Shrines, Shanti and Sustainable Development

Living in the post 9/11 era, we know that the history of inter-faith relationship is as old as the history of religions of the world. Diverse religions and various religious communities, ever since they came into existence, have attempted to relate, to adjust, to co-exist, to dialogue, and to co-operate mutually with their neighbouring religion. These attempts had not been totally peaceful, smooth and amicable. There have been many positive and desirable instances of interfaith relationship and coexistence. But some chapters in the history of the world religions and their relationship are so painful that their memory brings heartache and regrets to the followers. The historical realities of the Crusades, the jihad and Dharma, Yudh are those hangover of inter-religious rivalries of the past (Ramaswamy 1933) which again have become a great threat to humanity.

The present Pakistani situation, particularly the war on terror and its impact on religious minorities of Pakistan on the one hand and odd political relationship between India and Pakistan on the other hand, seek the need of re-emergence of Sufism as a

"Common religious identity, which is not an exclusive construct, but is based on collective experience and sharing. Contrary to orthodox religions, which are more often than not, interpreted by the religious elite (resulting in vandalism, bigotry and killings),

Sufism and Bakhti transcend boundaries, aiming to unite, rather than divide. The mainstay of Sufism is to embrace to marginalized and combat violence in many forms”

(Thapar 1977, p.25)

For centuries, the shrines of Sufi saints have been great centres of Shanti (peace) and Ravadari (harmony). Civil society of Pakistan has yet not realised the importance of these centres due to common misconception and misinterpretation of these centres. The civil society yet has to realise that the Sufism is an effective source of peace within the communities and people of South Asia. Only peace can guarantee the social, economic and political uplift in the region.

Two major sufi saints, Shah Shams Sabzwari (Multan), of the fourteenth century and Bulhe Shah (Kasur) of eighteen century, have been selected for the proposed panel to express their ideas and teachings for a liberal and harmonious society.

The panel will offer two documentaries titled ‘Shah Shams Sabzwari’; and, ‘Bulhe Shah’ along with two comprehensive studies about the life and works of these Sufi saints, with special reference to suicide bomb attack in and around certain shrines of Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtoonkwa during 2009-10. The title of the presentations are: ‘Shah Shams: Flower on Cup of Milk’; and, ‘Bulhe Shah: A Man of All Religions’.

References:

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