

DARA SHIKOH AND HIS COMPARATIVE HERMENEUTICS OF ISLAM AND HINDUISM

“Indian tradition remembers Dara Shikoh not so much as an emperor’s son, but as mystic philosopher. The great dream of his life – a dream shattered by his untimely death – was the brotherhood of all faiths and the unity of mankind. After him the vision of unity was lost in the atmosphere of hatred and rivalry created by the warring sects and religious schools, and even today we are in the age of religious disintegrations¹.”

It is well-known that Islam after a short period of its rise spread like lightning in every direction. It reached the boundaries of China in no time and it conquered Sindh in the times of Ummayyads and with this begins the commercial relations of Muslims with the other nations and communities including India.

India has been a cradle of different social, religious and intellectual movements and it has possessed a glorious civilization comprising of different philosophies and ways of life at different stages of its history. A critical study of *Vedas* and *Upanishads* makes it clear that Indian sages maintained a religion based on monotheism. When we go through the ancient scriptures of the country, we find similarities with the scriptures existed elsewhere in the world maintaining

¹*Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 259

monotheism and equality of human beings. As per the belief of Islam, the Prophets have been deputed by God to every community and then the *avatars* and sages appeared in India might be prophets. The unity concept propounded by *Vedas* and *Upanishads* and the message of equality postulated by leaders of reformation in ancient India like Buddha, Jinan and others, resembles the teachings of the Semitic or the Abrahamic prophets. From the eighth century Muslims begin to acquaint themselves with the books of other nations and it is in this period that Hindu and Buddhistic works were translated into Arabic². This process of intellectual interactions continued further in the following centuries. The tenth century was more important in this regard as Al-Bīrūnī makes his historic journey to India, known in Arabic as al-Hind, and compiles his renowned *Tarīkh al-Hind* (The History of India). Similarly, Sufi master al-Jīlī in the fourteenth century argued that the *barāhima* (Hindus) belong to the religion of Abraham and seek to realize *tawhīd* (the ontological oneness of God) too.

In the following centuries, the close interaction between the local Indian cultures and the cultural traditions of the Muslim world led to the evolution of a new phenomenon in Indian history – a mixed Indo-Muslim culture which combined elements of various traditions.

²A *Hindu-Islamic Translation: Retrieving DārāShikūh's Confluence of the Two Oceans*

By Doha Tazi Hemida, Columbia University <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f39f/692631a739c722618bf308fe5a68ac6020f7.pdf>

One of the manifestations of this Indo- Muslim synthesis in the domain of spirituality was the emergence and popularity of a number of reformist religious trends. These religious reformers called for bringing the Hindus and the Muslim closer to each other by mutual accommodation of each other's' religious teachings. Some of the reformers rejected the cast system of Hinduism and condemned poverty, and social inequality in Hindu society. These teaching are collectively called Bhakti³.

The trends of Indo-Muslim cultural fusion were visible not only in the grassroots movements like Bhagti but also in the poetry and philosophy of the Muslim and Hindu feudal aristocracy close to royal courts. However, in the aristocratic version of Bhagti like trends there was no place for the ideas of social equality and protest against the caste system. Most probably, it was the outcome of the partial assimilation of the local Hindu elite by foreign Muslim ruling circles, which joined hands to protect their common political and socio-economic interests. The most astute representatives of the Muslim and local feudal elite realized that the close cooperation among the ethnically and religiously diverse elements of the feudal classes could better protect their social positions and political stability of the newly established Muslim state. The tendencies of collaboration between Muslim and local Hindu feudal elite were particularly visible during the rule of the great Mughal emperor Akbar (1556- 1605).

³Bhagti was popular mystical current in medieval Hinduism in which the love between man and God is emphasized.

He even introduced a new religion Deen-e-Illahi in which he tried to combine the selected elements of a number of religions- Muslim mysticism, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroaster-ism and others. The main objective of this venture was to ensure political stability of the Mughal Empire. However, this religion failed to make advance outside the close circle of the emperor.

In such a long history of cross-cultural exchange and discourse between the two religions, the comparative treatise between Islam and Hinduism, *Majma' al-bahrayn* (Confluence of the Two Oceans) by the Mughal prince DārāShikūh (1615–1659), as well as his translation of the Upanishads (*Sirr-iakbar*) from Sanskrit into Persian may be considered as an important and concerted step towards bringing the Hindus and Muslim closer to each other⁴.

