

World Sufi Forum
New Delhi, March 17, 2016

Text of the address by Prime Minister of India, Mr Narendra Modi

Syed Mohammad Ashraf, Founder President, All India Ulama and Mashaik Board

Shawki Ibrahim Abdel Karim Allam, Grand Mufti of Egypt,
Shaykh Hashimuddin Al Gailani, from Baghdad

Syed Minhaj Ur Rehman from Bangladesh

Diwan Ahmed Masood Chisti from Pakistan

Syed Nizami from Nizamuddin Dargah and Syed Chisti from Ajmer Sharif

My ministerial colleagues,

Scholars and Sufis from India

Our guests from our neighbours and from nations far beyond,

Welcome to a land that is a timeless fountain of peace, and an ancient source of traditions and faiths, which has received and nurtured religions from the world.

Welcome to a people with an abiding belief in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the World is one family.

A belief in harmony with the message of Holy Quran that mankind were one community, then they differed among themselves,

A creed echoed in the words of the great Persian Sufi poet Saadi, written in the United Nations, that human beings come from the same source: We are one family.

Welcome to the ancient city of Delhi - built by the genius of diverse peoples, cultures and faiths.

Like our nation, the city's heart has place for every faith, from those with few followers to those with billion believers.

Its magnificent shrines include the dargahs of great Sufi saints Mehboob-e-Ilahi and Hazrat Bakhtiyar Kaki, that draw people from all faiths and all corners of the world.

This is an extraordinary event of great importance to the world, at a critical time for humanity.

At a time when the dark shadow of violence is becoming longer, you are the noor, or the light of hope.

When young laughter is silenced by guns on the streets, you are the voice that heals.

In a world that struggles to assemble for peace and justice, this is an assembly of those whose life itself is a message of peace, tolerance and love.

You have come from different lands and cultures, but you are united by a common faith.

You speak different languages, but they blend together in a message of harmony.

And, you represent the rich diversity of the Islamic civilization that stands on the solid bedrock of a great religion.

It is a civilization that reached great heights by the 15th century in science, medicine, literature, art, architecture and commerce.

It drew on the immense talents of its people and also Islam's engagement with diverse civilizations – ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Africa; the Persian, Central Asian and Caucasian lands; the region of East Asia; and, with Buddhism and Indian philosophy and science.

As it enriched itself, it also enriched the world.

It set, once again, an enduring lesson of human history: it is through openness and enquiry, engagement and accommodation, and respect for diversity that humanity advances, nations progress and the world prospers.

And, this is the message of Sufism, one of the greatest contributions of Islam to this world.

From its origins in Egypt and West Asia, Sufism travelled to distant lands, holding aloft the banner of faith and the flag of human values, learning from spiritual thoughts of other civilisations, and attracting people with the life and message of its saints.

In the different settings of Saharan Africa or in Southeast Asia, in Turkey

or in Central Asia, in Iran or India, Sufism reflected the universal human desire to go beyond the practice and precepts of religion for a deeper unity with the Almighty.

And, in that spiritual and mystical enquiry, Sufis experienced the universal message of Almighty:

That perfection in human life is reflected in the qualities that are dear to God.

That all are creations of God; and, that if we love God, we must also love all his creations.

As Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya said, "Almighty holds dear those who love Him for the sake of human beings, and those who love human beings for the sake of Almighty."

This is the message of oneness of humanity, of all of Almighty's creations.

For the Sufis, therefore, service to God meant service to humanity.

In the words of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, of all the worships, the worship that pleases the Almighty God the most is the grant of relief to the humble and the oppressed.

In a beautiful imagery of human values, he said, human beings must have the affection of the Sun, the generosity of the river and the hospitality of the earth, because they benefit us all, without discrimination and distinction among people.

And, its humanism also upheld the place and status of women in society.

Above all, Sufism is a celebration of diversity and pluralism, expressed in the words of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, that every people has its own path of truth, beliefs and focus of reverence.

These words reflect the divine message to the Holy Prophet that there is no compulsion in religion; And also that to every people we have appointed ways of worship which they observe.

And, it is in harmony with the soul of the Bhakti saint's saying in the Hindu tradition, "Into the bosom of the one great sea, Flow streams that come from hills on every side."

