

Dara Shukoh - The Prince who turned Sufi

[Gyani Brahma Singh Brahma*](#)

Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shahejahan, was born of his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal, of the Taj Mahal fame. He was born in Ajmer and it is said that he was born with the blessings of Khwaja Muinuddin Hassan Chishti Ajmeri, on 19 Safar 1024 A.H. - 20th day of March, 1615 A.D. His grandfather Emperor Jehangir named him Dara Shukoh - King of Glory. When Shahjahan fell seriously ill in 1675 A.D. he passed orders that Dara Shukoh succeeded him as Emperor of Delhi and desired that all officials of the State obeyed him. But Allah willed otherwise, Dara Shukoh had leanings for *Tassawwuf* and in addition he maintained association with Hindu *yogis* and *sanyasis* - a class of *sufis* or ascetics and renunciates. On this pretext Aurangzeb took him to be a hazard for the Islamic Throne. A belligerency brewed amongst the three brothers resulting in a fierce battle at Samugarh, at a distance of eight miles from Delhi, on the 29th day of May, 1658 A.D. Dara Shukoh was defeated and fate favoured Aurangzeb to be the royal owner of the peerless throne of the vast Mughal empire of India.

Dara Shukoh fled to the Punjab, on way to Iran, to seek succour from Shah Abbas II but was betrayed by Afghan Bulooch Sardar Malik Jiwan, whose life Dara had saved once at Bolan Pass. Dara Shukoh, along with his son Sipar Shukoh and two daughters, was handed over to commander Bahadur Khan who conveyed them to Delhi on the 23rd day of August, 1659 A.D. Misfortune had befallen also earlier when his beloved wife princess Karim-un-nisa Nadira Begum died on June 5th, 1659 A.D. Her mortal coil was sent to Lahore and buried there, the city of Hazrat Mian Mir and his (Dara's) Murshid Mulla Shah Badakhshani, being a sacred place for Dara.

At Delhi he was executed for apostasy under the dictate of Aurangzeb's court of *Shariat* on the 30th day of August, 1659 A.D. He was buried in the compound of Humayun's *maqbara* - tomb.

The whole history of Turkish Sultanate and Mughal Imperialism is a story of violence, chicanery, and counter chicanery. The very Roshan Ara who was Aurangzeb's assistant in treachery against Dara and his family was herself later poisoned to death by Aurangzeb, allegedly for inciting Aurangzeb's son, Akbar against Aurangzeb.

The Sikh traditions speak of Dara Shukoh's protracted sickness when Emperor Shahejahan requisitioned some Ayurvedic herbs as demanded by the royal physician from the Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai's (1620-1661 A.D.) pioneering *Chikitsalya* - dispensary in Kiratpur, Punjab. The herbs were said to be giant *harrar* - myrobalm and *lovung* - cloves. Though Dara had made mention of his illness in his '*Sakinat-ul-Aulia*', and its treatment with the divine grace of Hazrat Mian Mir, no mention occurs of the herbs obtained by his royal parent from the Sikh Guru's dispensary. However, Dara Shukoh had a great regard for Guru Har Rai and, it is said, Guru Har Rai assisted fugitive Dara Shukoh with his own troops under the command of Sikandar, son of Chaudhry Langah. Unfortunately, Sikandar was betrayed in Sind and fell into the hands of the enemies, who conveyed him to Delhi where he was put to death under Aurangzeb's orders. Aurangzeb never swallowed the so-called hostile act of the Guru and as

soon as he entrenched himself on the throne, he sent for Guru Har Rai to his court. Sikh history has a long account of this episode. But we shall go into that digression.

“However, the great spiritual leaders of the age ever avoided a mishap of a reckless and unheeding civilisation. In fact they have embraced their portion of human catastrophe and have lived through without rancour to the arbitrary usage of the cosmic power at their finger tips. They have to live within the laws of our physical world.”

As is well known, Guru Har Rai did not go to meet Emperor Aurangzeb in person. He sent his elder son Baba Ram Rai, and suffered the consequences.

Dara Shukoh was attracted to Sufism, which holds that there are as many roads to God as there are those who seek Him. He carried out a thorough assessment of Vedic literature and a comparison between Islamic and Christian Scriptures. He was initiated into Vedantic Philosophy by an Udasi mystic Lal Dass who was a prominent exponent of Sant Kabir’s teachings. He also enjoyed the company of Bhagat Ramanand and Muslim Bairaagi (ascetic) Mirza Saalik Lahori and Mirza Lahori.