Sultan Muhammad DārāShukōh, a Sufi, scholar and Mughal prince, enjoyed a short but full life, spanning a variety of fields of activity. He was the eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shāhjahān and his wife MumtāzMaḥal, born in the city of Ajmer on the 29th of Safar 1024 A.H./ 30th of March 1615 C.E.⁵

⁴Francesca Orsini, "Krishna is the Truth of Man": Mir 'Abdul Wahid Bilgrami's *Haqā'iq-i-Hindī* (Indian Truths) and the Circulation of Dhruvad and Bishnupad" in Thomas Bruijn and Allison Busch eds., *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁵His date of birth is mentioned in his own book *SafinatulAulya* : ولادت این فقیر : در خطه اجمیر، بالای ساگر تال روینده در سلخ صفر نصف شب در شنبه سال یک هزار بیست و چهار هجری، چون در خانئہ الیماجد فقیر سه صبیہ شدہ بود و سن مبارک ... الخ

The passage is translated by Mahfuz-ul-Haq in his introduction to *Majma'-ul-Bahrain*: "And this fakir was born in the suburbs of Ajmir by the (lake of) Sagar Tal on the last day of Safar, Monday midnight, 1024 A.H." (MahfuzulHaq, "Introduction" to *Dārā, Majma',1*)

Our sources on the early childhood and early career of the prince are very scanty. The contemporary Mughal chronicles in fact provide very meagre information on his early career and education, and it is to isolated remarks in the sources that we owe the knowledge that Mullā'AbdulLaṭīfSulṭānpūrī, MullāMīrakHarawī and the famous calligrapher 'AbdulRashīdDaylamī were his tutors.⁶Our information starts to improve when, at the age of eighteen, he was married to Nādira Begum⁷ (d. 1069 A.H./1651 C.E.). In the following year the couple lost their first child and it was possibly due to the shock of this that Dārā became ill. His father, Emperor Shāhjahān, took him to the Qādirī Sufi MiyānMīr. This was Dārā's first encounter with a Sufi master, and it probably took place sometime in 1043 A.H./1634 C.E. The second and last time he visited MiyānMīr occurred during the month of Rajab 1044 A.H./December 1634 C.E.⁸

⁶For a detailed account of these figures see Hasrat, *Dārā*, 3 and Qanungo, *Dara*, 4. Of the three, Dārā refers to MullāMīrak by name as his tutor in his works. See *Dārā*, *Safīnat al-Awliyā'* (Kanpur: Maṭba'at-iMunshī Naval Kishor, 1900) (hereinafter referred to as *Safīna*), 197 and *Dārā*, *Sakīnat al-Awliyā'*. Edited by Sayyid MuḥammadRiḍāJalālīNā'īnī and Dr.Tārā Chand. Tehran: Mū'assasa-iMaṭbū'ātī-i'Ilmī, 1344 [1965] (hereinafter referred to as *Dārā*, *Sakīna*), 59. MullāLaṭīf was an expert on the theological and rational sciences while 'AbdulRashīdDaylamī was a well-known calligrapher; however, neither is mentioned anywhere in Dārā's works.

⁷Karīm al-Nisā' Begum, daughter of SulṭānParvēz, was also known as NādirahBānū (SheoNarain, "Dara," 24) or as Nādirah Begum (Qanungo, *Dara*, 7).

⁸According to Qanungo, the date of Dārā's first visit to Miyan Mir was "April 7, 1634" (See Qanungo, *Dara*, 72), which corresponds to 8th Shawwal 1043. However, according to Sheikh Muhammad Ikram, Dārā visited Miyan Mir on "25th February 1634" See S.M. Ikram, *Raud-iKauthar* (Karachi: Feroze sons, 1958), 398. For a detailed account of the dates and the discrepancy, refer to Hayat, "Concept," 9, 41.

