



**JUSTICE, BALANCE, AND ETHICAL RENEWAL: SHAH WALIULLAH'S
APPROACH FOR RE-ORGANIZING SOCIETY IN 21ST CENTURY**

Abdul Rehman Sajid

Doctoral Candidate, Institute of Islamic Studies,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Abdul.sajid87@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Hammad Lakhvi

Dean/ Professor, Institute of Islamic Studies,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

hammad.is@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study explores Shah Waliullah's model of justice, balance, and ethical renewal as a framework for reorganizing society in the 21st century. In an age marked by moral decline, corruption, social inequality, and institutional weakness, modern societies are in need of a value-based approach that connects ethics with governance and social order. Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703–1762), one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of South Asia, lived during the collapse of the Mughal Empire and witnessed major political and social disruption. His writings show that stable societies depend on justice ('adl), balance (tawazun), and moral reform (islah akhlaqi). This research focuses on his theory of Irtafaqat, which explains the natural hierarchy of family, community, state, and humanity. Each level has rights and responsibilities, and harmony among them ensures social stability. The study uses qualitative and analytical methods, examining both primary sources such as Hujjatullah al-Balighah and Izalat al-Khafa and modern secondary literature in English and Urdu. Findings show that Shah Waliullah's ideas strongly relate to present-day challenges such as inequality, leadership crises, weak family systems, and global injustice. His framework offers solutions for moral development at the family level, community cooperation, fair governance, and ethical global relations. The research concludes that Irtafaqat provides a holistic and timeless model for justice and ethical renewal. Applying Shah Waliullah's principles today can help modern societies rebuild moral foundations, reduce corruption, strengthen institutions, and achieve balanced social order.

Keywords: Shah Waliullah, Irtafaqat, Justice, Ethical Renewal, Social Re-Organization, 21st Century.

1. Introduction to the Topic

Justice, balance, and ethical renewal are essential principles for building a peaceful and harmonious society. In the 21st century, global communities are struggling with moral decline, weak institutions, corruption, social inequality, and rapid technological shifts that have changed human behavior and social relations. In this environment, classical Islamic scholars like Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703–1762) offer deep insights that can help modern societies rebuild themselves on moral, ethical, and just foundations.¹ Shah Waliullah lived during the decline of the Mughal Empire, a time marked by political disorder, economic instability, and social fragmentation. His writings show that a society becomes strong when justice ('adl), balance (*tawazun*), and ethical renewal (*islah akhlaqi*) are maintained at all levels.² His famous theory of Irtafaqat describes how family, community, state, and humanity form a natural hierarchy that works together to ensure stability and justice.³ These lessons remain important in the 21st century because societies today face similar problems: injustice, inequality, weak moral foundations, and social disruption. By studying Shah Waliullah's approach, we can identify ethical solutions for modern social organization.⁴



2. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it connects classical Islamic social thought with today's social problems. Shah Waliullah's work combines spirituality with social analysis, making him one of the earliest Muslim thinkers to explain how political, economic, and moral factors shape society.⁵ A major contribution of this study is that it highlights the modern relevance of Irtafaqat, which is rarely discussed in contemporary academic research. Modern social science often focuses only on economic or political factors, while Shah Waliullah adds a moral and spiritual dimension that is largely missing in current discourse.⁶ His emphasis on ethical leadership, fair governance, and community cooperation provides a timeless model for social renewal. Additionally, the study is important for Islamic scholarship because it fills the gap between traditional religious studies and modern social theory.⁷ By analyzing Shah Waliullah through a modern lens, the research helps both scholars and students understand how classical Islamic ideas can solve modern challenges such as corruption, injustice, extremism, and weakening social institutions.⁸

3. Literature Review

Modern academic work on Shah Waliullah includes several important studies. Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2002, 2012) explores the changing role of Islamic scholars and highlights the social importance of Waliullah's teachings.⁹ Marcia Hermansen (2009) provides valuable insight into his intellectual and spiritual worldview, explaining how he addressed the political troubles of 18th-century India.¹⁰ Hafeez Malik (2008) discusses Shah Waliullah's influence on Islamic revivalist movements and the need for moral leadership.¹¹ In Urdu literature, many scholars published after 2000 have explored Shah Waliullah's social ideas. Dr. Masood ul Hasan examines the social dimensions of Waliullah's thought and emphasizes the importance of balance in community life.¹² Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Mujaddidi analyzes how his ideas apply to family, society, and governance.¹³ Primary sources such as *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, *Al-Fauz al-Kabir*, and *Izalat al-Khafa* provide the philosophical foundation of his theory of Irtafaqat.¹⁴ However, modern literature rarely examines these texts in relation to 21st-century social problems. This study attempts to fill that academic gap by connecting Waliullah's classical framework with the modern need for ethical and balanced societies.