Dara Shukoh wrote many books, most of these in Persian: *Sakinat-ul-Aulia* which contains a biographical sketch of Hazrat Mian Mir, mentions as many as nine other books written by Dara: the important being ‘*Majmaa-ul-Bahreen*’, ‘*Sirr-e-Akbar*’, or *Sirr-ul-Asraar*, *Dar-Swalo-Jawaab Dara Sukohwa Baba Lall Das*.

While writing ‘*Majmaa-ul-Bahreen*’ (Mingling of Two Oceans) the two oceans arguably being Hinduism and Islam, Dara Shukoh had before his vision a clear equality of the creedal doctrines of the faiths of Hinduism and Islam, i.e. *Vedanta* and *Tassawwuf*. He writes that, in his detailed discussion in protracted and prolonged meetings with Hindu intellectuals and religious leaders, on the Essence of God - *Marfat-e-Rabbaani-Zaat*, he had come to the conclusion that the differences between Hinduism and Islam were simply of words and voice. As also while explaining the equality of *Kuft* and Islam (Darkness and Light) and between *Mandir* and *Masjid*, he writes that, ‘Unique Allah be praised around whose Divine face Islam and *Kufr* are two *zulf* - tresses of hair cascading symmetrically on either side, opposite one another, yet none of them hides His beautiful complexion. He adds further, ‘I am proud that this books has been written for the chosen people of both religions who happen to be capable to benefit from its reading and deep study.’ Dara Shukoh has also discussed the doctrine of Evolution - *Silsilah-e-Aafreenish* - within the context of both, Hinduism and Islam, where he finds no difference and speaks of its equality.

Majmaa-ul-Bahreen has prized significance that, in it, he has endeavoured- and succeeded - to discuss comparative study of two faiths, one whose antiquity has still to be established, and the other whose expansion and development in a millennium and a half continued to amaze great thinkers of the world.

Sirr-e-Akbar - The Great Secret or *Sirr-e-Asraar* - The secret of secrets - The great Mystery was the result of Dara Shukoh’s extreme fascination with the greatness, vastness, depth, and glory, of the ancient Hindu lore. He was of the opinion that Sanskrit was unsurpassed in systematising and perfecting knowledge - *gyan* - *ilm* on the earth. He had made a thorough study of Persian, Arabic, and other akin languages, yet he had expressed this opinion in his translation of fifty-two Sanskrit *Upanishads* into Persian, and had named it *Sirr-e-Akbar* or *Sirr-e-Asraar*. In its foreword Dara Shukoh writes that, “I had collected a large number of Hindu pundits and sanyasis from Benaras, the center of the Hindu lore and wisdom, with whose help I completed this work within six months in Delhi”, i.e. by the 28th of June, 1675 A.D. He was

of 42 years of age then. His interest in these was not that of a mere scholar but that of a deep religious thinker.

He found the Doctrine of the Unity of God within the *Upanishads*, and he is said to believe that “the reference in *Al Qur’an* to the hidden books - *ummau-Kitab* was to the *Upanishads*, because they contain the essence of unity and they are the secrets which had to be kept hidden, the most ancient books.” The *Al-Qur’an* reads:-

That (this is indeed a a noble Qur’an. In a book kept hidden, which none toucheth save the purified. A revelation from the Lord of the worlds.
(*Sura LVI-77-80 and LXXXV-21-22*)

A century later Anquetil Duperron, a French scholar translated the Persian texts into French, and later into Latin, in the years 1801-1802 A.D.

The Latin version fell into the hands of Scopenhauer Shelling who popularised its study in Germany and said, “It has been the solace of my life and I hope it will be the same after my death.” Thus the entire world was introduced to the teaching and wisdom of the *Upanishads*.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 A.D.), Tenth Guru of the Sikh faith, builder of the Khalsa Singhs (1699 A.D.) is believed to have get transferred *Sirr-e-Akbar* into Punjabi (Gurmukhi) from the original Persian, by his court poets, both Hindus and Muslims, bestowing on them liberal gifts in kind and coin. The total literature so translated and produced by the Guru and his court poets is documented to be about 9 maunds and named *Vidyasagar* - Essence of knowledge. But, unfortunately, all this rare literary wealth was washed away in the torrential waters of the Satluj after the Guru, his family, and the troops, had evacuated Anandpur Sahib - City of Bliss, the seat of the Khalsa, in December 1704 A.D., following a protracted siege by Aurangzeb’s army to route the Sikh Guru for his alleged rebellion.