As for Dārā's political career, this began in 1043 A.H./1634 C.E. when he was given the first military rank (manṣab) in command of 1200 soldiers (dhāt) and 6000 horsemen (sawār).⁹ In 1055 A.H./1645 C.E., he was appointed as governor of Allahabad, and during the next four years he saw the Punjab (1057 A.H./1647 C.E.) and Gujarat (1059 A.H./1649 C.E.) added to his responsibilities, although in 1062 A.H./1652 C.E. he was relieved of the latter charge.¹⁰ In the same year, Dārā found himself in command of 30,000 soldiers and 20,000 horsemen when Kabul and Multan were annexed to his governorship.¹¹ By the year 1067 A.H./1657 C.E., the troops under Dārā's command had reached 60,000 soldiers and 40,000 horsemen.¹² Moreover, later in the same year, due to the illness of his father Shāhjahān, he was appointed as regent to look after the affairs of the empire. However, his brothers refused to acknowledge him in this new role.¹³ Dārā was not a successful warrior. His three expeditions against the Persian army brought very few positive results. During his first expedition, in the year 1049

⁹Qanungo mentions that the jāgir (property) of Hissar was given to him to convey that Dārā was the heir-apparent; this was because the jāgir of Hissar was the "Dauphiny of the House of Babur" (See Qanungo, Dara, 15).

¹⁰Qanungo, Dara, 18.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Iftikhar Ahmad Ghauri, War of Succession between the Sons of Shāhjahān (1657-1658) (Lahore: Publishers United Limited, 1964) (hereinafter referred to as Ghauri, War), 35. As soon as Dārā's brothers Shujā', Aurangzēb and Murād heard about their father's illness, Aurangzēb and Murād condemned Dārā as a mulhid (heretic) and advanced on Agra, while Shujā', after crowning himself, marched towards Banares (Qanungo, Dara, 161-167).

A.H./1639 C.E., he was recalled while on the way to Kandahar when fears of Persian hostility suddenly died down.¹⁴ In the year 1062 A.H./1652 C.E., he was sent again to Kandahar but had to return when the Persian king ShāhŞafī died and the war was called off.¹⁵ Then in the year 1063 A.H./1653 C.E., he lost his final chance of capturing Kandahar due partly to disunity amongst his military officers and partly to his own undiplomatic attitude towards his commanders (maṣabdārs).¹⁶ The later events in Dārā's life encompass his two significant defeats in the war of succession when Aurangzēb and Murād, rejecting Dārā's regency, waged war against him in Samugarh.¹⁷ This caused him to flee towards Ahmadabad, where he established his own court. He suffered his final defeat a few months later in 1069 A.H./1659 C.E. at the hands of his brother Aurangzēb, in Deorai. Although personally a brave leader, his lack of diplomatic and leadership skills lost him his crown, and he fled to Dadar seeking refuge.¹⁸

¹⁴The Persian king ShāhŞafī (1039-1052 A.H./1629-1642 A.D.) was also involved in serious conflict with the Ottoman Sulṭān Murād (Qanungo, Dara, 23).

¹⁵Qanungo, Dara, 24.

¹⁶Although the expedition succeeded in taking the forts in Zamindawar, it was by and large a failure. Yet in spite of this – due to the love and affection of his father – Dārā was praised by Shāhjahān. (Qanungo, Dara, 33-71). A detailed account of the siege of Kandahar was written by an unknown author in a manuscript entitled *Laṭā'if al Akhbār*, which is available at the India Office Collection, British Library, catalogued by Rieu as Add 24,089. According to Rieu, this is the same work cited by KhāfiKhān as the *Tārīkh-i Kandahār*, who ascribes it to RashīdKhān, a courtier of Aurangzēb who served the emperor for more than sixteen years (Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1879), 264.

¹⁷Qanungo, Dara, 178-89.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 208-12.

His stay in Dadar was short and traumatic: first, his wife Nādira Begum died and then his host Malik Jīwan betrayed him. Dārā and his son were imprisoned by Malik Jīwan and then handed over to the new emperor Aurangzēb.¹⁹ Finally, by order of the latter and in rejection of Dārā's appeal,²⁰ he was paraded in disgrace through the streets of Delhi and beheaded in DhūalḤijjah 1069 A.H./August 1659 C.E.²¹

History shows that Dārā's political career was a long string of failures. The reason for these has been, and will remain, part of the ongoing debate amongst historians. However, this debate and the issues arising from it are beyond of the scope of the present study.

