

INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTATION OF DARA SHIKOH

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ABSTRACT

Dara Shikoh was an important figure in the history of the Mughal Empire. He was the eldest son of emperor Shahjahan and elder brother of Aurangzeb. He was a liberal Mughal Prince and inclined towards philosophy over military pursuits. No doubt he held two sided position in Indian history as a political figure and as an intellectual personality. However, his political career was short and shadowed with failures, but his contribution towards literary and intellectual area was profound and amazing. He was also a great patron of the Art and widely considered to represent the pinnacle of Indo-Islamic cultural assimilation. He was given a model of religions toleration, which was short, lived but still has substantial relevance.

KEYWORDS: *Sufism, Alim, Qadiri, Safinat-Ul-Awliya, Sakinat-Ul-Awliya, Sirr-E-Akbar, Hasanat-Ul-Arifini, Majma-Ul-Bahrain.*

INTRODUCTION

In this research paper, an attempt has been made to specifically highlight the intellectual and literary contribution of Prince Dara Shikoh. In this context, important information is obtained from contemporary and near contemporary Persian texts and also from some relevant secondary sources.

Dara Shikoh was a unique intellectual genius of his era. He was born in March 1615 in the premises of Sagartal near Ajmer. Information is available that his father Shahjahan had prayed for a son in the shrine Ajmers famous sufi khwaza Muinuddin Chishti.

Dara was named Mahammad Dara Shikoh by Mughal Emperor Jahagir. It is known that he was welcomed by calling him '**Gule Awwaline Gulistan Shahi**' i.e. the first flower of the garden of the empire¹. His birthday was celebrated with great Joy. Dara himself has mentioned this is one of his book Safinat-ul-Awliya. Dara Shikoh's education was managed under the supervision of scholar Mulla Abdul Latif Sultanpuri. Similarly the scholar Abulfazal was employed for calligraphy². In his youth Dara Shikoh was married to Nadira Begum³. This information is

available about Nidra Begum that she had a lot of influence in the royal Harem. And she supported her husband in different times throughout his life and was always loyal to him.

Dara Shikoh's life can be divided into two parts. Political life and intellectual philosophical life. In this context, information is available from Persian sources and European accounts that in his political life Dara was struggling for succession. But his intellectual and philosophical life was full of achievement. He was intellectually curious and creative from the very beginning. Also it is said that he remained an intellectually curious student throughout his life.

It is important to mention that after Mughal Emperor Akbar in the Mughal dynasty, Dara Shikoh was the only one who gave much importance to unity and coordination between Hindus and Muslims in religious and intellectual terms. It is important to note that his thinking was somewhat different from Akbar⁴. Dara did not want to develop any new sect like Mughal emperor Akbar. Some scholars believe that he wanted to stay in the heart of Islam and find a common meeting place for different sects. It is generally said that Dara was a good scholar of Quran and Hadith, but he did not accept some interpretations of the traditional system. His teacher Abdul Latif also contributed to his intellectual development. Apart from this, Dara was also inclined towards Sufism. He studied many books on 'Tasawuf' (mysticism). In this Context, Persian Historian Khafi Khan also writes that 'Dara was completely influenced by the sufism'⁵ besides this; the influence of the principles of Sufism is also reflected in the preface of books like *Sirr-e-Akbar*, *Safinat-ul-Awliya*, *Risala-i-Haqnuma* etc. Dara also had contact with many Sufis Sadhaks and liberal Saints like Baba Lal etc. Some sources tell us that in this series he had intellectually contact with some Christian Priests. Available sources also show that gradually Dara developed interest in Vedanta and Yoga philosophy along with Sanskrit studies. Dara learnt the deep secrets of Indian thought from the able scholars of Kashi and started practicing yoga in the company of Yogis. As a result, Dara's outlook became broader and broader. In this sequence, the welfare idea of global brotherhood arose in his mind and during this period 'Majma-ul-Bahrain' (Samudra Sangam) was published.

It is also worth mentioning that some traditional writers have made serious allegations against Dara Shikoh. They have even tried to prove him a 'Heretic'⁶. But if we look deeply, Dara had a strong faith in Islam. This is also evident from the preface of the books written by him. But there is no doubt that his attitude towards other religion was very liberal and tolerant like Emperor Akbar.

