

Bringing Peace through Literature: The Impact of Dara Sukoh's Vision of Synthesizing Sufism and Bhakti Tradition on Indian Society

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Abstract

India has a tradition of producing some remarkable individuals who have contributed to the unification of society by trying to eliminate the religious polarities existing in the society. Dara Shikoh is one such personality who has dedicated his life in abridging the difference between Hindus and Muslims in India. Being the eldest son of Jahangir and Mumtaz Mahal, he carried the legacy of his grandfather, Emperor Akbar in terms of religious tolerance. His position in the Mughal court during his time is very pivotal in the sense as he was not just a royal figure but also a cultural and spiritual innovator who brought revolution in the field of translation. He was not only propounder of Sufism but also of Bhakti tradition. Mughal empire, being the most diverse empire in India as most of the rulers have embraced the culture and tradition of the majority of people living in India and individuals like Emperor Akbar and Dara Shikoh stand ahead in it. They tried to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims making India a plural society. Dara Shukoh's one of the biggest achievements is his translations of Hindu religious texts like, The Upanishads, The Bhagavad Gita and the Atharva Veda from Sanskrit to Persian. In our present paper, we are trying to capture the essence of Dara Shikoh's spiritual explorations and his translations influencing Indian society by bringing peace and strengthening mutual love between two communities.

Keywords: Peace, Sufi vision, Bhakti tradition, Mughal empire, Indian society.

Introduction

Dara Shukoh is a historical character so when we are discussing him we have to discuss the history because it is necessary to know the circumstances and situation in which he has lived and what has influenced him the most. This is indeed an herculean task because we have to interpret history which is not easy as different scholars say different things about history. For this purpose we have read the chronicles by Historians. In his book, *Historiography* (2008), Jaypalan argued about the responsibility and methods inculcated by the historians while interpreting history in the following lines:

Generally the historian is not satisfied with mere facts about the past. But he is interested in finding about what caused these events to take place and attempts to

explain the significance of the facts. Some events are classified as historical facts. It is primary duty of the historian to explain and interpret them in such a way as to appreciate the past. Hence, mere collection of facts, does not constitute history. The task of interpretation has to be taken in the light of some accepted norm which would add sense and meaning to his labours. Unless the story of mankind is interpreted and told in a convincing manner nobody would be interested in the study of the past. [107]

Sometimes some writers also interpret history in their writing, Kamleshwar is one such writer. He interpreted various incidents of history in his *magnus opus* Hindi novel, *Kitne Pakistan* which has been translated into English by Ameena Kazi Ansari as *Partition*.

In his novel, he has depicted how Dara Shukoh has endeavoured to follow the path uniting the two prominent faiths with cultural polarities existing in India; the Hindus and the Muslims.

It is believed by some scholars that the bifurcation of India which happened in 1947 has its roots much earlier. The drift between the Hindus and Muslims was not new but it has its roots in many centuries before. One of the reasons was the accession of Aurangzeb to the throne. Historian Chhatrasal Bundela had admired Dara Shukoh a lot and had an opinion about him that, “this man is responsible for condemning Hindustan’s emerging history to the gallows. The death of Dara Shukoh marked the death of Hindustan.” (155:2006) He and many others have this opinion because the policies of Aurangzeb was the reason behind creating rift between Hindus and Muslims. But some people have another version of the story as they considered him lusty for power but not a radical being. So there are two versions of history of the same time as per many documents, autobiographies and biographies. This subjectivity has harmed the understanding of future generations and created many prejudices that disturbed the social and political, cultural and religious structure of the nation. In Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan*, the character Adeeb cautions:

‘It is arguments like these... that change the parameters of social, religious and historical realities, and lead to disunity, ostracism and ill will in the future. The vanquished deliberately erased truth and memory. They record in word and deed a history warped to suit their own perspective. ... on the other hand, when the victors are confronted by these

collective realities, take up the weapon of religion. By incorporating religion into statecraft, they go to the extremes of selfish opportunism. This is the reality underlying the initial offensives carried out during the early years of the Middle Ages.” (141: 2006)

The above lines spoken through the character Adeeb in the novels reflects his recommendation for secular interpretation and shredding religious prejudice while interpreting history.

Dara Shukoh, a great scholar, an exceptional translator and patron of poetry was profoundly known for his endeavour in uncovering a commonality between mystical elements of Islam and Hinduism. He was the son of Emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal and the most beloved Prince of his subject was his life ended in a very miserable state. He was defeated by his younger brother Prince Aurangzeb due to the treachery by a Hindu king, Raja Rajrup of Jammu (whom he trusted a lot) in 1659 and was brutally killed. He was secretly buried in an unidentified grave in his forefather’s Humayun Tomb in New Delhi but his remains were discovered in 2020 making it known to all.

