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Reviewing on Women in the Poetic Texts of Imam Al-Shafi'i R.H.M

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Abstract

Women are bestowed with special status in Islam. In the *Diwan* of al-Shafi'i r.h.m, it depicts few of the poetic texts regarding the woman. This study will emphasize three poetic texts of Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m that are reviewing on the position and privilege of women in Islam. All of these texts were gathered from *Diwan* of al-Shafi'i r.h.m as a primary source. Subsequently, by the approach of textual analysis, this research tried to analyse those three poetic texts through the support of secondary data that were obtained from various sources. This research paper identified that *Diwan* of al-Shafi'i r.h.m possesses few perceptions of the woman that are in line with the requirement that is stated in al-Quran and al-Sunnah. All of these analysed texts are contributing to highlight the position and privilege of a woman according to Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m that correspond to the acknowledgement of woman's position as stated in al-Quran.

Keywords: *Diwan* of al-Shafi'i, Imam al-Shafi'i, women in Islam, women and al-Quran

Introduction

Women are granted the greatest honour in Islam. This special respect puts women's position elevated and their unprecedented position is on the perfect view along human history. With the advent of Islam, the situation became different by the abolishment of the way of *jahiliyyah* people treated women as part of the loot, degrading and comparing women with animals even worst (Hassan & Razi, 2006).

The coming of Islam surely annihilating many of the unethical ways of life and practices during the days of *jahiliyyah* (ignorance), cum implementing the virtues and wholesome quality amongst the societies. It is a living proof that can be seen by the absence of discrimination and oppression happened after the settlement of Islam. Besides, the bestowment of the fourth chapter in al-Quran that was named as *al-Nisa'*, is clearly showing that Islam never cast aside the role of women in the world of politics, economic and religious affairs. The existence of this chapter is totally realizing and

pulling the *jahilliyah* people out by acknowledging that Islam brings the harmonious and discrimination-free lifestyle.

Imam Shafi'i and Women

Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m is no longer a foreign figure amongst the Muslim society. He was one of the prominent Imams of Madhabs (school of thought within fiqh) and he produced many books and poems that are comprising various of disciplines, such as fiqh, aqidah, tasawwuf, hadith and others. He also mastering and fluent the Arabic language. Thus, in the Arabic literature, his masterpiece known as *al-Diwan* al-Shafi'i consists of poems that spontaneously uttered by him during teaching sessions (Bahjat, 1999). Those articulated poems were gathered by his disciple and composed into a book in numerous versions and publications.

Many of his poems touch on the issue and polemic of the society that occurred during his time. In his poems, the affairs of women in his poems also being directly or indirectly discussed. Hence, this paper will deliberate three of his poetic texts that are pointing on the circle of women during his lifetime. By this approach, this study able to correct the exist misperception of society towards women that still perceived at that particular time. Besides, this discussion is one of the advices and guidelines for the society to become more optimistic in performing *'ibadah* (the act of worship) and seeking knowledge.

The Thematic Analysis of Women in Diwan al-Shafi'i R.H.M

1) Discussion on Women's Love: A Great Predicament

This poem was quoted from *al-Diwan al-Shafi'i*, arranged by Bahjat (1999: 44), cited from the *Manaqib al-Shafi'i*, compiled by al-Baihaqi (2/82):

أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ فِي النِّسَاءِ وَقَالُوا إِنَّ حُبَّ النِّسَاءِ جَهْدُ الْبَلَاءِ
لَيْسَ حُبُّ النِّسَاءِ جَهْدًا وَلَكِنْ قَرَبٌ مِّنْ لَا تَحِبُّ جَهْدُ الْبَلَاءِ

Many people talk about women, they said the most painful predicament is to love a woman.

Nonetheless, to love a woman isn't the miserable tribulation, but the most painful is how close the haters.

In the abovementioned poetry stanza, the issue of loving a woman is said to be the most painful predicament. However, according to Imam al-Shafi'i, the opinion of saying that to love a woman is the most distressing tribulation is apparently incorrect. The truth of the real predicament is to be together with the hater.

This refutation is corresponding with the Quranic revelation chapter al-Rum, verse

21:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ
٢١

And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.

Hubb defined as the tendency of heart and thought towards someone (al-Askari, 1988: 122). The tendency of heart and thought towards women is such a pleasure, even this feeling able to bring happiness and blessing in a family. This tendency can nurture the ambience of *mawaddah wa rahmah*. In contrary, if someone is forced to live with someone that he or she hates, surely it is the most painful thing, as how stated on the second stanza of that poem.

