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## Dārā Shikoh and Islamic Pluralism

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article History</b> Published Online: _Published_</p> <p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dara Shikoh</li><li>• Islamic Liberalism</li><li>• Interfaith Under standing</li><li>• Islamic Pluralism</li></ul>	<p>Today mankind is facing a hard time regarding its religious practices and identities due to various complications. The root cause of this is not getting a proper interpretation of religion according to the changing circumstances. Conservatives always prefer to follow preconceived notions and stay away from contemporary issues. some pseudo-leaders take advantage of this attitude and misuse religion for their own interests and sowing seeds of division among the masses. Nowadays, the practice of religious rituals is becoming a symbol of bigotry and intolerance is being promoted and spread. This is the main reason why confusion and differences are increasing among people regarding religion. These problems can be countered by highlighting and spreading the works of Dara Shikoh</p>

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## **Introduction**

The main purpose of interfaith dialogue and comparative studies is to address questions that arise about religion or its consequence. The approaches of dialogue and studies should be equipped with the concept of acceptance, respect, and tolerance which can be applied to social harmony. The elements of harmony are commonly found in religious discourse and practices that bind human behavior. The strategy of such an initiative would create a positive perspective that strengthens the sense of coexistence. Dara Shikoh's dialogue and comparative studies are an example of such a harmonious ideal that reinforce traditions of social tolerance. Majma-ul-Bahrain and Dara Shikoh's dialogue with Baba Lal was an intellectual exchange of views that shaped an exemplary dialogue model. It was an important and worthy work of intellectuals on interfaith work. It throws light on the synergy of divine knowledge and the question arising in the mind of man.

Today it is imperative to find common ground that harmonizes with each other. Although there are differences in the doctrines, customs, and myths of religions, which may seem contradictory, we can find a common point in all of them. Further, there is a misconception about religions that it only instructs to follow a specific system and does not accept any right to diversity, and does not accept any value outside their ambit. If look carefully, this does not prove to be true. Therefore, Prince Dara Shikoh practically tried to prove that religion is a universal possession. The knowledge and ultimate truth which is found in every religion can be taken to understand clearly or to remove doubts because the destination of all religions is the same, only the philosophical approach is different. The thrust of Prince Dara Shikoh was to eliminate religious differences and establish holistic peace.

As we see religious fanaticism is spreading everywhere and people are alienating each other. Therefore, it has become necessary to explore the spiritual wisdom and reasoning contained



in the religious scriptures and doctrines from different perspectives to know the reasons behind these problems. Inter-religious interactions and dialogues bring mutual understanding on such issues as people's beliefs, ideas, and practices related to religion in society, thereby strengthening a man's social and ideological consciousness. The outcome of the dialogue is more effective in religious reconciliation efforts.

In this Paper, the work done by Prince Dara Shikoh on religious spirituality, universality, and tolerance has been analyzed. This is an attempt to present the multi-facets of Prince Dara Shikoh and especially his works in the field of inter-religious understanding and universal spirituality from a contemporary perspective. what Dara Shikoh has done is relevant forever. A careful study of the life, personality, and thoughts of Dara Shikoh reveals three points, first that the essence of religion is in spirituality, second that religion is universal and third for the pursuit of the 'Absolute Truth' one can be benefited from different religious wisdom and doctrines instead of a particular thought.

### **Life & Personality of Dara Shikoh**

Prince Muhammad Dara Shikoh was born in Ajmer on the night of Monday, 20th March 1615 (29th Safar, 1024 A.H.). He was the eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. It was said that the well-known Sufi saint Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti had blessed his birth. King Shah Jahan frequently traveled to the shrine of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti and prayed for a son. Emperor Jahangir named this beloved grandson and future successor as Muhammad Dara Shikoh. The lucky newcomer was hailed as the "Prime Rose of the Empire" (Gul-i-Awwalin-i-Gulistan-i-Shahi - representing his year of birth).<sup>i</sup> He was the apparent heir to the Mughal Empire and was groomed to be the future ruler of the Mughal Empire. He was appointed as a military commander at an early age. Later he was appointed as the Governor of Allahabad, Bihar, Gujarat, Kabul, Lahore, Malwa, and Multan. Being the favorite of the monarch, He



had the authority to appoint his executive for the administration of his province, and stay with the king himself.

