
Western Scholarly Works On Shah Wali Allah And His Universal Thoughts

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Abstract

Shah Wali Allah (R.A) was a great Muslim scholar of 18th century from the sub-continent. His thoughts and teachings were international and had worldwide influence. He formulated his ideas nearly a century before the well-known reformers of the world like Karl Marx and Adam Smith.

A reasonable research work has been done on Shah Wali Allah's books, thoughts terminologies and his movements in almost every part of the world. Especially the west and the western scholars have laboriously studied Shah Wali Allah and contributed to a better understanding of his thoughts. These research works consist of the translations of his books in the western languages, research thesis for Ph.D degrees and research articles for different journals. A large number of European universities and other publishing companies also played an important role and helped in researching and printing these researches.

In this article the universal approach of Shah Wali Allah's thoughts is described with a brief detail of some research works conducted on him and his works in Europe. This also provides awareness of the importance

of Shah Wali Allah's thoughts in Europe and the various related aspects to his teachings. Moreover, the comprehension and analytical approach of the Europeans on Shah Wali Allah can be observed as well.

Key Words :Shah Wali's ideology, universality, revolution, terminologies, reformation

Introduction

Shah Wali Allah Dehlavi (1703-1762) was an influential Islamic reformer who wanted to revive Muslim society in Asia. He as a productive writer, produced 51 important Islamic texts. Although he was a great religious and social leader of Sub-continent but his created collections of books and valuable thoughts are read, understood, acknowledged and extensively researched universally because of their being universal as well as valuable for all. European scholars gave special significance to his creative contributions. Great amount of standard research work was carried upon his thoughts and teachings. This article encompasses a survey of the research work done in Europe on Shah Wali Allah's life, his works and ideology, with brief details along with explanation of the universality of his thoughts. This reflects the significance and esteem given by European researchers to Shah Wali Allah, and also informs about the worth of these researches. Moreover, by benefiting from this modern study and research, it can also pave way for the application and implementation of his thoughts in contemporary times.

1. Shah Wali Allah and the Universality of his Thoughts

Shah Wali Allah, belonging to Sub-continent was a great personality of Islamic world in terms of thoughts, reformation, modernity and creator of his age. According to encyclopedia Bartanica he was an Indian theologian and founder of modern Islamic thought who first attempted to reevaluate Islamic theology in the light of modern changes.¹

He was born in 18th C, known as an age of upheaval in the history of Sub-Continent. This time was the demise of King Aurangzaib Alamgeer and political control of English colonizers and Marhatas in this South Asiatic land. Therefore, he in that time period, put forward such economic

principles, political concepts, rules of governance, basic human rights, international laws and matters related to religious affairs, and narrated such great reforming ideas and thoughts by introducing a brief system that had the ability of application at international level. These universal and comprehensive thoughts, ideologies and international teaching, and guidance given by him were imitable and beneficial for the entire world. Molana Ubaid Ullah Sindhi while describing universality and direction of his thoughts, at one instance in his book says:

“When the books of Imam Wali Allah read carefully, then it would be obvious that although his language originally is from Dehli, yet his addressees with the reference of elites of Dehli, are Judes, Christians and non-Arab nations on the one hand and Greek, Iran and Sabis of hind (Arian) on the other hand, are equally participants in the subject of his discussion.”²

This was the reason that ideas of Shah Wali not only limited to Sub-continent but also spread and become famous among world-wide nations. Guidance was sought after through his thoughts from various corners of the world. While highlighting this aspect Molana Munazir Ahsan Gillani says:

Shah Wali’s writings has the solution for Western inclination and disbelief. Now this is an understood fact that not only in Hindustan but also all including Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, have started this realization. And thanks to God, Shah Wali’s books have gained fame in all these Muslim countries.³

Therefore, fame of Shah Wali’s universal ideology at international level was an essential fact.

2. Shah Wali Aallah’s ideologies as a pioneer of well-known universal thoughts

Besides the universality of Shah wali Allah’s thoughts, teachings and a compact economic system it is also a fact that his system was the pioneer and more effective among the well-known economic systems of the world. Therefore, these thoughts can be called as the originator of such universal ideologies.

