

## **Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and His Intellectual Contributions: A Study**

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**Abstract.** *Qutb uddin Ahmad ibn Abdur Rahim al- Umari ad- Dehlawi, commonly known as Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, was an Islamic Sunni Scholar and Sufi reformer. Shah Waliullah was an exceptional individual, who has undoubtedly made the greatest social, political, religious, literary, and intellectual contributions to the development of thought in south-east Asia. Shah Waliullah, without doubt struggled for the improvement of Muslims. He urged the Muslims to refrain from false practices, exhorted them to unite and not to divide on insignificant differences. Shah Waliullah left a lasting legacy behind and indeed is and always will be a source of inspiration for generations to come. His contributions and renaissance of the Muslims positively impacted those in his time continues to do so. Shah Waliullah's reformist ideas profoundly impacted those of his time to such an extent that the annals of history of Southeast Asia cannot be discussed without referring to his influence. Even the various schools of thought and reformist movements of our time, especially those linked to the subcontinent revere him and have pride in boasting their origins back to his teaching and claim his intellectual and spiritual influence.*

*In this study, we shall try our best to explore the contributions of Shah waliullah Dehlawi in every side of the society.*

**Key words:** *Explore, Exceptional, Contribution, Attribute, Holy Qur'an, Literary and impact.*

### **Introduction:**

The start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be attributed to the decline of Muslim rule in the Indian sub-continent. The situation of Indian Muslims was continuously declining to the extent that they started to fear for their survival and identity. Fortunately, Shah Waliullah, a prominent Islamic scholar in Delhi decided to take matters into his own hands to protect Muslim rule, culture and religion. He believed that the religious decline was the reason behind the social, political and economic devastation of the Muslims and that former splendour could only be restored by applying Islamic teachings in every sphere of life. For this purpose, he started many efforts. Moreover he translated the Holy Qur'an into Persian. He also united different sects of Muslims to create harmony in society. He also made contributions to the literature and published many of his works. It highlights the incredible social, political, and religious services of Shah Waliullah, the great Islamic scholar of Indian subcontinent.

### **Early Education and Career:**

Shah Waliullah received his early education at al- Madrasah al- Rahimiyyah founded by his father. By the age of fourteen, he had memorized the Quran and gained proficiency in Arabic and Persian. At fifteen he was initiated into the Naqshabandi order. Following his father's death in 1131 AH (1719 CE) Shah Waliullah assumed the position of headmaster at the family's Madrasah-i- Rahimiyah, a renowned Islamic seminary in Delhi during his time.

## **Studies in the Hejaz:**

In 1731 CE, Shah Waliullah travelled to the Hejaz for hajj ( pilgrimage to Mecca), after which he remained in Mecca and Medina for about fourteen months to study under renowned Hadith masters and broaden his intellectual horizons. He studied under scholars like shaykh Abu Tahir al-Kudri and shaykh Taj al-Din al- Qala'i. He obtained ijazahs in the six classical collections of Hadith as well as the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik.

During this time, he saw the forty seven spiritual visions which from the subject matter of his famous mystical work *Fuyud al-haramayn* ( Emanations or Spiritual visions of Mecca and Medina) notable entries include visions of Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain giving him a pen symbolizing his inheritance of the prophets knowledge. After making his second hajj, Shah Waliullah returned home to Delhi in 1144 AH (1732 CE), All but one or two of his works were produced during his later years.

The life of Shah Waliullah, the most prominent Muslim thinker and scholar-revolutionary of pre-modern India coincided with the period of multiple crises, both political and socio-religious that confronted the Muslim world in general and the Muslim of Indian subcontinent in particular.

## **His Thought and Style as Arabic Author in *Hujjatul- Balighah*:**

By the consensus of all critical opinion Shah Waliullah's book *Hujjatul- Balighah* is his most famous and a standard Arabic work. It was produced in period of decline in the standards of the Arabic language and literature not only in India but in the whole of Arab and the wider Muslim world.

