The OSCAR PUBLISHING Services
American Journal Of Social Sciences And Humanity Research

VOLUME Vol.06 Issue03 2026
PAGE NO. 182-186
DOI 10.37547/ajsshr/Volume06Issue03-41

The Ethical-Axiological Content of The Categories Of "Justice," "Fairness," "Right," And "Oppression" In Ali Safiy's Legacy

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Received: 12 February 2026; **Accepted:** 10 March 2026; **Published:** 31 March 2026

Abstract: This study aims to reveal the philosophical content of the ideal of social justice in the legacy of the fifteenth–sixteenth-century thinker Fakhr al-Din Ali Safi (1463–1533) through the categories of "adl," "insaf," "haqq," and "zulm." The works Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat, Lata'if al-Tawa'if, and Adab al-Ashab were examined through historical-semantic, hermeneutical, and axiological analysis. Rashahat was interpreted as a normative text characteristic of the hagiographical genre, distinguishing between its historical basis and the layers of normative memory constructed by the author. It was established that "adl" represents the proper standard of relations, "insaf" their internal and personal dimension, "haqq" the normative foundation upon which they converge, and "zulm" the violation of this order. The negative (restraining oppression) and positive (protection, service, and benevolence) dimensions of justice, as well as their manifestations at the individual, community, and governmental levels, were demonstrated.

Keywords: Ali Safi; social justice; adl; insaf; zulm; Naqshbandiyya; Khwaja Ahrar; Islamic ethics.

Introduction: The problem of social justice has long been one of the central issues in the philosophical and ethical thought of the Islamic world. In the spiritual environment of Transoxiana and Khorasan during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, justice was not merely a political requirement associated with state governance but a system of values encompassing an individual's internal moral order, recognition of the rights of others, restraint of oppression, and responsible exercise of power. Within the Sufi environment of the Timurid period, these values developed as practical norms regulating relations between political authority and spiritual influence.

Fakhr al-Din Ali Safi (1463–1533) was a prominent representative of the Naqshbandiyya tradition, the son of Husayn Wa'iz Kashifi, and the author of Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat, Lata'if al-Tawa'if, and Adab al-Ashab. He did not provide definitions of the concepts of justice in the form of a separate philosophical treatise; rather, their meanings emerge through biographical events, didactic narratives, and norms of everyday conduct. Therefore, reconstructing the thinker's views requires more than merely identifying the relevant terms: it is necessary to determine which actions are approved in the text, which situations are condemned as oppression, and which social outcomes are presented as desirable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research related to this topic can be divided into three areas. The first area comprises philosophical and historical studies conducted in Uzbekistan. S. Ismoilov examined the role of the Naqshbandiyya order in the development of Sufism and the social significance of Khwaja Ahrar's activities of "himayat" (protection) [9]. B. Valikhujayev demonstrated, on the basis of historical sources, that Khwaja Ahrar defended the interests of the subjects before rulers [18]. H. Aliqulov systematically analyzed the problem of justice in the interpretations of Eastern thinkers [7]. U. Mavlyanov specifically studied Ali Safi's socio-philosophical and spiritual-ethical views [12].

The second area concerns international historiography on the Naqshbandiyya order and Khwaja Ahrar. J. Paul provided a detailed examination of the political and

social mechanisms underlying the influence of the Naqshbandiyya order in fifteenth-century Central Asia [13]. J.-A. Gross interpreted Ahrar's economic position through the complex relationship between Sufi humility and substantial property resources [8]. A. G. Siddiqui demonstrated that later Naqshbandiyya hagiographical writings retrospectively transformed the early Khwajagan circles into a unified spiritual lineage [15]. N. Tosun summarized encyclopedic information concerning Ahrar's life and activities [17].

The third area encompasses studies concerning the familial and intellectual environment in which Ali Safi developed, particularly the ethical legacy of Kashifi. A. Lowen analyzed Futuvvatnama-i Sultani, identifying adab as a central category of futuwwa practice [11], while M. Subtelny examined Akhlaq-i Muhsini as a systematic example of Persian ethical and advisory literature [16].

In these studies, Ali Safi's works have primarily been used as historical sources or as materials for the history of the Naqshbandiyya order. The interrelationship between the categories of "adl," "insaf," "haqq," and "zulm" in his legacy has not been specifically examined as an integrated axiological system.

METHODOLOGY

The primary sources of the study comprise three works by Ali Safi: Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat [1], Lata'if al-Tawa'if [3], and Adab al-Ashab [2]. For comparative context, Husayn Wa'iz Kashifi's Futuvvatnama-i Sultani [10], as well as studies on Khwaja Ahrar and the history of the Naqshbandiyya order, were consulted.

The following methods were employed in the study:

- Historical-semantic analysis – reconstructing the meanings of the categories within the context of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries without equating them with modern legal and political terminology.