The fact that human beings are tested with various tribulations that are painful, however each of the problems shouldered by the individuals, are not beyond their capability. This statement is stated by Quranic revelation, chapter al Baqarah, verse 286:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought.

The painful feeling from each of the tribulations is depending on how someone tries to face and solve it. The refutation done by Imam al-Shafi'i is completely corresponding to the hadith of Prophet Muhammad, narrated by Muslim:

إِتَّقُوا اللَّهَ فِي النِّسَاءِ، فَإِنَّكُمْ أَخَذْتُمُوهُنَّ بِأَمَانَةِ اللَّهِ، وَاسْتَحْلَلْتُمْ فُرُوجَهُنَّ بِكَلِمَةِ اللَّهِ، وَلَهُنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ.

(Narrated by Muslim (num. 1218) Book al-Hajj, from Abu Hurairah R.A)

Be conscious of Allah pertaining to women affairs. Indeed, you took them with Allah's mandate upon you, and it is permissible for you on their private parts by God's affirmation. Hence, the rights of them upon you is to give them sustenance and clothes in the way of ma'ruf (acceptable).

This command was said to ensure that women are protected with love since they are indeed responsibility for men. Thus, in protecting this trust, an individual should possess a genuine feeling of love towards this obligation in order to ensure this life duty able to be well conducted.

2) Talaq and Iddah

The next poem narrated by Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Hakim said, "I heard that al-Shafi'i said, I had a friend and he is so nice and treat me so well. Later on, he migrates to Sabin and from then on, he forgot me. Until I sent him a letter and wrote few stanzas of the poem, he returned and asked my forgiveness for what he did after he read that poem:

1	خذها إليك فإن ودك طالق	مني وليس طلاق ذات البين
2	فإن ارعوت فإنها تطليقة	ويدوم ودك لي على ثنتين
3	وإن التويت شفعتها بمثالها	وتكون تطليقتها في حيضين
4	فإذا التلات أتتك مني طائعا	لم تعن عنك ولاية السبيين
5	لم أرض أن أهجو حصينا وحده	حتى أسود وجه كل حصين

(Mujahid Mustafa Bahjat, 1999: 109)

Meaning:

Take this love with you, indeed your love has ended from my heart in a form of talaq but not forever remain severed,

If you still stubbornly refuse, hence this is the first talaq; your love towards me still have two chances,

*If you turn your face over and reluctant to console, thus I'll divorce you for the second time, but both of the talaq as if done during the menses period (something that I like)
If I divorce you thrice, all at once, hence there is no use to become a ruler of Sibayn district
I am not only condemning a Husayn, but all people that characterized as similar as Husayn.*

In the above-stated poem, the mentioned woman pictured in that poem is a wife to someone. Imam Shafi'i r.h.m portrayed that the love relationship towards his friend likens to a relationship between husband and wife that are having the marriage crisis. He was comparing his friend as a woman (wife) that seems to forget him as a husband due to her obsession in preserving the status quo of hers – despite the husband is still in love with his wife.

However, due to her reluctant to return home, the husband determines to divorce his wife with single *talaq (talaq raj'i)* and not as *talaq bain*. If his wife still loves him, therefore, she may return, within the period of two times of her menstruation circle. However, if the third circle of her menstruation comes in, hence that divorcement turn as *talaq bain* and it is forbidden for them to stay together. *Talaq bain sughra* will taking place where their marriage relationship is nullified and there is no more chance for resolution. Hence, up to this point, the chances for them to reconcile and to stay together as how the legal spouses to be are no longer presentable.

This analogy is in line with the issue of divorce that has been clearly discussed in Quran, chapter al-Baqarah, verse 229-230:

الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَنٍ وَلَا يُجِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا مِمَّا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ٢٢٩ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ٢٣٠

229. Divorce may be (pronounced) twice, then keep (them) in good fellowship or let (them) go with kindness; and it is not lawful for you to take any part of what you have given them, unless both fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah; then if you fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah, there is no blame on them for what she gives up to become free thereby. These are the limits of Allah, so do not exceed them and whoever exceeds the limits of Allah these it is that are unjust.

230. So if he divorces her, she shall not be lawful to him afterwards until she marries another husband; then if he divorces her there is no blame on them both if they return to each other (by marriage), if they think that they can keep within the limits of Allah, and these are the limits of Allah which He makes clear for a people who know.