It was against this background that Shah Waliullah appeared on the Arabic literary scene of South Asia. It is to the credit of this great scholar-revolutionary that he brought about a revolution in the development and the use of Arabic language. He produced his world –famous book *Hujjatul- Balighah* which is perhaps best book written in India on the religio-philosophical aspects of Islam. In it he discusses both scholasticism and the secrets and philosophy of religion which he regarded as the most important of all the religious sciences. He successfully presented in it the highest philosophy of Islamic Shari'at in an intelligible and demonstrative form.

A careful study of the book shows that Shah Waliullah had mastered the Arabic language and literature including its syntax, morphology and rhetoric. His early memorisation and profound understanding of the Qur'an had left a deep and lasting impact on his religious, spiritual and philosophical orientation. That is the main reason that his writing throughout this book and elsewhere are interspersed with the words, expressions and verses used in the Qur'an.

## **His contribution to Qur'anic studies:**

It can be said that Shah Waliullah's translation of the Qur'an into the Persian language is arguably his greatest work and contribution. This is because at that time Persian was the culture, educational and administrative language of India. Furthermore, there was an absence of such translation of the Qur'an. Due to such absence, the masses remains in ignorance about the main primary source of Islam. Hence, Shah Waliullah fulfilled such a dire need by writing an easy to read translation of the Qur'an and that too in the language of the people.

## **There was an absence of such translation of the Qur'an:**

As in several other branches of Islamic learning, Shah Waliullah excelled and made pioneering contributions in the field of Qur'anic studies also. He had been principally concerned with the mission of rehabilitating the theory and practice of authentic, accommodating, flexible and tolerant Islam as preached and practised by Prophet Muhammad, who is rightly revered by Muslims as the Qur'an in action. He wanted to accomplish this objective by disseminating knowledge about the original sources of Islam i.e. the Qur'an and Hadith, the study of which had been neglected in South Asia where the doctrine of *taqlid* (*tradition*) had been in vogue since the advent of Islam in this region.

## **Fath ar- Rahman (Translation of the Qur'an):**

Shah Waliullah's translation of the Qur'an into Persian known as " Fath ar- Rahman," was a groundbreaking effort to make the Qur'an accessible to non- Arabic speaking Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. This was one of the earliest translations of the Qur'an into a non-Arabic language.

## **Al-Budur al-bazigha (The full Moon Rising in Splendour):**

The unity of God, the purpose of human existence and the evolution of religious laws. It reflects Shah Waliullah's philosophical inquiries into the nature of divine attributes and human responsibilities.

*Izalat al-Khifa' an khilafat al-khulafa* ( Removing the uncertainty about the Caliphate of the Caliphs): Here he addresses the concept of Caliphate and leadership in Islam. In this book he delves into the historical, theological and political aspects of the caliphate, discussing the roles and responsibilities of caliphs and leaders in the Muslim community. The book aims to clarify misconceptions and provide a comprehensive understanding of Islamic governance based on the principles derived from the Qur'an and Hadith.

## ***Al-Fauz al- Kabir fi Usul al-Tafsir* (The Great Success in the Principles of Quranic Commentary):**

This is a comprehensive text that outlines the foundational principles of tafsir (Quranic exegesis) according to Shah Waliullah. It covers various aspects understanding the Qur'an, including linguistic, theological and contextual considerations. The book serves as a guide for scholars and students of the Qur'an to approach its interpretation systematically and accurately.

### **Socio-Political Context and Impact:**

Shah Waliullah's era marked the decline of the Mughal Empire which faced significant challenges from regional powers such as the Marathas, Sikhs and Jats. Economically British colonial interests were encroaching, particularly in Bengal. Socially, there was a growing disconnect from Islamic practices introduced during earlier Mughal reigns. As India teetered on the edge of British colonization, the Mughal Empire was disintegrating, losing control and increasingly engaging in immoral activities.

Shah Waliullah emerged during this tumultuous period just before the full establishment of British rule and amidst the decline of the Mughal Empire. He and his family were well known within the Mughal dynasty. He utilized his intellectual stature and moral authority to actively engage in political discourse. He advocated for Muslim unity and revival of Islamic governance.