After finishing his preparatory studies with private tutors, Dara studied under Mulla Abdul Latif Sultanpuri and began by reading the Quran, Hadith, commentaries on both, as well as works of Persian poetry and a thorough history of Timurid as per the Mughal education system. His education under Mulla Abdul Latif nourished his interest in Sufism, which is reflected in all of his intellectual output. Dara was lured to metaphysics and mysticism. The harmony among all faiths and fraternity were the dreams of his life that were tragically dashed by his early demise.<sup>ii</sup>

Dara Shikoh was eloquence, quick-witted and generous. He developed himself as a scholarly principle and practice, and most significantly gave preference to the study of metaphysics. Dara Shikoh remained like a student throughout life and had quested the essential oneness in mystical discourses and holy scripture of all religions. During his reign as a Crown Prince, Dara Shikoh was always accompanied by religious scholars. He granted pensions to them. He professed his Muslim faith, but in private he was Gentile with a Gentile, Christian with Christian. It is believed that he absorbed opinions from them that were consistent with the country's religion.<sup>iii</sup>

Gentile: A term used in the bible for the people who are outside of the nation of Israel (Bani Israel).

Dara Shikoh developed transformational thinking that is still relevant for individuals and for society today. The trend of Dara Shikoh in the Mughal royalty was distinct in reconciliation with Indian religion. He devoted the greater part of his time and energy to carrying on literary propaganda for the promotion of peace and concord between the better minds in Islam and Hinduism. He appeared in the role of a peacemaker between the Hindus and the Muslims, his task is being to interpret to each community the highest truths of the religion of the other in a most intelligent and acceptable manner.<sup>iv</sup>



## **Religious Beliefs:**

During the war of succession and/or trial, Dara Shikoh was portrayed as an apostate. But in fact, he did not renounce his religion and he never became a Hindu, as his opponents had rumored. Dara shikoh was executed on a decree from the legal advisers of Aurangzeb that "Dara Shikoh was apostatized from the law and having vilified the religion of God had allied himself with heresy." <sup>v</sup>

Dara Shikoh's religiosity can be easily determined from his writings. He was a Muslim of the Sufi faith, and as a Sufi temperament, he was always in search of truth and followed the Sufi's footsteps. Generally, Dara introduced himself as follower of Hanafi school of thoughts and Qadiriya spiritual order. During his discipleship with Mulla Shah, he met the Hindu sage, Baba Lai. As his curiosity grew, he came into contact with various religions. He always expressed his views very clearly and like other Muslim scholars, always commenced his book or writing with the praise of God, the Prophet, his descendants, and their companions. We can assume him as a progressive seeker in the quest for religious truth because he always criticized the conservatives for their parochialism. It does not mean that he rebelled against Islam and became an apostate.

According to Mahfuz ul Haq, "In all these works there is not the slightest indication that Dara had renounced Islam and embraced Hinduism. He is a Muslim throughout. He is of opinion that the Vedas are "revealed books" but certainly this could not amount to apostasy from Islam. He believed in the Quran and was of opinion that "the Vedas were in accordance with the Quran or rather they were an interpretation of that." Can such an opinion amount to renouncing Islam? It is for the doctors of the Faith to pronounce an opinion on the point but, to a layman like myself, it appears that no one could possibly be declared a Kafir on one's simply expressing the above views. There have been many revealed books, which



according to the Muslim faith have been abrogated, but, nevertheless, they can be studied profitably by one who wishes to make a higher and deeper study of religions and theological problems. So, if Dara found in the Vedas an elucidation and explanation of certain abstruse problems of the Quran, he cannot be condemned. Mirza Janjanan Mazhar, who was a very well-known saint of India has expressed practically the same views but he has not been condemned by any. He writes; It appears from the ancient books of the Indians that the Divine Mercy, at the beginning of the creation of the human species, sent a Book, named the Bed (Veda), which is in four parts, in order to regulate the duties of this as well as the next world....All the schools (of the Hindus) unanimously believe in the unity of the most-high God; consider the world to be created; believe in the destruction of the world, in the reward for good and bad conduct; in the resurrection and accountability (of conduct) ..... rules and regulations of their faith are fully and well arranged. So it is evident that it had been a good religion but abrogated. In Islamic Shar, no mention of any other abrogated religions, save Judaism and Christianity, is made: whereas many other religions have undergone the process of obliteration and affirmation (i.e. changes)".<sup>vi</sup>

