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The Light of God in the Fire-Temple: Dārā Shikōh's Engagement with Vedānta

The Indian Mughal Prince Dārā Shikōh (d. 1659) and his engagement with Indic thought in the form of the Vedic teaching of the Upanishads, 50 of which he had translated into Classical Persian under the title *Sirr-e Akbar*, and his attempt to identify the teaching of the Vedānta with the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine of Ibn al-'Arabī in his celebrated Persian treatise *Majma' al-baḥrayn* represent a forgotten chapter in the history of Muslims' interaction with a spiritual tradition which is so markedly different from it. Dārā Shikōh, an initiate of the Qādiri ṣūfī *ṭarīqa* identified the ancient Sanskrit text of the Veda as a *kitāb*, a revealed scripture and argued in *Majma' al-baḥrayn* as well as in his introduction to the *Sirr-e Akbar* that the pith and marrow of *tawḥīd* is expounded in the portion of the Veda known as the Upanishads. This unique engagement with a non-Middle Eastern spiritual tradition represents an extraordinary episode in the history of Islam and it is most unfortunate that aside from the work of M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq in 1929 and that of Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nā'īnī in 1978 not a single work has been devoted to Dārā Shikōh's thought. This paper seeks to address this lacuna by presenting a comprehensive analysis based on the above two works of how he interpreted the Vedic doctrine in the light of Ibn al-'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd*. I think that his is a fascinating story, and it continues to be relevant in the subcontinent today especially amidst the polarization in Indian society instigated and continually perpetuated by the ascendancy of the RSS (an ultranationalist and paramilitary organization one of whose members actually assassinated Gandhi) and its political wing the BJP (the party of the current prime minister Narendra Modi).



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