

TRACING THE BHĀRTIYATĀ OF DĀRĀ SHOKŪH

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Abstract

This article explores the Bhārtiyatā of Dārā Shokūh, the Mughal prince of Turko-Iranian descent, born and brought up in the Indian cultural milieu. It aims to trace the essence of Bhārtiyatā in the personality as well as the academic and spiritual pursuits of Dārā, concerning his Indian socio-cultural background.

Dārā's bhārtiyatā is traced in his words, works, and dialogues with spiritual personalities, shedding light on the fact that his Indian upbringing played a significant role in shaping his spiritual journey.

Therefore, with the premise that the Indian culture is not a culture carved in stone, but rather is perennially evolving and thus a living tradition, being constantly augmented by the people living it, this paper is an attempt to portray the Indianness of Dārā.

Keywords: Dārāshokūh, Bhārtiyatā, Indianness, Mughal, India, Iran

Introduction

The Mughal kings of Turko-Iranian descent reigned over most parts of Bhārat during three centuries, i.e., from 1526 CE to 1857 CE. Dārā Shokūh's father, Shāh-Jahān (1037-1068 CE), was the fourth king of this dynasty, and Muhammad Dārā Shokūh¹ (1615-1659 CE) was his eldest son, born in 1615 CE (Ḥasanī A, 1967, 145 & Hāshim Khān, M. 1869, 594) in Ajmer, and the crown prince of the empire. He was betrayed and killed by the order of his brother, Aurangzeb, who was, without any doubt, the most despotic ruler of the Mughal dynasty. The prime reason for his beheading was the case made against him, concerning his spiritual or *ādhyātmik* pursuits involving the search for "a point of confluence" between the Indian and Islamic faiths.

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The life and works of Dārā Shokūh have been studied and discussed by many scholars during at least the previous century, in the form of fictional writings, theatre plays, etcetera. The essence of these modern renderings of Dārā's story demonstrates the tussle between orthodoxy and tolerance. They present the two opposing views and perspectives of Islam, seen in Dārā and Aurangzeb, respectively.

For example, the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal on the one hand, defends Aurangzeb, and is among the few deniers of Dārā's syncretic approach to life, in the modern scenario; but numerous others like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad have been inspired by the syncretic approach of Dārā, and regard him as the exceptional seeker of harmony between Hindu and Islamic faiths. We come across Hindu reformers like Kanhaiyalal Alakhdhari using the Persian translations of Hindu texts to educate Hindus about their traditions in the 19th century. Even Hindu nationalist leader Bhaurao Deoras did acknowledge Dārā as a "Hero" in the late 20th century (Gandhi, 2020, 4).

Over the past century, there has been a notable surge in scholarly attention directed towards Dārā, far surpassing the recognition he garnered during his era in the late 17th century. Scholars such as Carl Ernst, K.R. Qanungo, Jean Filliozat, Bikramjeet Hasrat, Louis Massignon, Jalali Naini, and Pandit Sheo Narain, among others, have meticulously examined various dimensions of Dārā's impact on the intellectual and cultural evolution of Indian culture and civilization, giving a glimpse of the possible Hindu-Muslim confluence of thoughts through the personality of Dārā; but unfortunately, the aspect of Dārā's Indianness or *bhārtiyatā* has not been discussed in any of the discussions regarding the Indian born prince of the Mughal empire. Hence, this is the first research of its kind on the said subject.

Bhārtiyatā from a classical perspective

The definitions of the word *Bhārtiya*, provided by Western scholars, need a serious review and amendment; as for them, *Bhārtiyatā* means the inhabitants of the geographical boundaries of the land known as Bhārat or India. Whereas for Indians, since time immemorial, the *Matru-Punya-Dharma-Dev-Karm "Bhumī"* are the synonyms of *Bhārata* or *Bhāratavarsha*, *Jambudvīpa*. The Inhabitants of this vast and diverse cultural land associated the land they live in, not just with geography but with their maternal ancestry, i.e., *Matru*, the good karma or a virtue, i.e., *Punya*, their way of life, i.e., *Dharma*, the land of their deities, i.e., *Dev*, the land of their actions, i.e., *Karma*. Therefore, the

term *Bhārtiya* and the associated *Bhārtiyatā* cannot be just a politically and geographically limited term in the Indian context, whereas it may be true to other nations of the world, which are completely different from the *Bhārtiya* worldview, rooted in millennia of wisdom.

