. *Al-Fātiḥah* is ordained to be invoked by every Muslim as his basic invocation during his five daily ritual prayers. The prayer would not be complete unless the *al-Fātiḥah* is recited. This humble supplication to God guides us to the straight right path and never let us be deviated from it. The most important ritual prayer for man is to make supplication to God in order to make him steadfast in the right path which is the middle way far away from the two poles of extremism and rejection. The fact that a Muslim is ordained to invoke this prayer at least 17 times a day, unquestionably indicates the importance of keeping a balanced and moderate path in his or her life. God calls it as *ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path) which is between the two extreme approaches taken by two major religions. A significant number of Qurʾānic exegetes are of the opinion that the above mentioned two groups are respectively Christianity and Judaism. The Qurʾān urges Muslim community not to

imitate the Christians who are extreme in their religion. Allah (S.W.T.) says:

Say: O people of the Book! Exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even Way (Qur'ān, 5:77).

This warning constitutes all forms of belief, worship, rituals, and transactions. The Christianity in particular, has gone beyond all permissible limits of their religion. Due to their excessiveness in worship, they were particularly admonished in the Qur'ān, "Do not exceed the limits of your religion" (4:171). They transgressed the permissible limits of religion by elevating the status of Jesus Christ to the level of God and recognized him as the son of God. The love to Prophet Jesus grew in an unprecedented and strange way that caused their deviation. As a result of their blind love, they ascribed divinity to Jesus which finally transformed as a weird claim of trinity of God. In short, the excess of love and unrestrained reverence to Prophet Jesus made the Christians deviate from the right path and has gone astray.

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) strongly warned his followers never to exceed the limits of love to him. Although the love to the Prophet is an essential component of faith, a Muslim is required to be vigilant not to reach his love in a state of assigning divinity to the Prophet as the Christians did wrongly to Jesus. Jews on the other hand, have exceeded in their religion in many ways and reached its epitome by killing the prophets who had been sent to them. In short, the *al-Fātiḥah* teaches Muslims to be consistent in the right path, keeping away from the deviated ways and distorted approaches of the two communities for their excessiveness and extremism. Seeking the guidance of the straight path and not leaning towards either extreme way becomes a major theme of the *Sharī'ah*. Therefore, it would be considered as one of the objectives of the *Sharī'ah*.

### **The Definitions of *Wasatiyyah* and its Scope**

The Arabic term *wasatiyyah* is generally used to denote moderation in personal conduct as well as a collection of behavioral characteristics (Yaakub, 2016). It may be simply referred to as an attitude or position that is contrary to the extremism and excessiveness (Yaakub, 2016).

The term *wasatiyyah* is a verbal noun of the original word *wasat*. Instead of assigning to a single literal and unilateral meaning, many other synonymous meanings, as in the case of other words in the Arabic language, are also being credited to *wasatiyyah*. *Tawassuṭ*, *i'tidāl*, *tawāzun* and *iqtisād* (Hashim Kamali, 2015) are translated as moderation, justice, balance, and prudence respectively. The opposite of *wasatiyyah* is *taṭarruf*, which refers to inclination towards the peripheries (Hashim Kamali, 2015) which is simply translated in to “extremism” or “radicalism” in our time.