Dārā appears to have been interested in the Qādiriyya Sufi silsila from his childhood. Perhaps the Mughals' traditional attachment to the Sufis played a vital role in Dārā's understanding and acceptance of Sufi thought. However, his specific inclination towards the

¹⁹Ibid.,220-25.

²⁰Ruqa'āt-i'Alamgir contains this letter of Dārā which he wrote from prison to Awrangzeb: My brother and my king (bādshāh-i man), I think of not sovereignty. I wish it may be auspicious to you and your descendants. The idea of my execution in your lofty mind is unnecessary. If I am allotted a residential place and one of my maids to attend to me, I would pray for Your Majesty from my peaceful corner. (See Hasrat, Dārā, 105)

²¹The date of Dārā's execution differs in the historical sources. This has been pointed out by Mahfuz-ul-Haq. He writes: "According to Maathir-i-Alamgiri, (Bib.lnd.), p.27, Dārā was executed on the night of Thursday, the 21st DhulHijja; the author of Amal-i-Salih (Elliot vii, p.244) records on the 26th DhulHijja, Khafi Khan (Muntakhab-ulLubab, ii, p.87) says that Dārā was executed on the last (akhir) day of DhulHijja, (i.e. 29th), while Mufti Ghulam Sarwar (Khazīnat-ul-Aṣfiya, I, p.174), records the date of execution on the first Muharram 1070 A.H." (MahfuzulHaq, "Introduction" to Dārā, Majma, 4, n.2.)

Qādiriyasilsila was due to his teacher MullāMirakHarawī.²²

His affiliation with this silsilabecame stronger in 1043 A.H./1634 C.E., when as we saw earlier, he first met MiyānMīr in consultation over his health.²³

As a Qādirī Sufi, his works speak at length about the practice of dhikr (lit. remembrance, a term normally used for meditation on God) and his personal experiences with his own Sufi masters; in fact, in one of these experiences he claims to have attained the highest level of Sufism.²⁴ All of these are indications that he took his role as a Qādirī Sufi and wayfarer (sālik) very seriously.

Apart from his own works, there are a couple of other sources that also confirm that he was a recognized Sufi master. Dārā's sister Jahānārā, in the introduction to her work Mūnisalarwāḥ, introduces him as "murshid-iīnḥaqīra" (guide or Sufi master of this humble person).²⁵ Another Qādirī biographer, Shaykh MuḥammadSharīf, uses the phrase raḥmatullāh'alayhi

²²Dārā introduces Akhund Mirak Shaykh not only as his teacher but also as a Qādirī Sufi. Perhaps this is the reason that he claims an affiliation with the Qādiriyasilsila "from the beginning" (Dārā, Sakīna, 31, 59, 243).

²³Dārā, Safīna, 72; idem, Dārā, Sakīna, 48-49.

²⁴For the issue of initiation see Hayat "Concept," 32-33. Dārā explains his personal spiritual experience in the following words: "Whatever others would attain in one month from him, I attained in one night and whatever others would attain in one year I attained in one month and if others reached the stage after years of struggle and spiritual exercise I found it without any exercise, with his bounty; and once and for all the friendship (love) of the two worlds went out of my heart, and the doors of (divine) bounty and mercy were opened upon my heart and He gave me whatever I asked" (Dārā, Sakīna, 6).

²⁵Jahānārā, Mū'nis al-arwāḥ, Ms. Or. 250 in the India Office (British Library), folio 6.

(may God's blessings be upon him) wherever he writes the name of Dārā.²⁶ Similarly, the copyist of manuscript E adds raḥmatullāh to Dārā's name in the colophon.²⁷ From his early years, Dara manifested his keen interest in ancient Indian religious and philosophical literature. On his demand a number of ancient Hindu religious-philosophical treatises- 'Yogavasishatha', Bhagavad-Gita and mystic drama 'Prabodha 'Chandrodhaya' were translated into Persian. The interest of Dara Shikoh to religious books of Hinduism provided the Muslim orthodox mullahs and Aurangzeb the pretext to accuse him in 1652 of heresy and deviation²⁸. Dara Shikoh studied not only ancient Indian religious literature like Vedas and Upanishads but also had a good knowledge of Jewish and Christian religious literature such as Pentateuch²⁹, New Testament and Muslim Sufi writings³⁰. He was not the first among the Muslim aristocrats to show his interest in epical and religious literature of the Hindus. The famous historian of Akbar, Abu Al Fazal and his elder brother Faizi also studied the epical and religious books of the Hindus and took part in the Persian translation of Mahabharata³¹. Dara Shako's world outlook was formed under immense influence of Sufi teachings which were very popular in

²⁶Ms. Or 213 in India Office (British Library), folios 84, 86, 87, 89, 90.