Dara Shikoh's intellectual and literary contribution was invaluable. It can be briefly mentioned here:-

A) **Safinat-ul-Awliya**: This is the first book written by Dara in Persian. It was completed in 1640AD⁷. It includes biographies and teaching of popular Sufi Sants from the advent of Islam till his time. It also contains popular saying of Sufis. For example, the famous saying of Sufi Sheikh Abdullah Magrabi □ "Saints are the trustees of God for the entire humanity and their blessings avert the terrible calamities of mankind". Similarly, the saying of Sufi Ibrahim Kassar, "Two things can protect you from the trap of the world selfless service to the friends of God along with saints. Thus, the work displays Dara's deep knowledge of Sufism.

B) **Sakint-ul-Awliya**: It was completed by Dara in 1642AD. It mainly discusses the life of Qadiri Sufi Miyan-Mir of Lahore and his prominent disciples. Dara has also discussed the

method of religious worship of Qadir Sufis such as Zikr (remembrance) and Maraqib etc⁸. Apart from this, Dara has also depicted the life and teachings of his spiritual Guru Mullah Shah. Similarly, some other contemporary Saints have been discussed.

C) **Hansat-ul-Arfin** : This is Dara's third composition on Saints. In this too, the unity of God has been depicted⁹.

D) **Tariqat-ul-Haquiqa** : This is a short essay. It is in both prose and verse forms. It describes the qualities of God and the deep knowledge related to God¹⁰.

E) **Risala-e-Haknuma** : This work was completed in 1646AD. This composition was written for the spiritual guidance of the novices in the path of Sufism¹¹. In this, Dara has described for Alam (world). In a way, spiritual union is depicted in it.

F) **Aksire Azam** : This is a collection of persian poems . It mainly contains Ghazals and Rubais. It is important to note that Dara used to write under the pen name Qadiri. Dara's poetic talent has been praised by his teacher Mullah Shah and the author of Khalinatural-Asfiya.

G) **Majma-ul-Bahrain** (Samunder sangam) : This book written by Dara contains a comparative study of Hinduism and Islam. It was probably written around 1646AD. It mainly depicts the unity of God¹². This also makes it clear that Dara had knowledge of both Vedanta and Tasawuf. In this Dara has made a great effort to show a combined culture.

H) **Yoga Vasishta**: It is said that Dara Shikoh translated yoga Vasista Ramayana into persain. And Dara has written an interesting introduction to it. In which, Dara has described his meeting with Rishi Vasishta and two Divya Purush in his dream¹³. For this work also he took the help of learned scholars of Hindustan. It is important to note that the introduction written by Dara in this book makes it clear how much he as connected with the Indian tradition.

I) **Sirr-e-Akbar**: This can be considered as an outstanding intellectual achievement of Dara. He translated near about 50 upanishad into persian. It was named 'Sirr-e-Akbar'¹⁴ In this work he took the help of able scholars of Kashi. In this also Dara's feeling of oneness of God or Tauhid is reflected. It is important to mention that this persain translation of the upanishads was taken with him to france by the french traveller Bernier. Later a translation of it was published in French and in Latin language. After reading this french translation, German researcher philosopher Chapin Haver made this important comment, "Reading this gives me great strength in life"

In this way, the questions and answer between Dara and Saint Baba Lal compiled under the name of Nadir-ul-Nikaat. It also shed light on the liberal and tolerant ideology of Dara and Saint Baba Lal. Similarly, Dara came in contact with Mazzub Sarmad. Sarmad was an Armenian mystic and poet who travelled the Indian Subcontinent during the 17th century and settled in India. Sarmad lived in Lahore for some time and then came to Delhi, where prince Dara came in close contact with him. Sarmad also believed in the Wuzudi Ideology (unity of being) of the sufis¹⁵. Dara shikoh was also influenced by his liberal and tolerant ideology and he took This information is available about Nidra Begum this ideology forward.

Thus, it is clear from the above description that Data was a unique intellectual genius of his era. But it is a matter of great regret that the end of a liberal and tolerant personality like Dara was not good. Under political and religious conspiracies, he was declared a Heretic and ultimately he was killed. Shymlal Gangopadhyay, a learned writer of Bengal, writes about Dara Shikoh that

"Infact Dara went for ahead of his times while searching for a meeting point between the religions thinking of Hindus and Muslims.¹⁶" But it is not that Dara's contribution went in vain. Many great men of the coming generations were inspired by Dara and continued to encourage the high philosophy of Sarvadharm Sambhav'.

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9. Ibid, p. XXXVI
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12. Ibid, P. XLiii
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14. See for details, Dara Shikoh's, Sirr-e-Akbar, Ed and Translated by Dr. Harsh Naryan, Lucknow, 1975.
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16. Dara Shikoh, Majma-al-Bahrian,P.Liii.