



# DARA SHIKOH; AN AMBASSADOR OF INDO - ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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## ABSTRACT

Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) was renowned Sufi, author, poet, and translator of Hindu Religious Testimonies. He is the eldest son of Shahjahan and designated crown prince. He occupied a unique position among all Mughal princes because of his comparative study of Islamic mysticism and classical Hindu philosophy. Dara Shikoh greatly worked for the Indo-Islamic mysticism by highlighting the similarities between ancient Hindu and Islamic Sufi teachings. He not only followed the liberal religious attitude of his grandfather Akbar but gave a new dimension to Indo-Islamic Mysticism in India and it spread all over the world through his mystical works. Dara Shikoh being a disciple of Mian Mir Qadari and a great follower of Qadari order of Sufism devoted his much time for the search of truth. And during his study and research he felt that the search for God (truth) was same at all the times and all over the world. He preached the mingling of classical Hindu philosophy and Islamic Mysticism and always tried to find the common grounds between these two thoughts so that a healthier tradition could be produced, that will lead to universal brotherhood among the followers of different religions, which is utmost need of the present world. This was crux of Indo-Islamic Mysticism produced by the Dara Shikoh. He was executed by his younger brother Aurangzeb on political and religious basis. Aurangzeb was a staunch Sunni Muslim, who followed the policy of intolerance with Hindus and spiritual persons like Dara Shikoh and the great Sufi sage and Persian poet Sarmad.

**KEY WORDS:** Dara Shikoh, Islamic Mysticism, Tawhid, Hindu philosophy, Dara Upanishads, Yoga Vashista.

## INTRODUCTION:

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, a school of practice that emphasizes the inward search for God and rejects materialism. The idea after Sufism are the Holy versus of God and the Hadiths of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). But, this word "Sufism" is not found at all in Holy Quran. Sufism or mysticism is a practice that purifies the Sufi's from evil deeds and makes them able to search for God and reach the actual truth.

When we look upon the mystical thought in Indian subcontinent, it came here with the arrival of Sufi saints, along the spreading wave of Islam from the middle eastern countries during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. The Sufi's spread the beautiful messages of Islam in India not only by demonstrations but by the realistic conduct and desire to create an evil less society. They worked for the peace and harmony in the country; their mission was always to serve the mankind and worship the Almighty Allah only. They believe in peace, tolerance, compassion and universal brotherhood.

Dara Shikoh was born at Ajmer (Monday night, the 29 Safar, 1024 A.H). The city hallowed by the memory of the great mystic Khawaja Maen-u Din Chisti, whose tomb was there since centuries, and is being visited by the number of devoted followers. The king Shahjahan was also one of the great followers of the mystic saint and frequently visited the tomb of the Chisti saint and prayed earnestly for the birth of a male child. The prayers were accepted by the almighty Allah (swt) and Dara was born. It is said that Dara's birth was naturally hailed with the outburst of feeling of joy by his devoted father. King Jahangir named the child as Dara Shikoh and poet laureate of the Jahangir's court Kaleem Kashani said a famous Caught "Gul-e-Awaleen Gulistaan-e-Shahi".

Dara Shikoh's was unique among the Mughal family and entirely distinct in all respects from other princes of the entire Mughal house. In fact the qualities of his two great ancestors Humayun and Akbar were found in him. The Humayun who had lost his life while descending from the stairs of royal Mughal library used to spend most of his time in library to acquire knowledge and the same habit was inherited in Dara Shikoh who spent his whole life on the study mysticism. While the interest in comparative religions, universal brotherhood, humanism, communal harmony and peace was acquired from Akbar the Great; these qualities played a significant role in shaping his mind. His great mission in life was the promotion of peace and harmony among the followers of Hinduism and Islam. Throughout his life he worked for the promotion of universal brotherhood and promoted the ethical and moral thought through his great pieces of literature.

Dara Shikoh was a great patron of art, architecture and literature. He was always surrounded by scholars and artists. He himself was a skilled calligrapher, artist, poet, writer and translator of Sanskrit books. He wrote several books on Sufism and translated a few remarkable Sanskrit works into Persian with the help of some Hindu writers. He used all his skills for the promotion of peace and universal brotherhood throughout his life. His mission of life was to eradicate the hatred among the human beings on the basis of religion and status. According to his school of thought God has created humans equally and all religions lead towards one God. Because of his school of thought he faced so many controversies and dif-

iculties in life but never gave up until he was beheaded by his younger brother Aurangzeb Alamgir on 10 September, 1659, at the age of 44 years.

