

# An Introduction of the Concept of Tolerance in Indian-Islam: A Legacy of Theological Thought in Indian-Islam

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## Introduction

**T**HE destruction of the Bamiyan Cliff Buddhas by the Taliban in March 2001, followed by the suicide attacks on September 11 of that year against the World Trade Center and the United States Department of Defense headquarters (Pentagon) by a group assumed to be motivated by an Islamic fundamentalist ideology, are symbolic of increasing tensions, conflicts and resistance involving Islam. At the same time, it seems impossible to overlook misapprehensions and misunderstandings of Islam that are growing increasingly prevalent worldwide. Japan, in particular, has historically had few points of contact with Islamic culture and civilization with the result that the level of understanding and appreciation for Islam in Japan is generally very shallow and tenuous.<sup>1</sup> In light of current conditions, in which the followers of Islam (Muslims) have been deeply involved in a series of incidents that have shocked and shaken world opinion, the present level of understanding of Islam among the Japanese cannot be considered adequate or acceptable.

Most Japanese people rely on the news media as their principal source of information about Islam, and since most of this media is Western in its orientation, it is impossible to suppress a sense of concern that there are serious distortions in the formation of Japanese views and images of Islam.

This paper will attempt to address, from a perspective rather different from that of the news media—which tends to focus almost exclusively on the forces of so-called Islamic Fundamentalism—the idea of tolerance in Islam, especially as this relates to coexistence with the adherents of polytheism. I hope to introduce some of the diversity of the intellectual efforts of Indian-Islam and to explore, from the perspective of these Islamic intellectual traditions, the possibilities of peaceful coexistence

with other cultures and civilizations. This paper is thus an attempt to contribute to the increased diversity of Japanese perceptions of Islam.

### **What is Needed for Better Understanding of Islam?**

There are a number of specific elements that hamper efforts by Japanese people to develop a better understanding of Islam. This is not restricted to the fact that Islam is a tradition with which Japanese have had little contact and which is therefore largely unfamiliar; nor the fact that historically there has been only the most limited cultural intercourse between Japan and the Islamic world. An even more critical factor is found in the distance between the cultural and ideational patterns underlying Japanese and Islamic cultures, particularly the difference in between the natural environment of Japan and that against which Islam arose. In other words, Japanese culture may be thought of as a typical “monsoon culture,” having developed in a warm, humid climate. It is thus necessary first to appreciate the underlying differences with core elements of Islam, which arose in arid environment, to analyze and dissect these differences, in order to establish a fundamental perspective that will enhance genuine understanding.

While an extensive or in-depth analysis of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to examine a few of the most essential points.

As is well known, Islam follows in the tradition of stern monotheism that characterizes the Abrahamic religions. What is often difficult for Japanese people to grasp is that this “one God” is not one deity among many, but the only God, an exclusive God who denies the existence of any other gods, forbidding their worship. This idea is prominently visible in the Old Testament injunction: “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). It is spelled out with even greater strictness in the Qur’an: “And your Allah is One Allah: There is no god but He” (Sura 2:163).

The exclusive, singular nature of God is the necessary precondition for Islam. While Judaism resembles Islam on this point, they both differ from the other great Abrahamic religion, Christianity, which, with the doctrine of the Trinity, has come to embody a less stringent form of monotheism. In historic terms, also, the strict monotheistic ideals of Islam are widely and deeply divided from the religious traditions of monsoon regions of the world.<sup>2</sup>

These tensions, however, have been largely ameliorated among the practitioners of the Islamic mysticism known as Sufism. Further, the

worldview of Islam, based on the assumption that the creation of the world is a one-time event at the hand of a creator God, is difficult to grasp for Japanese people, who are accustomed to viewing life as “circulatory,” that is, repeating cycles of change and transformation. Likewise, the “paternal” view of an absolute God of stern, strict judgment is largely foreign to Japanese people, who are tend to think of deities in more maternal, plural and embracing terms.

This is not to say, of course, that understanding is not impossible, only that it requires persistent, mutual effort toward that end.

### **Examples of the Idea of Tolerance in Islam**

As the above should indicate, in order for Japanese people to gain a correct understanding of Islam, it is first necessary that the essential differences in traditional worldview and approach to religion be made clear and that efforts to construct knowledge about Islam be based on this understanding. Thus, one of the first tasks of this paper will be to clarify the differences between the idea of “tolerance” as it has been understood in Islam, contrasted with how it is presently understood in Japan.