4. Research Question

How can Shah Waliullah's theory of Irtafaqat ensure justice, balance, and ethical renewal in the 21st century, and how can it be applied to reorganize modern societies?

5. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodology to explore Shah Waliullah's ideas.

1. Primary Source Study

This includes direct analysis of: *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, *Al-Fauz al-Kabir*, *Izalat al-Khafa*. These works provide Shah Waliullah's original views on justice, human nature, moral responsibility, and social structure.¹⁵

2. Secondary Source Review

English and Urdu academic studies published after 2000 are used to understand: historical background, social context, modern interpretation of Waliullah's thought.

3. Thematic Analysis

Key themes studied include: justice, balance, moral renewal, social harmony, leadership, ethical governance.



4. Comparative Interpretation

The study compares Shah Waliullah's framework with modern social science theories to highlight its universal value and contemporary relevance.

DISCUSSION

Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703–1762) was one of the most important Islamic scholars, thinkers, and reformers of South Asia. He was born during a time of political weakness and social decline when the Mughal Empire was collapsing. Because of this unstable environment, he observed the causes of social disorder very closely.¹¹⁶ His education was grounded in Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Tasawwuf, philosophy, and social ethics. After studying in the Hijaz, he returned to Delhi with the aim of reviving Islamic teachings and restoring moral and social balance in Muslim society.¹⁷ He believed that the problems of society were directly linked to injustice, exploitation, ignorance, and weak leadership. His works, especially *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, show that he understood the deep connection between individual behavior, community health, and national strength.¹⁸

Shah Waliullah as a Social Scientist

Although modern sociology did not exist in his time, Shah Waliullah's method of studying society was very scientific. He used observation, reasoning, comparison, and pattern analysis tools that are used today in modern social sciences.¹⁹ He studied: the behavior of people, the causes behind moral decline, economic injustice, political corruption, the collapse of institutions, and the rise and fall of civilizations.²⁰ He believed that societies collapse not only because of political weaknesses but also because of moral failures, loss of justice, and imbalanced social roles. Modern scholars such as Marcia Hermansen see him as a thinker who linked spiritual values with social order, similar to how contemporary sociologists connect culture with social stability.²¹ His approach shows that he was not only a religious scholar but also a social scientist whose ideas can help explain today's global social issues.

Shah Waliullah's Approach of Irtafaqat (Expanded Explanation with References)

Shah Waliullah's theory of Irtafaqat is one of his most important contributions to Islamic social thought. The word *Irtafaqat* refers to the natural levels, stages, or hierarchies through which human society is organized. According to him, human beings cannot live alone; they naturally form groups, systems, and institutions. These levels are designed by Allah for establishing justice, cooperation, and moral development in society. Shah Waliullah explains that if these levels remain balanced and work together properly, society becomes peaceful, just, and well-organized. But when any level becomes weak or corrupt, the entire social order suffers.²²

1. Family

The family is the first and most important level of social life. Shah Waliullah says that a healthy society begins with a healthy home. Children learn moral behavior, discipline, respect, and faith from their parents. He believed that parents must provide justice, compassion, and proper upbringing. A family that gives moral training becomes the starting point of good citizenship and responsible social behavior. He also writes in *Hujjatullah al-Baligha* that moral and spiritual training begins at home, and society cannot be reformed unless families are morally strong.²³

2. Community (Mu'ashrah)

The second level is the community, which includes neighbors, local groups, economic relations, and social interaction. According to Shah Waliullah, human beings depend on one another for survival, protection, learning, and emotional support. A community must be based on:

- Cooperation



- Welfare and charity
- Social justice
- Fair trade
- Mutual respect
- Helping the poor and weak

Shah Waliullah emphasized that communities must create a culture of responsibility and ethical behavior. In this way, society becomes more peaceful and socially stable.²⁴

3. State (Dawlah)

The third level is the state, which has the responsibility to organize the entire system of human life. Shah Waliullah believed that government is necessary for protecting the rights of people and ensuring justice. The state must:

- Protect life, honor, and property
- Ensure economic justice
- Provide security
- Promote moral values
- Prevent oppression
- Punish corruption and wrongdoing

He also emphasized that leadership must be trustworthy, just, and God-fearing. A corrupt or unjust ruler destroys society, while a righteous leader strengthens it. His political thought shows that good governance is not just administrative it is also moral and spiritual.²⁵