Dara Shikoh Qadari was one of the great Sufi from the royal Mughal family, he was a good writer, poet, translator, calligrapher and elder son of Shahjahan and Mumtaz Mahal. Keeping aside his political outlook I mainly try to focus on his contribution as an ambassador of Indo-Islamic mysticism. Dara Shikoh's personality was developed in a mystical and intellectual environment which encouraged him for gaining knowledge of metaphysics and boosted him in the search of truth. During his life he interacted with different Islamic Sufi's and Hindu yogis of that time and was impressed by these Sufi's and yogi's. He was attracted towards Qadari order and attached himself with Miya Mir Qadari and Mullah Shah Badakhshi. The Qadari order was established by Sheikh Abdul Qadar Jilani (1078-1116). The Qadari teachings emphasize the struggle against the desires of the ego. Jilani defined it as, "the greater struggle". This has two stages first against deeds forbidden by religious law and second against fundamental values such as greed, vanity, and fear.

He opened a new window in Indian Islamic mysticism and his thought spread throughout the world by his Sufistic works. His works are broadly categorized into two parts; the first consists of manuscripts on Islamic Mysticism and Muslim saints, the most important of these being the Safinat ul- Auliya (1640), the Sikanat ul- Auliya (1642), the Risala-I-Haq Numa (1651-1653), the Hasanatul-Arifeen (1652) and the Iksir-I-Azam. The second part consists of writings such as the Majma ul- Behrain (1653), the Mukalama-i- Baba Lal Das Wa Dara Shikoh (1653), the Surr-i Akbar (1657) and his Persian translations of the Yoga Vashista and the Gita.

**Safinat ul- Auliya (1640):** Dara Shikoh wrote the biography of Sufi saints and their relation with different orders of Mysticism. He has started the book by praising Almighty Allah and last prophet of the Universe Hazrat Mohammad (peace be upon him). He praised the four friends or great Shaba's and two grandsons of prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) then he has discussed all the Sufi saints one by one. While discussing them he gave the examples of their miracles. In this master piece of work Dara Shikoh discussed the Sufi saints of Nakashbandi order, Suharwardi order, Qadari Order and Chesti order. During writing the book Dara Shikoh took help from Ganiat-ul Talibeen and Kashif-ul Mehjoob of Abdul Qadir Jilani and Ali Hijwari Daata Gang Bakhsh respectively.

**Sikanat ul- Auliya (1642):** Dara Shikoh was the disciple of Qadari order and was associated to Mian Mir Qadari and mullah shah Badakhshi. He had a great knowledge of mysticism and has mastery over Persian language. He wrote a book on the life, works, miracles and golden sayings of his spiritual guides like Mian Mir Qadari and Mullah Shah Badakhshi. He has started the book by praising Almighty Allah and prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). Dara Shikoh also discussed some important points of mysticism in this book.

**Risala-I Haq Numa (1646):** This is a small pamphlet written by Dara Shikoh in Persian language. Haq means Truth and Numa means Pointing. So Haq Numa means pointing towards truth. Dara Shikoh in this pamphlet described four

planes of existence as: Nasut (physical), Jabarut (blissful), Malakut (super physical) and Lahut (Divine). Another name of this pamphlet is Darul Nukaat. In this small piece of literature Dara Shikoh writes that when a mystic seeker gets deeper and deeper in mysticism and makes a relationship with his spiritual guide who polishes him has to read and study this pamphlet. This is a small book but is much more important in understanding the mystical thought given by a great Sufi scholar of Mughal period who can be rightly called "an ambassador of Indo-Islamic mysticism".

**Hasanatul-Arifeen (1652):** Dara Shikoh is the author of this great work on mysticism namely Hasanatul-Arifeen written in 1652 AD, as he attained grasp on Persian poetry, prose and Mysticism. This book is a Persian prose with some poetry also, to make this interesting and meaningful for readers. In the introduction of this book Dara Shikoh says that in the condition of "Wajed", some secrets of truth come on tongue, which are not understood by these self-styled "Ulimas". After listening to these secrets they put the tag of kufr on me. Dara says in order to get rid of these tags, I am writing this book.