This poetic text composed of information regarding divorce and the observed period for a woman after a divorce was done, which she may not marry another man. The combination of parable and knowledge on *talaq* and *iddah* in this single poetic text is evaluated to be very meticulous and unique. From the angle of its language structure, the usage of the word *wudd* by Imam al-Shafi'i is truly picturing that his certainty that his friend still loves him, however, that kind of feeling only resides inside his heart and not on his thought. The word of *wudd* is different with *hubb* which the latter is a

tendency of heart and thought towards the beloved ones. The real loving couples must possess the mutual feeling of *hubb* and not solely be in *wudd* throughout the relationship.

3) Women are The Unique Creatures

Ghazal is a form of a poem that existed during the pagan life of Arab Jahiliyya. Usually, the ghazal is a poetic expression that contains the element of love towards women, their beauty and all aspect that can be discussed on a woman. However, with the advent of Islam, the form of ghazal shifted to become more positive and educational – by talking about the noble women, the beauty of self-contemplating and sundries. Amongst the ghazal poem that found in *Diwan al-Shafi'i* r.h.m is a poetic expression created whenever Abu Yaakub al-Buwaity asked Imam Shafi'i regarding zuhd. He inquired al-Shafi'i whether he has any ghazal pertaining to the practice of zuhd? Upon his question, directly, Imam Shafi'i invoked this poem:

ما كان كحللك بالمنعوت للبصر	يا كاحل العين بعد النوم بالسهر	1
حانت وفاتي ولم أشبع من النظر	لو أن عيني إليك الدهر ناظرة	2
لولا التفرق والتنغيص بالسفر	سقى للدهر مضى ما كان أطيبه!	3
مثل السحاب الذي يأتي بلا مطر	إن الرسول الذي يأتي بلا عدة	4
فنور وجهك يجلب ظلمة البصر	دعني أمتع طرفي منك بالنظر	5

(Mujahid Mustafa Bahjat, 1999: 66)

Meaning:

*O people that put kohl after waking up from the midnight sleep
Your kohl is not related to the eye gaze
Though my eyes look upon you forever
My death came, yet it is not contented to put my eyes on you
Pray for the time to reach the perfect point
If not due to dispersion and travel
Indeed, the messengers came were countless
Like the cloud that comes without rain
Let me delight myself by looking at you
As the light of your face glorifies the darkness of eyes*

This poem describes the characteristic of how meticulous the women and always adorned themselves whenever they are sitting with their husbands. Imam al-Shafi'i regarded this kind of women have a perfect appearance even in the dark. However, the loveliness of that woman is not hindering him to remember and contemplate that the death will come in any time. That description on women is in line with the command of Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h towards the responsibilities of a wife in observing their manner while being together with husband:

خَيْرُ النِّسَاءِ مَنْ تَسُرُّكَ إِذَا أَبْصَرْتِ، وَتُطِيعُكَ إِذَا أَمَرْتِ، وَتَحْفَظُ غَيْبَتَكَ فِي نَفْسِهَا وَمَالِكَ

(Narrated by ath-Thabrani, from 'Abdullah bin Salam)

Meaning:

“The most righteous woman is the who when you look at her, you are pleased, devoutly obedient when you order her, if you are absent from her, she guards herself and your property.”

However, Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m did not conclude his poem with that point, but he put the end of that poem by advising the society that the death is pretty near and the pleasure of this life should not deceive them. This statement is concurrently attached with the holy revelation in chapter Ali 'Imran, verse 14:

رُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ الدِّسَاءِ وَالْبَيِّنِ وَالْقَنْطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثَ ذَٰلِكَ مَتَاعُ
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَتَابِ ١٤

The love of desires, of women and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well-bred horses and cattle and tilth, is made to seem fair to men; this is the provision of the life of this world; and Allah is He with Whom is the good goal (of life).

In this context of the discussion, Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m tried to deliver to the society that the women are put in a noble position, the world's ornaments and being cherished above all others. However, human beings should be conscious with this temporary pleasure since the main focus that should be emphasised in this life is to get the blessing of Allah, and get to the best place of return.

Conclusion

Imam al-Shafi'i r.h.m was not putting aside the role and value of women in his poems. His discussions on women throughout his poetic texts were so meticulous and not against the noble character of a Muslim. The elements of advice found in his poems are very valuable and those advices and teachings able to be set as guidelines in adding up the someone's faith towards Allah. It is closely related to verses of Quran and hadith of Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. This situation is clearly portraying his particularity in expressing the poems since he put both of the aforementioned sources as his references. The language pitch used by al-Shafi'i also easy to be understood and appropriate with his character of an educator.

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