- Hermeneutical and contextual analysis – identifying normative content through actions approved or condemned in the text, even where the relevant terms are not explicitly used.

- Axiological analysis – revealing the value criteria by which social outcomes are evaluated.

- Genre-based source criticism – interpreting Rashahat as a normative text characteristic of the hagiographical genre and distinguishing two layers: the historical basis of fifteenth-century sociopolitical experience and the normative memory constructed by the author in the early sixteenth century [15].

- Comparative method – comparing Ali Safi's views with Kashifi's conception of futuwwa and Islamic ethics within the Ghazalian tradition.

The selected approach makes it possible to avoid equating the idealized figures depicted in Ali Safi's texts with all the actions of historical individuals and instead to identify which actions the author selected as criteria of justice.

RESULTS

The analysis showed that four categories form an interconnected semantic system in Ali Safi's legacy. Although they are not presented in a separate terminological chapter, they provide an effective analytical model for interpreting the thinker's ethical-political narratives and prescriptions concerning proper conduct.

Table 1. The Meaning of the Categories of Justice in Ali Safi's Legacy

Category	Meaning	Function	Primary Source
Adl	The proper standard of relations and decisions; "putting things in their rightful place"	A criterion of external social order	Rashahat, Lata'if al-Tawa'if
Insaf	Impartiality toward one's own interests, self-restraint, and conscientious judgment	The internal, personal prerequisite of justice	Adab al-Ashab, Rashahat
Haqq	Divine truth and the inalienable rights and entitlements of individuals	The normative foundation connecting adl and insaf	Rashahat
Zulm	The abuse of power, position, wealth, or influence for personal benefit	The violation of adl and insaf	Rashahat, Lata'if al-Tawa'if

"Adl" – Norm and Balance. In Rashahat, the efforts of representatives of the Khwajagan–Naqshbandiyya tradition to protect the subjects, mitigate abuses by officials, safeguard community interests in their interactions with rulers, and prioritize reconciliation in conflicts are governed by a single axiological criterion: minimizing harm to individuals and communities, ensuring that rights are duly respected, and linking

authority with responsibility [9]. Justice does not mean the absolute victory of one party but rather an order that requires the moral limitation of power. The hagiographical prophecy attributed to Khwaja Shahab al-Din Shashi, according to which sultans would heed Ahrar's commands, defines the ideal function of spiritual authority: the value of proximity to rulers lies in the opportunity to restrain them from oppression.

In Lata'if al-Tawa'if, just governance is associated with a ruler's faithfulness to promises, support for the noble aspirations of the community, and responsible exercise of official authority [12]. In the narratives concerning Khusraw Parviz, Mas'ud of Ghazni, Anushirvan, Ulugh Beg, and Babur, justice is evaluated not as a theoretical principle but through the consequences of a ruler's decisions for people's lives [6, p. 27]. When the unity of words and deeds is violated, the moral legitimacy of authority is also weakened.

"Insaf" – The Internal Dimension of Justice. Whereas "adl" denotes the proper standard of relations, "insaf" is associated with an individual's refusal to absolutize personal interests, recognition of the rights of others, and avoidance of abusing one's opportunities. It cannot be equated with the modern concept of "equality": its historical semantics place greater emphasis on conscientious judgment, fairness, and self-restraint. Adab al-Ashab addresses the practice of showing excessive deference to one member of a community while disregarding others [2, p. 278]. The rule permitting visits to a sick person belonging to another religion demonstrates that confessional differences do not necessarily preclude humane relations [2, p. 296].

The Naqshbandiyya principles of hush dar dam, nazar bar qadam, nigahdasht, and wuquf-i qalbi primarily constitute a system of mystical self-observation and cannot be directly characterized as a theory of social justice. Nevertheless, the practices of restraining arrogance and anger and evaluating every action responsibly constitute moral conditions that reduce the likelihood of oppression [14, pp. 47–50]. In this sense, insaf serves as an internal bridge connecting personal morality with social justice.

"Haqq" – The Normative Foundation

"Haqq" denotes, on the one hand, religious-ontological truth and, on the other, an individual's inviolable due and entitlement. The violation of haqq constitutes a defining characteristic of oppression, while its recognition serves as a moral prerequisite for justice. If insaf represents the internal state of this recognition, adl is its external manifestation in relationships and decisions. Owing to its dual nature, the protection of the rights of the oppressed is interpreted not as a matter of political benefit but as a requirement of moral rectitude.

"Zulm" – The Violation of Order

Zulm is not merely the antonym of justice; it is the violation of the rights of others resulting from the use of power, position, wealth, or religious authority for personal purposes. It manifests not only in overt violence by rulers but also in the abuse of taxation, unjustified oppression of the population, breach of promises, and subordination of community interests to personal gain. Ali Safi preserved accounts of Khwaja Ahrar and his associates protecting the people from oppression [4, p. 271].