Dara Shikoh in this literary piece criticized the self-styled 'Ulima' who only focuses on the external appearance while ignoring the actual eternal faith of Islam. This is the third book of Dara Shikoh in the track of his Sufistic works. It has a significant importance in his Sufistic thought.

**Iksir-I-Azam:** Dara Shikoh was a great poet of his period mentioned by his contemporary intellectuals. The author of "Khazinat- ul Asifiya" Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Lahori remarks about his poetry that, "his poetry is like the ocean of Unitarianism flowing out of his pearl scattering tongue; or like the sun of monotheism, rising from the horizon in the manner of his luminous opening verse (Malta)".

Iksir-I-Azam is the Diwan of Dara Shikoh, which has Quatrains and Ghazals. In this poetic work he has expressed the Sufistic views and described monotheism in his own unique way. The Diwan was first published by Asiatic society Calcutta.

**Majma ul- Behrain (1653):** Dara Shikoh is the author of this incredible manuscript known by the name of Majma ul- Behrain, "Mingling of two oceans" originally written in Persian language, its Hindi version is called Samudra Sangam Grantha. This book is considered as one of his top works on comparative religions. It was devoted to a revelation of the mystical and pluralistic affinities between Sufism and Vedantic speculation.

Majma-ul Behrain is one among the earliest works on comparative religions which was written for the unity of Islam, Hinduism and other religions. Dara Shikoh was keen for the comparative religions which come out in the form of this book, which has a literary and universal importance. He studied the common things in these religions especially the "Unity of God". He has revealed that there must not be any reason for religions hatred among different religions because God has created man equally and all religions lead to one God.

**Muqalama- Baba Lal Das Wa Dara Shikoh- (1653):** This is a summary of long discussion between Baba Lal Das and Dara Shikoh. The discussion was translated into Persian by Dara's contemporary writer Chander Bhan Brahman who is one of the known writer of his period. Baba Lal Das was a good friend of Dara Shikoh's spiritual guide Mian Mir Qadari. Dara Shikoh was interested to meet him. When Baba Lal Das came to Lahore, Dara himself went to meet him and asked some questions regarding Hinduism. Baba Lal Das had a good knowledge of Hinduism and gave satisfied answers to the questions. Dara Shikoh was greatly influenced by his answers and his knowledge of Hinduism and Hindu spirituality.

**Sir-I-Akbar (1657):** Dara Shikoh had always quest for the common mystical heritage between Hinduism and Islam. Despite his busy political life, he spent his much more time in translating the Upanishads. In order to fulfill his quest, he did a significant task with the help of Hindu writers. This translation of Upanishads is appropriately called Sir-I-Akbar "the greatest secrets". He completed the translation of fifty-two Upanishads in 1657.

It is Sir-I-Akbar, which spread the upanishadic knowledge to the rest of the world. Different writers translated the Upanishads but it was Dara Shikoh's translation which did the great job in this regard. It was two years after Dara Shikoh did this translation, he was executed by his younger brother Aurangzeb in 1659. After the deep analysis of Dara's spiritual thought, we came to know some points about him which are discussed under following headings.

**Explanation of Sufi's and Sufism:** Dara Shikoh explained Sufi's and Sufism in his unique style which he felt missing during his time. His faith in the spiritual power of saints and his interest in this field were firmly established after visiting Hazrat Mian Mir. He wrote a biography of the Sufi's namely Safeenatul Auliya, starting by the praise of Almighty Allah and praise of prophet Mohammad (peace be upon Him) as usual. He discussed the saints of different orders such as Nakashbandi, Suharwardi, Qadari and Chesti and wrote their marvels as well.

He wrote another biography of his spiritual guides Mian Mir Qadari and Mullah

Shah Badakhshi. Beside that he wrote marvels, sensational works and their Sufistic thought. By writing this book Dara Shikoh showed his gratitude for Sufism Sufi's and his spiritual guides.

**Mingling of Islamic Mysticism and Hindu mysticism:** Dara Shikoh gave new dimensions to Sufism in India by mingling Sufism and Hindu spirituality and revealed that both of these lead to the same truth. His comparative religious study gave him a unique way of thinking and led him to a new thought that can be seen in his book Majma ul- Behrain (Mingling of two oceans). During study he searched the similarities between Hinduism and Islam and gave a Sufistic thought of religious tolerance, peace, humanism and universal brotherhood. For example, he says the Hindu notion of mukti, is similar with the concept of salvation, denoting the annihilation of the self in God. The Sufi concept of love is said to be similar with the concept of Maya of the Hindu monotheists.

