

Chapter – 34

## Imam Shafi'i'

(768 - 820 AD)

The name of Imam Shafi'i is Muhammad and his Kunniya is Abdullah. His title is Nasir-ul-Hadith. He was born in about 150AH/768AD in Gaza (*Syria*). His father had died before his birth, so his mother had shifted to her brother in A'sqalan, (*Yemen*).

His father's name is Idrees bin Abbas. His ancestor's name was Shafi'i, so he was called Shafi'i. He belonged to the Quraish tribe and the Hashimi family. Going back to the seventh generation, his gene is met with the Noble Prophet. His mother was from the tribe of Azd, which was considered to be a prominent Yemeni tribe. She was also from the Quraish and Hashimi family.

According to Hafiz ibn Hajr Asqalani, he was having the medium height and moderate body. His hands were too long and reach to his knees. The forehead was wide and he has long nose. He used to have a regular smile on his lips. His beard was modest and in his late age he used to dye to them.

He memorized the Quran at the age of seven. At the age of ten he also learnt the Muwatta of Imam Malik, by heart. Then his mother sent him to Makkah with his uncle for further education. Here he met with Muslim Bin Khalid Ranji, a teacher of Jurisprudence and Mufti of Makkah. From him he taught Jurisprudence and Hadith. In those days he desired to meet Imam Malik, so he left to Madinah, not only with the

permission of his teacher but also with an introductory letter from him. When he first met Imam Malik, Imam said to him: "Fear God! very soon you will get glory". Then he studied Hadith and Fiqh from Imam Malik. During the stay of Madinah Munawwara, he also taught the Hadiths frequently from Ibrahim bin Sa'ad Ansari, Muhammad bin Ismail Fadik and Abdullah bin Nafi' al-Saig. He also studied the Fatawa. He fully understood the rules and regulations of the "Cross questioning and Amendments". Thus he got much benefit from the company of all these renowned scholars.

After completing his education in Madinah, Imam Shafi'i returned to Makkah. Shortly thereafter he went to Yemen. Here, his focus was the various sciences and arts that include: history, art of syntax, art of dictionary, genealogies, face reading and archery. In all these sciences he did attain perfection very quickly. He learned archery considering it as the art of soldiers and got perfection in it. In the science of knowledge, much of the experience and skill of practice is required, but for Imam Shafii' it did not take long to achieve perfection in this subject as well. He worked on the art of dictionary till the age of 20. Imam had memorized ten thousand Hazel (*Bible Verses*) with its unique and rare dictionary. For this, literary experts greatly appreciated the qualities of Imam Shafii'. Mubru says that I have not seen anyone's writing better than Imam Shafi'i's writings. Imam Abu Mansoor, the dictionary expert, admits that Imam Shafi'i has got perfection in this subject. Allamah Zafhashri says that Imam Shafi'i is the Imam of the Sharia and the leader of Mujtahidin. He is an expert on the scriptures and contained extensive knowledge.

Imam Shafii' used to deliver his speeches very eloquently and expressively. Arab idioms were frequently offered in his conversations, which was not easy for ordinary people to

understand. However, he always adopted the simple and easy language in his writings. More than 100 books are cited on various topics. In his writings, "Kitab-ul-Umm" is the most famous book. This book is a collection of various articles covering approximately 140 topics. This collection contains 4,000 pages, in seven volumes.