It is quite obvious that Muhammad Dara Shukoh continued the mystical tradition of his great-grandfather Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur and his grandfather Jalauddin Muhammad Akbar and developed their traditions of respecting the Indian language, culture and values. It was Mughal Emperor Akbar who commissioned the translation of the Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian, which influenced the religious views of Dara Shukoh. As an ardent supporter of

composite culture and religious tolerance, Emperor Akbar commissioned the translation of the Upanishads because he wanted to remove cultural polarities existing in the society on the basis of religion and he was a seeker of united search for truth. Moreover, he wanted to build a multicultural society based on love and respect for each other's religion which they can only do if they understand each other's religion which will remove various misconceptions existing in their minds regarding other religions.

Dara Shukuh was very much influenced by Akbar's religious tolerance and he carried it further in a more comprehensive way. He was influenced by his grandfather's translation and became interested in the local mystic thought of the Vedantic tradition. He believed that the mystical traditions of both Hinduism and Islam spoke of the same truth. He believed that the foundation of the two religions was the same, which is the belief, "One Reality and One God". He had a firm faith that one could not rule a diverse country without understanding the people, their religion, customs, rituals, and traditions. He also believed that no one could become a just emperor without respecting the manners and ways of both the Hindus and the Muslims.

Dara Shukoh, had an Armenian Islamic scholar named Samad (Islamic named Saeed) who was from Kashan in erstwhile Iran. He met Dara Shukoh in Shahjahanabad. It was his inspiration and patronage that led to Prince Dara's Persian translation of Sanskrit texts, including the Upanishads, which was titled *Sirr-i-Akbar* (The Great Secret). Sarmad became Dara's tutor and his influence grew to

such an extent that it shook the Mughal Empire. Those were the days that Aurangzeb was plotting his move against his father. Of Dara, Azad writes that "the humility with which he met the Muslim divines was matched only by the devotion with which he bowed his head before Hindu saints and sadhus".

Dara Shikoh's eclectic religious views and literary works helped establish a syncretic religious environment in the country during the 17th-18th century. He befriended Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs, including the seventh Sikh Guru, Guru Har Rai, and the Armenian-born mystic-atheist poet, Sarmad Kashani. He was a scholar who translated the Bhagavad Gita and 52 Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian. His works, including *Majma-ul-Bahrain* (Mingling of Two Oceans) and *Sirr-i-Akbar* (Great Mystery), sought to establish connections between Hinduism and Islam. He is known for 10 mystical works:

1. "Safinatul-Avliya" is a bright example of mystical literature. A work on the cases of Qadiriya, Junaydiya, Naqshbandiya, Kubraviya, Chishtiyya and other mashoyikhi and Orifa, Saliha women;
2. "Sakinatul-Avliya" - Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, Manaqib of Minju Caliphs;
3. "Haqnama" is a work on mysticism and mysticism;
4. "Hasanotulrifiyn" (also called "Shatkhiyot") - about Shatkhiyot of Ibrahim Adham, Bayazid Bistomi, Rabia Adawiya, Mansur Halloj, their successors;
5. "Majma' al-Bahrayn" - about common and specific aspects of Islamic and Hindu sects (translated into Arabic in 1185-1771-72);

6. "Sirri Akbar" or "Sirrul-asrar" - a translation of 50 Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian;
7. Dara Shukuh Divan. He received the nickname "Qadiri" because he belonged to the Qadiriya sect. 133 ghazals and 28 rubai's are collected in the divan kept in Ogra library. It is said that Doro Shukuh's poems were written in Sufi and Orifon content in the "Suhufi Ibrahim" Tazkir. Devon was published in Mashhad in 1944;
8. Mystical names. A set of names in Sanskrit and Persian on mystical issues (question-and-answer letters) to his contemporaries;
9. "Tariqatul-haqiqat" (also called "Ma'arif") is an introduction and 3 addresses, each of which is divided into 30 addresses. Different stages of the tariqat are covered in this treatise. It contains the poems of Sa'di, Amir Khusrav and Jami;
10. Question and answer booklet. "Discussion" is also called conversation. It consists of questions and answers received by Muhammad Daro Shukuh from Indian citizens Baba Lol Dos about Hindu sects and Indian philosophy. The pamphlet contains poems by Jalaluddin Rumi, Nizami, Hafiz and other poets. There is information that Muhammad Daro Shukuh also translated some of the stories contained in "Jog" written in Sanskrit, consisting of 60 thousand verses.

Dara Shukoh was also a follower of the Qadiri order of Sufis and a disciple of Miyan Mir. When we discuss Sufism then it is necessary to talk about Bhakti tradition also. Sufism and Bhakti tradition are the two spiritual movements in Islam and Hinduism which emphasize on profound personal

connection of an individual with the Almighty riveting purely on love, devotion and divinity.