Interestingly, the *Bhārtiyas* of ancient India had a unique cultural way to define the geographical boundaries of their land. According to the ancient texts such as the Mahābhārata and the Yajurveda (XXX.16) and Atharvaveda (X.4:14:8)², the eastern frontiers of *Bhāratvarsha* were inhabited by the *Kiratas*, the western frontiers were defined by the extent of presence of *Yavanas*; whereas the northern boundaries were constituted of the *Turuskas*, and the Southern frontiers were inhabited by the *Andhras*. The cultural demarcation of Indian boundaries had been a fairly logical and wise way to define which people could be called *Bhārtiyas*. The Persians are also known to follow somewhat the same practice of defining their “Cultural” borders. Although the practice was later mangled by the Europeans in their race to demarcate the world on the basis of geographical borders. In their attempts to define Indianness, the ancient Indians preferred to use the metrics of culture and tradition, rather than using the historical or geographical metrics.

Bhārtiyatā: a national identity

National identity is a complex, multifaceted concept that must be seen and can only be understood in terms of various factors, including history, culture, language, shared values, myths, and collective folk memories. In the Indian context, it delves deeper into the philosophical and socio-cultural dimensions, rather than just being a legal and political concept.

The concept of Indian identity or *Bhārtiyatā* is deeply layered and shaped by its long history, rich cultural diversity, and philosophical traditions. The *Bhārtiya* identity is marked by an interplay of unity and diversity, making it unique among other national identities. The “harmony in the opposites” makes *Bhārat* a unique example of unity in plurality in the world. India is the only country in the world, where Sufi-Islamic ideas of oneness of God and even panegyrist *Qasidas* about the revered personalities of Islam are written in unadulterated Hindi or Hindavi, by the people of Non-Indian descent, such as Amir Khusrau Dehlavi; whose couplets -having an Islamic core to them- are sung even today at the Sufi shrines of Ajmer and Nizamuddin in an Indian style of singing called *Qawwali*. The Sufi shrines of Ajmer and Nizamuddin, and many more scattered across *Bhārat*, are visited by followers of every faith in the world.

The foundational characteristic of Bhārat is the acceptance of diversity and plurality, which includes not just tolerance but active engagement with different philosophical and religious ideas. The Indian ethos is encapsulated in ancient Bhārtiya sayings such as *Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti*, i.e., truth is one, but sages call it by many names. This idea displays the core of Indian pluralism, emphasizing that diverse paths can lead to the same ultimate reality. It emphasizes that the reality is multifaceted and thus it cannot be fully comprehended only from a single perspective. The *Jain* philosophy of *Anektavad* (many-sidedness) believes that no single viewpoint has a monopoly over the truth. It must be understood through multiple perspectives.

The Upanishads expanded this idea by exploring different metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical frameworks while respecting the validity of alternative views.

The ancient Indian saying of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, i.e. world is one family, cements the Indian perspective of interconnectedness of the people of the world. It reflects the inclusive worldview of Indian thought, extending respect and compassion beyond geographical and cultural boundaries.

The philosophical pluralism of Bhārat is not just an abstract idea but a lived reality that shapes its identity. By acknowledging multiple paths to truth, respecting diversity, and embracing interconnectedness, the Indian thought offers a working model for harmonious coexistence to the world. The soul of pluralism is at the heart of Bhārtiyatā and continues to inspire individuals and societies worldwide.

Therefore, shared customs, rituals, and practices define a national identity. Speaking a common language is also a marker of national identity; values and ideals of life are also considered fundamental to the national identity, which ultimately comes down to self-perception, i.e., someone deeply relating to the markers mentioned above. Among the notable examples of the above argument, one can point towards the case of Heliodorus, the ambassador of Antialkidas, to a king of Avanti, who became a devotee of Vishnu after coming in contact and deeply related with the Bhārtiya culture.

Dārā the Bhārtiya

Dārā truly believed that it was fundamentally wrong to regard the Hindu, i.e., Indians, the status of “aliens, unknown or others”. The word Hindu used by Dārā does not only have a religious connotation, but it also includes the geographical identity of the people. The word

Hindu, Hidu, Sindhu, Sidu has been used for the inhabitants of the geographical and cultural boundaries of Bhārat. I was a first-hand witness to such usage by Iranians, even in modern times. Hindu for them is equivalent to Indian; interestingly, I was a Hindu for many in Iran.