The word developed from its simple meaning, into a broad concept and terminology with multiple dimensions, stems from the Qur'ānic designation of the Muslim community as *ummatan wasaṭan* which may variously refer to the justly balanced community or best community. The Qur'ān says: “And thus we have made you a just community (or middle most community) that you will be witness over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you” (2:143). As mentioned earlier, the literal meaning of the word *wasat* can be translated into the three interrelated meanings: i.e. to be moderate; to be in the middle; and thirdly to be the best. It denotes that taking the middle of the road, and positioning in the center of the circle (Yaakub and Othman, 2016). Instead of being confined to a single meaning of moderation, its meaning extends to a number of other alternatives such as the “best” and “strongest”. Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) affirms that the term *wasat* is equivalent to *khiyār* or “chosen” or “selected” and ‘*adl*, or “just” linguistically (Etin, 2015). A prophetic tradition which affirms the exact meaning of *wasatiyyah* is noteworthy in this discussion. According to this report the Prophet (S.A.W.) himself clearly stated that *wasat* means justice. Justice, in its literal sense, is the middle-most position between two or more opposing sides, without inclining to or favoring any of the sides, and not swayed by emotions, biases or prejudice in making judgments, decisions or solving disputes (Kamal Hassan, 2015). The meaning the Prophet (S.A.W.) envisages in this *ḥadīth* clearly represents a number of manifestations such as attitude, unbiased stance, and character. One of the wise sayings of Arabs which is *khair al-umūr al-wasaṭ* means that the best of affairs is the middle and moderate position (Kamal Hassan, 2015). The prophetic tradition which says “beware of excessiveness in religion, people before you have perished as a result of such excessiveness” (Reported by Aḥmad, Nasa’ī and Ibn Mājah in



their Sunan) is clear advice to be moderate and balanced in religious affairs too.

### **The Emphasis of *Wasatiyyah* in the *Sharī'ah***

All aspects of the *Sharī'ah* in its totality, whether legal or ethical, social and spiritual, have been granted to the humanity in balance and order. All rulings and admonitions of the *Sharī'ah* urge Muslims to be moderate and balanced. It could be assumed that the *wasatiyyah* is a middle station between two other stations, a degree between two other degrees. It means that there are three situations for all the issues. It may be suffixed as negligence in pursuing what is of benefit. Secondly, the excess position or extreme level, and the third position is the middle and moderate stance. For example, if anyone refuses to observe the principles and rulings of the *Sharī'ah* will certainly lose the benefits which are supposed to be generated by the *Sharī'ah*. His position is supposed to be in one station that is the negligence or refusal of the *Sharī'ah*. In the other words, it is the onside of the issue. The next station is taking the rulings of the *Sharī'ah* at an extreme level. This station is supposed to be the other and opposite side of the issue in hand. Contrary to both extreme stations, the *Sharī'ah* draws a middle line in between them. There are some examples of Qur'ānic verses of the middle position of the *Sharī'ah*. Allah (S.W.T.) says, "Whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor niggardly but there is always a just mean between those (two extremes)." (25:67); "O you who have attained to faith. Do not deprive yourself of the good things of life which God has made lawful to you, but do not transgress the bounds of what is right; verily, God does not love those who transgress the bounds of what is right." (5:87); "Eat and drink freely, but do not waste; verily, he does not love the wasteful." (7:31)

The above verses clearly indicate that keeping *wasatiyyah* or moderation in all aspects of human life is an essential part of the *Sharī'ah*. Wael B. Hallaq has meticulously observed al-Shāṭibī's middle path position in his engagement with legal issues. He observes the feature of al-Shāṭibī's treatment of the *Sharī'ah* in which he stresses on universal aspects of the law. He writes;

"al-Shāṭibī was attempting to establish, once and for all, that the true *Sharī'ah* aims at steering a middle course between attitudes guided by personal interests, on the one hand,

and those that are religiously over-zealous and excessively demanding on the other. This is why he states time and again throughout the book, and in a variety of contexts, that the *Sharī'ah* represents nothing but a middle-of-the-road position between undue difficulty ('*usr*') and extreme ease (*yusur*)" (Hallaq, 2005: 174).

Although al-Shāṭibī confined himself to limiting the objectives of *Sharī'ah* to five fundamental principles, many of the other important sub-objectives have clearly been illustrated in his writings. He distinguishes moderation as one of the most distinctive characteristics of the *Sharī'ah* since it keeps a moderate and middle way in imposing laws. When the laws are imposed as obligations, Islamic law proceeds and maintains the path of moderation and consummate fairness (Attia, 2007). In this sense, al-Shāṭibī unequivocally affirmed the principle *wasatiyyah* although he did not categorize it as one of objectives of the *Sharī'ah*. Ibn 'Āshūr (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2006), on the other hand, describes moderation with the Arabic word *samāḥah* (magnanimity) which means "standing midway between sternness (*tadyiq*) and (*tasāhul*)." He explains the idea of *samāḥah* as the ideal of moderation, justice, and temperance. Although he adduced the principle of *wasatiyyah* (he used the word magnanimity in place of *wasatiyyah*) as a higher objective of the *Sharī'ah*, he elaborated the concept very little.