In Japan, the millet system of religious toleration of religious minorities within the Ottoman Empire is frequently cited as an example of religious tolerance within Islam. Clearly, the millet system opened the way for Christians and Jews to advance within the Ottoman bureaucracy with almost no discriminatory distinction from Muslims, and historically this contributed to the realization of the peace coexistence among these religions. It is also true that the flourishing of the Ottoman Empire was built on this policy. But the millet system does not offer any concrete way of understanding how Islam could coexist peacefully with people of other religions traditions who are, like the Japanese, polytheists (Arabic: *silku*) worshiping images of their deities (*sanam, wasan*).

Those offered protection under the millet system were defined in the Qur’an as “People of the Book” (*Ahl al-kitab*), that is, Jews and Christians chosen by God to receive revelatory texts. Further, this tolerance was concentrated principally on people of exceptional administrative talents and extended only on the assumption of acceptance of the absolute superiority of Islam. It was not extended in principle, therefore, to the adherents of the kinds of polytheistic faiths (such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Shinto), which are dismissed in the Qur’an.

In other words, the policy of religious toleration under the Ottoman Turks was not directed toward the adherents of polytheism. At the very least, there is no specific provision made for people practicing polytheis-

tic faiths. Nor does toleration in this context imply equal treatment or the full enjoyment of the rights accorded to Muslims. In this sense, the Islamic idea of tolerance as practiced in the Ottoman Empire cannot be applied to the polytheistic religions based on the worship of sacred images that prevail in the regions from India and to the east of India. Thus, for Japanese people, the millet system does not provide a very convincing example of Islamic tolerance.

In this sense, the syncretic ideas of Hindu-Islam, which developed within the Islamic cultural spheres of India—ideas that see an essential equality and oneness between Islam and even polytheistic faiths and yet which are derived from traditional Islamic theology—point to important possibilities within Islamic theology. It is, in other words, possible to see the potential for the development of a new idea of Islamic tolerance, one that embraces even polytheists, within this tradition.

### **The Idea of Tolerance**

Before examining particular aspects of the idea of tolerance in Islam, it is first necessary to give a brief overview of the history of the idea of tolerance. This is because the term tolerance points to content that is at once of great importance but at the same time to a large degree indeterminate. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discover a generally accepted understanding of the meaning of the term. Thus, before entering in to an examination of the concrete modalities of the idea of tolerance in Indian-Islam, we will first discuss the meaning of “tolerance.”

Generally in Japan, the word tolerance is taken to mean: 1) generous, willing to forgive and accept people; not blaming or finding fault with others; 2) refraining, based on an awareness of the difficulty of doing good, from attacking harshly the faults or failings of others; an important virtue in Christianity; 3) recognizing the freedom of those holding minority (heretical) views to express these, refraining from discriminating against those who hold such views (*Kojien* Dictionary, Second Edition). The expression for tolerance (*kanyo*) in Japanese is composed of two Chinese characters. The first of which (*kan*) originally referred to the gentle song and slow dancing prayer style of female shamans or shrine maidens; it has come to take on a meaning of unhurried, unpressed, large-hearted and, thus, accepting or embracing of others (*Jito* Character Dictionary). The second character, *yo*, means a vessel or container, originally indicating objects used in prayer ritual.

Reviewing the original meaning of the Chinese characters used to express this concept, we can say that *kanyo* indicates accepting, in a

large-hearted spirit, the words and actions of others. It is expressive of the extent of one's personal, inner capacity to accept and embrace others. But the size or scale of this capacity can, in fact, be problematic. That is, this concept points to a relative or comparative personal capacity; when that capacity is exceeded there is nothing that acts as a standard or norm that would restrain one's reaction. There is thus in my view a limitation hidden within the word that makes this concept fundamentally different from the Buddhist idea of mutual exchangeability or the spirit of compassion. I will examine this in a later section together with what I term "warm tolerance."

