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Vice President's Secretariat

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Visits exhibition on Prince Dara Shukoh

Posted On: 20 FEB 2018 1:37PM by PIB Delhi

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that Prince Dara Shukoh's writings can come as a refreshing source for infusing peace and harmony, whenever we are confronted by the narrow walls that tend to divide humanity and conflicts that result in needless violence. He was addressing the gathering after visiting the exhibition that showcases the forgotten Prince of yester years Dara Shukoh organized by Mr. Francois Gautier, at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, in New Delhi today.

The Vice President called the exhibition most timely and might help us better understand humanity's eternal quest for peace, harmony and love. He further said that Prince Dara Shukoh, one of the sons of Emperor Shah Jehan grew up under the unmistakable influence of the teachings of the Sufi Saint, Shaik Muin-uddin Chisti. His message is relevant for all times, he added.

The vice President said that principles of Sufism are highly relevant to break down narrow prejudices and bring people together, especially in today's world of materialism, consumerism and growing religious fundamentalism. He further said that all religions seek to unite people and the common strand in each of them, including Sufism, is spiritualism, tolerance and respect for others. There is a greater need today to put into practice some of the meaningful teachings of Sufi saints to bring harmony between all groups of society and break down divisive walls between communities, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am happy to be visiting this exhibition which showcases the forgotten prince of yester years

Dara Shukoh, the Prince who exemplified an extraordinarily broad vision of cultural synthesis.

I think this is most timely and might help us better understand humanity's eternal quest for peace, harmony and love.

As we look at the long history of human existence, we see a relentless quest. We in different parts of the planet, in different cultures and societies, have asked questions about our life and its deeper purpose and significance.

Each society has come up with different answers and explanations. Religions, belief systems and world views took shape.

Over a period of time, these have become institutionalized. The edicts, the scriptures, sculptures, art, architecture, music and performing arts gave expression to these belief systems. They provided a sheet anchor to humanity, a bonding force to face the uncertainties and life's twists and turns. It increased cohesion and group solidarity. Underlying all religions is the need for self-actualization, the social need to connect with fellow human beings and the spiritual need to connect with some higher force.

This quest for the spirit of oneness has ironically both unified as well as divided humanity because of the difference in the external forms, rituals, texts, names and symbols.

The human history has many lessons for us. We have periods of long bitter wars fought in the name of religion. We have peaks of peaceful co-existence and depths of strident intolerance. Every era has examples of this ceaseless battle between various religious groups and also of the refreshing soothing voices of, balanced, path breaking visionaries.

Sisters and Brothers,

This is a constant struggle of letting the voices of harmony, mutual respect and understanding rise up. Today's symposium is a step in that direction. We are examining the relevance of Sufism today and also recalling a forgotten prince of yesteryears. One is a philosophical strand that has through the ages has been one of the unifying influences binding people throughout its long and rich history. The second is Dara Shukoh, the Prince who exemplified an extraordinarily broad vision of cultural synthesis.

In today's world of materialism, consumerism and growing religious fundamentalism, the principles of Sufism are highly relevant to break down narrow prejudices and bring people together. Basically, all religions seek to unite people and the common strand in each of them, including Sufism, is spiritualism, tolerance and respect for others. As the famous poet Iqbal had said "Majhab Nahi Sikhaata Aapas me Bair Rakhna". No religion teaches us to fight among ourselves.

In fact, in the present times when religious bigotry and narrow sectarian ideologies are gaining ground, and when attempts are being made to use religion as a force to divide people, tenets of Sufism like true belief in Divine Oneness, acting in accordance with the Divine Will, practicing altruism, giving preference to well being of others and purity of intention, among others can act as a cementing force.

Like many religions of the world that have found in India a hospitable home, Sufism has also been a part of India's cultural landscape since medieval times. The Indian ethos and the cultural, philosophic tradition has always recognized and celebrated diversity and plurality. Ours is a country that recognized thousands of years ago that - "Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti" (Truth is one, sages call it by various names).