Guru Gobind Singh has portrayed some significant events of the protracted siege and his forced desertion in his historic *misaal* - *Zafar Naama* - Letter of victory, in Persian script, to Aurangzeb before the latter passed away in February of the year 1707 A.D.

Dar Swaal-o-Jawaab Dara Shukoh wa Baba Lal Dass - a booklet in question and answer format, between Dara Shukoh and Sufi Sant Kabir’s (1398-1518 A.D.) prominent follower Lal Dass expounding the philosophy of Hindu religion and Sufistic lore. This *Rasaala* - booklet is of great interest to both the followers of Hinduism and Islam.

Baba Lal, a *Mundeya* Bairagi was a Hindu Khatri by caste and belonged to the town of Kasur, district Lahore, now in Pakistan, but he spent most of his life in village Dhyampur, near Batala, Punjab. He was a close friend of Hazrat Mian Mir. Dara Shukoh held him in high esteem. He has been mentioned by Dara Shukoh in his *Mahjmaa-ul-Bahreen*, along with other prominent Sufi Mashaiekh. Dara Shukoh happened to meet him in Lahore while returning from an unsuccessful war in Qandhar, sometime in the middle of December 1653 A.D. They had long discussions, or dialogue - (*Do-Log*) spread over seven sittings. Munshi Chander Bhan Brahmin of Patiala, who was Dara Shukoh’s head amanuenses brought to writing these discussions under orders of the Prince. The writings show that truth and devotion towards God do not have an exclusive claim of any one religion. These discussion were first published in Urdu translations by Mujib Hind Press, Darya Ganj, Delhi. Their Urdu translation had lately been published again by a Hindu named Chiranji Lal.
(*Bazm-e-Teimuri* by Sayed Sukaima Naqvi - page 403).

Dara Shukoh also translated into Persian the renowned philosophic treatises of *Yog Vashisht* and *Gita*. This shows that Dara Shukoh had made an expansive study of the Epic poem, *Mahabharata*, claimed to be the fifth Veda by the Hindus, since *Gita* forms the last and eighteenth chapter of the epic.

Dara Shukoh's exclusive and undiluted aim was to educate and equip *Ahl-e-Islam* with the knowledge of religious and social beliefs and customs of Hindus whom the Great Mughals ruled. He hoped this would result in induction of peace and harmony in the Indian subjects.

It is one of the greatest tragedies of the Indian history that Aurangzeb overcame the legitimate heir of the Mughals, Dara Shukoh, and imposed his own blinkered vision of Islam on India, obscuring the finer points of Islam that had so much to offer the country of its adoption in terms of equality and energetic administration. Had Dara come to the throne, even Akbar, India's greatest of rulers, would have been outshone by the great grandson's ability to weld different faiths into a mighty nation. Dara was executed by Aurangzeb for declaring Hinduism and Islam to be twin brothers.

“Some Hindus view Akbar as an *Avatar* and, unquestionably, of all the mortal rulers history recorded, he came nearest to fitting the bill.”
(*The wonder that was India* - Mussa Rizvi)

Dara Shukoh was a born poet, a virtuoso calligrapher and painter, apart from his being a Sufi with the seal of royalty on him. All his poetical compositions were in Persian, drenched in his belief in the doctrine of *Wahdat-ul-Wajud*. He was accepted to be, in Sufi and non-Muslim circles, an incarnation of his great-grandfather Akbar the Great who also was an advocate of *Wahdat-ul-Wajud*.

Wahdat-ul-Wajud postulates that, “The absolute is the One creator of all creatures and is pervading into all.” Sheikh Ibn Arabi is accepted to be the founder of this doctrine though, in itself, it is as old as the *Upanishads*.

Dara Shukoh expresses the fact thus:

*Dar Zaat, dooeyee na deed hoshiar
Mao tu bavad, baraaeye guftaar;
Aadaad meaney yak eeyaan beein
Az yak benigar keh gashat bisseeyaar.*

i.e. The wise see not a second in essence
we and you are mere calling words,
See One contained evident in many -
See One hath formed in shapes many.