

ZAMAKHSHAR AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TOWARD HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

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Zamakhshari is one of those scholars who have greatly influenced the Holy Scripture's interpretation and its knowledge. He came in a time when the Zahiri School influenced general masses, as well as the political authorities. Zamakhshari stressed on metaphorical meaning of the Quran as he belonged to Mu'tazillite School¹ and convinced majority of the scholars about his interpretation. He was a leading scholar in *tafsir*, *hadith*, syntax, linguistics and rhetoric,² and contributed to human knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Abu al-Qasim Muhammad bin Umar Jarullah Zamakhshari Khwarizmi was born in Rajab 27, 467 AH/ March 8, 1075 AD, at Zamakhshar, a town of Khwarizm.³ Al-Suyuti, however, mentions his date birth as 497 AH,⁴ which seems incorrect and probably print mistake. Zamakhshari is called as Jarullah (neighbor of Allah) because of his long stay in Baytullah, at Makkah.⁵

Mahmood Zamakhshari traveled to several places such as Bukharah, Marve, Gorgang, Samarkand, Baghdad and Makkah, to seek knowledge. He studied grammar with an Andalusian scholar, literature with Abu Mudar Mahmood ibn Jarir al-Dabbi and Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn al-Muzaffar.⁶ At Baghdad, he studied with Abu Mansoor Nasr ibn al-Haithi, Abu Sa'd al-Shaqqani and Abu al-Khattab ibn al-Batar⁷ or ibn Tabar⁸ and others. At Makkah he studied with ibn Wahhas.⁹ On his way to hajj, when Zamakhshari stayed at Baghdad, a famous 'Alwi scholar Abu al-Sa'adat ibn al-Shajari greeted him with the following verses:

When questioned, the riders informed me with pleasant
News about Ahmad ibn Da'ud,
Until we met, but by God, my ear did not hear
Better (news) than what I saw (meaning, he was greater
than what he had heard).¹⁰

When ibn Shajari finished, Zamakhshari thanked him. Then praising him he said:

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“Once Zayd al-Khayl¹¹ visited the Prophet (pbuh), upon seeing him, Zaid loudly recited *shadah* (that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is a Messenger of Allah). The Prophet (pbuh) said to him, ‘O Zayd al-Khayl! Everyone who was introduced to me was found inferior than his characteristic, except you. You are more than what was characterized.’ Same is our Sharif.”¹²

Thus Abu al-Qasim Jarullah responded him and praised him more eloquently.

Once travelling to Bukhara, to study there, a tumor developed in his leg and consequently it was cut off.¹³ Then he had to walk on crutches. According to another version, due to heavy snowfall and ice-cold, he slipped and his leg was damaged.¹⁴ Al-Damghani, a famous Hanafi scholar in Iraq, says that he asked Zamakhshari why his leg was cut? In response he said: ‘Due to my mother’s curse.’ To explain this he said:

Once, when I was a child, I caught a sparrow and tied thread to its leg. Then it flew and entered a hole. When I pulled the thread, its leg broke. My mother felt sorry for it and said, ‘may Allah break your leg the way its leg is broken.’ When I traveled to Bukhara in search of knowledge, on my way, I fall down from the back of mount and my leg broke.”¹⁵

There is no contradiction in these statements. Every narration is further explanation for other ones. According to al-Suyuti, at the time of walk he would cover his crutch with his long dress and a spectator would think he is lame. He used to carry documentary report as a proof for the event, for he was afraid that people won’t believe it and would think it was cut off because of suspicion.¹⁶

Zamakhshari was a celebrated scholar. Anywhere he would go, a crowd of student would gather around him. Though his mother tongue was Persian, he would teach in Arabic, except the beginners. It was due to his great love for Arabic language and its superiority.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, he belonged to *Mu’tazillite* School of thought and was proud of it and openly described his creed about

i'tizal. Visiting his friends he would knock the door and would ask the person at the door, "Tell him, Abu al-Qasim al-Mu'tazilli is at the door."¹⁸

While returning from Makkah to his town, Jarullah Zamakhshari died at Gorgang¹⁹ on Dhu al-Hijjah 9, 538 AH/ June 14, 1144 AD. On his death some one has said:

فارض مكة تدرى الدموع مقلته حزناً لفرقة جارالله محمود²⁰
(The land of Makkah is shedding tears being grieved by the separation of Jarullah Mahmood).

CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

Jarullah Mahmood was a genius scholar and had leading role in the field of rhetoric. In this regard he had many works in the field of Quran, linguistics, poetry etc. His works are as follow:

AS A LINGUIST

As a linguist, Zamakhshari has several works in various fields of linguistic:

TAFSIR (INTERPRETATION OF THE QURAN)

In this field his most famous work is Quranic exegesis naming, *al-Kashshaf 'an haqa'iq al-tanzil wa 'uyun al-al-aqawil fi wujuh al-ta'wil*. This work is appreciated even by his critics who blame him for *I'tizal*.

According to Zamakhshari, he wrote this *tafsir* because some of his friends insisted to do so. Therefore, he delivered some lectures on *Surah al-Baqarah*, which were recorded by them. Later on, he traveled to Makkah and completed rest of his work in a short period of two years and three or four months, while such work takes usually thirty years. According to Zamakhshari, it happened due to the blessing of this holy place.²¹

Al-Kashshaf, actually reveals beauty of the Quran through its rhetoric and keeping various sciences in it. The author has compassed rhetoric, *al-Adab* (literature), *'ilm al-Ma'ani* (the science of meaning) and *'ilm al-Bayan* (elocution).

In introduction of *al-Kashshaf*, the author writes:

It is only the science of *tafsir*, if it is adopted, non-of the scholars have been successful until now, to have complete insight in it, as Jahiz has mentioned in his work *Nazm al-Quran...* One could be a diver of a deep ocean of the Quranic realities, who is skilled in two Quranic sciences i.e. the science of meaning and the science of rhetoric... It means, he

has vast and deep study based on research, and has gone through many books and references; he is aware of ups and downs of time, and he is hero of literature and pioneer of the Quranic scholars. Beside these virtues, he is of balanced nature, very aware and sharp minded, aware of the Quranic issues, even though these are too tiny. He is well informed of allusion and metaphors even hidden in layers; he is neither fanatic nor narrow minded, hard tempered and furious...²²

Truly, Zamakhshari has guarded all in his *tafsir* what he has said in the introduction. It is as such the author has described in poetic verses. He says:

ان التفاسير في الدنيا بلا عدد
ان كنت تبغى الهدى فلزم قراءته
وليس فيها، لعمري، مثل كشافي
فا لجهل كالداء والكشاف كالشافي²³

(There are countless *tafsir* in this world, but by my life, non-is like my Kashshaf.

If you want to seek guidance, then you must study it. Ignorance is like disease and Kashshaf is its healer).

Any work that is praised by others, especially by the opponents, is truly worth to be proud of. About Zamakhshari and his Kashshaf, a famous scholar, al-Suyuti writes that he was a king of rhetoric; this is why his book spread all over the Far East and West.²⁴

Another scholar, Shaikh Hayder al-Harvi says:

As for al-Kashshaf, it is highly exalted and nothing has been seen like that,

Either in the predecessors' collection or in their followers...He

left no stone while using the principles of interpretation...Comparing

other *tafsir* with it, if we suppose that others are free of tiny

errors, they would not have such a beauty and sweetness (as possess

al-Kashshaf).²⁵

Kashshaf is distinguished from other *tafsir* because of its five characteristics:

1. It is free of interpolation and unnecessary details.

2. It is free of stories and Judaic.
3. The author has solely depended on Arabic language while explaining Quranic words and its styles.
4. Special attention is given to rhetoric, and for the reason of inimitability of the Quran he has searched out rhetorical points in it.
5. To explain any point, the author has adopted method of question answer. First of all he raises question, then he responds to it.²⁶