In addition to his book *Kitab-ul-Umm*, other important writings of Imam Shafi'i are the *Risalah Usool*, *Ahkam-ul-Quran*, and *Ikhtilaf-ul-Hadith*. In the *Risalah Usool*, he has set principles and Hadith and Fiqh. By the time, a series of the false statements in the hadiths were introduced and as a result the Fiqh was also affected. For its rectification, Imam Shafi'i took a round of many Islamic countries and thoroughly assessed the situation first, and after thorough consideration, he devised sophisticated principles that have remained the basis of the day. For example, he gave his own opinion on the speculation. For this he said that the rules contained in the Quran and Sunnah are limited, however new forms emerge with the time and they keep coming limitlessly. Therefore, we need to consider not only the Quran and Hadith but also the practice of the Companions. If some aspects of the problem are the same but the situation is not the same, then we have the right to speculate. Nevertheless, our research may continue but in the light of the basic rules of the Quran and the Hadith and their arguments. Everyone accepted the Imam's opinion. In *Ahkam-ul-Quran*, the book of Imam Shafi'i, the rulings that are obligatory on Muslims include beliefs, worships, legal and social issues as well as the penalizing aspects. This book explains them. Similarly, the book "*Ikhtilaf al-Hadith*" is a comprehensive book of Imam Shafi'i on the subject of Hadith.

The number of the disciples of Imam Shafi'i are said to be 160. But Rabi Ibn Suleiman says that his students were in

hundreds and their exact numbers could not be ascertained. Some of his disciples who created their names include Imam Hameedi, Imam Bukhari, Harmala bin Yahya, Suleiman bin Dawood, Abu Ibrahim, Rabi' bin Suleiman, Abu Yaqoob Yusuf bin Yahya and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal.

His early life was spent in poverty. But later, when Allah bestowed His favour on him, he got hold of wealth like treasure. But he used to distribute this wealth to the needy people and among the poor, the orphans and the widows. In the beginning, when people sympathized with him, he used to repeat what the Noble Prophet had said to Hazrat Abu Dhar. The saying of the Prophet was: *"Live in the world like a poor person or a traveller, and think to yourself that one day you have to go to the grave."* And when people started criticizing his spending money, Imam Shafi'i used to say, *"I follow only the Sunnah". Everybody knows what Abu Bakr had left for his family, he used to say: the name of Allah and his Prophet and that is enough."*

Imam Shafi'i was extremely a truth loving person. He often had debates and discussions and in that he always answered the party with a big smile. He used to say that I have never argued with anyone for the sake of being proud or projecting myself. It was always my intention to say only the truth.

Imam Shafi'i was distinguished by the fact that he used both verbal communication as well as pen. He made speeches and wrote books too. He also had the debates and revolutionized the world through his thoughts. He also freely criticized on views of others and conveyed his own views and ideas to the people very clearly. Imam Ibn Hanbal says for him: *"Shafii' was purely philosophical in four things: One was in the dictionary, the second was in disagreement with other people,*

*the third was in the elegant mystical meanings, and the fourth was Jurisprudence".*

Although Imam Shafi'i was the most prominent person of the time. He was a great Mujtahid. He was the elucidator of the Quran and the narrator of the Hadith. He was the founder of a new school of thought in Islamic Jurisprudence, he got an authority on it. Even then he himself never considered his sayings as the last word. He kept on rethinking. In his researches, explorations, and exertions, he used to adopt deletions, additions and modifications in his writings.

The followers of the Fiqh of Imam Shafi'i are mostly in Egypt and Syria. Once the Shafii Fiqh dominated in these areas it continued to follow. In these countries the office of judge and the speaker was not entrusted to anyone other than the Shafi'i people. The Fiqh of Shafi'i came out of Egypt and rose to prominence in Iraq as well and is widely held in the city of Baghdad. After that it reached to Iran, Hijaz and some parts of India. This Fiqh also gained its influence in North Africa and Andalus in 300AH/912AD. To this day, the same fiqh is still practiced in Egypt.

Imam Shafi'i died in the month of Rajab, 204AH/819AD. At the time of death he was 52 years old. Imam Mazai gave the last bath to him. His funeral was held after the Friday prayer. A large number of people attended this funeral. He was buried in the cemetery near Jabal Muqtain, just outside Cairo. The name of this graveyard is called Qurafa al-Sughra. His shrine is the blessed shrine to this day, and people persistently offering Fatiha on his grave.