This is the fact that Shah Wali's revolutionary books, opinions, views and principles of economy, were presented at a time when half a century still remained in French Revolution (1789 BC), and a century to Karl Marx, the originator of communism. Thus he introduced his unique thoughts and principles when Europe was still not aware of the development of machines and lived in dark ages. And later on luckily, they attained the powerful facility of printing press, when the changing time in above mentioned personality and change in Europe appeared, otherwise, Shah's philosophy while appearing long before time, was highly logical, clear, intellectual and practically applicable. If this printing press would have been available to him, then a great revolution could have originated. Whilst, the publication of his manuscripts, could be possible after a century and half.⁴

Comparison between the thoughts of Shah wali Allah and other international thinkers and description of this origination in this regard has also been performed by many other researchers and philosophers. Molana Ubaidullah Sindhi, during his stay in Europe, along with the study of socialism, deeply observed the respect and value of Karl Marx among the Europeans and expressed in this way,

“The base of this respect and honor was the economic system of Karl Marx. We were astonished that such revolutionary scripts that later Karl Marx wrote in his writings, were already presented in Hakim Ul Hind's (Shah Wali) manuscripts. Because Imam Wali died in 1773(AD) and Karl Marx was born in 1818”.⁵

This was the reason that he is considered forerunner to above mentioned reformers.

It is described in the encyclopedia.com that One chapter in the work described the harms of capitalism, which Shah Wali Allah thought led to the fall of the Roman and Sassanid empires. Many of his philosophies and thoughts relating to economics and socialism are now considered revolutionary, and he is considered to be a forerunner to Karl Marx.⁶

This realism was realized sooner or later on the international level and Shah Wali's principles, ideology and teachings became universal and worldly applicable owing to its worth.

3. Significance and Study of Shah Wali Ullah and his ideology in Europe

Shah Wali's presented universal principles, ideologies and teachings were so compact and beneficial that due to its importance, his followers highly promoted his knowledge. Consequently, not only research work was carried out on his preaching in sub-continent but his books were translated in many languages of the world also. Many scholarly works were started on these books and they became focus of research in many countries.

Likewise, the scholarly analysis of his works was conducted minutely in the Eastern countries and the Western countries also did not lack behind in this race. Therefore, Western scholars paid close attention and studied minutely to Shah Wali's thoughts in Western universities and research institutions. The worth of Shah's ideas and research work on them in the West, is mentioned below briefly.

3.1- Significance of Shah Wali Ullah's thoughts among Western Scholars and the West.

West and Western scholars laid special emphasis on Shah's work and made his work the focus of attention by taking benefit from his work. The importance of Shah's can be understood from his book Hujjat-Allah-hul-Baaligha which is translated in English by Dr. Muhammad Al-Ghazali, The Socio Political Thought of Shah Wali Allah. In the editor's note of this book Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari writes about Shah's worth and influence in Europe:

“Like Wise perceptible interest has been shown by several western scholars who have laboriously studied Shah Wali Allah... There are, however, also other western scholars who have contributed to a better understanding of his thought“⁷

The importance of Shah Wali's teachings in the eyes of West and Western researchers can also be illustrated with another example that the Foreword of the above mentioned translation of Dr. Muhammad Al-Ghazali is written briefly by Prof. Dr. Marcia K. Hermansen, from The Department of Theology in the Loyola University Chicago America, writes about the importance of Shah wali's considerations:

“This study of Shah Wali Allah's thought is therefore an important corrective to the perception that Islamic Theology remained frozen in a scholastic mode, unable to address either empirical facts or broader human existential concerns”⁸

After expressing these words about the esteemed worth of Shah Wali's views, she further writes:

“It is instructive to note that as a Muslim thinker who bridged the classical and the modern periods of Islamic History, Shah Wali Allah did not have a rigid interpretation of concepts”⁹

This detailed Foreword illustrates and clarifies the value and worth of Shah Wali's ideology.

Moreover Professor Marcia also excellently translated and researched on Shah's book *Hujjat-Allah-hul-Balighah* herself, that will be presented afterwards briefly.

In the book named, *Theory of Islamic Philosophy*, published in London and New York, compiled by Oliver Leoman and Syed Hossein Nasr, collected many research articles by the western scholars. In most of these research works Shah Wali and his thoughts have been discussed from various aspects. From these the one of the articles, titled “The Quran and Hadith as source and inspiration of Islamic Philosophy” by Syed Hossein Nasr where he illustrates Shah's contribution and significance in these words:

“In fact some of the out standing Islamic philosophers such as Ibn-e-Rushd, Mir Damad and Shah Wali Allah of Dehli have also been authorities in the domain of the sacred law.”¹⁰

It can be assessed from this statement that European scholars count Shah Wali among the great Muslim scholars like Ibne-Rushd. Furthermore, this was the significance of Shah Wali that many countless research projects, theses, articles and essays have been written in the west on his personality, his books and innovative ideas.

3.2. Evaluation of research works conducted in the West on Shah Wali Ullah and his thoughts

The research works done on Shah Wali and his thoughts are of many perspectives, dimensions and aspects. These scholarly works include: theses, translation and research on Shah’s books, research articles published in many journals and the books written on him. These works are done in various European languages generally and most of the work is in English and French.