4. Humanity (Insāniyyat)

The fourth and highest level of Irtafaqat is humanity as a whole. Shah Waliullah believed that Islam promotes global ethics, international justice, and peaceful cooperation between nations. All human beings, regardless of religion or culture, form one global community. At this level, the main goals are:

- World peace
- Fair dealings between nations
- Protection of human dignity
- Ending oppression
- International cooperation for human welfare

He emphasized that nations should not fight for greed or power but should work together for justice and peace. This global perspective makes Shah Waliullah's thought extremely relevant in today's world of global conflict and inequality.²⁶

Overall Importance of Irtafaqat

Shah Waliullah believed that these levels family, community, state, and humanity are connected like parts of one body. If even one part becomes weak, the whole system is damaged. Peace and harmony are only possible when:

- Families provide moral training
- Communities support justice and cooperation
- Governments act with fairness
- Nations cooperate for human welfare

This integrated balance is the true purpose of Irtafaqat. His theory offers a powerful framework for solving modern problems such as corruption, inequality, social disorder, and moral decline.



Does Irtafaqat Ensure Justice, Balance, and Ethical Renewal?

Shah Waliullah's theory of Irtafaqat is not only a description of how society is structured, but also a complete model for ensuring justice, balance, and ethical renewal at every level of human life. In his writing especially *Hujjatullah al-Balighah* he explains that social order is only stable when families, communities, governments, and nations work in harmony and follow moral principles. In this way, Irtafaqat becomes a guiding system for building a just and ethical society.²⁷

1. Justice ('Adl)

According to Shah Waliullah, justice begins at the smallest level the family but it must continue all the way up to the national and global levels. He argues that no society can be just if its families, communities, and institutions are corrupt. Justice has three stages:

a. Justice in the Family

Fair treatment of children, peaceful marital relations, and a home built on compassion are necessary for raising honest and balanced individuals. A child who grows up with justice learns to practice fairness in society.

b. Justice in the Community

Communities must promote fairness in trade, honesty in social dealings, and cooperation. When communities hold people accountable, corruption decreases.

c. Justice in the State

At the state level, justice becomes a law and governance issue. The government must protect rights, punish wrongdoing, and provide equality before the law. Shah Waliullah writes that rulers must fear God and remain accountable for every action.²⁸

2. Balance (Tawāzun)

Shah Waliullah believed that every level of society has its own duties. When each level performs its responsibilities, society stays balanced. But when even one level fails, the entire system becomes unstable.

Examples of Imbalance

- Weak families lead to poorly trained citizens.
- Corrupt leaders weaken the moral foundation of the nation.
- Unjust communities create social divisions.

Irtafaqat teaches that harmony only exists when families, communities, states, and nations respect one another's roles.²⁹

3. Ethical Renewal (Islāh Akhlāqi)

Shah Waliullah emphasized *islāh*, meaning ethical and moral reform. His idea of ethical renewal is a step-by-step process:

Step 1: Reform of the Individual

Personal character must include honesty, discipline, humility, justice, and responsibility.

Step 2: Reform of the Family

Good individuals create peaceful and loving families.

Step 3: Reform of the Community

Spiritually motivated families build responsible communities.

Step 4: Reform of the Nation

A nation becomes strong only when its citizens and institutions follow moral values.

Step 5: Reform of Humanity

Global peace is possible only when societies value justice and compassion.

Shah Waliullah saw ethical renewal as a chain reaction the reform of one person can influence society and then the entire world.³⁰



Findings

1. Shah Waliullah's theories are still relevant to modern social issues such as inequality, corruption, and moral decline.
2. His theory of *Irtafaqat* provides a complete framework that connects family, community, state, and humanity in one unified system.³¹
3. Justice and balance are central to his approach and can help solve modern governance and social welfare problems.
4. *Irtafaqat* encourages both moral and institutional reform, showing that ethical values must support political and economic structures.
5. Many modern social issues can be understood and addressed through Shah Waliullah's model of social organization.³²