*Wasatiyyah*, therefore, elevates itself as a fundamental universal principle upheld by the *Sharī'ah* which aims to bring benefits and welfare of humanity through the attainment of this objective. Since the overall objective of the *Sharī'ah* is to bring good and benefits to humanity and warding off harm, deviating from moderation either to negligence or extremism is equal in bringing harm. In addition, the universality of moderation can be justified as it is prescribed to observe at all occasions and situations and irrespective of time and space. All the prophets sent by God had carried out the responsibility of imparting justice to their societies. The Qur'ān says;

We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice (57: 25).

The word *mīzān* in the above verse has been translated as justice by many exegeses. However, its meaning should not be confined in a single meaning, rather the principle of *wasatiyyah* or moderation is also rightly

embedded in the word. In many places, the Qur'ān directly and indirectly exhorts believers to apply this principle individually and collectively. Moreover, the title of *wasaṭiyyah* justly balanced is designated as the fundamental feature of the Muslim community. All this indicates that the *wasaṭiyyah* could be enumerated as one of the higher objectives of the *Sharī'ah*. As some of the principles of the *Sharī'ah* like justice and freedom are conceived in later period as the higher objectives of the *Sharī'ah*, the *wasaṭiyyah* could also be considered as a higher objective of the *Sharī'ah*.

### **Various Dimensions of *Wasaṭiyyah***

Grounded on the textual premises of the Qur'ānic and the prophetic traditions, scholars have developed the principle of *wasaṭiyyah* broadly into various dimensions. From a narrow and literal meaning, the principle has momentarily been elaborated and interpreted according to the social changes and needs of time. For instance, Kamal Hasan is of the view that *wasaṭiyyah* encompasses three fundamental components namely justice, excellence, and balance or moderation (Muhammad Haniff, 2014). Hashim Kamali defined the *wasaṭiyyah* as a “recommended posture that occurs to the people of sound nature and intellect, distinguished by its aversion to both extremism and manifest neglect” (Hashim Kamali, 2015: 9). The principle of *wasaṭiyyah* described by Hashim Kamali and Muhammad Bakir Yaakub is noteworthy since their views acknowledge the newly evolved global trends. Hashim Kamali envisages the moderation in a comprehensive way. He writes; “moderation is a virtue that helps to develop social harmony and equilibrium in personal affairs within the family and society and the much wider spectrum of human relationships.” (Hashim Kamali, 2015: 1). According to Muhammad Bakir Yaakub (2016: 62), “the *Sharī'ah* offers a holistic approach of life to humankind in term of promoting moderation, tolerance, justice, and peaceful co-existence between and among people of different racial, socio-cultural, and ethno-religious backgrounds now we see around the world”.

Muhammad Asad also envisages *wasaṭiyyah* or moderation as a hallmark of the Muslim community and their scheme of life. He writes; “a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes and is realistic in its appreciation of man's nature and possibilities, rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated asceticism.” (Asad, 1980:30).

