SOCIO-ECONOMIC IDEAS OF SHAH WALIULLAH

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis is an attempt to emphasize Shah Waliullah has a reformer in various fields of Islamic Society with special reference to his socio-economical thoughts. It was the period when the Islamic society was on its way to ultimate ruin and destruction. The political power of the Mughal dynasty was challenged by new forces and the corrupt Mughal kings were unmindful of their responsibility as rulers. Shah Waliullah was a witness to the political, religious, educational, economical and other conditions of the society and was conscious of the consequences to which it was exposed. He tried his best to halt and divert the process of destruction of Islamic values in the Muslim society with the zeal of a reformer. In this thesis a general survey of his achievements has been attempted with particular emphasis on his contribution to Islamic education. The present work seeks to investigate and study socio-economic ideas of Shah Waliullah with an attempt to discuss their efforts and endeavours with necessary analysis and exploration. This study has tried to collect the materials from the original sources and books of Shah Waliullah and other writers. The study has been conducted under six chapters excluding the introduction, which is summarized below:

The introduction forms the background of the study in which discussion on various aspects of Shah Waliullah’s achievements has been attempted from the beginning of his career to its end. In practice people had forgotten the life to come after death. The enjoyment on this earth was the order of the day. The morals of the public were so debased that it was only the worldly interests with which they were concerned. The so called Mujaheddin had lost the spirit of fighting in the way of God. Some people had occupied the position of court poets enjoyed in the company of the rulers and nobles. Others entered the profession of mystics, faqirs and story tellers which had became their profession and the means of living. In short, lawful means of livelihood, which required hard work and sense of moral values, became absent and people were undulging in the art of idleness. In his analysis of the rise and fall of nations Shah Waliullah goes deep and links the moral degradation to the ills of the economic system prevailing in the society.
He addressed the different sections of the society and pointed out the state of affairs. He addressed the nobles, the soldiers, the people of learning, the scholars and divinity and also the people of different vocations drawing their attention to the moral weaknesses they were suffering from.

Shah Waliullah was one of the most influential figures among the reformers who were born in the Indian subcontinent. He was a brilliant intellectual, who possessed deep urge for social reform. Shah Waliullah was one of the greatest Muslim scholars of eighteenth century, who made an immense contribution to the intellectual, economic, social, political and religious lives of the Muslims in India, the effects of which persist to the present day. He lived during a time when the Muslim empire was losing ground on the Indian subcontinent, with the Muslim community divided and at odds. Seeking to give theological and metaphysical issues a new rational interpretation and laboring to harmonize reason and revelation, he tried to reconcile the various factions of the Indian Muslims, thereby protecting the empire from collapse.

The socio-economic contributions of Shah Waliullah could be divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides a complete overview of social and economic condition of Indian Muslim society out of the Medieval orthodoxy, conservatism and traditionalism in the eighteenth century and brings about a change in its socio-economic thinking, compatible with the tenets of Islam, on the one hand, and responsive to the demands of the modern age, on the other. The times of this century were very uneasy, critical and ruinous for Muslims in all spheres - political, scientific, educational, etc. In this chapter, we have tried to mention the social and economic conditions of the Muslims of India in the eighteenth century under two sections viz. social conditions and economic conditions. In social points of views, Shah Waliullah’s period was famous for political instability and degeneration which occurred due to moral and social downfall and consequently political collapse. On the other hand, we have highlighted the Indian economy including agriculture and small industry which were technically backward and stagnant. Shah Waliullah belongs to that period of the Mughal rule in India when, after the death of Aurangzeb Alamgir the process of all round disintegration of the empire had already set in, comprising of all aspects of the society; political, social, moral, religious, educational, economic and
others. During his life time Shah Waliullah tried his best to reverse the course of events by his writings and by taking an active interest in the political affairs of the country.

The Second chapter provides a complete overview of the biographical accounts of Shah Waliullah. The important literary works of his life have been discussed in this chapter. Wherein we have tried to explain the parental generation of Shah Waliullah who was descendant on his father’s side from Umar bin Khattab (R.) the second caliph of Islam. This chapter also explains briefly contribution of each parental generation and further, the education, thoughts and struggles of Shah Waliullah from childhood to adulthood journey.