Dārā's hospitality towards Indian texts was based on his understanding and worldview that: if a stranger is welcomed and understood by the host, both will realise that they are no strangers at all! He realised that there was a long and now lost connection between Islam and Hindu culture, with both having a shared identity.

Dārā eloquently points to the situation in *Majma al Bahrayn*, while quoting a couplet from Sana'i, the famous sufi poet of the 12th century CE (1131 CE):

وحدہ لا شریک لہ گوین (Haq, 1929: 79) کفر و اسلام در رهش پویان

Both non-belief and faith are following his path; crying out loud, that HE has no partner!

Dārā's Indian perspective makes him keep the Indian texts and scriptures in the same category as Psalms of David, the Gospel, and the Quran (Naini, Tarachand, 1978: 357). For Dārā, Upanishads were "hermeneutically continuous" with the Quran. Upanishads, for him, are the keys sent beforehand to the lock of truth sent with the Quran.

Dārā, like many other Sufis before him, believed in acquiring knowledge, which is the most important element of the stages of Sufism. Knowledge which is advocated strongly in Qur'an as well as the tradition of prophet where he famously said: "seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim; and one should seek knowledge, even if it requires going to china" (which was considered to be the end of the known world to common folk of those times). In this regard, striking similarities are seen in the words and actions of Dārā and Khwaja Nasir Uddin Ubaidullah, who is better known as Khawaja Ahrar, who lived from 1404-1490 CE in modern Uzbekistan. Dārā mentions his fine words in his work *Hasanāt-ul Ārifīn* (Fine words of the Gnostics). Khwaja Ahrār famously said "if I know that in Khata (A city in Turkestan), a non-believer immersed in sin, is in some manner, singing the note of Monotheism (*ek-Ishvarvaad*), I shall go to him and become his assistant, shall be grateful to him and shall learn the same from him" (Rahīn, 1973, 49).

Dārā didn't show any prejudice or bias when he was choosing to have a dialogue with people like Baba Lal Das, and for example, even while discussing the aspects of Moksha for the armies of Rām and

Rāvana. This dialogue exemplifies a distinctive interfaith discourse between two truth-seekers, converging from divergent theological perspectives, both possessing an intellectual acumen, enabling them to navigate a precarious ideological terrain. Dārā's inquiries reflect a profound familiarity with Indian traditions and a willingness to perceive underlying unity amidst superficial doctrinal disparities. This is evidenced by the broad spectrum of topics encompassed within his queries, spanning Islamic and Indian traditions interchangeably. His approach was a pure pursuit of knowledge and ultimately the truth. Dārā asks many questions related to the Hindu faith, which were in fact a foundation for his future action of writing *Majma* and translating the Upanishads.

His childhood inclinations towards the Indian culture and tradition, his spiritual journey while composing previous works such as *Safinatul Awliya* and *Sakinatul Awliya* and *Risala-e-Haqnuma*, his dialogue with Baba Lal Das and finally his pursuit of truth while writing *Majma-al-Bahrayn*; his whole journey had such an impact on his consciousness, that sometime before finalizing his greatest work *Sirr-e-Akbar* (translation of Upanishads in Persian) in 1657 CE, he saw sage *Vashishtha* in a dream state (which was not uncommon with Dārā, as he had earlier seen Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah in such a state); sage *Vashishtha* told Shri Rama to embrace Dārā. Dārā writes: "*Bashishtha said: O Ramchandra! This is a disciple who is absolutely sincere, please embrace him.*" & "*With the utmost affection, Ram took me into his arms*"... "*Thereafter, Bashishtha gave Ramchandra sweets to feed me with. I ate the sweets*" (Abedi, Chand, 1968: 10). By experiencing this dream, Dārā experienced the supreme honour, and thus regarded this as a blessing for continuing the work on *Sirr-e-Akbar* and also causing the translation of Jog *Vashishtha*. The *Bhārtiyatā* was so entrenched in Dārā by that time that he experienced interactions with the Hindu Gods in dreams and also acted upon them, taking them as a sign for positive actions on his part.

According to modern standards, Dārā was born Indian, and this fact reflects in the presence of Indian values in him, and the presence of an innate respect towards the Indian culture and tradition, as well as the books of ancient Indian wisdom and Hindu ascetics such as Baba Lal Das.