It should be noted that *kanyo* was traditionally not a common idiom in Japan.<sup>3</sup> The word took on the sense in which it is used today originally as a translation of the Western European idea of tolerance in Tetsujiro Inoue's 1881 "Dictionary of Philosophy" and elsewhere. If we consider the roots of the English word "tolerance," it is found in the Latin *tolerantia*, meaning to endure, put up with or forgive. This indicates, in other words, the act of accepting and "enduring" the acts of others. It is also a unilateral, rather than mutual, action or relationship.

Tolerance in the sense of enduring, putting up with or forgiving requires neither mutual understanding nor a sense of the essential equality of oneself and the other person. This kind of tolerance can be realized simply by accepting or putting up with the existence of another in a common or shared space. Tolerance in this sense can be achieved even when one is entirely indifferent to the other, with no particular understanding or concern. It can function as tolerance or acceptance bestowed on a person by someone else in a position of superiority.

Thus, mutual recognition of the need for this degree of coexistence does not necessarily imply, much less require, a relation of coexistence in which there is mutual understanding or appreciation of the equality of self and other, or a heartfelt sense of acceptance. In other words, this kind of coexistence can be established even under conditions of mutual lack of interest, recognition or acceptance so long as the independent, or even isolated, existence of the parties concerned can be maintained. I refer to this as "cold tolerance."

There are many terms corresponding to "tolerance" that can be found in the Qur'an, including *affār*, to forget; *saffāra*, to change mood and not heed something; *ghaffār*, to hide something away as if nothing had ever happened; as well as *samuh*, to be generous.

This kind of tolerance does not go beyond that which is unilaterally accorded by one party to the other, in which one party forgives or accepts the other. The millet system under the Ottoman Empire could be

understood as a representative example of this kind of tolerance.

### **The Idea of Tolerance in Ancient India**

On the other hand, the form of tolerance that is the central concern of this paper is that which was pursued and developed in ancient India. It is a form of tolerance that is based on the assumption of an essential sameness, or equivalence, that underlies differences on the phenomenological level. This can be found in the Vedantic teaching of the oneness of Atman and Brahman as expressed in this passage:

Verily, this whole world is *Brahman*, .... Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, without speech, without concern, this is the self of mine within the heart; this is *Brahman*.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the assumption of this philosophical stance, Gautama Buddha developed the following philosophy.

883. "What some say is true, real, others say is empty, false. Thus contending, they dispute. Why do ascetics not say one (and the same) thing?"

884. "There is only one truth; there is no second, about which an intelligent man might dispute with an (other) intelligent man. Ascetics themselves proclaim various truths, therefore they do not say one (and the same) thing."

...

886. "There are not indeed many various truths, (which are) eternal in the world, except by reason of (mistaken) perception. Devising a speculation in respect of their views, they say there are two things, truth and falsehood."

...

894. "Standing (firm) in his decision, measuring (others against) himself, he enters into further dispute in the world. (But) the person who has left all decisions behind does not cause trouble in the world."<sup>5</sup>

This is, in other words, a spirit or idea of tolerance that starts from the stance of recognizing that there is an underlying, essential sameness that all people share and that transcends the differences of views, opinions and faith that we respectively develop in the phenomenal world. This idea of tolerance is typically expressed as compassion, *maitrī-karuṇā*, to

feel the suffering or pain of another as one's own. In this paper, I will refer to this as "warm tolerance."

Within the tradition of Indian philosophy is an important strain that does not absolutize the self, but relativizes both self and other, placing the self on the same plane of existence as others. More concretely, this involves the conceptual work of interchanging self and other. This can be found in the following expression from within Vedanta philosophy. "Liberation (enlightenment) means becoming like a god (*tadbhāvāpatti*), to resemble god in both essence and attributes."<sup>6</sup>

Within Indian tradition this is referred to as *upāsana* (lit. "sitting near"), which originally indicated a way of thinking rooted in magical ritual and symbolic manipulations as a means of gaining the attention and favor of a deity; the idea of compassion may be understood as one means by which this was systematized.