He was born on the 4th of Shawwal 1114 A.H./1703 AD. His birth was foretold to his father Shah Abdur Rahim in his vision. When he reached the age of seventeen years his father died. During the twelve years after the death of his father he was busy in his father’s institution Madrasa Rahimia in giving lessons on theology, logic and philosophy. In the year 1143 A.H./ he visited the Holy cities of Makka and Madina. He stayed there for about two years, taking lessons in the science of Hadith from the renowned scholar Shaikh Abu Tahir. Then he returned home on the 14th of Rajab 1145 A.H./ December 20th the 1732 A.D. During his life Shah Waliullah saw the reign of ten Mughal rulers. The main events of this period are the massacre of the population of Delhi by Nadir Shah, rise of Sadat Bara, the imprisonment of Farrukh Sair, his torture and death, rise of Maratha and Sikhs and the destruction of Maratha power.

The Third chapter comprises of brief notes on Shah Waliullah’s important works. If all his works were to be discussed then it would require a whole volume separately. Shah Waliullah has covered most of the Islamic sciences in his works in Arabic and Persian language. The most monumental task he performed was to translate the Quran from Arabic to Persian which was the language spoken by the Muslims at that time in India. His aim was that educated Muslims may have access to the Quran without depending on the scholars who had opposed his reform measures. Apart from the Holy Quran, Shah Waliullah also wrote authentic books on Tafseer, Hadith, the principles of Hadith, and on mystical subjects. But his most popular book of “Hujatullah al- Baligha” explains how Islam is suitable for all races, cultures and
people of the world and how successfully it solves social, moral, economic and political problems of human beings.

The fourth chapter presents the social contributions and thoughts of Shah Waliullah wherein he criticized particular class of the Muslim society for their sinful innovation and polytheistic practices borrowed from their non-Muslim neighbours in the light of *Quran* and *Sunnah*. Shah Waliullah gave attention to the need of reforming the Muslim society after Shaikh Ahmad Mujaddid alf-Thani, who had denounced, in his several letters, the heterodox beliefs and practices that had crept into the Muslim Society.

The fifth chapter explains the economic ideas and contribution of Shah Waliullah, which were fragmented and scattered during his works and his numerous letters addressed to rulers, governors, nobles and friends. In his opinion, the main reasons for this development were the incident of the imperial treasury, contraction of state land the increasing number of fiefs, irregular payments to army and government officials, heavy taxation and declining production, and the royal court’s luxurious life. This analysis reveals his belief that a sound economy was a prerequisite for a stable and strong state. In addition to studying an applied aspect of the economy, Shah Waliullah dealt with such theoretical issues as basic occupations, the need for the division of labor, the nature and functions of money, undesirable economic practices, an economic analysis of *riba al-fadl* and *riba al-nasi'ah*, and issues related to public finance and public expenditure. Shah Waliullah also presented a theory of development known as *al-irtifaqat*.

The sixth chapter provides the impact of socio-economic thoughts of Shah Waliullah on the society. In this chapter, we have shown how Shah Waliullah had tried to elucidate for the establishment of the greatest international power both morally and materially so that Muslim society could make itself the greatest power in the world. Shah Waliullah recognized that growth and change were essential for a healthy society; he did not believe that the Muslim society was strengthened by a blind following of one or another of the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence. Shah Waliullah was responsible for awakening in the community, the desire to win back its moral fervor and to maintain its purity.
Shah Waliullah was an unparalleled Islamic scholar, thinker and reformer in the Indian subcontinent. He spent whole life in the service of religion and education and worked for the interests of the Muslim society. His sole anxiety all the time was to see the Muslims as powerful, strong and ruling, based upon the Islamic system. He tried his best to restore the Muslims’ power and reform the society and revive the pure religion and establish accurate and complete Islamic educational system.

Shah Waliullah’s thought for the economy, which brought development to the people who were below the poverty line. He wanted to increase the purchasing power of the common man, which was so much needed during his days. He was not in favor of the economic model, which did not benefit the economically weak class. He also came down heavily on the policy dictated by the feudal-oriented system. He was more concerned about the value while the market economy of those days was concerned about price. He realized that the capitalist model of development was ruining the country so far as the interest of the common man was concerned. He did not approve the concentration of the sources of economy in a few hands and in its place, suggested an alternative arrangement in which the economy is largely beneficial for the humanity. He criticized the development of the country which was not for the masses but for a particular rich section of the society. For him the basic need of the society was to augment the production for the masses, which was the need of the hour. The problem of the common man, he emphasized was an equitable or just distribution of the wealth and that the sources of income should be utilized for the benefit of the masses. Shah Waliullah considered the economic model of those days utterly alien to the realities of the country, which was inhabited largely by the toiling masses. He wanted the market to be for the people and not the people to be for the market.