The *Bhārtiyatā* of Dārā lies in his inherent inclinations towards syncretic ideas, rooted in his character, by a close association with his father and therefore by association with the tradition of his ancestors like Akbar and Jahangir, and their attitude towards the spiritual personalities of their times, irrespective of their faith. As an example, Young Prince Khurram -later known as Shahjahan- used to

accompany his father when he used to go to see a Hindu elder named Jādrūp on foot and without any mount. The same Jādrūp is said to have had one-on-one meetings with Akbar as well. Akbar is said to have had regular dialogues with Hindu scholars and yogis such as Madhu Sarsuti, Madhusudan, Damodar Bhat, Jādrūp, RamBhadr, and Gopinath (Nizami, 1989: 195). Dārā's pursuits were rooted in his genuine thirst for knowledge or truth, as he calls it, which makes them completely different from the interfaith dialogues that Akbar began during his time. The reason for such a difference is rooted in the fundamental objective of his spiritual pursuit, i.e., if an apparent stranger is welcomed and understood by anyone willing to be a tolerant host, he (stranger) would turn out to be no stranger at all! This made Dārā's pursuit unique in the long history of such seekers of truth.

His connection with Sufi saints by virtue of his father led him to have a keen interest in Sufi adhyātm and Quran at an early age (see Haq, 1929, for further reading). This, in the long run, even got him the title of "the Sufi prince".

Significance of Dārā's works

The importance of Dārā's translations of Indian texts lies in the fact that they became the primary source for the introduction of these texts to the world. The translation of Dārā's work in the Latin language by Anquetil Duperron in the 19th century, and from there to many world languages, shows that it was indeed Dārā who "invited" these texts to explore the world and influence the hearts and minds of millions more than just the prince himself.

Undeniably, the richness of the primary text is essential for the strangers to get hooked to it, but the most important factor in such a situation and for such a situation to materialize is the role of the person who makes the first introduction. If the introduction lacks in any manner, the audience might be gone for good; for a brilliant food is deemed unworthy of eating, looking at, or even touching, if it is presented in an unworthy setting, be it time, place, vessel, or anything else. This is where Dārā's value and the worthiness of his works make themselves known to the minds of true scholars.

What is Bhārtiyatā?

Mahatma Gandhi opines that: "Indian culture is... neither Hindu, Islamic nor any other wholly. It is a fusion of all and essentially

Eastern. And everyone who calls himself or herself an Indian is bound to treasure that culture, be its trustee and resist any attack upon it.” (Young India, 13: 18:88) Therefore, the Indian culture includes the traditions of all those who called India their home, which is in harmony with the ancient Bhārtiya concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Indianness or Bhārtiyatā can be located or defined based on values which are inherently Indian; i.e., the values such as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family; or in other words, acceptance of pluralism), the values such as *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* (May all sentient beings be at peace)³, *Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti* (Truth is one but sages give it many names), the Buddhist doctrine of *upaya-kaushla*, insisting that “seekers find the truth to the extent of their intellectual capacities”, etcetera. The heterogenous nature of Indian society and culture, in terms of a wide variety of religions, languages, values, and lifestyles, is proof of its innate syncretic nature. The idea of the welfare of everyone (world) or “*loksangraha*” present in the Bhagvad-Gita, indicates the deep-rootedness of such philosophy in Indian culture. The Bhārtiyatā can be witnessed deeply embedded in the principles of *Sarva Dharma Sadbhāva*, i.e., all faiths (ways of life) are equally worthy of respect, and *Sarva Dharma Samanvaya*, i.e., all faiths (ways of life) are ultimately one.

Correlating the Bhārtiya concepts with the life and works of Dārā Shokūh, we clearly see the reflections and manifestations of fundamentals like: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, *sarve bhavantu sukhinah*, *Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti*, and *upaya-kaushla* surrounding the words and actions of Dārā. He is, in fact, a staunch follower and a bright practical example of the Indian principles of *Sarva Dharma Sadbhāva* and *Sarva Dharma Samanvaya*.

