

Pakistan Affairs

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Q. Give an account of the life and services of Shah Waliullah. How did he save the Indian Muslims from Political annihilation and religious degeneration?

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 18th century, the great Mughal empire slowly started to decline in the Indian Subcontinent. The extravagant lives of the Mughal rulers and their ignorance to social, economic and religious issues finally caught up with them, and resulted not only in the moral decadence of the emperors but also the masses. At the same time, Poor understanding of the Holy Quran and the increasing prevalence of opposition groups such as the Marathas and the British worked to sway Muslims away from their Din. As a result, not only did evil practices such as gambling, drinking and adultery become widespread, but also diverted Muslims to man-made religions and Unorthodox creeds. These failures could have easily led to Political disintegration and ultimately a religious collapse, had it not been for the services and activities of one man, Shah Waliullah.

WHO WAS SHAH WALIULLAH?

→ Qutub-ud-Din, also known as Shah Waliullah due to his piety, was amongst the most influential religious reformers in the Indian subcontinent.

→ He was born in 1703 in Phulat, Muzaffarnagar (Northern India) and died in 1762 in Delhi (accounting for the attribution "al-Dihlawi").

→ At the age of 15, he lost his father and started to teach at his Madrassa, called Madrasah-i-Rahimiya.

→ He has been referred to as the Godfather of revivalist Islam due to his social movement, aimed at reviving belief in Islamic teachings and uniting Muslims.

THE DECAY OF THE MUGHAL RULE

The death of the last major Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (1707), marked the beginning of the decay in Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent. The next two Muslim rulers to succeed Aurangzeb were under the influence

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of a corrupt general, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, whereas the next four were controlled by Political adventurers, the Sayyid brothers.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF MUSLIMS IN THE 18th CENTURY SUBCONTINENT

Drawing on the situation of the Muslims in the 18th century, Sayid Sulaiman Nadwi stated:

“The Mughal Empire was about to collapse.”

a) Accumulation of Private Wealth and Personal Power

Everyone was determined to accumulate as much private wealth as possible, rather than national power and glory. Emperors lived lavish lives as Abdul Aziz Dehlawi provides:

“The women of the house of Nawab Qamaruddin Khan used to conclude their bath with a dip in rose water.”

Additionally, rulers neglected their duty of promoting justice, economic prosperity and social cohesion, and merely worked to fatten

their Personal Power.

b) Undisciplined force

Muslim soldiers lacked discipline and used their horses and armoury for the sole motive of enriching themselves. They consumed Indian hemp for pleasure and intimidated the weak and defenceless.

c) Increasing pressure from opposition groups

Nobody was willing to face the Marathas, and more importantly, the British, who posed difficult questions to Islamic scholars in an attempt to divert Muslims to Christianity.

d) Muslim Schism

While the number of Muslims considerably increased, various sects of Islam had been created. Sunnis' and shias' often conflicted with one another. The advantages of the increasing number of Muslims had thus, been offset by the increasing divisions and quarrels among them.

e) Poor understanding of Islam

Muslims had little to no understanding of the

Holy Quran, and the doctrine of Tawhid (Oneness of Allah) was interpreted by many as meaning that although Allah is one, He has delegated His authority to saints and godly souls who act on His behalf in distributing favours. The mosques, as a result, remained unattended, fakirs were listened to and people pilgrimaged to the so-called Holy men, worshipped as saints.

f) Evil Practices

The moral aspects of the Quran were ignored and evil practices such as opium-eating, wine-drinking, adultery, interests (on loans) and gambling had become the common currency. For instance, it is reported that the Mughal rulers of the time, Muhammad Shah, Jahandar Shah and Ahmad Shah were so indulged in such practices that beautiful women could be spotted in their palaces from a distance of a few miles.

CIVILISING THE UNCIVILISED: EFFORTS OF SHAH WALIULLAH

In these ignorant times, al-Dihlawi took upon himself the duty to unite Muslims and put an end to the evil practices perpetuated by the masses.