While Sufism believes in pursuing a direct personal experience of God (Allah) through the values of love, devotion and the most important aspect which is purification of soul, the Bhakti Movement believes in focusing around the devotion (bhakti) to a personal God which can be from any caste, social status or gender. Both the movements were reformist movements eliminating fanaticism and other kinds of discrimination existing in their religions. The Sufis accentuated inner spiritual practices like dhikr (remembrance of God), meditation and chanting religious hymns as a way to reach the almighty, the Bhakti saints conveyed their devotion to their God through the means of music, poetry and songs.

Both the Sufi and the Bhakti Movement believed in devotion and love for God as the path to spiritual fulfillment. They both focused on an emotion and personal association with the almighty. They both had rejected the rigid religious rituals, social hierarchies and discrimination based on the caste, and have stressed on devotion for all.

Both the Sufi and Bhakti movements are still famous in the contemporary world because of their richness in poetry and music which is based on mysticism and devotion. Both Sufi and Bhakti poets have written or sung verses showing their profound love and devotion to God. In olden days, spirituality was not accessible to the common people, but these two movements have this concept. These two movements were beyond caste, gender and social status. Both the movements have

emphasized on self-transformation which is relevant for the direct communion with God, so they had strictly rejected the external rituals or institutions.

Dara Shukoh is one such believer who followed these paths in his life. In his lifetime, he was profoundly influenced by some mythical figures and thinkers who persuaded him to follow the path of Sufism. He as an individual from childhood had an urge to understand spirituality and the union with the divine leading him to follow the mystical path of Islam, particularly Sufism. There are many individuals and aspects which have helped in Dara Shukoh's transformation from a common individual to a Sufi saint. First and foremost is the influence of his mother, Empress Mumtaz Mahal. A simple devout mother, she motivated Dara Shukoh towards intellectual and spiritual pursuit which has further led him to walk on the path of exploration of divine connection.

The second great influence was that of Mian Mir, a famous Sufi saint from Lahore. He was his spiritual mentor whose teaching on mysticism and exploration for the divine had a significant influence on Dara. One of the most important influences on Dara was that of Saeed (Sarmad), an Armenian trader from Kashan (Iran). Though he came as a trader but experienced spirituality leading him to meet Dara at Shahjahanabad. He greatly inspired Dara Shukoh and under his patronage he became inclined towards translating Hindu religious texts from Sanskrit to Persian. He tutored Dara and became so popular that his influence in the Mughal Empire made Aurangzeb his enemy, who was able to execute him through a conspiracy. During the

era of Dara Shukoh, the mystical ideas of Sufi scholar Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi were very much influential. His concepts regarding the unity of existence and divine love were quite similar with that of Dara's ideology of mysticism.

Dara Shukoh was inclined towards Sufi mysticism since childhood as he believed in the idea of transcending the ego and realizing the oneness of the soul with the Almighty. His personal interest in mysticism is quite reflective in his translations of religious texts of Hinduism. This demonstrates his secular aspect as a follower of Sufism because he followed the path of unity between all religions, especially making a bridge between Hinduism and Islam.

Dara Shukoh was a very learned and intellectual scholar because of reading of various spiritual texts of Islam and Hinduism which influenced him a lot and shaped his personality. Reading texts of various traditions of Islamic philosophy especially Sufism and Vedantic teachings of Hinduism influenced his philosophy and made him a scholar of both Islam and Hinduism. This led to the spiritual unity combining two religious philosophies. He was a great scholar of two ancient languages; Persian and Sanskrit and his translated works make him one of the greatest translators India has ever had.

Conclusion

Dara Shukoh's spiritual journey was thus shaped by a blend of personal inquiry, the teachings of Sufi saints like Mian Mir, and his broader intellectual pursuits, marking him as a figure that sought spiritual synthesis and

religious tolerance. His efforts to find common ground between Islam and Hinduism influenced the Mughal court's cultural dynamics, marking a distinctive era of syncretic philosophy and art. His legacy as a scholar and a proponent of religious tolerance continues to be celebrated.

In the history, Dara Shukoh is considered as a tragic character, who though was a pious innocent soul but was badly executed by his own brother, Aurangzeb. The eldest son of Shah Jahan, Dara Shukoh was groomed to be the future ruler of the Mughal empire but something else was written in his fate. History would have been different had he been the Emperor of India. Today in an age of rising tide of fundamentalism, it is relevant to see the figure of Dara Shukoh as a flicker of hope. His inspirational personality as a Sufi and his words of wisdom will always be remembered as a spiritual bridge between the two communities.

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