Dārā was indeed a true follower of the *Pavamāna* Mantra of Bhārtiya Culture, stating: *Asato ma Sat gamaya Tamaso ma Jyotir gamaya Mrityor ma Amritam Gamaya*, i.e., Lead me from falsehood to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality. (Olivelle, 1998: 44)

Therefore, when at his hearing Dārā says: what does it matter which door we open to come into the light, (Gandhi, 2020: 1) he is probably carefully choosing the metaphor with the Ancient Indian mantra in mind, which is asking to be lead from darkness to light; the mantra prays for leading oneself from illusion to truth; probably the same “truth” Dārā keeps on mentioning in his works; and lastly from death to immortality; which Dārā surely achieved. It may seem, his prayers did come true! Moreover, the idea of many doors to the light or many paths to the truth is even seen in discourses of Mowlana

Rumi when he points out: “don’t you see, there are many roads to the Kaaba” (Arberry, 1995, 23:175), Dārā’s faith in his own experiences of the truth, was undoubtedly strengthened by his readings into this discourse of Mowlana Rumi.

So what does Bhārtiyatā mean? The cultural inclusiveness of Bhārat is Bhārtiyatā. Swami Vivekananda’s message to work for Jana-Desh-Dharma is Bhārtiyatā. Bhārtiyatā means a follower of every faith of India, is a Bhārtiya first, and his religious identity is the second.

People may have different philosophies of life and faith, but they do recognize and accept all others being true to themselves, while having a common supreme goal and objective. That is included in the idea of Bhārtiyatā. Dharma is at the core of Bhārtiyatā, and what is dharma? It is the righteousness. The righteousness Dārā had in the face of death. The Dharma he understood when the ring on his finger was inscribed with the names of Allah and Prabhu on two sides. He had come to understand the truth of *Pavamāna* Mantra, and the fact that whatever name you call the creator with, he will answer you; the fact which made him start his *Majma-al-Bahrayn* with this couplet of Hakim Sanayi:

به هر نامی که خوانی سر بر آرد به نام آن که او نامی ندارد

In the name of the one who has no (single) name;

Whatever name you call him with, he answers. (Haq, 1929: 79)

Bhārtiyatā means true syncretic culture and tradition of our land, bringing together world scriptures, philosophies, and ideologies with the true belief that there are multiple ways to the same creator or divine God. Mowlana Rumi’s famous story in *Mathnavi Ma’navi*, regarding Moses and the shepherd, is one of the great examples of such syncretic traditions, which had its impact on a scholar like Dārā, who was an ardent follower of Rumi’s Sufi philosophy, the examples of which are scattered in all the works of Dārā.

Mowlana Rumi says:

یدمآ ندر کل صفی اربیی یدمآ ندر کل صو اربوتی

You have come (into the world) to bring (people) towards God, and not to separate them (from each other). (Zamāni, 2019, 2: 443)

Interestingly, while paraphrasing God, Mowlana states that every culture has its own way of addressing the divine, when God was reprimanding Moses for stopping a heartfelt conversation of the shepherd with him:

هندوان را اصطلاح هند مدح سندیان را اصطلاح سند مدح

i.e., Hindus (the people of Hind) use 'their' idiom for praising the almighty, and the people of Sind use idioms of Sind for praise (Zamāni, 2019, 2: 445)

ار لادو میرگند ار ناوړام ار لادو میرگند ار نابزام

We do not watch (pay heed to) the language or the speech; We look at the spirit and the condition (they are in) (Zamāni, 2019, 2: 445)

Bhārtiyatā means non-violence and inclusiveness, as pointed out earlier, and this trait is seen in Dārā, when he commands the forces in Battle, but (as seen by his failures in battles) is innately incapable of violence; therefore, he is defeated now and then. It was because of his innate non-violent Sufi soul that he was not able to perform violence. Dārā's distance from soul-wrenching administrative and military tasks for a better part of his life was one of the significant reasons that led to his military failures, but on the other hand, provided him the time he needed to spend on his spiritual pursuits.

The idea of inclusiveness is as apparent as the Sun in the works of Dārā; pick up his *Majma al Bahrayn* (Confluence of Oceans), *Sir-re-Akbar* (the great secret), i.e., his translation of Upanishads, pick any of his works, and look at his actions. He was a wanderer searching for the truth, taking everybody along the way. The universal syncretic approach towards the world was fed to him through the air he breathed in the land of wisdom and the people he sat with, irrespective of their faiths. The effect of mingling with the mystical personalities is put in words brilliantly by the Persian poet Sa'di, who describes the reason for the fragrant nature of a clump of mud, being rooted in its mingling with the flowers for some time. (Furūghi, 2006: 6)

وگر نه من همان خاکم که هستم⁴ کمال همنشین در من اثر کرد

Yes, there are others who are opposite to Dārā in this regard, having the same circumstances as his; but then again, even in the Indian scenario, we have Rāvana and Vibhīshana as two branches belonging to the same tree, growing in different directions.