This article focuses on research works that are done or published in Europe or completed by European scholars and researchers in the Western languages.

These works can be divided and illustrated in the following two aspects.

- I. Research works done in Europe on the books of Shah Wali Ullah
- II. Research works conducted in Europe on the personality, services and thoughts of Shah Wali

These points are illustrated in detail accordingly.

I. Research works done in Europe on the books of Shah Wali Allah (Translations & Research)

Shah Wali composed a large number of highly beneficial books on Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqh, Tasawwaf and History. Besides this he presented as unique role in writing of secret aspects and the reality of shariah that are matchless in the history of Islam. Various writers have mentioned that around 53 books are attributed to Shah Wali, whereas many are rarely available.¹¹

According to analysis of scholarly works and especially European researcher, Shah's compilation and writings are highly appreciable. Therefore, a western scholar, John O. Voll writes about Shah: "Outside of the Indian subcontinent Hujjat Allah al-Baligha and Al-Insaf fee Bayan Sabab al Ikhtilaf and Iqd al-Jid are the most readily available of Shah Wali Allah's work"¹²

Another Scholar Aziz Al-Azmeh mentions Shah and his books in these words:

"It may be instructive to compare our assessment of Wali Allah's work as it was received by his successor to that of Ibn Khaldun (1404) to whom he is also likened"¹³

Scholarly works done on Shah Wali's books are mentioned below.

1. **(Tawil al-Ahadith)**, A Dutch Scholar Prof. J. M. S. Baljon translated this famous book of Shah Wali in English that is published with the title: A Mystical Interpretation of Prophetic Tales by an Indian Muslim: Shah Wali Allah of Dehli) English Translation of Tawil al-Ahadith by J.M.S Baljon (Leiden E.J Brill 1973).

Prof. Baljon's research work on Shah Wali is considered fundamental brief in Europe. Besides this scholarly work, other compiled books and articles by Prof. Baljon would be elaborated in detail in the following pages. While commenting on Baljon's contribution to Shah's work, Dr. Zafar Is'haaq

Ansari writes: “The most mentionable among them of course is the veteran Dutch Scholar J.M.S. Baljon who has devoted a full scale book to an analytical study of Shah Wali Allah”¹⁴

The significance of Prof. Baljon’s work on Shah’s ideology can be assessed from the fact that most of research work done later on, takes assistance from Baljon’s investigation and the reference of these works are given.

2. **(Hujja-tulla-hul- baligha)**, This is one of Shah Wali Ullah’s famous books. It has been translated and researched affectively in English in Loyola University Chicago in Department of Theology by Prof. Marcia K. Hermensen that is published by Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, The Netherland in 1996.

This translation got fame equally in east and west. Afterword this translation was published with the title: “The conclusive argument from God, Shah Wali Allah of Dehli’s Hujat Allah Al-Balighah by Marcia K. Hermansen; Shah Wali Allah in "British Journal of middle eastern studies" Vol. 27 No. 2 Nov 2000. ¹⁵

Owing to its significance and worth, Islamic research institute Islamabad with the cooperation of Brill Publisher, also published its translation in 2003 so that Pakistani nation can also take assistance from this work.

This work of the writer has been created by much hard work and by high standard work. By commenting upon this translation, the editor of IRI Islamabad Dr. Zafar Ishaq Insari writes:

“Her English translation the first half of Hujjat-ullahul-Baligha, a tough and challenging task for any scholar, is a living monument of her penetrating grasp of Shah Wali Allah’s thought which deserves much applause”¹⁶

In these research projects, Western educational institutes and researchers have been in close cooperation consistently, consequently these scholarly works have been compiled quickly and easily. As the above mentioned professor wrote in the acknowledgement of the translation and research of the book, *Hujat ulla hul Baligha*, about some of those western Universities and researchers who helped her in this work. This shows the keen interest of the Western institutes and researchers in Shah wali's work. She writes:

“The university of Chicago and the Social sciences and humanities research council of Canada both of which supported my graduate study. Among friends and colleagues Alan and Sylvia Godlas, Barbora von schlegell ... and my other friends and colleagues in Chicago, Canada and San Diego who contributed in various ways”¹⁷

3. **(Altaf-Al-Qudus)**, This is a unique book written by Shah Wali Ullah on the topic of Tasawaf. English translation of this book written by G. H. Jalbani named as of “The Sacred Knowledge”, was published from London Octagon Press in 1984. This translation is of good quality and standard . It is also discussed by Prof Marcia K. Hermansen in the bibliography of her translation mentioned above.¹⁸