Two Dimensions and Three Levels of Justice

In Ali Safi's thought, justice has two dimensions. The negative dimension involves restraining oppression, injustice, arrogance, and the abuse of official authority. The positive dimension encompasses protection, service, benevolence, reconciliation, fulfillment of promises, and active support for the interests of the people. Episodes concerning Mawlana Sayyid Hasan indicate that a spiritually accomplished murshid should not confine himself to personal perfection but should also engage in resolving the problems of the wider community [4, p. 429]. Khwaja Ahrar's service to the sick and his engagement with rulers to protect the people from the oppression of sultans [17, pp. 19–20] demonstrate service as a practice aimed at reducing social harm.

Social justice is formed at the intersection of three levels: the arif governs himself through inner spiritual discipline and serves society; the ruler combines authority with moral responsibility; and community members recognize one another's dignity through proper conduct.

DISCUSSION

The findings require interpreting Ali Safi's model of justice without idealization. Khwaja Ahrar possessed substantial economic resources and maintained close relations with the political elite; his activities have received differing assessments in historiography. Gross analyzed Ahrar's position through the complex relationship between Sufi humility and substantial property resources, while Paul examined in detail the political mechanisms underlying the influence of the Naqshbandiyya order [8, pp. 84–104]. Therefore, rather than equating the image of Ahrar presented in the text with all the actions of the historical Ahrar, it is more appropriate to identify which actions the author selected as criteria of justice. This selection itself reveals Ali Safi's axiological position.

According to Siddiqui's conclusion, later Naqshbandiyya hagiographical writings retrospectively

transformed the early Khwajagan circles into a unified spiritual lineage [15]. This confirms the necessity of interpreting Rashahat as a normative text rather than a neutral chronicle. It is precisely this normative character that provides an important source-based opportunity to identify the author's value criteria: political events were selected as examples of spiritual perfection.

A comparison of Ali Safi's model with modern theories reveals its historical specificity. First, it is not an egalitarian political program: the roles of ruler, official, sheikh, disciple, and subject are preserved, but higher status requires greater responsibility rather than greater privilege. Second, it is not utilitarianism: the consequences of decisions are important, but they are evaluated in conjunction with moral and religious norms rather than as an independent criterion of utility. Third, in Ali Safi's thought, justice is concerned less with the question "Who governs?" than with "In whose interests and according to what standards is authority exercised?" [18, pp. 67–74].

Sharia constitutes an important normative foundation of justice in Ali Safi's thought. However, it appears not merely as a collection of legal rules but as a moral criterion encompassing the requirements to restrain oppression, respect individual rights, and maintain proper standards in governance. The principles of controlling the nafs, maintaining vigilance of the heart, and preserving purity of intention share substantive similarities with Islamic ethics in the Ghazalian tradition. Nevertheless, sufficient direct textual evidence is lacking to establish that Ali Safi systematically adopted his concept of adl from al-Ghazali; it is more appropriate to speak here of the continuity of a shared intellectual tradition.

The relationship between justice and benevolence also deserves particular attention. Benevolence does not replace justice: generosity toward the oppressed does not justify oppression. However, formal fairness alone may not adequately address the actual needs of the community. The concept of jawanmardi in Kashifi's legacy, encompassing the unity of generosity, fidelity, service, and proper conduct [10], formed an integral part of the intellectual environment in which Ali Safi developed and was reformulated in his works through biographical and didactic examples.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions were reached:

1. In Ali Safi's legacy, adl represents the proper standard of society and interpersonal relations, while insaf denotes the internal moral dimension that encourages individuals to begin observing this standard with themselves. Haqq constitutes the normative foundation connecting these two categories, whereas zulm represents their violation—the domination of power and personal interests over the rights of others.

2. Justice possesses negative (restraining oppression) and positive (protection, service, benevolence, reconciliation, and fulfillment of promises) dimensions. Merely refraining from oppression does not constitute complete justice; alleviating the suffering of the oppressed when one has the means to do so is also a moral duty.

3. Social justice emerges at the intersection of the individual (control of the nafs), the community (proper interpersonal conduct), and authority (responsible governance). The rules of everyday conduct in Adab al-Ashab and the political events described in Rashahat reiterate a common principle: not treating others as objects of one's own will.

4. Ali Safi's ideal of justice is not a modern egalitarian or legal-political conception. It represents a historical-ethical model that preserves distinctions in social status while assigning greater responsibility to those occupying higher positions and integrating religious-mystical and socio-ethical dimensions.

The findings can be used in courses on the history of philosophy, ethics, and the foundations of spirituality, as well as in research on national moral values.

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