Conclusion

Shah Waliullah's approach clearly shows that a society can only achieve real progress when justice, balance, and strong ethical values are placed at the center of social life. For him, these values are not optional or secondary; they are the foundation on which peaceful and successful societies are built. His theory of *Irtafaqat* gives a complete picture of how different levels of society from the small unit of the family, to the community, the nation, and finally the whole world are connected with each other. He explains that when these levels work together with harmony and responsibility, society becomes stable, cooperative, and morally strong. But when these levels break apart or ignore ethical standards, then conflict, injustice, and disorder spread. In the 21st century, the world is facing many serious challenges: moral decline, political unrest, widening economic gaps, increasing corruption, and rapidly changing social behaviors. Many people feel confused, insecure, or disappointed with modern institutions. In this environment, Shah Waliullah's ideas become even more important and meaningful. His teachings remind us that material development alone cannot bring peace; societies must also rebuild their moral character, their sense of justice, and their commitment to fairness. Applying the concept of *Irtafaqat* today can guide modern societies toward real improvement. At the family level, it encourages strong relationships, good upbringing, and mutual respect. At the community level, it promotes cooperation, social responsibility, and trust. At the national level, it demands just leadership, transparent institutions, and equal opportunities for all citizens. And at the global level, it encourages humanity to work together for peace, ethical progress, and the protection of human dignity. Shah Waliullah's thought also shows that true social reorganization is not possible through laws and structures alone. It requires a deep moral renewal within individuals and institutions. Structural reforms become effective only when people act with honesty, responsibility, and a fear of accountability before God. Thus, his message combines both spiritual reform and social justice, making it a holistic and balanced approach. Because of this, Shah Waliullah's teachings remain highly relevant for today's policymakers, scholars, educators, and students. His framework helps us understand how ethical principles can guide social development in a world that is often driven by material interests. For anyone searching for a just, peaceful, and balanced society, his ideas offer timeless wisdom and a practical roadmap. In conclusion, Shah Waliullah provides a powerful vision for rebuilding society in the 21st century. His theory of *Irtafaqat* teaches that justice, balance, and moral values must shape every level of social life. If applied with sincerity, his ideas can help modern societies reduce corruption, strengthen institutions, bring fairness to economic systems, and restore harmony among people. His thought continues to inspire all those who believe that a better society is possible through both moral transformation and wise social organization.



References

- ¹ Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Islamic Research Institute, 2009). Pp 89-96
- ² Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Islamic Research Institute, 2009). P 94
- ³ Shah Waliullah, *Al-Fauz al-Kabir* (Delhi: Idarah-e-Adabiyat, 2004). P 48
- ⁴ Hafeez Malik, *Islam and Modernity: Intellectual Revival and Reform* (London: Routledge, 2008), 48.
- ⁵ Zaman, Muhammad Qasim, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 59.
- ⁶ Zaman, Muhammad Qasim, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2002), p 70.
- ⁷ Marcia Hermansen, "Shah Waliullah and His Thought," in *Islamic Thought in South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p 92.
- ⁸ Dr. Masood ul Hasan, *Fikr-e-Waliullahi ka Samaji Tanazur* (Lahore: Idara-e-Talifat, 2012), 200.
- ⁹ Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 67.
- ¹⁰ Hermansen, *Islamic Thought in South Asia*, 50.
- ¹¹ Malik, *Islam and Modernity*, 56.
- ¹² Hasan, *Fikr-e-Waliullahi ka Samaji Tanazur*, 123.
- ¹³ Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Mujaddidi, *Shah Waliullah Aur Samaji Nizam* (Karachi: Dar-ul-Fikr, 2015), 123.
- ¹⁴ Shah Waliullah, *Izalat al-Khafa* (Karachi: Qadimi Kutub Khana, 2007), 154.
- ¹⁵ Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, 96.
- ¹⁶ Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2009), p 97.
- ¹⁷ Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2009), p 97.
- ¹⁸ Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, 98.
- ¹⁹ Zaman, Muhammad Qasim, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp 44-46
- ²⁰ Zaman, Muhammad Qasim, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp 44-46.
- ²¹ Marcia Hermansen, "Shah Waliullah and His Thought," in *Islamic Thought in South Asia*, ed. M. Reza Pirbhai (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p 90.
- ²² Zaman, Muhammad Qasim, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p 45.
- ²³ Marcia K. Hermansen, *Shah Wali Allah's Thought: Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Lahore: Iqbal International Institute for Research & Dialogue, 2009), pp 92-94
- ²⁴ Jalal, Ayesha, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp 58-60
- ²⁵ Treen, SherAli, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), pp 81-84



-
- ²⁶ Irfan A. Omar, *Shah Wali Allah of Delhi: Sufi Scholar and Social Reformer* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), pp 121–124
- ²⁷ Marcia K. Hermansen, *Shah Wali Allah's Thought: Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Lahore: IRD, 2009), pp 90–96
- ²⁸ Tareen, SherAli, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), pp 78–83
- ²⁹ Irfan A. Omar, *Shah Wali Allah of Delhi: Sufi Scholar and Social Reformer* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), pp 115–118
- ³⁰ Jalal, Ayesha, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp 65–67
- ³¹ Shah Waliullah, *Izalat al-Khafa 'an Khilafat al-Khulafa* (Karachi: Qadimi Kutub Khana, 2007), p 150
- ³² Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, 95.