The basic message of Dara Shikoh's spiritual thought mentioned in Majma ul Behrain is summed up in his own words as; 'Mysticism is equality'; 'if I know that an infidel, immersed in sin, is in a way, singing the note song of monotheism, I go to him, hear him and I am grateful to him'.

Dara Shikoh has written in the translations of Upanishads that a strong strain of monotheism may be found in the Vedas and is of the opinion that the monotheistic philosophy of the Upanishads may be 'in conformity with the Holy Quran and a commentary thereon. This translation of Upanishads by Dara Shikoh played a vital role in awakening the west to the wisdom of the Upanishads.

**Concept of Monotheism "Tawhid":** Dara writes, 'man is a drop and God is ocean' 'look where you can, All is He, God's face is ever face to face.

The absolute is the one creator of all creations and is pervading into all. Dara Shikoh was fully faithful in the existence of one God. He searched for the unity of God in comparative religions. He felt that all religions lead to one God who is omnipotent and worthy of worship. During study of Upanishads, he reached to the conclusion that the upanishadic knowledge also verifies the unity of God. He opines that the 'great secret' of the Upanishads is the monotheistic message, which is similar to that, on which the Holy Quran is based.

**Anti-mullah concept:** Dara Shikoh was against the fundamental molvi's because his attitude was always friendly with the people of other religions and against religious intolerance. He in his book Hasanat ul- Arifeen criticized bitterly the molvi's who ignore the inner dimensions of faith, and focus simply on external faith and external appearance.

Dara in this regard followed the anti-mullah trend of famous Persian poet of Shiraz namely Hafiz Shirazi who was eagerly against the externally looking molvi's (zahir parist molvi's), he says that these molvi's are demonstrating the religion and morality on the dice and in Masjids but when are alone do the other things instead. Dara Shikoh in his poetry says, 'Paradise is a place with no Mullah and it is free from their noise and quarrel'. Against this, the then Ulma's gave the fatwa of traitor (Mulhid) with regards to his translation of Upanishads and Majma ul-Behrain. These fatwas became one of the reasons for Aurangzeb Alamgir to kill Dara Shikoh.

**Stages of Sufism:** Dara Shikoh's interest and love towards Sufism was enriched and shined by his deep study and meetings with different Muslim and Hindu saints. His spiritual guides like Mian Mir Qadari and Mullah Shah Badakhshi played a significant role in developing his spiritual thought.

Dara Shikoh, in one of his booklets namely Risala-Haq Numa discussed different stages of mysticism. According to him a seeker starts from Alam-I nasut (physical plane) and passes through different stages and finally reaches to Alam-I lahut (plane of absolute truth). He talks about four stages through which the Sufi seeker's journey takes him like Nasut (Human World), Malakut (invisible world), Jabrut (Highest Heaven) and Lahut (Divine essence).

#### CONCLUSION:

Dara Shikoh was a Sufi seeker (salik), who never wished to abandon the Islamic thought but to expand its boundaries. He spent most of his time in search of truth like a professional scholar besides political inclination. He searched for the (Unity of God) in different religions and found that all religions lead to one God, Who is almighty, omnipotent and creator of the whole Universe.

Dara gave new dimensions to Indo-Islamic mysticism by mingling Islamic mysticism and Hindu spirituality and found so many similarities which remained the basis for unifying these two oceans. This is actually the fundamental mystical concept of Dara Shikoh which differentiates him from others and really made him the ambassador of Indo-Islamic mysticism.

Dara Shikoh throughout his life worked for the unity and communal harmony among the Muslims and Hindu communities of India. He was always against religious intolerance and priest dominant society. But his dream wasn't fulfilled as his younger brother Aurangzeb killed him for the throne of Mughal kingship.

Dara Shikoh despite of his mystical life, himself fought some battles with his brothers, every time he wanted peace and prosperity among his brothers but they were much greedy for the royal throne and never gave positive response to his attempts in bringing peace and prosperity.

Present circumstances throughout the world especially in India are going worse to worst by illogical and unethical religious intolerance which is a big hurdle to form a peaceful and prosperous society. So if we wish a peaceful society we have to follow the message of Universal brotherhood given by Dara Shikoh Qadari in his writings.

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