4. **(Al Insaaf fee Bayan Sabab-al-Ikhtilaf & Iqd ul Jeed fee Ahkaam Al Ijtihad wattaqleed)** These two books are very worthwhile and comprehensive creations of Shah Wali Allah on the topic of Ijtihad and the reasons of differentiation. These books are also translated and researched by Dr. Marcia K. Hermansen by the title of

“Shah Wali Allah’s Treatises on Islamic Law”, was published by Fons Vitae of Kentucky in 2011.¹⁹

II. Scholarly Work Done In The West On Shah Wali’s Personality, Thoughts And Teachings (Research Articles and books).

A long list can be made on the scholarly works done in Europe on Shah Wali’s personality and thoughts beside his books. These research works include dissertations, essays and books. These articles and books directly or indirectly inculcate subjects related to Shah’s ideology, teachings, movements and specific terminologies. Most of these works are also extremely fruitful and significant for countries of Eastern region.

Below mentioned are some of the researches of these scholars and authors, along with their publications and publishers’ names for the ease of access to the readers.

1. Prof Aziz Ahmed

His studies on Shah Wali Ullah are well known and highly thought of in Europe. He served as professor of Islamic Studies in University of Toronto Canada and was died in 1978 in Toronto. He is famous as a great fiction writer, critic, translator and historian.²⁰

Below mentioned are some of researches and essays written in English.

- I. “Political and Religious ideas of Shah Wali Allah of Dehli”²¹
- II. “The Waliullah Movement, In Islamic Culture in the Indian environment London”²²
- III. “The Intellectual History of Islam in India”²³
- IV. “Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian environment”²⁴

2. Abdel. Al, Khalil, Abdul Hamid.

His PhD dissertation is on Shah Wali ullah with the title. “God the Universe and Man in Islamic thought.” The contribution of Shah Wali Allah of Dehli (1702-1762)²⁵

3. Prof. J.M.S Baljon

Professor Baljon was a Dutch scholar. His work on Shah Wali is a source of reference for the succeeding scholars. Besides his previously mentioned creation of English translation by the title, "Taveel ul Hadith", following notable scholarly works are also of greater significance that are mentioned along with publication detail.

- I. "Psychology of apprehended and applied Shah Wali Allah Dehli"²⁶
- II. "Ethics of Shah Wali Allah of Dehli"²⁷
- III. "Shah Wali Allah's Terminology of Creation"²⁸
- IV. "Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dehli"²⁹

4. Berque Jacques

"Un contemporanea in Islamic-Indian de Jean Jacques Rousseau"³⁰

5. Marcia K. Hermansen

Professor Hermansen attained great fame because of his work on books and ideology of Shah Wali. I have introduced in the previous pages mentioned Hermansen's translated works of Hujat-ullah hul-Baligha and Aqd-ul-Jeed. Besides these books Prof. Hermansen created research thesis and many research articles that are mentioned below:

- I. "Wali Allah, Shah. In Oxford Encyclopedia of the modern Islamic world"³¹
- II. "Tension Between the universal and the particular in an eighteenth century theory of Religions Revelation: Shah Wali Allah of Dehli's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha"³²
- III. "Shah Wali Allah's Theory of The Subtle Spiritual Centers (Lata-if) A Sufi Theory of Personhood and self transformation"³³
- IV. "The current state of Shah Wali Allah studies"³⁴
- V. "Shah wali Alla's Theory of Religions"³⁵

6. Voll, Johyn. O

"Hadith Scholars and Tariqahs" 'An Ulema' Group"³⁶

7. Valiuddin, Mir

“Contemplative Disciplines in Sufiism”³⁷

8. Met Calf, Barbara Daly

“Islamic Revival in British India” Deoband; 1860-1900 ³⁸

9. Francica Robinson

“Verities of South Asian Islam”³⁹

10. Albert Hourani

“Islam in European Thought”⁴⁰

This is a collection of many essays and researches that is written on the relationship between Europe, and Islamic thought and culture. These analyze various aspects of Shah’s ideology.

11. Abdul Azim Aislahi

“Stages of Socio-Economic development Shah Wali-Allah’s concept of Al Irtifaqat”⁴¹

The list of research works conducted on Shah Wali in the west is very long. Some of these have briefly been mentioned here. Further research in this regard can bring forward more such scholarly works. This analysis on one hand shows the universality of Wali’s thoughts while on the other hand it highlights the trust and contribution of western scholars regarding these thoughts.

Moreover, this research can also be helpful in application of Shah’s thoughts in modern times. This can be a source of triumph in this world and the world hereafter.

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