I am fairly certain that the Dārā we know would have been a completely different person if he had been born in his maternal homeland of Persia. It was Bhārat and the Bhārtiyatā which made Dārā, the Dārā Shokūh of Hindustan/Bhārat. The inclusiveness & Bhārtiyatā was in his food, in the air he breathed, and the people around him, including the ones he interacted with. He made sure to be around people who were carrying the beacon of Bhārtiyatā in their self; the notion suggested here is already proven by Dārā,

through his words and works; for example when Dārā chose the name of his book to be “confluence of oceans”; which Indian philosophy do you think, corroborates most with the title he chose? Here also we see the glimpse of the ancient Indian knowledge shimmering quietly in Dārā’s work; the shloka (सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु नरिमयाः। सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु) *Sarve bhavantu sukhinah... sarve bhadraṇi pashyantu...* is clearly evident here. We see the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* in the actions and writings of Dārā, who considers everyone to be part of one truth/or one family. There is no You and Me according to him, there is only one Divine, one truth with many names, and everyone is seeking him, and in that, at least we are one!

Dārā and his inclusive and syncretic approach and worldview are seen in the reply he gave to the prosecutor who asked him whether he thinks the Hindu faith is as valid as the Muslim faith. Dārā destroyed the argument with a simple, concise reply: “Who cares which door you open to come into the light? The ring on his hand, with Allah and Prabhu engraved on each side, is the practical application of this philosophy, which he certainly lived by and died for.

Dārā and Aurangzeb are two sides of the same coin. The points of convergence and divergence among them made them distinct from each other. While one is famous in the world for his actions in bringing humanity together, the other is infamous for his tyranny, death, and destruction. At this instance, the words of the famous Persian poet, Urfi Shirazi, come to mind:

دناز و سب و دندھ و دیوشد مز مز بہت ناملسم ندرمس پزکن کر سب، فرعد و کینا بنانچ

Engage with good and bad in such a manner, O urfi, that after your death,

The Muslim washes your body with Zamzam, and the Hindu burns it.
(Ansāri 1998:1:116)

Dārā was indeed loved by the people of India, irrespective of their faiths and beliefs; and Bernier’s eyewitness account of Dārā’s execution corroborates the view: He says, “I observed the people were weeping and lamenting the fate of Dārā in the most touching language... From every quarter, I heard piercing and distressing shrieks; for the Indian people have a very tender heart. Men, women, and children wailing as if some mighty calamity had happened to themselves.” (Bernier, (tr) Constable, 1916: 99-100)

It was indeed Dārā’s actions that created a place for him in the hearts of common folk and ultimately gained him the title of “Sufi Prince”, unseen of any other Mughal emperor or prince.

Dārā's Bhārtiya actions

Keeping in mind the fact that Dārā Shokūh was born and brought up in the Indian cultural milieu, and with regard to his works, one can clearly see the threads of his Bhartiyata in his words.

When Dārā discusses controlling the breath/Nafas in Risala, his thought corresponds directly to the Prashna Upanishad (2.13)⁵, which says “In the power of life, breath is this whole world, as also what exists in the third heave. Protect us, as a mother, her sons, grant us prosperity and wisdom.” (Olivelle, 1998:463) (*prāṇasyedaṃ vaśe sarvaṃ tridive yatpratiṣṭhitam | māteva putrānrakṣasva śrīṣca prajñāṃ ca vidhehi na iti*). Prana has multiple levels of meaning, including breath as well as the energy of consciousness. Prana in Vedic philosophy is the source of energy for all other human faculties; their existence and survival depend upon Prana, or breath, or nafas. This is what Dārā aims at when he mentions having achieved the feat of breathing only twice during the whole night, i.e., he can control all his other faculties because he has control over his prana. Perhaps he had mastered Yoga by that time.

Dārā and his individual search for truth guided him to the fact that “*Satyā*” or truth or *Haqiqat* cannot be owned by any particular ideology or faith and the fact that it can be searched, pursued and even found, through all the paths (faiths) of the world, depending upon the pursuer and seeker's ‘will’ to find the truth.