²⁷See the last line of the ms.E.

²⁸Encyclopedia of Islam, vol.2, f.24, London-Leiden, 1961, p.135.

²⁹Pentateuch refers to five books of Prophet Moses Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

³⁰J. Sarkar, History of Aurangzeb, mainly based on Persian Sources.vol.1, Calcutta, 1912.p.296-297.

³¹A. Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2003, pp.85, 86.

the East for many centuries. The pantheistic ideas of Sufism emerged under the direct influence of classical Persian poetry in which Dara was well versed. At that time a number of prominent Persian poets like Mirza Abdul Qadir BedilAzeemabadi, Mullah Jami Bekhud, Mir Jalal-ud-Din Siadat Lahori were living in India. At the end of 16th and the beginning of 17th century many other Persian poets such like Nazim HarwaiHarati, Mir Muzzudin Muhammad FitratMeshhadi, Sarmad Kashani, Kalim Abu Talib Hamdani also visited India. Many Central Asian poets like Shokat Bukhari, Baba Rahim Mushrab, MalekaSamarkandi and others were frequent visitors of the Mughal court³².

It is also known that Dara Shikoh was not only well versed in his contemporary Sufi Persian poetry but he also knew classical Persian literature. He studied great Persian poets like Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (1207-1273), Abdul Majid Majadud Sanai (died in 1131), and Nur-ud-Din Abdul Rahman Jami (1414-1482) and Khamsa of Nizami.

It should be noted that besides Sufi poets Dara was deeply influenced by contemporary Sufi priests and Hindu Yogis. He was a great patron of not only Muslim but also Hindu, Christian, and Jew religious scholars, philosophers, and poet-mystics. Apart from two prominent Sufi saints Mian Mir and Mullah Shahi Badshahi of the Qadria Order, to which Dara himself belonged, his philosophical and religious outlook evolved under the influence of the Hindu Yogi Baba Lal

³²Z.G. Rizaev, Indian Style in Persian Poetry in 17th and 18th Century. Tashkent, 1971, p.53.

Das Bairagi, who is considered the founder of various trends in Bhakti Movement³³.

It is also well known that Dara had relations with Sufi mystic Sarmad Kashani. Sarmad was a Jew from Iranian city of Kashan with a good knowledge of ancient books of Judaism. Later, he was converted to Islam and renamed himself as Muhammad Saeed and migrated to India.

The religious thoughts of Sarmad were even more eclectic than that of Baba Lal Das. In his poetry Sarmad propagated syncretistic religious ideas. Many letters written by Dara Shikoh to Sarmad and vice versa are well preserved. In these letters Dara had addressed Sarmad as 'My Master and Preceptor'³⁴ while he had used 'My friend' for Dara³⁵. It means their relations were quite frank.

Dara had left a substantial amount of literary heritage. His early works include 'Safinat-al- Aulia 1640, 'Sakinatal-Aulia in 1642, 'Risala-e-Haq Nama (1651-1653). These books are about life and works of Sufi saints. In another work 'Hasanat-al- Arfeen' 1652 Dara has collected sayings of the saints belonging to different orders. "Mukalma-e-Baba Lal w Dara Shikoh" written in 1653 contains Dara's dialogue with Bhagti leader Baba Lal Das Bairagi. This book has invited the curiosity of various scholars interested in the study of Hindu spirituality. There are several discussions in this book

³³B.J. Hasrat, The Diwan and Quatrain of Dara Shikoh, 'Islamic Culture' Hyderabad, 1944, No, 3, p.148.

³⁴B.J. Hasrat, Dara Shikoh; Life and Works. Calcutta, 1953, p.239.

³⁵Annemarie Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. p.100.

mainly on the subjects of Indian philosophy and mythology³⁶.