And in the wisdom of Bulleh Shah, "Lord is mixed in every heart."

These values are the need of our times.

This is the reality of Nature. We learn this wisdom in the perfect balance and harmony that exists in the vast diversity of a forest.

Its message is beyond the confines of schools and sects. It's a spiritual quest that traces its origin from the Holy Prophet and the fundamental values of Islam, which literally means peace.

And, it reminds us that when we think of the 99 names of Allah, none stand for force and violence, and that the first two names denote compassionate and merciful. Allah is Rahman and Raheem.

Sufism is the voice of peace, co-existence, compassion and equality; a call to universal brotherhood.

And, just as India became a principal center of Islamic civilization, our nation also emerged as one of the most vibrant hubs of Sufism.

Sufism became the face of Islam in India, even as it remained deeply rooted in the Holy Quran, and Hadis.

Sufism blossomed in India's openness and pluralism. It engaged with her spiritual tradition, and evolved its own Indian ethos.

And, it helped shape a distinct Islamic heritage of India.

We see this heritage in the fields of art, architecture and culture that is part of the fabric of our nation and our collective daily lives.

We see it in the spiritual and intellectual tradition of India.

It helped strengthen the inclusive culture that is our great nation's immense contribution to the cultural tapestry of this world.

In Baba Farid's poetry or Guru Granth Sahib, we feel the same spiritual connection.

We see compassion in the langars of Sufi shrines and the village tombs of local Pirs that attracted the poor and hungry;

The words of Hindavi were spoken in the Sufi Khanqahs.

Sufism's contribution to poetry in India is huge. Its impact on the development of Indian music is profound.

None had a greater impact than the Sufi poet-musician Amir Khusrau. Eight centuries later, his poetry and musical innovation continue to be part of the soul of Hindustani music. No one had spoken of Indian music with such passion as he had.

Who else could have expressed love for India so beautifully as he did:

“But India, from head to toe, is a picture of heaven,

Adam came from the palace of paradise,

He could only be sent to an orchard of fruits that is India.

If India is not paradise, how could it be made the abode of the peacock, the bird of paradise?”

It is this spirit of Sufism, the love for their country and the pride in their nation that define the Muslims in India.

They reflect the timeless culture of peace, diversity and equality of faith of our land;

They are steeped in the democratic tradition of India, confident of their place in the country and invested in the future of their nation;

And, above all, they are shaped by the values of the Islamic heritage of India. It upholds the highest ideals of Islam and has always rejected the forces of terrorism and extremism.

Now, as they travel to different parts of the world, they are the ambassadors of the values and traditions of our nation.

As a nation, we stood against colonialism and in our struggle for freedom.

At the dawn of independence some chose to go away; and, I believe, that it also had to do with the colonial politics of that time.

The tallest of our leaders, such as Maulana Azad, and important spiritual leaders, such as Maulana Hussain Madani, and millions and millions of ordinary citizens, rejected the idea of division on the basis of religion.

Now, India is moving forward on the strength of the struggles, the sacrifices, the bravery, the knowledge, the skill, the art and the pride of every member of every faith in our diverse and yet united nation.

Like the strings of sitar that each produces a note, but come together to create a beautiful melody.

This is the spirit of India. This is the strength of our nation.

All our people, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, the micro-minority of Parsis, believers, non-believers, are an integral part of India.

Just as it once came to India, today Sufism from India has spread across the world.

But, this tradition that evolved in India belongs to the whole of South Asia.

That is why I urge others in the region to nurture and revive this glorious heritage of ours.

When the spiritual love of Sufism, not the violent force of terrorism, flows across the border, this region will be the paradise on earth that Amir Khusrau spoke about.

Let me paraphrase what I have said before: Terrorism divides and destroys us.

Indeed, when terrorism and extremism have become the most destructive force of our times, the message of Sufism has global relevance.

In the centres of conflict in West Asia to calm cities in distant countries, in the remote villages of Africa to the towns in our own region, terrorism is a daily threat.

Each day brings us terrible news and horrifying images:

- of schools turned into graveyards of innocence;
- of prayer gatherings turned into funeral processions,
- of call to prayer or Azaan drowned by the sound of explosion;
- of blood on the beach, massacres in malls and smouldering cars on streets;
- of thriving cities ruined and priceless heritage destroyed;
- and, of parents bearing coffins, entire communities dislocated, millions displaced, and refugees caught between fire and stormy seas.

