

## The Contributions of Imam Shafi'i in Arabic Language and Literature

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this working study is to see the extent of experience and education of Imam Shafie in Arabic language and literature. General Muslim public knows Imam Shafie as a great figure in the school of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence. However, it may be rarely known about the early education history of Imam Shafie that focused on learning Arabic language and literature. Hence, with the application of qualitative approach and historical design analysis on the background and history of his life, this study makes an attempt to explain the early experience and learning of Imam Shafie in Arabic language and literature. This study also tries to see how he was recognized as the figure of Arabic language and literature of his time, apart from the figures in the school of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence. The outcome of the analysis found that Imam Shafie received an early exposure in Arabic language education and literature during his childhood until teenager and he was chosen as a transcendent figure of Arabic language and literature at his early teens.

**Key words:** Imam Shafie education, Arabic language, Arabic literature, Arabic language and literature, childhood

### INTRODUCTION

**The background of Imam Shafie:** Before analysing in detail about the early education related to language and literature of Imam Shafie, researcher would like to present briefly on the background of Imam Shafie in order to observe the history of his descendants more clearly.

His full name is Abu Abd Allah Muhammad bin Idris bin al-Abbas bin Uthman bin Shafi bin al-Sayb bin Abid bin Abd al-Yazid bin Hashim bin Abd al-Muttalib bin Abd al-Manaf. The descendants met with the line of Rasul Allah at the lineage of Abd al-Manaf and the line was at his mother's side (Majid, 2011; Ramadan, 2006).

According to the strongest opinion, he was born in Gaza (Gaza is a state in Palestine. For further details, Al-Hamawi, Yaqt bin Abd Allah, editor Farid Abd al-Aziz al-Jundi, *Mujam al-Buldan*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon in 1990), Palestine in 150H and some others mentioned that he originated from Asqalan (Asqalan was originally a well-known forest area in Palestine in the 11-17th century. Later, it became a town populated by Palestinian, located in the coast area between Gaza and Jibrayn. For more information; al-Hamawi and *Mujam al-Buldan*. The third narrator said he was born in Yemen the day of the death of al-Imam Abu Anifah in 150H. His father passed away before knowing him. He lived with his mother and in orphanage and very poor condition. Then, his mother moved together with him to Mecca when he was <2 year old (al-Baqai, 1986). He passed away on Friday night after Isha prayer on the last day of Rejab in the beginning of 204 at the age of 54 year.

From the genealogy of the lineage, it can be said that Imam Shafie was descended from Bani Hashim and in the line of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

### IMAM SHAFIE 'S HISTORY OF EARLY EDUCATION

In analysing Imam Shafie's history of his early education, researcher sees that his early learning started with memorizing Koran and Hadith as early as 7 year old. The statements below well explains his history of early education before he emerged as a figure to the majestic school of thought.

At Mecca, Imam Shafie and his mother lived nearby Syibu al-Khaif in a very poor condition. It is narrated before he reached 7 year old, he worked very hard to memorize Koran and Hadith. His intelligence in memorizing Koran and Hadith can be seen from his words in which he told the stories:

In al-Kuttab (the school for memorizing Koran), I saw the teachers who were teaching there reading the Koran to the students, so I joined them to memorize it. Until while, I was memorizing all the things he said, he then mentioned to me, "it is unlawful for me to take not even a bit of any sort of wages from you"

Later, his teacher picked him as his successor (watching the other students) if he was not around (al-Ahl, 1966).

After memorizing Koran at al-Kuttab, he then moved to Masjidil Haram where he attended various knowledge sharing events. He memorized the Koran since, he was 7 year old then, he read and memorized the book of Al-Muwata by Imam Malik at the age of 12 before he met with him directly in Medina (al-Ahl, 1966).

After he completed (khatam) the book of al-Muwata which was after the age of 12, he started to direct his attention and interest into Arabic language and literature. In order to see the extent of his education in Arabic language and literature, researcher will present some notes describing his education history related to Arabic language and literature.

### **EARLY EDUCATION OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

In some records by the Islamic scholars narrating the life history of Imam Shafie, they explained that he was very interested in Arabic language and literature when he was as early as 13 year old. This means that Imam Shafie has emphasised on Arabic language and literature after completed memorizing Koran at the age of 7 year old and Hadith at 9 year old. This case can be reinforced with some excerpts from biographies of Shafie mentioning that as in the records of Musab Ibn Abd Allah al-Zubayri, he said that Imam Shafie has begun the pattern of his life by learning poetry and literature (Saqar, 1980).