### **Dara Shikoh's Religious Approach:**

Dara Shikoh always described his personality and spirituality in his writings, and presented himself as ideal with the affirmation "The unafflicted, un-sorrowing Fakir, Mohammad Dara Shikoh". We can find his ideology in Hasant-ul-Arifin as he stated " He is fortunate who finds taste in these matters, and is benefited by them and considers himself a sincere devotee of theirs (the Sufis) and engages himself in such pursuits. God, the Generous, has said, 'We did not create Jinn and the human beings except for devotion'. All the erotic and esoteric commentators of the Quran have explained devotion by the word 'Irfan (or, Divine knowledge). Hence,



nothing is better than Tauhid (monotheism) and Marifat (Divine knowledge) (vii)

He was attempting to develop universalism through spiritual teaching of the religions viz, the Marifat (Divine knowledge) and Tauhid (monotheism). Hence, Dara tried to explore the possibilities of universalism through his writings. The implementation of his ideology can bring down religious conflicts and resolve them so that peace and harmony prevail in Indian society. His ideologies reflected the following points;

The quest for universal divine knowledge (Marifat)

Enhancement of understanding through dialogue

Today, we can implement the ideas of Dara in two ways, first by arranging for interreligious dialogue, and second by incorporating his quest for religious truth and comparative study into the curriculum.

#### **Quest for Universal Divine Knowledge (Marifat)**

Dara Shikoh's ideas are more needed today than in the past to reduce the growing bitterness in society. He emphasized spirituality as the main core of religion to bring people closer. In today's era, we can divide his idea of to quest for universal divine knowledge (*Ma'rifat*) into two parts.

Recognition of Religious Pluralism

Inter-religious Spirituality & Enlightenment

### **Religious Pluralism**

Since the circumstance of pluralism has been for centuries and no one can deny this truth, rather people have been embracing it in different ways. If we look at history, we can find different ways of mutual relations in the past. When people treat others as equal participants and understand each other, prejudice and misunderstanding are reduced and pave the way for mutual recognition and respect. All religions have a sacred attitude that compels us to believe that all these religions have a common source. It motivates not only to accept the specific values of other



religions but also to live in unity with diversity while respecting the core values of different religions.

As it is believed in Sufism, the purpose of religion is introspection and connectedness to God. Each religion has a different belief system, but the basic principles of spirituality are almost the same in all. Philosophically, all religions are rooted in universality. The same ultimate reality is worshipped almost by all but people understand that reality in different ways. Prince Dara Shikoh had realized this truth from his master (Pir-o-Murshid) and knowledge that diversity is the reality of the universe. Therefore, there are also differences in religions and faiths. There are various religions and beliefs which give a sense of divinity and humanity to human beings.

Today, due to better opportunities and globalization, people have migrated more than ever before and are establishing themselves in a new society, especially while maintaining their religious identity, in which the spirit of pluralism has increased. There is a growing awareness among people that they live and exist in a religiously pluralistic world and they do not consider it a catastrophe but a gift. This attitude towards multi-religious situations paved the way for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Earlier people who lived far away like strangers now are becoming their neighbors and have been enriching society by sharing each other's knowledge. The sense of coexistence comes due to the virtues of optimism, tolerance, and complacency which people gained from religiosity and spirituality but unfortunately, some people do not understand, or intentionally have to misinterpret the spirit of religion, pushing the people toward unrest, wars, and terrorism.

The existence of many religions can be due to the understanding and realization of the divine mysteries. As it is stated in the Vedas (viii) "the one light manifests itself in various forms." While the Holy Quran said in other words that " O Mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of a Male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that ye may know each Other.





verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he Who is) the most righteous of you)" (ix) The verse emphasizes the point that there is no place in Islam for intolerance, bigotry, or prejudice on the basis of color, race, nationality, etc. This universal tolerance of Islam applies to all aspects of life and to all affairs of human beings. Therefore, it is clearly understood that most religions evolve from one source and lead finally to the one ultimate goal.

The acceptance of religious pluralism from the holy scriptures brings effective understanding among human beings. What the religious systems affirm as truth is almost accepted by the believers of any faith. There are many differences in the interpretation of religious doctrine but at last, we see that there are many points on which we can unite. A number of philosophers and theologians have turned their attention to the relationship between religious diversity with the main focus on whether this diversity might lead to effective understanding. The understanding prevails in peace and satisfaction.

As we see in our surroundings that religion plays a very effective role in society. The participation of religions in human society has been since the beginning, rather it has been considered that religion has imparted knowledge to educate human beings. But it has also been observed that in spite of this education and initiation, the spirituality of religion and its consequences on human beings is obscured over time and does not affect their life and behavior. The need of the hour is to review the works of Prince Dara Shikoh and propagate inter-religious works for a tolerant and tranquil society.