Al-Kashshaf's popularity could be imagined from its commentaries written by many scholars during the span of time. Ahmad ibn Munayyar al-Maliki wrote its commentary, naming it as *al-Intisaf min al-Kashshaf*,²⁷ in 683 AH/ 1284 AD. Abdullah ibn al-Hadi ibn Yahya's work in 810 AH/ 1407 AD is called *al-Jawaahir al-Shaffaaf al-Multaqat min Mughaassat alKashshaaf. Tajrid 'ala Kashshaaf m'a ziyaadati nukati al-Kashshaaf*, by Jamalud-Din Ali ibn Muhamad ibn Abi al-Qasim, has been published from San'a', in 795 AH/ 1393 AD. *Nughbatul Kashshaf min Khutbatil Kashshaf*, by Muhammad Feroz Abadi (d. 817 AH/ 1414 AD). 'Ali al-Jurjani, who died in 816 AH/ 1413 AD, has marginal notes, published from Cairo in 1308 and 1318 AH. Another work *Khulasatul Kashshaf* is compiled by Siddiq Hasan Khan, Amir of Bhopal in 1307 AH/ 1890 AD.

His opponents, such as Abu Hayyan blames him for lacking knowledge in the field of rhetoric.²⁸ However, this objection is not valid because majority of his opponents, too, considers him irrefutable in this field. His only "sin" is that Zamakhshari belongs to Mu'tazillite School of thoughts as well as he strongly advocates them.

IN THE FIELD OF GRAMMAR

Like other sciences, Zamakhshari studied syntax. He studied *al-Kitab*, a famous book of Grammar, by an eminent linguist, Sibawayh.²⁹ This is why Basra School of Grammar influenced him. On some issues he gave preference to Kufa and Baghdad School. He, however, has disagreement on several grammatical issues with other grammarians and has presented a different point of view. In Grammar, Zamakhshari has two works:

1. *Al-Mufassal*
2. *Al-Unmudhaj*

Al-Mufasssal is well known work among the grammarians. It was compiled in sixteen months, from Ramadan 513 – Muharrm 515 AH/ 1119-1121 AD.³⁰ It was so popular that several scholars have commentary on it. Ibn Ya'ish,³¹ in two volumes, knows the most famous explanation as *Sharh al-Mufasssal*. This is also very popular because it is short and concise. The author has divided it into four types:

- i) Nouns, in which he discussed nominative (*marfu'at*), accusative (*mansubat*), genitive (*majrurat*), diminutives (*tasghir*) and derived (*mushtaqat*).
- ii) Verb and its various types.
- iii) Articles and their types of coupling and non-coupling (such as prepositions, exception particles, conditional particles, interrogative, etc.
- iv) Common nouns.

The second treatise *al-Unmudhaj* was also very popular. Several scholars have commentary on it. The notable explanation is by Abdul Ghani al-Irdbaily. Another commentary is *Hada'iq al-Haqa'iq*, by Sa'dud Din al-Barda'i. Muhammad 'Isa 'Askari's commentary, *al-Firudhaj fi al-Unmudhaj*, is published in two volumes from Cairo in 1289 AH.

Other than these two works, the author has two other treatises in syntax, called *al-Mufrad wa al-Murakkab fi al-Nahw* and *al-Ahaji fi al-Nahw*. Their names are found in books but these are not available.

OTHER WORKS IN LINGUISTIC

Zamakhshari's knowledge of Arabic was very vast. He was not only aware of its grammatical aspects but also of its similes, metaphors, proverbs, parables and various aspects of rhetoric. He knew their origin and root, which is visible in his works as follows:

- i) *Asas al-Balaghah*. It is a dictionary of old Arabic language, and is properly arranged. This arrangement gave it popularity. Basically the author has differentiated between *haqiqat* (real meaning) and *majaz* (metaphorical meaning), and between *sarih* (clear meaning) and *kinayah* (metonymy). One of the characteristics of this book is that the author brings those words and their beautiful phrase construction, which are used by creative minded and genius people. He also informs us about the era in which that word or idiom etc. was used. This book has been

published respectively from Egypt and Luckhnow, in 1299 and 1341 A. H.

ii) *Al-Durr al-Da'ir* is a collection of metaphors and similes of the Arabs.

iii) *Al-Mustaqsa fi al-Amthal*. It is a collection of old similes used by the Arabs. Its manuscripts are found in Istanbul and other places.

iv) *Muqaddimatul Adab*. The book contains treasure of words for literary purpose. Zamakhshari also wrote its explanation in Persian. He has dedicated this book to a general, Atsiz ibn Khwarizm Shah.

v) *Nuzhatul Muta'annis wa Nuhzatul Muqtabis* is a literary book to understand language.

vi) *Zubdatul Amthal*, vii) *Sawa'irul Amthal*, viii) *Diwan al-Tamaththul* and ix) *Samim al-Arabiyyah* are some other works in this field.