### **Engagement with Mughal administration:**

**Advisory Role:** Despite the declining Mughal Empire, Shah Waliullah maintained close relationship with the ruling class, providing guidance on state, law and governance matters. **Critique and Reform:** He critiqued the moral and administrative failures of the Mughal rulers and sought to reform both intellectual and practical aspects of governance, ensuring adherence to principles of justice and moral integrity.

His correspondence with political leaders played a crucial role in shaping political alliances and strategies. A significant example of his political influence was his letter to Ahmad Shah Durrani, urging him to intervene in India to restore Muslim political authority. This intervention culminated in the pivotal Battle of Panipat in 1761, underscoring Shah Waliullah's role as political thinker and strategist dedicated to protecting Muslim communities from both external threats and internal discord.

### **Shah Waliullah's cosmological understanding:**

Shah Waliullah's cosmological understanding was a sophisticated blend of Sufi metaphysics, rational thoughts, and Islamic theology. By grounding his cosmological views in the Quran and Sunnah, he provided a comprehensive framework that influenced his educational reforms and socio-political thoughts.

**Moral and Ethical Order:** Shah Waliullah linked his cosmological views to social and political ethics. He believed that understanding the divine order of the universe could guide humans in establishing a just and moral society.

### **Shah Waliullah as Hakim of the Ummat**

Here we must give full credit to Shah Waliullah that like a successful Hakim (Philosopher Wise man) of the Ummat Muslim community, he is not only correctly diagnosed the malady that had crippled

the Muslim society but also prescribed the panacea for their ills and diseases which according to him lay in reasserting the principles of ijtihad and in reviving the teaching of Islam as supported by the qur'an and Sunnah. He fully realised that the Muslim had become totally cut off from any direct knowledge of the Qur'an and that their entire knowledge of Islam was based on hearsay and indirect sources. That was also main reason why their practices contrasted sharply with the genuine teaching of the Qur'an. He, therefore, thought it absolutely necessary for Muslims to get acquainted with the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith in order to be rightly guided in their socio-religious and judicial matters. Moreover, it was mainly on the strength of dynamic and enlightened Islam as enshrined in the Qur'an that he tried his best through his writings and preachings to bridge the gulf between different hostile groups among Muslims.

### **His Impact:**

The innovative religious and philosophical thought of Shah Waliullah characterised by his pacifist and reconciliatory approach had an indelible impact on the socio-religious of the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent. He succeeded to a great extend through his writing on subject in paving the ground for the coming generations of sufis to address themselves straightway to the main objective of tasawwuf for their enlightenment.

Shah Waliullah himself an accomplished theologian and Sufi, effectively highlighted the interdependence of Shariatand Tariqat. Just as he did not permit for the Sufis any deviation for the commands of Sjhariat, similarly he demanded from the theologians that while performing their religious duties, they should also abide by the spirit behind the outward manifestation of Islam.

The thought of Shah Waliullah served as a guard in the sub-continent against the militant extremism which spread in the wake of the Wahhabi movements launched by the followers of Muhammad ibn-Abdul Wahhab of Najd.

The great lasting impact of Shah Waliullah is clearly visible in a number of reform movements that were lauched by Muslim Ulama and reformers in different parts of the country in their respective times. The Ahl-i-Hadith 'Ulama and Ulema of Deoband Movement, the Nadwatul Ulema Movement, etc. have been inspired by his teaching and thought.