Underlying this way of thinking is a polytheistic worldview that recognizes the sacred nature (*Atman*) existing within all things. This is in fact a reflection of an unique characteristic of Indian thought that assumes the existence of a singular abstract principle (*Brahman*) behind and underlying all individual existences. A similar conceptual framework in which the distinctions between self and other are relativized can be found in the Hellenic idea of *epieikeia*, usually translated equity. This word originally means "to exchange places" and suggests a process of attempting to view and understand things from the perspective of an other. Classical Greek society was also a polytheistic society in which modes of peaceful coexistence of the various deities was pursued, and this may have given rise to this word. But it is important to note that classical Greek philosophy included an ideational scheme supporting "warm tolerance."

This is particularly important in the present context as it is well known that Hellenic philosophy exerted a shaping influence on the formation of Islamic philosophy. If that is the case, then it should be possible to discover within Islamic philosophy the idea of "exchanging places with another."

Such a way of thinking is clearly present in the ideas of Indian-Islam, my particular field of specialty. While the specific origins of this idea are perhaps impossible to identify, it is clear that there are traditions of this type to be found among the mystics of Indian-Islam.

Here I would like to turn my attention to the history and record of ideas left by the followers of Islam in India that gave rise to an idea of tolerance that is based on the mutual recognition of difference underlain by a recognition of human sameness, one that transcends distinctions

among the followers of Islam, other “People of the Book,” and polytheists.

### **Prototypes of the Idea of Tolerance in Indian Sufism**

Sufism, which teaches the unification of man and God, played an important role in the development and expansion of Indian-Islam. The adherents of Sufism softened the orthodox views of Islam, with its exclusionary monotheism, and actively promoted coexistence between Muslims and Hindus. They are known for the contributions in furthering the spread of Islam into regions where other religions had heretofore predominated.<sup>7</sup> Their role in the spread and establishment of Islam in India is particularly well known.<sup>8</sup>

Among the Sufis, A.M. al-Hallāj (c. C.E. 857–922) played an especially important role in the context of the spread of Islam in India. To give a brief overview of the life and career of al-Hallāj, he was born in Tur in southern Persia; his grandfather is said to have been a Zoroastrian.<sup>9</sup> Al-Hallāj was educated in Basra. He joined the Sufi movement, then in its nascent stages, and from early in life was active Sufi.<sup>10</sup>

Sufism at the time had yet to take definitive form and al-Hallāj played an important role in its intellectual and doctrinal development. After making pilgrimages to various sites in Persia he traveled (c. 897–902) to regions, such as India and Turkistan, where non-Muslims were in the majority, absorbing the religions, ideas, culture and customs of these peoples. It is thought that through his travels in regions where Hindu and Buddhist thinking prevailed, he was influenced in certain ways by the worldviews of these religions. This influence was perhaps evident in his famous declaration, *Ana 'I-Haqq* (“I am the truth” or “I am God”), which had an immeasurable and shocking impact on both the Islamic world as well as Islamic thought.<sup>11</sup> Within the context of Abrahamic monotheism, of which Islam is perhaps the most pure form, for a human being, the creation of the exclusive, absolute and transcendent God, to declare equivalence or equality with that God was considered to be most outrageous kind of blasphemy. It was a pronouncement unthinkable from the perspective of the orthodoxy.

For a Muslim to declare “I am God” expresses a system of thought representing the shocking and potentially fundamental denial of Islamic theology as it had developed to that point. In general it is said that al-Hallāj was influenced by Gnostic theories in coming to this conclusion. But at the same time, it is certainly conceivable that he was influenced by the Upanishads or Vedanta philosophy that teach the oneness of

Brahman and Atman, or by Buddhist ideas.<sup>12</sup>

However, al-Hallāj's idea of the unity of man and God brought persecutions from the adherents of orthodoxy, resulting in his execution and the extremely unusual measure of cremation—more precisely, the burning and disposal of his body as a means of signifying the depths of his sin.

Nonetheless, his ideas found acceptance among the practitioners of Sufism. This influence is seen most particularly in Mughal Court in India, especially during the reign of the third Emperor Akbar (1542–1605) and his great-grandson Dārā Shikūh (1615–1659).

Also said to have been deeply involved in the development of Sufi thought is al-Berūnī (c. 973–1050). He accompanied Mahmud of Ghazni on his invasion of India, infamous for its brutality, and ended up living for an extended period in northwest India. He learned Sanskrit and studied Indian philosophy in the original, developing the deep knowledge for which he became justly renowned. In 1030 he translated works on Samkhya, as well as the Yoga Sutra, into Arabic. In his work *al-India*, al-Berūnī demonstrates the depth of his knowledge and understanding of Hinduism and Buddhism. The author of this paper has yet to encounter materials that clarify the relationship between his reception of these religions and his own Islamic faith.