However, the most valuable among the works of Dara are his three last books; 'Majma-al-Bahrain' (Mingling of the Oceans) (1653), and Ser-al-Asrar (secret of the secrets) or Ser-al-Akbar (great secret) a translation of Hindu religious book Upanishad completed in 1657, and collection of his poetry under title Akseer-e-Azam (the mightiest Elixir).

In his work 'Majma-al-Bahrain' Dara had not only explained pantheistic terms of the Indian philosophical literature but also had given their Muslim Sufi synonyms. In this work Dara tried to discover the affinities between Vedic and Sufi perceptions of the ultimate truth.

This work of Dara was re-translated into Sanskrit in 1708 under title 'Samudra Sangma'³⁷.

Though known to biographers, Dārā's Dīwān was not in as wide circulation as his other works had been. In fact, it was "considered as non-existent or lost."³⁸

In assessing Dārā's poetry in the light of his thought, it is safe to say that Dārā's Sufi works show a gradual development – beginning with general appreciation of the Sufis then moving to his specific Tariqa and then gradually moving on towards his understanding of various Sufi concepts such as waḥdat al-wujūd, 'ārif and ṣulḥ-ikul. Dārā's poetical compositions encompass all

³⁶B.J. Hasrat, Dara Shakuh; Life and Works., p.254

³⁷ Dara Shakoh, Sakinat-al-Auliya Urdu translation by Professor Maqbool Beg Badakhshani, Packages Limited, Lahore, 1971, p.alifjeem.

³⁸Hasrat, Dārā, 129

above elements; however, the Dīwān has not been systematically arranged to show any chronological development. In the Dīwān one can find eulogies for God, Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi masters of his own Ṭarīqa. These confirm the central position that Sufi thought occupied in his intellectual outlook. Following are a few examples from his Dīwān that testify to this:

قادرى گنت قادر مطلق از پيهر فنا کمال بقا ست

Qādirī became the Almighty (absolute powerful). From every annihilation ensues the excellence of subsistence.³⁹

قادرى زود عينقادر شد چون مدد کرد قادر بغداد

Qādirī became virtually Qādir (God?) when Qādir-i Baghdad ('Abd al-Qādir Gīlānī, founder of the Qadiriyya Ṭarīqa) helped.⁴⁰

تسبيح من عجب درآمد بزبان گفتا که مرا چرا کنسرت گردان

گردلبه عوض همبهدگردانی تو دانی که برا چه بست خلق انسان

My rosary has asked a strange question of me. Why do you keep on moving me (my beads)? If you would have moved your heart rather than rotating me, you would have known that why Human being was created.⁴¹

Bikramajit Hasrat has divided Dārā's writings into two phases: the early period, when he wrote on Sufism, and the later period when he wrote on Hinduism. In keeping with this division Hasrat places Majma' al-Baḥrayn in his list of works on Hinduism.⁴² The fact is, however,

³⁹Dārā, Diwān, 19.

⁴⁰Ibid., 29.

⁴¹Ibid., 161.

⁴²Hasrat, Dārā, 9-10.

that there was an intermediate period in Dārā's scholarly career when he learnt and wrote about the comparative aspects of Hinduism and Islam, more specifically on Advaita Vedanta¹⁸⁸ and ṭaṣawwuf. It was only after this point that he wrote exclusively on Hinduism. I would therefore prefer to assign two works – the compilation Su'ālvaJavāb-iDārāShukōhvaBābāLālDās and Majma' al-Baḥrayn -- to the intermediate category.

The first work -- Su'ālvaJavāb -- was not in fact written by DārāShukōh himself. It was compiled by his secretaries, including Chandarbhān.⁴³ The work is in fact a report of at least seven dialogues that took place in Lahore between DārāShukōh and BābāLālDās during the year 1064 A.H./1653 C.E. The contribution of Dārā to these dialogues is remarkable. The mere fact that interfaith discussion took place at that time between a Hindu and a Muslim and entirely for the sake of expanding knowledge is extraordinary enough, but the demeanor of the questions shows that Dārā was trying to learn about Hinduism and while doing so, comparing various concepts with Islam-- an even more remarkable phenomenon. Dārā demonstrates a very humble attitude towards the Hindu Yogi. They meet, not at the governor's palace but in the precincts of various

⁴³According to Mahfuz-ul-Haq, "ChandarBhan was an inhabitant of Patyala or of Lahore, as asserted by some. He was the Mir Munshi (Head of the secretaries) to Dārā and was appointed in the Dar-ul-Insha of Shahjahan, in 1066 H. and entitled Rai ChandarBhan. He died in 1068 A.H.or 1073. He left several works including Chahar Chaman, Munshiat-i-Brahman, Karnama, Guldasta, Majma-ul-Wuzara, etc., and Diwan" (see Dārā, Majma, 24).

tombs⁴⁴ – in a sense the perfect setting for a Sufi to learn about Advaita Vedanta from a Hindu Yogi who was a monist.