### **Social contribution:**

Shah Waliullah made exceptional contributions through his reforms, he aligned society towards success. At that time Muslims had totally forgotten their authentic teaching. They actively practised many innovations in their daily lives that were against the spirit of Islam. To eliminate the non-Islamic practices from the daily lives of the Muslims, he took several steps. First he worked hard to remove sectarianism from society by eliminating hostility between shia and sunni sects of Islam and making them unite on common grounds. He wrote many books to end these group misunderstanding. Second the concept of dowry was on the rise among the Muslims. He made them realize that these practices are not allowed in Islam and discouraged them. Third, inter-religious marriages between Hindus and Muslims were increasingly becoming a norm of society. To eliminate this innovation in Islam, he declared a ban on inter-religious marriage practice. He also opposed the accumulation of wealth. He believed that the Islamic system of zakat was the best remedy for this evil and encouraged Muslims to increase practise it. Hence, the contributions of Shah Waliullah in the social sector helped Muslims a lot in protecting their identity.

### **Political contributions:**

A hallmark of Shah Waliullah was his ability to reconcile opposing points of view to the satisfaction of each side. Standing behind this aspect of his teachings is the unity of the Muslim community. His powerful abilities as a reconciler enabled him to provide common ground and a strong basis for co-operation and harmony between the sunni and sia

Shah Waliullah worked tirelessly for the protection of Muslim rule. Politically, his foresight and wisdom created a political enlivening of Muslims and despite being an Islamic scholar, he emerged as a political leader of Muslims. He did not rely on the incompetent Mughal rulers. He played a pivotal

role in making Muslims learn about their authentic culture and heritage. Furthermore, he proposed that a system should be created in which all the matters should be carried out according to teaching of Islam. In short, the political contributions of Shah Waliullah saved the Muslims from destruction.

### **Religious contributions**

Being an Islamic scholar, Shah Waliullah always worked for consolidation of Islam. He believed that Muslim should not only read the Quran but also understand it. He always opposed the concept of blind following and promoted logical understanding of concepts. Moreover, he urged Muslim rulers to follow in prophet Muhammad's(S.A.W)footsteps and lead a simple life. He brought elasticity to Islam by introducing liberal concepts. He strongly supported the need for Ijtihad and believed that the solution to the newly confronted problems lies in the practice of Ijtihad. He was the mujtahid of that time and found Islamic solutions to many problems. Besides this, he also worked to create a balance between different sects. He studied all the Muslim fiqh and wrote **Al Insaf fi Bayan Sbab al Ikhtiaf**, highlighting the common points among sects.

### **Literary contributions**

Shah Waliullah did wonders with the help of his writings by presenting a new modern version of Islam. He wrote around one hundred books in Urdu and Persian which opened a new era of literature for the subcontinent. One of the remarkable contributions is translating the Holy Quran into Persian. Also he wrote a book called ‘Hujja Allah al Baligah’ in which he mentioned the factors responsible for the downfall of Muslims. Moreover , he wrote “Fuyyuz ALHaramain”; in this book he described his dream in which he was told about his charg. Likewise he published another book named “Khilafat al khulafa”. The main idea behind this book was to end the misunderstanding between shia and sunnis. He made them realise that their creatures of the same God and they have many small differences in their belief but they have a lot of things in common. In summery, literature published by Shah Waliullah proved to be a turning point in the history of Muslims.

### **Critical Analysis**

After evaluating the contributions of Shah Waliullah, it is not wrong to say that he made unforgettable efforts to protect Muslims' survival. His guidance, not limited to the religious field, proved very beneficial as he saved them from the brunt of Marhattas. In addition, his idea of the understanding of the Holy Quran gave a new life to the belief of Indian Muslims, who used to blindly follow the statements made by Ulema.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion, it is concluded that his lessons created consciousness of the current risks and what the future had for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Shah Waliullah's situation as a scholar and conservative is undisputed in subcontinent. His services made a live Muslim society and played his part for the recovery of the Muslims in the subcontinent. He lived in eighteenth century yet his view point and way to deal with the issue of his age belongs to twentieth

In a nutshell, Shah Waliullah is among those personalities whose services protected the identity of Muslims in the subcontinent, as he worked enthusiastically and tirelessly for the social revival of Muslims. He tried to solve the social problems confronted by Muslims through his writing and advice. Besides this, He was the first to translate the Holy Quran into Persian to help people understand it correctly and try to apply it in daily life.

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