Perhaps due to the fact that he was a member of the highly educated elite, he voices his view that the worship of idols is a customs that exist everywhere,<sup>13</sup> expressing a degree of understanding toward the customs of the practitioners of other faiths. At the same time, however al-Berūnī does not criticize Mahmud's pillaging of Indian territories and it seems likely that his consciousness of other religions was limited to the passive tolerance expressed by the term *ghaffār*. In other words, at this stage, within Indian-Islam and its environs, the idea of tolerance had not developed to the point of acknowledging the equality of the practitioners of other religions.

### **The Development of the Idea of Tolerance in Indian-Islam.**

It would not be until around the 12th century that the “warm tolerance” that is a defining characteristic of Indian-Islam would develop and see specific application relative to the practitioners of polytheist faiths. Representative of this development was Faridūd-dīn (1176–1265) a mystic associated with the Chistiyya School that was one of the two main schools of Sufism in India during the period of Islam's initial introduction in India. Farid was born in India to a family originating in

Afghanistan. His mother was also Indian-born and Farid was fluent in Indian languages. In this sense he was a member of the first generation to come to intellectual maturity within an Indian cultural and religious environment.

Farid's thinking was thus both Islamic as well as Vedantic in that we find in it the idea of unification with the One of absolute existence—the unification of God and man, in other words—and, based on this, the idea of transcending the differences of the phenomenal world. Farid's ideas share many basic commonalities with those of al-Hallāj introduced earlier. The following passage is illustrative:

Without her Husband Lord, how can the soul-bride ever find peace?  
 When He becomes merciful, then God unites us with Himself. ||2||  
 The lonely soul-bride suffers in the pit of the world.  
 She has no companions, and no friends.  
 In His Mercy, God has united me with the Saadh Sangat, the Company  
 of the Holy.  
 And when I look again, then I find God as my Helper. ||3||  
 The path upon which I must walk is very depressing.  
 It is sharper than a two-edged sword, and very narrow.  
 That is where my path lies.  
 (*Granth Sahib* p. 794)<sup>14</sup>

As this passage indicates, transcendence of the differences and distinctions of the phenomenal world through unification with God lies at the heart of Farid's teaching. For Farid, the crucial thing was salvation through unification with God, something achieved through our love for God.

They alone are true, whose love for God is deep and heart-felt.  
 Those who have one thing in their heart, and something else in their  
 mouth, are judged to be false.  
 Those who are imbued with love for the Lord, are delighted by His  
 Vision.  
 Those who forget the Naam, the Name of the Lord, are a burden on the  
 earth.  
 ...  
 So speak the Truth, in righteousness, and do not speak falsehood.  
 ...  
 Just so, the transitory human bodies pass away. Reflect upon this in  
 your mind.

It takes six months to form the body, but it breaks in an instant.

...

Some have been cremated, and some lie in their graves; their souls are suffering rebukes.

(*Granth Sahib* p. 488)

Farid then went on to develop a form of thought that assumes an essential correspondence between Hinduism and Islam transcending the differences in their respective forms. In this we see the development of a stance that declares the differences in religions insignificant when compared to the importance of our absolute faith in and submission to God, our yearning for unification with God. This idea might be termed Vedantic in the Indian context, or an expression of Sufism in the Islamic context. This way of thinking gained widespread adherence among the followers of Islam in India, forming the tradition that I refer to as Indian-Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Heirs to this tradition include such figures as Kabeer (c. 1425–1498) and Nanak (1469–c. 1538) active in the 15th and 16th centuries. Kabeer was an impoverished weaver who exhibited such remarkable religious gifts that he came to be known among Hindus as a bhakta (one who offers sacred love to God) and among the Muslims as a Sufi. The fact that he was looked up to as a sage by the adherents of both traditions is symbolic of the atmosphere of religious tolerance that prevailed in medieval India. Kabeer opposed any dogmatic approach to religion and argued that in true faith directed toward God there is no distinction between Hinduism and Islam. On this point, he states.