AS A MAN OF LETTERS

Jarullah was a creative writer and his creativity is visible in all his writings. The following example will shed light on his writing. In Al-Atwaq, he writes:

احمق من النعاقمه من افتخر بالزعامة، لمارى الشقى من الزعيم، ولا بعد منه منافوز بالنعيم، هالك بالهوالك، خابط في الظلم الحوالك، على آثاره لاعفاء، ادركته بجانيقها الضعفاء.³²

Trans: "The one proud of leadership, is stupid than an Ostrich; I do not see more misfortunate than a leader who is for from tranquility. He perishes to death, lost in darkness; destruction follows him when his weapons target weak people."

Writing about nobility, he says:

لا تقنع بالشرف التالد، فذلك الشرف للوالد، واضم الى التالد طريفاً حتى تكون بهما شريفاً، ولا تدل بشرف ابيك ما لم تدل عليه بشرف فيك.³³

Trans: Don't be satisfied with possessed nobility, for that is your father's nobility.

Add to it uncommon qualities that make you distinguished. Don't proceed with your father's honor, until you are told about your own honor (means until you have your own dignity and eminence).

Evil scholars (ulama-e-soo') are found in every society. They, too, were part of the society where Zamakhshari was living. Telling about their character, he says:

مالعلماء السوء جمعوا عزائم الشرع ودونوها، ثم رخصوا فيها لامراء السوء و
 هونوها، -- ليقيمروا المال وييسروا، ويفقروا الايتام ويوسروا، اكمام واسعة، فيها
 اصلال لاسعة، واقلام كانهما ازلام، وفتوى يعمل بها الجاهل فيتوى³⁴

Trans. 'What happened to the evil scholars? They gathered together to resolve religious issues and wrote them down. Then they soften them for evil rulers and degraded it. Infected they preserved it and then suspended it...just to gamble and play game of chance with, to put the orphans in need and prosper their selves. Their long sleeves bear biting vipers. Their pens are just like arrows without head and feathers. As for their *fatwa*, when an ignorant person act upon them, he parishes.'

AS A POET

Beside other qualities, Zamakhshari was a poet. His collection of poetry is called *Diwan al-Sh'ir*. It has been published from Cairo. Some scattered parts could be found in different books. His poetry is meaningful and beautiful. Some of his poetry is presented here:

العمر للرحمان جل جلاله وسواه في جهلاته يتغمغم
 ماللتراب وللعلوم وانما يسعى ليعلم انه لا يعلم³⁵

1. Knowledge is with the most Merciful and the Exalted.
Other than Him just mutters in their ignorance.
2. What is the association of dust (man) with sciences? He is just struggling to know, because he does not know.

At other place Zamakhshari expresses his love to the family of the Prophet. But this love is logical, not a blind one. He says:

كثر الشك والخلاف وكل يدعي الفوز بالصراط السوي
 فاعتصق بلاله سواه ثم حبي لاحمد وعلى
 فاز كلب بحب اصحبك هف كيف اشقى بحب آل نبي؟³⁶

1. Doubts and disagreement rose a great deal. Everyone claims he succeeded to find the right path.
2. My attachment is to the One, and there is no god but He. After that my love is dedicated to Ahmad and Ali.

3. A dog succeeded when he loved people of the Cave. How could I be misfortunate if I express my love to the family of the Prophet?