Extreme approaches in religious affairs as well as mundane affairs is deemed as blameworthy and to be avoided. The moderation has to do with every aspect of human life. Asad goes on to say that moderation is a branch and subservient aspect of *tawhīd*, the oneness of God. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī also sees moderation as an alternative life approach for the Muslim community at a global level. According to him, moderation is a viable and global alternative way of life. In order for the Muslim community to be saved from engendering hostility towards Muslims and Islam worldwide, moderation needs to be restored at the collective level (al-Qaraḍāwī, 2006). The term *wasāṭiyyah* generally means an individual or societal characteristic and behaviors as being moderate and balanced (Hashim Kamali, 2015). For Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, “*wasāṭiyyah* is meant as keeping moderation and balance in belief, morality, and character. Hence, it functions in the manner of treating others and in the applied systems of socio-ethical order and governance” (Hashim Kamali, 2015: 11). The above mentioned scholars envisage *wasāṭiyyah* as a life scheme not only as an ethical value in private life but also as an approach need to be taken by Muslim *ummah* (community) at the collective level. The status of moderation from merely an ethical value, which is most often forced to be confined at the individual level, needs to be elevated to a broader sense by which it will be viewed as a major life scheme for Muslims at the societal and global levels. Muhammad Bakir Yaakub’s observation is noteworthy in this regard. He writes;

The understanding on “*wasāṭiyyah*” conception should geared to create a Muslim community with a dynamic attitudes, actions and practices which are not extreme or radical and never been inclined to extreme limits, forgetting moral values and spiritual, and act beyond the boundary of civilization values for the rights and fulfil its obligations at the expense of innocent lives, clashes between religious and others ( Yaakub, 2016: 61).

In short, the concept of *wasāṭiyyah*, should be transformed primarily, as Hashim Kamali pointed out, as a moral virtue of relevance not only for the personal conduct of individuals but also for the integrity and self-image of communities and nations (Hashim Kamali, 2015). It has to be practiced in all kinds of societies prevailing today irrespective of Muslim dominated societies or Muslim minority societies.

### The *Wasatiyyah* Based Approach of Early and Modern Scholars

The principle of *wasatiyyah* has been observed by both early and modern Muslim scholars. For example, Imam al-Shāfi‘ī was known for his role as synthesizer of divine revelation and human reason. His historical engagement was to draw a middle way of the two extreme intellectual streams of rationalism and traditionalism. It has been observed by the historians that the extreme stances taken by these two movements during inquisition represented relatively extreme positions on the religious spectrum (Hallaq, 2009). Al-Shāfi‘ī was presenting himself as a reformer by taking the middle position in approaching the *Sharī‘ah*. His contributions to Islamic law can be summarized as fulfilling one of the objectives of the *Sharī‘ah*, that is to bring back the moderate and balanced combination of divine texts and reason in approaching the *Sharī‘ah*. His disciples, such as, Ibn Sūrāj (d.306/918) completed this mission by conceptualizing legal theory as a synthesis between rationality and the textual tradition that is between reason and revelation (Hallaq, 2009). The reformative efforts of al- Shāfi‘ī and his disciples represented a mediating position between the rationalist and traditionalist approaches to understanding the *Sharī‘ah*.

Another significant figure that represented a *wasatiyyah* based approach was Imam al-Ghazālī (CE 1058-1111). During his time, the Greek philosophy and its logic dominated the Muslim mind and thought. The equilibrium and balance of the Muslim society in general had been shaken due to the decisive impact of Greek philosophy. Human reason and logic have again been placed as the major determinants of religion. The religious texts were construed largely and interpreted in terms of logic subscribed from Greek philosophy. Learning the religious sciences of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth were considered inferior and derogatory. People started relying on reason and logic. The intellectual stream that al-Ghazālī represented was a middle path. He introduced a middle way of moderation between the group of apologetic scholars who totally relied on reason in the intellectual arena and the traditional scholars who limited the religious sciences in *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. It was al-Ghazālī who combined the two streams of intellectuality. Accordingly, human reason and revelation have precisely been placed in its right degree. On one hand, he was defending the extreme approach of excessively relying on the logical side of Greek philosophy and, on the other hand, he paved an ideal path of approaching the various doctrines of Islamic sciences