His realization of truth is undoubtedly based on his geographical placement in the Indian society and Culture, which enabled and encouraged him to think like he did.

The Bhārtiyatā of Dārā is manifest in various facets of his life, including him being the princely hero of Jagannath Pandit's epic Jagadabharanam, i.e., the ornament of the world; it can be seen in him being a sincere student of Upanishads, being the munificent patron of Kavindracharya, and host for other Sanskrit scholars (Qanungo, 1968:212). He was regarded as a generous donor of Hindu temples and the ‘only’ refuge of the Hindu supplicants in Shah Jahan's court.

At the age of 18 years in 1633 CE, Dārā journeyed with his father to see Miyan Mir (Naini, Tarachand, 1978:356); interestingly, his actions with Miyan Mir are rooted in Indian culture. He goes barefoot inside the residential quarters of the revered Ārif. Dārā narrates his paying homage to the Ārif by “placing his hands at his feet, which opened the portals of divine mysteries on him.

Dārā's inclinations towards Indian culture have a direct connection

to his father, with whom he grew up in the court; Shah Jahan had a strong belief and regard towards Indian astrology, and this played a significant role in Dara's life from every now and then. For example, PādshāhNāmeḥ informs us that the emperor got the time of "Lagana" of Dārā's marriage, calculated and fixed by the astrologers of Greece and Hindustan (Qanungo, 1968:180).

Qanungo establishes that Shah Jahan was a master of Hindi vernacular and appreciator of Hindi Poetry, which is proved by the titles of 'Kavi-Rai' and 'Maha Kavi Rai' being prevalent in his court. (Qanungo, 1968:183) Hence, by association and lifelong accompaniment of his father, Dārā was undoubtedly fluent in the common Hindi/Hindavi/Hindustani dialect of India. The fact is somehow strengthened by Dārā's dialogue with Baba Lal Das. AlamgirNameh informs us that Dārā was in constant companionship of Brahmans, Jogi's and Sanyasis, which points to his Indian inclinations, regardless of his Turko-Iranian lineage.

As Dārā's scholarly inquiries deepened and broadened, so too did his appreciation for the inherent truths found within other religious traditions, leading him to articulate his admiration more openly. The significance of his intellectual contributions is accentuated by the recognition that, despite receiving a conventional education typical of Mughal princes preceding and succeeding him, Dārā exhibited the audacity to transcend societal prejudices and scrutinize matters from an unbiased perspective. Dārā himself asserts in Sirr-e-Akbar that, at the age of 25, in the year 1050 A.H. (corresponding to 1640 CE), he initiated intimate engagements with religious scholars from various faiths and delved into sacred texts such as the Psalms, the Gospels, (Naini, Tarachand, 1978: 358)) and the Pentateuch—an initial foray marking the commencement of his explorations into diverse religious doctrines. However, it is notable that prior to the authorship of Hasanāt and Majma, Dārā refrained from expressing substantive opinions regarding faiths other than Islam, including Hinduism.

Dārā's decision to incorporate Baba Lal Das within the esteemed ranks of the Urafa of Sufism in his work Hasanāt al Arifin (Aphorisms of the Gnostics) marks a ground-breaking departure from established conventions within Sufi discourse that had been perpetuated over centuries. By designating both Baba Lal Das and Kabir as "Min Akmal-i-Urafa" (among the perfect Gnostics) (Rahīn, 1973, 53-54), Dārā exhibited a remarkable fearlessness, deeply rooted in his Bhartiyata (Indianness), thereby challenging entrenched perceptions of the characteristics defining Ārifis (Gnostics). This bold assertion by Dārā, particularly regarding Baba Lal Das, poses

a significant challenge to the conventional understanding of the prerequisites for attaining Irfan (gnosis), traditionally believed to be contingent upon adherence to the foundational principles of Islam. According to prevailing perspectives, only a Muslim "Wali" (saint) was considered capable of attaining the esteemed state of Ma'rifat (knowledge). However, within Dārā's worldview, adherence to the teachings of the Prophet of Islam is viewed as the defining criterion for one's alignment with the path of the Prophet, thus extending the possibility of attaining spiritual enlightenment to individuals of all backgrounds without exception.