Ibn Khallikan says that at Halb, someone of the scholars, sung some verses to me and told that Zamakhshari had commandment that after his death these verses should be written down on his tomb. These verses are:

الهي قد اصبحت ضيفك في الثرى³⁷ ولضيف حق عند كل كريم
فهب لي ذنوبي في قرأى فانها عظيم ولا يقري³⁷ بغير عظيم

Oh my God! I have to be Your guest in soil,
And a guest has the right with every noble (to be entertained).

Therefore, forgive my sins in my hospitality because these (sins)
Are tremendous and cannot be tackled without the help of All Mighty.

Jarullah Zamakhshari has elegiac verses that he composed on the death of his teacher Abu Mudar. In these verses he says:

A narrator said what these pearl are, dropping continuously from your eyes?

I told, these are the pearls that had dropped Abu Mudar in my ears,
dropping now through my eyes.³⁸

Other than that, Jarullah Mahmood has an explanation of poetic verses used by Sibawayh, in his book. This explanation is called *Sharh Abyat Kitabu Sibawayh*. He has also an explanation of al-Shanfara's qasidah.

HADITH WORKS

In hadith literature, the author has three books.

1. *Kitab al-Fa'iq*. It is a dictionary to understand hadith vocabulary. It has been published from Hyderabad in 1334 A.H.
2. *Mukhtasar al-Muwafaqah Bayna Aal al-Bayt wa al-Sahabah*
3. *Khasa'is al-'Asharah al-Kiram al-Bararah*.

USUL:

Jarullah Mahmood had two books in this field:

1. *Mu'jam al-Hudud*.
2. *Al-Minhaj*

PROSODY

In prosody, Zamakhshari's work is called *al-Qistas fi al-'Urud*.

MAWA'IZ (Religious Exhortation)

Zamakhshari has several dialogues, carrying moral lessons. These dialogues are known as *Nawabigh al-Kalim*. These are also called *Muqamat*, as well as *Nasaa'ih al-Kubra*. The author begins them with "Ya Aba al-Qasim".

STORIES

Abu al-Qasim has two compilations of stories.

1. *Fusus al-Akhbar*.

2. *Rabi' al-Abrar*.

FIQH

Ru'oos al-Masa'il is book of fiqh.

In brief, Zamakhshari Jarullah Mahmood's scholarly writing is still blooming. His *tafsir* is criterion to understand deep meaning of the Quran, its similes, metaphors and proverbs. Asas al-Baslaghah and al-Mufassal and other works regarding to understand Arabic language are still providing guidance to scholars. He has contributed a lot in advancement of knowledge

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ . Mu'tazillah means 'those who separate themselves, who stand aside.' This religious movement was found at Basrah, in the first half of the 2nd/ 8th century by Wasil ibn 'Ata' (d. 131/ 748). This doctrine is based on five principles: (I) Uniqueness of God; (ii) Justice of God; (iii) the promise and the threat [that every Muslim, guilty of serious offence, who dies without repentance, will suffer for eternity the torments of Hell; (iv) the theory of an "intermediate state", that the sinful Muslim cannot here on earth be classified as "believer" or as "disbeliever" but would belong to a separate category that of the malefactor; and (v) the obligation on every Muslim to command the good and forbid the evil (*EI* 7, s.v. Mu'tazilla).

² . Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayaat al-A'yan*, Qum: Manshurat al-Radi, 1324; 5: 168.

³ . . *Da'irah-e-Ma'arif Islamiyah*, Danishgah-e-Punjab, Lahore, 10: 487.

b. M. Husayn al-Dhahabi, Dr. *al-Tafsir wa Mufassirun*, Beirut: Dar al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam, 1: 278.

c) *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, Beirut: Dar Ahiya' al-Turath al-Arabia, ND; 19: 127;

d) Ibn al-'Imad al-Hanbali, *Shadharat al-Dhahab*, Beirut: Dar al-Aafaq al-Jadidah, 3: 121.

e) Al-Sam'ani, *al-Ansab*, 3: 164; f) Muhammad Husayn al-Dhabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirun*, 1: 429;

g) Hafiz Shamsud Din al-Da'udi, *Tabaqat al-Mufassirin*, 2: 315 etc.