Shah Waliullah’s thoughts on the economic conditions of those days provide yet another example of his masterly skill in integrating economic theory with ethical values. No doubt, he was definitely ahead of his time in suggesting solution for the ills of the society. All his emphasis was on the plea that the economy of the society should not be pushed into the hands of the capitalist class. It should be for the larger and needy section of the population of the country which included agriculturists, small traders, labor and people belonging to different vocations. Needless to say, he
also defines injustice and unfairness as the creation of imperfection in the market and the artificial raising of prices.

Shah Waliullah lived in Mughal-ruled Delhi, the capital of India, during a time of rising decadence and anarchism that eventually engulfed the whole empire. Regional forces from all over India were in revolt and trying to capture Delhi so they could establish their own hegemony. The frequent change of rulers weakened the dynasty, and those who did sit on the throne gradually lost the necessary wisdom, courage and political insight. Luxurious living, extravagance, an empty treasury, and heavy taxation only added to the inhabitants’ unrest and anxiety. The ensuing disunity and disintegration was the largest challenge ever faced by the Mughals.

Shah Waliullah stands in the Indian subcontinent’s history as a link between medieval and modern Islamic thought. Through his writings on various Shāri‘ah sciences, he brought about a revolution in the Muslim minds, one that continues to inspire his readers even today. Focusing on the economic problems of his time, he reflected upon the economy’s applied aspects and such theoretical issues as a person’s basic occupation, the need for a division of labor, the nature and function of money, and undesirable economic practices. He also analyzed riba al-fādl and riba al-nāsi‘ah in economic terms and emphasized the need and importance of having a full treasury.

In addition, he formulated a theory known as al-irtifaqat. “Opening from simple village life” and ending with an “global society,” he divided society’s socioeconomic development into four stages, the first of which is dominated by the simple economic struggle and the last of which is developed to maintain a “now political organize on top of the global level” in order to “maintain” the various states’ socioeconomic interests and establish mutual “quiet and fairness”. The entire economic “thoughts” revolve around and are related to his concept of irtifaqat.

The relevance of Shah Waliullah’s theory of human development to us today, as he himself points out, is that when we cannot control the fourth stage, we should adorn and improve the third stage; when we lose the third stage, we should concentrate on bettering the second stage and so on, until we regain the next higher stage. The national and international socioeconomic and political institutions can serve their inherent purposes only if they function properly and crime, corruption, exploitation, and oppression are eliminated. The increasing concern with improving
the human development index, as well as many modern-day writers’ ongoing emphasis on adopting a value based system, only shows Shah Waliullah’s continuing relevance. History of *irtifaqat* is, therefore, a lasting and still-relevant contribution to the social sciences.

Shah Waliullah was responsible for awakening in the community, the desire to win back its moral fervor and to maintain its purity. To raise a community’s conscience, belief and faith from destruction was not a small achievement. His teachings created new awareness in the minds of Muslims of the subcontinent. He was a realist in his political thinking. He had a clear vision of society, religion, ethics, morals and polities. He presented such modern and golden principles of economics and politics that are still in use.

An inductive survey of human societies led Shah Waliullah to the conclusion that; any diversity of human societies’ pursuits various levels of social development, variation in their fads and fashions, divergence of their customs and conventions, heterogeneity of their races, stocks and vernaculars, dissimilarity of their cultural patterns and religious rites, and their difference in terms of time and space notwithstanding, they all recognize the broad essentials of universal social culture as identified by him. Thus, on the basis of a more or less empirical understructure, Shah Waliullah tried to develop a universal paradigm of the society.

In short, the entire thought of Shah Waliullah is a rational theorization of the Prophetic experience of receiving Divine guidance and reforming society according to the terms of this guidance. This Prophetic reform at once affected the totality of human existential enterprise. The contribution of Shah Waliullah lies in his pioneering endeavour to establish an organic link between the diversity of life and environment within a holistic framework of the Islamic World view. In brief, he laid the foundation of an economic and social theory which is well balanced and which safeguards the economic and social interests of all the sections of the humanity at large.