Kabeer, it does make a difference, how you chant the Lord's Name, 'Raam'. This is something to consider.

Everyone uses the same word for the son of Dasrath and the Wondrous Lord. ||190||

Kabeer, use the word 'Raam', only to speak of the All-pervading Lord. You must make that distinction.

One 'Raam' is pervading everywhere, while the other is contained only in himself. ||191||

(*Granth Sahib* p. 1374)

But, he concludes, this singular Raam is one.

When we consider that Kabeer was a Muslim, it becomes clear how distant he is from the dogmatic interpretations of that faith. And further, the fact that he made this bold assertions as a Muslim and this was

accepted not only by Hindus but also by his fellow Muslims, gives an indication of the possibilities for tolerance within Islam.

On the other hand, Nanak represents a case of someone who, while maintaining an essentially Hindu religious identity, called for fusion with Islam and unification through submission to the ultimate One. For Nanak, there is only one God and the various Hindu deities as well as Islam's Allah are all but partial expressions of the one true God.

But this truth is not well understood, according to Nanak, either by the Brahmins or the elites within Islam:

Brahma entered the lotus, and searched the nether regions, but he did not find the end of it.

He did not accept the Lord's Order - he was deluded by doubt. ||1||

...

The Qazis, Shaykhs and Fakeers in religious robes  
call themselves great; but through their egotism, their bodies are suffering in pain.

(*Granth Sahib* p. 227)

Further, the teaching of the one God that is predisposed neither to Hinduism nor Islam is that which can lead people to genuine happiness.

To those whose hearts are filled with the True Name of the Lord,  
and who sing the Glories of God, the death cannot touch.

...

Wherever I look, I see the One and Only Lord.

(*Granth Sahib* p. 227)

In this way, both Kabeer and Naanak grasped Hinduism and Islam in terms of a shared sense of a single supreme truth, which may be expressed in the different terms of Allah and Brahman, but are aspects of the same One. By thus relativizing both faith traditions, and assuming the existence of an even higher One, these religionists sought to transcend the differences between the two faiths. This is one form of the fusion of Hinduism and Islam that can be seen in Indian thought.

These teachings proved difficult, however, for both the adherents of the more orthodox schools of both Hinduism and Islam to accept. While these figures sought to achieve the amalgamation of the two faiths, in the end they gave rise to a new faith tradition that was outside of either.

While these intellectual efforts are in themselves noble, the examples, discussed below, of Akbar (1542–1605) and Dārā Shikūh (1615–1659)

merit our attention as most meaningful in terms of extending the possibilities of Islam and from the perspective of our contemporary concern of how best to realize the coexistence of different religious traditions.

### **Akbar's Philosophy of Religious Reconciliation**

Several decades after Kabeer and Nanak, the Third Mughal Emperor Akbar developed an unique philosophical stance that synthesized the teachings of Hinduism and Islam. Further, he was able to implement this in the real world as actual political and social policies.

While a detailed examination of their ideas is beyond the scope of this paper, the following offers a brief introduction of the ideas of Akbar and Dārā Shikūh. As mentioned, the tradition of religious mysticism that seeks to transcend religious differences forms a deep current in India and this was able to find natural acceptance even within the world of Muslims. The Mughal Emperor Akbar, who had his own religious experience as a Sufi, was able to implement his religious outlook actively in the realms of religious, political and cultural policy. As a result, a fusion of religions and cultures that could be called an amalgamate Hindi-Islamic civilization was realized for the approximately one-hundred year period from the reign of Akbar to that of Dārā Shikūh. At the heart of the Indian-Islamic world, a court culture flourished centered on the civilization of Islam and incorporating the Hindi, Christian, Jewish and Persian cultures.

In 1579, Akbar had been moved to modify his early policy of Islamic supremacy and initiated *Dīn-Ilāhī*, “the divine religion” to lead the process of unifying various faiths. This grew out of the conclusion Akbar had arrived at through the ongoing debates among various religions he had had conducted at the House of Faith (*Ibādathkhāna*) starting in 1575. At the House of Faith, “A noble palace was provided for the spiritual world, and the pillars of Divine knowledge rose high.”<sup>16</sup>

Here the Sufi Emperor Akbar presided.