1) Religious Contributions

a) From Arabic to Persian: For Shah Waliullah, the main cause for the decline of the Indian Muslims was their ignorance of the Holy Quran. Considering this, he started a movement, "Back to the Quran" and translated the Holy Scripture into Persian in an attempt to help deepen the society's understanding of Islam. Referring to the simplicity of the translation, Archad Islam commented that:

"[It was] so simple that anyone who knew the elements of Persian would understand the meaning of the Quran, particularly the soldiers and the children of the commoners."

b) To eliminate unorthodox creeds: Qutub ud-Din requested the Muslims to stop their pilgrimages to the tombs of sufis such as Shah Madar and Salar Masud. He moreover, criticized the Ulama and referred to them as fools. He advised them to give up their bogus interpretations of the Quran and stop fabricating Hadith which were misleading the people. They must, he asserted, learn from the Quran and Sunnah only, and engage in ijtihad (Independent

reasoning judgement on legal issues) rather than following the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence blindly and without understanding. He also wrote numerous books, ranging from commentaries on the Quran to socio-economic and political reforms. His most famous writing, however, is Hujjatullah al-Baligha where he elucidates on how the Din of Allah is suited for the whole of mankind, and how it successfully solves all its issues, from legal to cultural, economic to political, and moral to spiritual.

c) Eradicating social evils: Waliullah worked to abolish social practices such as drinking, gambling, prostitution etc and taught Muslims to occupy themselves in prayer, pursue legitimate professions rather than forcing their women into prostitution, and spend their nights with their family.

d) Bida'a: Qutub ud-Din blamed former Hindus who had recently converted to Islam for injecting Hindu practices, which he called Bida'a (acts contravening Islamic teachings) into the Muslim society. For example, like the Hindus, Muslims had prohibited second marriage for widows. Shah Waliullah expressed severe criticism for this practice and asserted that:

" [this was not] a tradition among the Arabs, neither during the jahillya [Pre-Islamic] period nor after the advent of the Prophet Muhammad."

For Shah Waliullah then; Islamic culture is Sunnah Plus Shariah minus Bida'a.

2) Political and economic Contributions

~~a) Against extravagance~~

a) Against extravagance: Al-Dihlawi stood against the lavish lives of the Mughal emperors and argued in his letters that it was one of the prime reasons for the downfall of the Mughals. To convey his point, he cited the examples of the Byzantine and Persian empires and how their lavish spending in Palaces, gardens, handsome slaves, baths and food contributed to their downfall.

b) Reducing state burden: In his book, "Hujjatulla - al - Baligha", Shah Waliullah contended that soldiers and ulamas who had ~~developed~~ ^{built} a habit of obtaining funds for ~~their~~ personal use must ~~cease to~~ ^{stop this} practice ~~an end~~ as they were providing no services in return, and thus were a burden to the state. Furthermore, he advocated the rights of laymen who on the

one hand were crushed by the reckless taxes imposed on them by the Mughal rulers, who and on the other hand, the emperors were ~~long~~ enjoying their luxuries.

c) Letter to Muslim soldiers: Waliullah motivated the soldiers and educated them on the concept of jihad - that Allah has raised them for the sole purpose of protecting Islamic teachings and rooting out all evils standing in the way of the Divine. He further informed them that they would be accountable before the court of Allah, and thus, must protect the defenceless and the weak rather than oppressing and intimidating them for self-gain.

d) Against Marathas: To overpower the Marathas, Waliullah sought help from Ahmad Shah Abdali of Persia and defeated them in at the battle of Panipat in 1761.

e) Letter to the British: He wrote a letter to the British to give up nepotism and provide equal job opportunities for all.

f) Distribution of Labour: Qutub-ud-Din argued that people must follow professions

they are fit for. This is because, a man with the wrong profession will not be able to satisfy his hunger, and thus, ^{will} be inclined towards beggary and other low and hateful practices.

IMPACT

The efforts of Shah Waliullah proved to be successful in reviving the spirit of Islam and helped reunite Muslims by educating the scholars, masses and rulers. Apart from this, his writings, opposition to the Marathas and letters to soldiers exerted great influence over future political movements and laid down the foundations for the two nation theory.

CONCLUSION

~~Shah~~ In conclusion, Shah Waliullah played an eminent role in the revival of Islam in the Indian subcontinent and saved Muslims from destruction. Not only was he able to enhance the society's understanding of Islam but also worked as a role model for the emperors by defeating the Marathas. He has therefore, been a revolutionary leader who apart from saving Muslims from political annihilation

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and religious degeneration, also laid down the foundations for an independent Muslim nation, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.