Dārā's second work in this category, *Majma' al-Baḥrayn*, was written in 1065 A.H./1655 C.E. after his discussion with the Hindu Yogi BābāLāldās.⁴⁵ The work was composed for an elite audience and was not meant for the common folk of either community.⁴⁶

From the *Su'ālvaJavāb*, it becomes clear that Dārā had already studied Hindu works like the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gītā* before embarking on the dialogues.⁴⁷ In the process, he developed a close bond with Hinduism to the extent that he no longer saw any substantial difference between Hinduism and Islam. As a result, after finishing *Majma'*, he started translating the Upanishads and created an intimate connection between the Qur'ān and the Upanishads by claiming that the Qur'ān refers to the Upanishads when it talks about the "protected book" literally 'hidden' or well-guarded (*kitābmaknūn*).

Lāldās plays the more important role in the work *Su'āl-o-Javāb*. He is a perfect gnostic for Dārā, responding to his every question. Strangely though, Lāldās is not referred to in the works of any of his contemporaries,

⁴⁴ In *Rumūz*, the reports of all seven dialogues also contain information as to the locations where the meetings between Dārā and Bābā took place (see *Rumūz*, 10, 11, 12, 15, 21, 25).

⁴⁵ Hayat, "Concept," 38.

⁴⁶ Dārā, *Majma'*, 38.

⁴⁷ Huart and Massignon, "Les entretiens," 299-301.

other than by Dārā himself and the author of the Dabistān-i Madhāhib.⁴⁸

The work referred as Su'ālvaJavāb is an account of a series of dialogues purported to have taken place between DārāShukōh and LālDās. Dārā himself seems to refer to these meetings with LālDās without describing their content or venues, when he writes in his Samudra Sangama: I attained peace along with other altogether perfect Vedic seers, especially in nearness to the true guru, an image of the form itself of spirituality and of knowledge, Baba Lal, who by the Lord, has attained the utmost of askesis, of knowledge, of the fruit of right understanding, and with him I met and conversed frequently..⁴⁹

His comparative works Samudra Sangama and Majma' al-Baḥrayn may be seen as the fruits of a quest for enlightenment which started with his meetings with LālDās. He says in his introduction to Samudra Sangama, adding to the above comment: (with him I met and convened frequently) I perceived no difference,

⁴⁸The author of the work is popularly assumed to have been Muhsin Fānī (d.1670). Though a historical figure - a friend of Dārā and a disciple of MuhibullāhAllāhbādī who lived in Kashmir - there is some doubt as to whether he actually wrote the work: see for instance Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, p.101. The author, whoever he was, seems to have had a lot of respect for Dārā since he introduces him as Muḥyi al-Dīn (one who gives life to the religion). See Dabistān-iMazāhib, ed. RahīmRizā'zādah (Tehran 1362 A.H./1983) (hereinafter referred to as Dabistān), vol.I, 1:359.

⁴⁹See Filliozat, Echoes, 203. A slightly different version of translation was found in Dārā, Samudra : "I had repeated meetings and discourses with some great Vedic scholars, specially with my great preceptor. Babalal, who is intelligence in essence and knowledge incarnate, who has attained the highest perfection in meditation, knowledge, good sense, comprehension of God and peace." See Dārā, Samudra, 124.

except in the terminology, regarding the realization of one's own form (svarūpa). And so, I expressed in the same way. And then I collected numerous fruitful expositions to be known by those who are engaged in the realization of the Real. And here under the name of a 'reunion' of the two oceans of the doctrines of the two upholders of knowledge, I established the Samudrasangama (the Meeting of the Oceans).⁵⁰

⁵⁰Here I have used the English translation of the Sanskrit text from Filliozat's work. See Filliozat, *Echoes*, 203.