The wide capacity and the toleration of the Shadow of God were unveiled. *Šūfī*, philosopher, orator, jurist, *Sunnī*, Shīā, Brahman, *Jaṭī*, *Sīūrā Cārbāk*, Nazarene, Jew, *Šābī* (*Sabīan*), Zoroastrian, and others enjoyed exquisite pleasure by beholding the calmness of the assembly, the sitting of the world-lord in the lofty pulpit (*mimbar*), and the adornment of the pleasant abode of impartiality.<sup>17</sup>

Various critiques have been directed toward the policy of religious rec-

conciliation carried out by Akbar.<sup>18</sup> But this philosophy of religious fusion was neither a spur of the moment impulse nor was it something arrived at for political expediency. The proof of this fact may be sought in the intellectual activities of Akbar's great-grandson Dārā Shikūh, who was heir this tradition. Akbar exercised "warm" tolerance toward various religions; his policies assured the equal treatment of all faiths.

When a minister protested indignantly that Akbar had elevated a practitioner of the Hindu faith to a position of great responsibility, Akbar turned this around and admonished him. "There are several Hindus working for you. What is wrong with me having Hindus working for me?"

### **Dārā Shikūh's Philosophy of Religious Fusion**

In Japan, there is even less knowledge about Dārā Shikūh than about Akbar. But his achievements are very significant and merit earnest research efforts from the perspective of comparative civilizations. It is well known, for example, that the translation of the Upanishad texts he had made from Sanskrit into Persian ("Oupnekhat") was later translated into Latin and thus had an important impact on European intellectual life.

This project of translating the sacred texts of the Hindu religion was an expression of Dārā's philosophical commitment to bringing about a Hindu-Islamic fusion. He arrived at this point by gaining an in-depth understanding of the philosophy of mysticism as a Sufi; he also was inspired by the Hindu sage Babar Rai and in a certain sense could be understood to have achieved the status of a bhakta. His most representative work is the "Mingling of Two Oceans" (*Majmā al-Baḥrayn*).

As Dārā Shikūh himself describes this process in the introduction to the work.

... Muḥammed Dārā Shikūh, that, after knowing the Truth of truths and ascertaining the secrets and subtleties of the true religion of the Ṣūfis and having been endowed with this great gift (i.e., Ṣūfistic inspiration), he thirsted to know the tenets of the religion of the Indian monotheists; and, having had repeated intercourse and (continuous) discussion with the doctors and perfect divines of this (i.e. Indian) religion who had attained the highest pitch of perfection in religious exercises, comprehension (of God), intelligence and (religious) insight, he did not find any difference, except verbal, in the way in which they sought and comprehended Truth. Consequently, having collected the views of the two

parties and having brought together the points—a knowledge of which is absolutely essential and useful for the seekers of Truth—he (i.e. the author) has compiled a tract and entitled it *Majma‘-ul-Bahrain* or “The Mingling of the Two Oceans,” as it is a collection of the truth and wisdom of *two* Truth-knowing (*Ḥaḳ Ṣhinās*) groups.<sup>19</sup>

This work discloses the commonalities between the Sufi and Vedanta philosophies, which both assume the underlying unity of all existence. Rooted in this, Dārā expresses a strong sympathy for the worldview expressed in the Upanishads, that this world is the manifestation of God, and human beings are the essence of God in microcosm. Dārā and his followers even taught the practice of breath control and the chanting of sacred syllable Aum, going so far as to recognize the possibility of enlightenment during this lifetime, as opposed to salvation after death.

Through these examples, Dārā *Ṣhikūh* demonstrates his awareness that the God of Islam and the God of Hinduism are not separate or different, but the same. In this way, he deepened and developed the ideas of Emperor Akbar and, while remaining within the framework of Islamic theology, embraced the diversity of God. From this perspective he came to see coexistence with polytheism as not only a social or cultural possibility, but as a religious one as well. This achievement may be thought of as the apex of Indian-Sufi intellectual efforts to extend the concept of tolerance in Islam to its very fullest dimension. This is a historical fact of immense importance in that it demonstrates that this kind of spirit of tolerance can be created from within the theology of Islam.