This statement is further strengthened with the excerpts by a contemporary writer, Abd al-Ghani al-Daqar (1972) in his work *Imam Shafie al-Faqih al-Sunnah al-Akbar* which mentions that if it was not for the position of Imam Shafie as a diligent imam, then he could be the most powerful literary in language and literature imagination of his time. He also said that right after completed the Koran, Imam Shafie has memorized poetry and its history. Imam Shafie has also gone out to the interior of Arab to learn Arabic language and its grammar until he appeared as the most fluent person at that time. He also once told as: I have gone out and met with the Huzayl (One of the dialects of Arab tribes which is included in Qiraah al-Sabah, the seven ways of recitation in the revelation of Holy Koran) tribe and I learned their language, the Huzayl is the most fluent Arabs and I was 17, I travelled and lived with them. When I came back to Mecca, I sang the poetry, memorized the literature, stories and history of Arabs.

The sequence from statements above, Abd Halim al-Jundi (1969) in his work *Imam Shafie-Nasir al-Sunnah wa Wadi al-Usul* cited that Shafie was in Huzayl for a long period of time until he managed to memorize >10,000 verses of poetry with irab (Flexible: Change of the

situation at the end of the word due to certain factors, the meaning and he managed to understand all of them in the early age (around 17-18 year old).

Based on the statements from the classic history analysts above, it can be stated that Imam Shafie has learned Arabic language and literature through the medium of poetry, in his early age of around 13-18 years old. A large number of verses memorized by him have helped to enhance his language and literature knowledge. When, he memorized the Arabic poetries, directly, he has learned the grammar, literature and history of Arabs which exist in the verses of Arabic poetry.

As a result of his determination on this Arabic language and literature, it can be seen through some of the recognitions given to him in learning the Arabic language and literature. Among them, Biquaie and Muhammad (1961) cited that Imam Shafie studied Arabic grammar and the aesthetic values for over 20 years although, he himself was in fact an Arab and spoke Arabic since childhood.

Abd al-Malik bin Hisham, one of the governors of Abbasid once said: The Imam of language and grammar for the Egyptian during his time was Imam Shafie. It was narrated that when Ibn Hisham had language problem, he would send a representative to Imam Shafie to debate about it. Abu Uthman al-Mazini wrote that Imam Shafie was our point of reference in grammar knowledge. Abu Ubayd al-Qasim bin Salam also said: "Imam Shafie was recognized as the language expert" (Biquaie and Muhammad, 1961).

Al-Jahiz, among the critics of Abbasid classical Arabic language and literature once expressed: I have examined many books written by the knowledge experts and I never found the one which was so well arranged like Imam Shafie, the conversation was like the arrangement of jewels. Imam Ahmad said: Nobody has ever produced a composition like the writings of Imam Shafie filled with virtue (Biquaie and Muhammad, 1961).

Not enough with that the respected figure of ancient Arabic language who was famous in Arabic Linguistic Knowledge, al-Asmaie once said when talking about Imam Shafie: My reading in the anthology of Huzayl was validated by a Quraysh youth known as Muhammad bin Idris Shafie.

Al-Asmaie has read the anthology till finished and he himself was a consultant in Arabic language during his time. When he finished reading it, Imam Shafie said: "Nobody whose language arrangement has been better than al-Asmaie" (al-Jundi, 1969). Similarly in the narration of Ibn Zawlaq, a classical Muslim scholar who wrote the biography of the scholars, also citing that Imam Shafie has compiled grammar essays of 200 volumes (al-Jundi, 1969).

## **IMAM SHAFIE AND THE ARABIC LITERATURE**

Language and literature are the two entities which cannot be separated. Due to his passion in Arabic language, Imam Shafie focused seriously into Arabic language which directly helped him continuously improving his skills in it too. Based on the citing of Musab bin Abd Allah al-Zubayri as what being narrated by al-Bayhaqi (1970) in *Manaqib Shafie*, he mentioned that Imam Shafie has begun his pattern of life (as teenager) by learning poetry and literature but later he also emphasized on Islamic Jurisprudence. Among the factors that made him began to pay attention to Islamic Jurisprudence was when he was reprimanded by al-Katib Ibn Batutah who once said: "People like you will just let your dignity down by just spending your time with this poetry. Where are you in Islamic Jurisprudence?" Imam Shafie was struck by the criticism and from then on he was determined to join the Islamic Jurisprudence knowledge sharing events other than giving attention to the language and literature which he did for so long. Imam Shafie then revealed:

- If its not by poetry scholars will disgraced
- I will now greater than Labid in poetry (one of the Greatest Arabic Poet)

The literature of Imam Shafie specifically in poetry, mostly display the language style of the Koran in addition he also put to great use of many Words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This might be because during his early life he lived in Mecca and teachers there were very concerned about Koran, the meaning of the contents and words. During that time, Abd Allah Ibn Abbas also was also in Mecca where he was the reference in interpreting and translating verses of Koran. Imam Shafie himself used to support the Koran interpretations by Ibn Abbas with Arabic poetries which he memorized. Therefore, it is not surprising that elements of Koran and Hadith could be found in the poetry of Imam Shafie (al-Daqar, 1972).