Although the name of Baba Lal 'Mundiyah' predominates as the primary representative of the Hindu faith within *Hasanat-al-Arifin*, two additional figures, namely Kabir and Baba Piyari, are also mentioned in the text, thus totalling three Indian names. Notably, both Baba Lal and Kabir are accorded the prestigious title of "Akmal-i-Urafa" (the perfect Gnostics) within the book's discourse.

The boldness in Dārā's decision to incorporate Indian Gnostics within the framework of *Hasanāt*, reflects not merely his princely status as a crown prince, but rather the evolution of his intellectual stance, which had brought him to the juncture, where -in a list overpopulated by Muslim Gnostics- mentioning Kabir and Baba Lal Das, as Gnostics from the Indian system of faith was not something erroneous on his behalf. Although symbolic of inclusivity, to the greatest extent for those times, it was a profoundly controversial gesture; one that Dārā approached with a demeanor marked by ease and calmness.

The thematic essence of *Hasanāt-al-Ārifin* as a collection of "paradoxical aphorisms" also provides a concealed rationale for the integration of Baba Lal and other Indian spiritual luminaries into its narrative fabric. In essence, the book's paradoxical nature, characterized by its propensity to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, serves as a fitting milieu for the acknowledgment of non-Muslim individuals as "perfect Gnostics." Given that *Shat'hiyat* comprises a compendium of Sufi aphorisms and the ecstatic utterances of Gnostics, its content inherently veers toward expressions that seemingly defy "orthodox" Islamic doctrines.

Indian culture, since time immemorial, has been an outlier among the different cultures of the world. Its inclusive characteristics have been starkly opposite to other cultures of the world, which try to make themselves exclusive. Heliodorus, the ambassador of Antialkidas, to a king of Avanti; or Menander the Greek monarch, the Milinda of Buddhist texts, who was a sympathizer of Buddhism (Renou, 1959, Further reading) were not common folk, and most certainly

the learned/influential people of repute, who were required to be torchbearers of their culture, in foreign lands such as India; but they were smitten by the soft power of Bhārtiyatā. The question arises: if such people can shed their older beliefs and knowledge when they come in contact with Bhāratīyāta, why should one doubt even for a moment that Dārā, who was born and brought up in Bhārat, identified primarily as a Bhārtīya? He was brought up among the spiritual and mystical personalities of Indian culture, and thus, had already amalgamated and become one with the Indo-Iranian culture and thought.

In conclusion, one thing I can state with absolute certainty about Dārā Shokuh is that, even after being a royal crown prince of the ruling power over most parts of the Indian lands at that time, Dārā is one of the perfect examples of “Acculturated Individual” in the Indian social canvas. By acculturation, which took place well over the course of decades- I mean, he retained his own identity, yet fit comfortably and proudly into the Indian society and culture. Dārā was a virtuous Indian Muslim, a noble scholar of syncretic philosophy, and a proud follower of Indian culture.

Notes

1. I would like to address one of the important issues of how the name of this Mughal prince of Turko-Iranian descent, has been misspelled by almost all the modern scholars of Indo-Persian studies in India and abroad. Dārā's surname is correctly pronounced as Shokūh or Shukoh (Indian pronunciation perhaps) and not *Shikoh*; where Shokūh means **Majestic** and thus his name meaning: **Majestic and Darius** (the great Achaemenid king of Persia); whereas the word *Shikoh* having no meaning in either of the Persian or Hindustani languages, clearly is a wrong pronunciation made commonly used by the repeated incorrect use by many scholars, who disregarded the meaninglessness of the word *Shikoh*.
2. प्रतीच्याम् । दिशि । भसदम् । अस्य । धेहि । उत्तरस्याम् । दिशि । उत्तरम् । धेहि । पार्श्वम् । ऊर्ध्वायाम् । दिशि । अजस्य । अनूकम् । धेहि । दिशि । ध्रुवायाम् । धेहि । पाजस्यम् । अन्तरिक्षे । मध्यतः । मध्यम् । अस्य ॥१४.८॥
3. ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः । सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ॥ ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥ (May all sentient beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness, may all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer. Om peace, peace peace.)
4. کلیات سعدی شیرازی
5. प्राणस्येदं वशे सर्वं त्रिदिवे यत्प्रतिष्ठितम् । मातेव पुत्रात्रकशस्व श्रीश्च प्रज्ञां च विधेहि न इति ॥

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