in a rightly combined manner where all doctrines of Islam have been given their rightful place and due consideration. Al-Ghazālī is counted as a unique intellectual figure in Islamic history in many ways. Most importantly, it could be argued that he came up with the scheme of a balanced and rightly combined integration of all Islamic sciences in a scientific way. Whereas some traditional scholars confined the *Sharī'ah* to the framework of *fiqh* and allied doctrines alone, some others limited it to rituals and spiritual spheres. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, some scholars tried to comprehend religion and faith through logical tools. In addition, for some Islam was all about theology. It is in this particular juncture that Imam al-Ghazālī took the sciences altogether. Al-Ghazālī mastered theology, *fiqh*, *usūl al-fiqh*, Sufism, philosophy and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* which became an independent discipline only in a later age (George, 1983). The integration of all these sciences and balanced methodology of approaching the various disciplines in a common platform, in one way is an attempt at bringing the *wasatīyyah* approach to all Islamic sciences.

Among the modern scholars who applied the *wasatīyyah* approach was Shah Walī Allah al-Dahlawī (CE1703-1762). His reform mission comprised of his holistic approach towards the *Sharī'ah* with its comprehensiveness and precise balance. The major intellectual contribution of the Shah Walī Allah can be summarized as his strenuous effort to reconcile the conflicting *madhāhib* (schools of Islamic law) which have historically developed, in fact, to alleviate the hardship of the laymen and to make them understand and practice the *Sharī'ah* easily. His time witnessed conflicts and tensions between the adherents of the four schools of Islamic law. Instead of relying on a single legal school, he considered all legal schools (*madhāhib*) equally. He introduced a platform of reconciliation to accept the differences of opinion among the scholars. In addition, Shah Walī Allah attempted to develop a comprehensive approach to the study and understanding of the *Sharī'ah* (El-Mesawi, 2003). Unlike many other scholars, instead of touching either one or two aspects of the *Sharī'ah*, he took the *Sharī'ah* as a whole and all-encompassing mode. He mastered almost all Islamic sciences such as theology, Islamic law, Sufism and ḥadīth. As in the case of Imam al-Ghazālī, he also delved in the esoteric and exoteric aspects of the *Sharī'ah* as well as the other areas of study. The major Islamic educational institutions and organizations in India claim their

intellectual and spiritual legacy from Shah Walī Allah (Al- Ghazālī, 2001). It is a clear proof of his balanced approach towards various Islamic disciplines. In short, he is one of the most important figures who attempted to approach the *Sharī'ah* in a comprehensive way by which the higher objective of moderation or *wasatiyyah* is restored.

Beside these two, a great number of other scholars and reformers have, in one way or other, rendered their invaluable services for the restoration of balance to the *Sharī'ah* in their time. Sometimes, it might be through the restoration of true *fiqh* and occasionally it might be through concentrating on spiritual dimension. Each and every dimension might be emphasized according to the need of the time. The moderate and balanced approach of the *Sharī'ah* is not seemingly unilateral for all time. The implication of conceiving the balance and its manifestation vary from society to society. Efforts for bringing moderation, and thereby attaining the higher objective of the *Sharī'ah* in a particular occasion in the history, might appear to be different in another occasion at a different historical context. This variation occurs according to the differences in the needs of reforms. Depending on the depth of the extremism and excessiveness, the reform efforts will also significantly vary.

### **Conclusion**

The principle of *wasatiyyah* has a great significance in society. Based on its significance highlighted by Qur'ānic verses and *aḥādīth* as well as the views of Muslim scholars, *wasatiyyah* should be considered as a higher objective of the *Sharī'ah*. It is equally important like the principles of justice and freedom which have been acknowledged as fundamentals of *Sharī'ah*. The Qur'ānic indications and prophetic traditions clearly show the recurrent use of the principle of *wasatiyyah* in the *Sharī'ah*. In addition, the approach of *wasatiyyah* has been applied by both early and later Muslim scholars in their mission of reform. Instead of mere a theoretical principle, *wasatiyyah* should be put into a practical manifestation in all aspects of man's life both at the individual as well as the collective level. The current age demands the adoption of the *wasatiyyah* approach in daily life more than any other principle of Islam, especially in a multi-cultural society like Malaysia.

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