At the final moment of his death, his famous student known as al-Muzanni went for a visit where Imam Shafie uttered with a forlorn tone: "I have sailed the world and I am parting with my friends, I can feel the moment of death, I do the wirid (Islamic incantations) mentioning the name of Allah and indeed I do not know the way my soul is heading, if it goes to the heaven it will exhilarate me or if to the hell, I will be in great sorrow" (Jawzi and Rahman, 1969).

When Imam Shafie returned to rahmatullah (passed away), various themed crying over him poetry were sung.

Among the poet who wrote such poetry was Ibn Durayd al-Azdi in his *qasidah* (Arabic poem) entitled *al-Ainiyyah* and it was rewritten by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi and al-Tabari in each other's work when they related about Imam Shafie and his personality (al-Ahl, 1986).

From the statements above, it clearly shows that the greatness of Imam Shafie is recognized by many famous scholars as the language consultant and rhetoric of his time. His intelligence on singing out the poetry with high value of language and literature is apparently is recognized by the famous scholars during his time and after.

## **THE LITERATURE OF IMAM AL-SHAFIE EDUCATES UMMAH (MUSLIM COLLECTIVELY)**

Although, he was exposed in Arabic language and literature when he was a teenager, it is without a doubt that the literature of Imam Shafie was loaded with great educational values. He devoted himself in the language and literature by applying the values of *ibadah* (acts and practices to Allah) in every expression and his eulogy. This phenomenon is to emphasize to the assertion that the *ibadah* cannot be ruled out even in the said language and literature. Even with the value of *ibadah*, made his expression more poetic and in its own elegance. There was an opinion that Shafie was much studied with the *sufi* (dervish) figure in literature. This is probably one of the reasons that make the poetry expression of Imam Shafie entirely formed like *sufi* (al-Ahl, 1986).

## **SEVERAL POETIC EXPRESSIONS OF IMAM SHAFIE**

Today, beautiful pieces of Imam al-Shafi'e's expression can be appreciated through his anthology named the *Diwan Shafie*. It is a collection of his poetry anthologies which have been compiled by scholars after his death. Examples of the eulogy presented here indicate the skills of Imam Shafie in the Arabic language and literature.

**Be willing with the destiny decreed by Allah:** I'm not willing to accept with what you see in my day but I'm pleased with what has been decided for me, if the days betray the agreement, I'm willing to accept, even though it is a force.

**Fight against astrologers:** Tell to all astrologers that I do not believe with their predictions based only on the order of the stars. Because I know that all that exists and will occur must have come from God.

**Reject bid'ah (heretical) in religion:** Man has always made bid'ah (heretical) in religion with their opinions which were never taught by the Prophet PBUH. They underestimate the rights of Allah and refuse to implement these rights.

**Poetry on manners and knowledge:** I complained to my teacher al Waqi' about my poor memorisation. He taught me to abandon disobedience and informed me that knowledge is light, the light of Allah will not illuminate the perpetrators of disobedience.

The faqih and the sufi do not be just one of them, I swear to Allah, I exhort you, the faqih hard stance difficult to feel righteous and the sufi is very ignorant and the ignorant is not likely to improve.

#### **THE EDUCATION SUMMARY OF IMAM SHAFIE IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

Based on the results of the observation of researchers in this study, it can be concluded that: First; Imam Shafie had early education in Arabic language and literature when he was as early as 9 years old. Second; Imam Shafie interested and pay attention to the Arabic language and literature only after he completed memorizing Koran and Hadith at the age of 9 years old. Third; His teenage years till the age of 19 years old he spent with tribal Huzayl to memorize poetry with the aim to learn the Arabic language and literature. Meanwhile at the age of 19 year and above, he spent on Islamic Jurisprudence and other disciplines. Fourth; The beauty of his language and literature was embroidered with high religious values in all his expressions. He did not ignore

the aspects of ibadah or worshipping Allah in every beautiful speech expression. Fifth; The expression of his poetry throughout his life can be referred in Diwan Shafie which still exists until today and becomes the evidence of his skills in Arabic language and literature.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This working study hopefully can give a bit of sharing about the educational background and experience of Imam Shafie towards Arabic language and literature. This study gives an overview to the public that although, Imam Shafie is recognized as the expert in Islamic Jurisprudence, his early education was in the Arabic language and literature which was as early as 9 year old.

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