⁴ . Jalal ud-Din 'Abdur Rahman al-Suyuti, *Bughyatul Wu'at fi Tabaqat al-Lughwiyin wa al-Nuhat*. Ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim. Matba' Isa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Shuraka'uh, 2: 279.

⁵ . *Da'irah-e-Ma'arif-e-Islamiyah*, 10: 487.

⁶ *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, 2: 127.

- ⁷ Al-Daudi, *Tabaqat al-Mufassirin*, 2: 315.
- ⁸ . Ibn al-'Ibad, *Shadharat al-Dhahab*, 3: 118.
- ⁹ . Da'irah-e-Ma'arif-e-Islamiyah, 10: 487.
- ¹⁰ *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, 19: 128.
- ¹¹ Zayd al-Khayl (d. 9 A.H./ 630 A.D.) came to the Prophet and embraced Islam. The Prophet called him "Zayd al-Khayr." On his return from Madinah, he died on the way (*Sirah ibn Hisham*, 2: 577, 578, *Usd al-Ghabah* 1: 477).
- ¹² Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, 19: 128-129.
- ¹³ . *Ibid*, 127
- ¹⁴ . *Ibid*.
- ¹⁵ . *Ibid*.
- ¹⁶ *Bughyatul-Wu'at*, 2: 280; *Shadharat al-Dhahab*, 3: 119.
- ¹⁷ . *Shadharat al-Dhahab*, 3: 119.
- ¹⁸ . *Ibid*, 3: 120; *Urdu Da'irah-e-Ma'arif-e-Islamiyah*, 10: 487
- ¹⁹ In Arabic it is called Jorjania, which is corrupt form Gorgang (Yaqut, *Mu'jam*, sv "Jurjania") Also *Wafayat al-A'yan*, 5: 170.
- ²⁰ . Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirin*, 1: 431.
- ²¹ . *Wafayat al-A'yan*, 5:173.
- ²² Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf's* introduction.
- ²³ . *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, 19:129; *Kashf al-Zunun*, 2: 173.
- ²⁴ Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirin*, 1: 441.
- ²⁵ . *ibid*, 436-37.
- ²⁶ Al-Zurqani, *Manahil al-'Irfan*.
- ²⁷ He is Ahmad ibn Mansoor al-Maliki, Chief Justice of Alexandria. In his works he has actually targeted Zamakhshari's mu'tazilite thoughts. In his words, "thank to Allah Who helped me to take revenge for Ahl al-Sunnah from the innovators" (Hariri, *Tarikh Tafsir wa Mufassirin*, p. 348).
- ²⁸ . *Al-Bahr al-Muhit*, 7: 85.
- ²⁹ . He was Abu Bishr 'Amr ibn Uthman ibn Qunber, known as Sibawayh. He was born in al-Bayda', a suburb of Shiraz, in 148 AH. He came to Baghdad and studied grammar with Shaikh Salama. But to become a master in the field of syntax, he studied with al-Khalil, 'Isa ibn 'Umar and Yunus ibn Habib. He studied literature with al-Akhfash. Thus he became the leader of philologists and the first who expended the science of grammar. He died in 180 AH at Sawa or Shiraz (al-Zirikli, *Wafayat al-A'yan*, vol.3; Kahhalah, *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin*; Mudarris, *Rehanatul Adab*, vol.3 etc).
- ³⁰ Urdu Da'irah al-Ma'arif Islamiyah, 10: 488. Also *Wafayat al-A'yan*, 5: 169.
- ³¹ . He was Abu al-Baq'a Muwaffaq al-Din Ya'ish ibn Ali ibn Ya'ish al-Nahawi (d. 643 AH/ 1245 AD). He was one of famous a grammarians.
- ³² . *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, 19:130
- ³³ . *Ibid*, 131.
- ³⁴ . *Ibid*, 130-31.
- ³⁵ . *Ibid*, 129.
- ³⁶ . *ibid*.
- ³⁷ . *Tabaqat al-Mufassirin*, p.316.
- ³⁸ *Shadharat al-Dhahab*, 3: 120

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- * ... *Asas al-Balaghah*, ed. Abdur Rahim Mahmood. PNG; ND.