In this digital century of new promise and opportunities, the reach of terror is growing and its toll is rising every year.

Since the beginning of this century, tens of thousands of families have lost their loved ones in thousands of terrorist incidents globally.

Last year alone, I am talking about 2015, over 90 countries experienced terrorist attacks. Parents in 100 countries live with the daily pain of their children lost to the battlefields of Syria.

And, in a globally mobile world, one incident can claim citizens of many nations.

Every year, we spend over 100 billion dollars on securing the world from terrorism, money that should have been spent on building lives of the poor.

The impact cannot be fully captured in statistics alone. It is changing the way we live.

There are forces and groups that are instruments of state policy and design. There are others recruited to the cause in misguided belief.

There are some who are trained in organized camps. There are those who find their inspiration in the borderless world of cyber space.

Terrorism uses diverse motivations and causes, none of which can be justified.

Terrorists distort a religion whose cause they profess to support.

They kill and destroy more in their own land and among their own people than they do elsewhere.

And, they are putting entire regions to peril and making the world more insecure and violent.

The fight against terrorism is not a confrontation against any religion. It cannot be.

It is a struggle between the values of humanism and the forces of inhumanity.

It is not a conflict to be fought only through military, intelligence or diplomatic means.

It is also a battle that must be won through the strength of our values and the real message of religions.

As I have said before, we must reject any link between terrorism and religion. Those who spread terror in the name of religion are anti-religious.

And, we must advance the message of Sufism that stands for the principles of Islam and the highest human values.

This is a task that states, societies, sages, scholars and families must pursue.

However, to me, the message of Sufism is not just confined to combating terrorism.

The values of harmony, welfare, compassion and love for human beings are the foundation of a just society.

That is the principle behind my creed of “Sab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikaas”.

And, these values are important to preserve and nurture diversity in our societies.

Diversity is a basic reality of Nature and source of richness of a society; and, it should not be a cause of discord.

We need just not constitutional provisions or legal safeguards, but also social values to build an inclusive and peaceful society, in which everyone belongs, secure about his rights and confident of her future.

This is also a time of great flux and transition in the world. The middle of the last century was an important turning point in history. A new world order emerged. Many new nations were born.

At the beginning of a new century, we are at yet another point of transformation on a scale rarely seen in human history.

In many parts of the world, there is uncertainty about the future, and how to deal with it as nations and societies.

These are precisely the times that the world is most vulnerable to violence and conflicts.

The global community must be more vigilant than ever before and counter the forces of darkness with the radiant light of human values.

So, let us remember the teaching of Holy Quran that if anyone slew one innocent person, it would be as if he slew a whole people; if anyone saved one life, it would be as if he saved a whole people.

Let us be inspired by the message of Hazrat Moinuddin Chishti,

With your spiritual light, dissolve the clouds of discord and war and spread goodwill, peace, and harmony among the people.

Let us remember the infinite humanism in Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi's words, "Contain all human faces in your own, without any judgment of them."

Let us also live the sermon of Bible that calls us to do good, seek peace and pursue it.

And, oneness in Kabir's observation that a river and its waves are one.

And, Guru Nanak Devji's prayer that Lord, may everyone in the world prosper and be in peace.

Let us be inspired by Swami Vivekananda's appeal against divisions and for people of all religions to hold the banner of harmony, not of dispute.

Let us also reaffirm the enduring message of Ahimsa of Lord Buddha and Mahavira.

And, from this forum, in this land of Gandhi,

And, of timeless prayers that always end with invocation of

Om Shanti; Shanti; Shanti: Peace, Peace, Peace,; Peace within and in the world.

Let us, therefore, send a message to the world:

- A melody of harmony and humanity
- The embrace of diversity, the spirit of oneness
- Of service with compassion and generosity,
- A resolve against terrorism, a rejection of extremism
- And, a determination to advance peace

Let us challenge the forces of violence with the kindness of our love and universal human values.

and Lastly, Let us restore the light of hope and turn this world into a garden of peace.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for what you stand for. Thank you for the role you are playing in building a better world. Thank you very much, Thanks a lot.