### Concluding Comments

In this way, Dārā *Ṣhikūh*, while remaining a Muslim, established, based on his own mystical experiences and from within his self-identity as a Sufi, a deep sympathy and understanding of Hinduism. In other words, he viewed not only coexistence, but even unification with Hinduism—disdained in dogmatic Islam as polytheistic and idolatrous—as possible. This is because for him the Hindu and Islamic God were one and the same, the only difference being the words used to express them. This is not simply the philosophical viewpoint and religious conviction achieved by Dārā *Ṣhikūh* as a mystic philosopher; this is a theological extension of Islam from within the theoretical framework of Islam, undertaken by an Islamic scholar.

Dārā *Ṣhikūh*'s ideas may be understood as the high point of the style of Islamic tolerance developed by Sufis starting with al-Hāllaj. But

movements in this direction disappeared from within the Mughal Court when Dārā Shikūh was defeated by his younger brother Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707) in a war of imperial succession and killed.

But the tolerant spirit of Islam developed in India has not been extinguished and continues to this day. The possibilities of an Islamic philosophy of tolerance developed by nameless Sufis, by Akbar and Dārā Shikūh, can provide an important sense of hope, drawn from this history, to the people of the 21st century. Or so, at least, is the author's belief. It is important that non-Muslims and Muslims work together to assure that possibilities for a tolerant Islam become the spirit of Islam in the 21st century.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> During the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the United States Embassy was occupied and its staff held hostage for an extended period. This event, which was particularly shocking to the Western countries, is dealt with in detail in Jun Shirai, *Iran-Iraku senso* (The Iran-Iraq War) Daisan Shokan, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the development of Islam in India, its history of conflict, confrontation and harmonization with Buddhism and Hinduism, see my *Indo Bukkyo wa naze horon-daka* (Why Did Indian Buddhism Decline?) Hokuju Shuppan, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> There is, for example, no entry for the term “tolerance” in the first English-Japanese dictionary published in 1868.

<sup>4</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣad, Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, George Allen & Unwin, 1953, pp. 391–392.

<sup>5</sup> K.R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipata)* Vol. III, Pali Text Society, 1995, pp. 101–2.

<sup>6</sup> Sengaku Maeda, et al., *Indo shisoshi* (“Intellectual History of India”), Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1990, p. 197.

<sup>7</sup> There are various theories regarding the formation of Sufism, but the influence of Indian thought, especially that of Buddhism and Vedanta philosophy, is said to be important. Special emphasis is placed on the role of al-Hallāj (C.E. 857–922) in the earliest stages of Sufism. This is dealt with in L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj* (4 vols.), Princeton University Press, 1982. For Sufism in general, A. al-Kalabadhi (tr. A. Arberry) *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, Cambridge University Press, 1935. A relatively recent introduction is found in I. Shah, *The Sufis*, New York, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> For research into the amalgamation philosophy of Sufism in India, see S.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (2 vols.), Delhi, 1978–83.

<sup>9</sup> L. Massignon, op cit., vol. 1, pp. 1–21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 126–134.

<sup>12</sup> S.A. Rizvi, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Berūnī *al-India*, Delhi, 1975. p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> English translations of the Sikh holy book *Granth Sahib* are available at: <http://www.srigranth.org/> (accessed 4 July 2006).

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion, see my “Indo Sufi ni mirareru Isuramu yugo shiso no hikaku shisoteki kenkyu” (Comparative Philosophical Research in the Islamic Amalga-

mation Ideas Seen in Indian Sufism) in *Hikaku shiso kenkyu*, No. 17, Hikaku Shiso Gakkai, 1990, pp. 46–53.

<sup>16</sup> *The Akbar Nāmā of Abu-l-Fazl*, Volume III, RARE BOOKS, 1973, p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>18</sup> There is no generally accepted historical appraisal of Akbar's reign. See Yasuaki Ishida, *Mugaru teikoku* (Mughal Empire) Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1965. Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbar Nāmā* is considered an essential source for research regarding Akbar.

<sup>19</sup> Dala shukoh [Dārā Shikūh], *Majmā al-Baḥrayn*, Bengal R.A.C. 1926, p. 80. For research in the ideas of Dārā Shikūh, see Kazuyo Sakaki, "Futatsu no umi no majiwaru tokoro" (Where Two Oceans Mingle) *Tohogaku*, No. 98, Tohogakkai, 1998, pp. 106–120.