The ideology of Prince Dara Shikoh is always going to fit into the fabric of Indian society. His ideas of spirituality, universalism, and inclusivity and his distance from orthodoxy and criticism always attract amiable and liberal people. He was not an atheist or ever abandoned Islam rather within the limits of Islam religion, he summed up the essence of all religions that the main purpose of religion is to recognize and get closeness to the almighty God. He strongly believed that all religions lead by their own path for the



same destination of ultimate truth and therefore there should be no religious distinction among them. He visited the mausoleums of important saints and recorded valuable historical details of his visits and saints. (x) He was one of the flag bearers of the Indian syncretic culture. His inter-religious dialogical works reduce religious enmity and have flourished confidence and respect in public. His eclectic approach, as expressed in his literary works is a precious legacy for an inclusive religious environment in the country. The Quran, Vedas, or other Divine Scriptures are not separate a book but rather are different editions of a single Book of God. All editions of the Book revealed by God were the same in regard to content. The potential of Dara's ideas is immense, so it is exigent that his doctrine should be exegesis in the form of a curriculum.

As a man of cordiality, Dara Shikoh profoundly believed in the unity of religions. He himself studied deeply the holy scripture and interacted with the sages in search of the truth. He desired to conceive religions as a field that had to be influenced by the spiritual spirit. In a time when the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures was limited to a particular section. He initiated the exploration of all religions and truth that interpenetrated all spheres of human life. In their inclusive religiosity, he emphasized the ultimate truth. What holy scriptures called religion is actually a spirituality as distinguished from ritual practices. Religion is the enlightenment of ultimate truth and connectedness with the creator. Moreover, Dara's dialogical and mystic philosophy emphasized the real truth of the religions. He worked not with might, but with dialogue that was the basis for trust and coexistence. Dialogue or interaction is the best channel of understanding that develop a trustful attitude among human beings.

His engagement with the sages and Sufis was a self-transforming spiritual act, intending to develop a syncretic society at a large. His dialogical thinking was steeped in a comprehensive interpretation



of the Holy scripture. He considers the Vedas and Upanishads to be essential books for understanding the Holy Quran as well as religious truth. As the Holy Quran said that there has been no community in the world for whose guidance Allah did not appoint the Prophets. This has been stated in several places in the Quran. The holy Quran said: "Every people has its guide" <sup>(xi)</sup>, The holy Quran again informs that "O Prophet, And We did send the messengers before you among the groups of earlier peoples" <sup>(xii)</sup>, further it is mentioned in the Holy Quran that "Surely We have sent you with truth as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and there was no community without a warner having passed among them". <sup>xiii</sup> It is clear from these verses of the Qur'an that the Messenger had come to every region to guide the people. Almost all Islamic books mention many prophets who have been sent to guide mankind, but only twenty-five are mentioned in the Quran. Adam (peace be upon him) was the first of the Prophets and Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the last among them. The exact number of prophets is unknown, but some traditions put their number at 124,000. In addition to the four revealed large books (Tawrat/Torah, Zabur/Psalms, Injil/Gospels, and Quran), many smaller books (purified scrolls), known as "Sahifa" have been revealed to various prophets. There is some revealed scroll (sahifa) mentioned in the Quran that was revealed to some prophets. Thus, Dara Shikoh understood that India could not be the exception to the divine guidance and the Vedas and Upanishads which are full of extraordinary wisdom and truth would have been revealed to ancient Indian prophets.

Monotheism is the foundation of Islam and as a Muslim, Dara Shikoh believed in the doctrine that there is only one God that created the whole cosmos. The doctrine of monotheism has been also widely discussed in the Vedas and Upanishads. The sages and scholars never annulled this belief or condemned the followers who believe in monotheism. Thus, Dara Shikoh turned to the erudition of the holy scripture of the Vedas and Upanishads and



tried to establish a connection between the holy book of the Quran and the Upanishads.

### **Conclusion:**

The perspective of Dara Shikoh on the relationship between the sacred literature of Islam and Hinduism seems to be his greatest contribution to Indian thought. He was very impressed with the knowledge of the Upanishads because the divine message in it is expressed in some explicit manner and it can be used to understand the less clear statements of the Quran. Quranic interpreters maintain that the Quran has an exoteric meaning, known as *zaahir*, but also an underlying esoteric meaning, known as *baatin*, that can be interpreted only by esoteric knowledge.

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