Early mystics of Sufism like Rabia and Mansoor remain symbols of divine love. The 10th century Sufi mystic Rabia represents the ideal of selfless love preached by Sufi mystics.

The preachings of divine love by Sufi saints permeated Sufi philosophy and made them popular everywhere including most parts of the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Turkey Central Asia, Afghanistan and the subcontinent. Rumi, inspired by Shams Tabrezi, wrote some of the greatest Sufi poetry which is popular all over the world today, including his celebrated *masnavi*.

Similarly, Hafez of Shiraz wrote some of the greatest poems which celebrate divine love. Hafez's poetry is an elegant expression of the experience of divine love, a recurring motif in his work. Hafez has been a great source of inspiration for generations of poets, thinkers and people across all segments of society. No wonder his mausoleum in Shiraz in Iran, attracts millions of visitors to this day.

Urdu poets from the earliest ages have brought into a sharp focus the synthesizing influence of Sufism, bringing out its many facets such as *fanaa* (mortality or annihilation of self), *baqaa* (permanence or divine eternity), *qatra* (drop), being a part of *dariya* (ocean) or *zarra* (speck) as a part of a *sehra* (desert). In this manner, man's relationship with God had been defined by several poets, many of them emphasizing the commonality of faiths.

As Meer Taqi Meer says:

Uske farogh-e-husn se jhamke hain sab main noor

shama-e-haram ho ya ho diya somnath ka

(It is His beauty which illuminates everything

Be it a candle in a mosque or a lamp in the temple of Somnath)

Sufi saints attracted followers from all faiths and to this day we find this spirit of togetherness when it comes to spiritualism in practice. For example, Khaja Mohiuddin Chisti's shrine in Ajmer, Hazrath Nizammuddin Auliya's dargah in New Delhi and Ameen Peer Dargah near Kadapa in my own state of Andhra Pradesh—these are among thousands of such shrines venerated by people across the country.

All these great saints like rishis and munis deeply loved humanity and could see the vital connection between humanity and divinity.

No wonder the impact of Sufi philosophy on Indian culture and social reform has been enormous. As Narada in his Bhakti Sutra's defines 'devotion', it is selfless love in its highest form. This selfless love is underpinned by qualities that are fundamental for peaceful coexistence – empathy and enlarged vision, a willingness to listen and understand, and an ability to tolerate differences and recognize the commonalities.

Today we are also inaugurating an exhibition of a remarkable person in Indian history who had internalized some of these qualities in his actions.

Prince Dara Shukoh, one of the sons of Emperor Shah Jehan grew up under the unmistakable influence of the teachings of the Sufi Saint, Shaik Muin-uddin Chisti. He studied all prominent religions of the world especially Islam and Hinduism and wrote the remarkable work called "Majma-ul-Bahrain" or the "Mingling of the two Oceans" in which he said that he did not find "any difference except verbal, in the way they sought to comprehend the truth", and both 'represent spiritual effort of man to realize Truth and God'. His message is relevant for all times.

Whenever we are confronted by the narrow walls that tend to divide humanity and conflicts that result in needless violence, Dara Shukoh's writings can come as a refreshing source for infusing peace and harmony. In fact, there are many such luminaries who have left their imprint on the sands of time and whose lives and messages need to be studied and popularized.

There is a greater need today to put into practice some of the meaningful teachings of Sufi saints to bring harmony between all groups of society and break down divisive walls between communities.

I am glad that Mr. Francois Gautier has dedicated many years of his professional life to the study of Indian history and has been organizing a number of programmes to share the lessons he has drawn from this treasure house. I compliment him and his team in Foundation for Advancement of Cultural Ties (FACT) for presenting the facts and a dispassionate analysis.

I would like to see that more such knowledge-sharing events are organized to build stronger bonds between people of different religions and cultures. For all those who care about our present and the future, it is important to build on all that is noble and glorious and avoid sliding into the dark alleys of distortion and destruction. To echo the saints of this ancient land, "Tamaso ma Jyotirgamaya" (Lead us from darkness to Light).

Jai Hind!"

AKT/BK/RK

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