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DĀRĀ ŠOKŌH
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DĀRĀ ŠOKŌH

DĀRĀŠOKŌH (b. near Ajmer, 19 Ṣafar 1024/20 March 1615, d. Delhi, 22 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1069/12 August 1659), first son of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahān (r. 1037-67/1627-57) and his wife Momtāz Maḥall, religious thinker, mystic, poet, and author of a number of works in Persian. Little is known about his education; one of his teachers was ʿAbd-al-Laṭīf Solṭānpūrī (Raḥmān-ʿAlī, p. 81). Although trained as heir apparent, Dārā Šokōh never showed a serious interest in politics or in military prowess; his father repeatedly promoted him, however, until he finally reached the unprecedented rank of commander of 60,000 *ḏāt*/40,000 *sovār* in 1067/1656. His only major military adventure, the attempt to reconquer the strategic fortress of Qandahār from the Persians in 1062/1652, ended in failure. Instead, Dārā Šokōh's interests were geared to philosophy and mysticism, and it is said that he accepted an appointment as governor of Allāhābād in 1055/1645 only because it was the seat of Moḥebb-Allāh Allāhābādī (d. 1058/1648), the most famous interpreter of the philosophy of Ebn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) in that period. Nevertheless, although Dārā Šokōh exchanged numerous letters with Moḥebb-Allāh, he never actually settled in his Allāhābād residence.

Both Jahāngīr (1013-37/1605-27) and Shah Jahān had shown reverence for Sufis and saintly Hindus. Thus when Dārā Šokōh fell seriously ill as a teenager his father took him to Lahore to Mīān Mīr (d. 1045/1635), a shaikh of the Qāderīya order, which was becoming prominent in Sind and the southern Punjab in the late 16th century. The boy was cured and at the same time developed a deep veneration for Mīān Mīr. In his second book, *Sakīnat al-*

awlīāʾ (comp. 1052/1642), Dārā Šokōh expressed his devotion to Mīān Mīr, to his saintly sister Bībī Jamāl Ḵātūn, and to Mollā Šāh Badaḵšī (d. 1072/1661), who had continued the spiritual chain after Mīān Mīr's death and under whom Dārā Šokōh and his sister Jahānārā had joined the order in 1030/1640. This book is a useful introduction to mystical life and lore in Lahore and Kashmir, based mainly on firsthand information. Before writing it, Dārā Šokōh had completed, on Ramażān 27 1049/21 January 1640, *Safīnat al-awlīāʾ*, a set of biographies of saintly people, modeled on ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt-al-ons*. The date was important to Dārā Šokōh, for he had had his first mystical experience of light in the *laylat-al-qadr*, 27 Ramażān 1040/29 April 1630, owing to Mīān Mīr's presence and spiritual power (*Sakīnat al-awlīāʾ*, p. 54). *Safīnat al-awlīāʾ* contains biographies not only of major saints of the different orders, including some women saints, but also of the first four caliphs, the twelve Shiʿite imams, and the founders of the four schools of Islamic law, thus demonstrating the prince's catholic Islamic stance. He always remained bound to the fundamentals of Islam and repeatedly called himself a Hanafite Qāderī; his mystical writings contain nothing that could not be found in the works of other Sufis. An interesting aspect of *Safīnat al-awlīāʾ* is that Dārā Šokōh incorrectly placed Jālāl-al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) and his family in the Kobrawī line, or *selsela*. He became familiar with certain Sufi practices, like *ḥabs-e dam*, the retaining of one's breath during the *ḏekr*, a practice that he described in detail (*Resāla-ye ḥaqqnomā*, p. 13). He did not, however, believe in exaggerated austerities, which in any case would have been difficult for him as heir apparent to a vast country.

After finishing his first two books Dārā Šokōh may have written *Ṭarīqat al-ḥaqīqa*, which has been attributed to him, though its style is more elaborate than that of his other works; it is in a combination of poetry and prose, and the majority of the poetic quotations are taken from Rūmī. The authenticity of this work is doubtful, however. His next work, *Resāla-ye ḥaqqnomā* (comp. 1056/1646) is one of his most impressive studies of Sufism, in the vein of Ebn al-ʿArabī, by whose philosophy he was deeply influenced; most of the Sufis with whom he corresponded, like Moḥebb-Allāh and Shah Delrobā, were proponents of the theories of *waḥdat al-wojūd* ("unity of being," as developed by Ebn al-ʿArabī, often incorrectly translated "pantheism"). In this small book he tried to explain the four planes of being, rising from *nāsūt* (the world of humanity) to the heights of *lāhūt* (the world of divinity). He considered this booklet to be a compendium of Ebn al-ʿArabī's *Fotūḥāt al-makkīya* and *Foṣūṣ al-ḥekam*, as well as of the *Lamaʿāt* of Faḵr-al-Dīn ʿErāqī (d. 688/1289) and the

Lawāʾeḥ of Jāmī (d. 898/1492). In his closing verse, which includes the date of completion, he claimed the book to have been divinely inspired. In the *Resāla* Dārā Šokōh called self-knowledge *eksīr-e aʿẓam* (the mightiest elixir), and this phrase was used as the title of his small *dīvān*, in which, under the pen name Qāderī, he expressed his thoughts in traditional images. It is certainly not a great work of poetical art and lacks luster, but some of the verses are interesting because of their bold assertion that "paradise is where there is no *mollā*."

Six years later, in 1062/1652, Dārā Šokōh compiled *Ḥasanāt al-ʿārefīn*, a collection of the *šaṭaḥāt* (theopathic locutions or paradoxes) of 107 saints. Many of the quatrains contained in this book are versified sayings of earlier Sufis. The book is usually regarded as his last contribution to the literature on pure Sufism.

Dārā Šokōh's interest in the esoteric aspects of Islam and his pursuit of genuine *tawḥīd* led him to study other religious traditions as well. An important step on his way to understanding the major religion of his future realm, Hinduism, was a series of conversations with the Hindu sage Baba Lal Das, a member of the reformist Kabirpanthi sect whom he met in the city of Lahore in late 1064/1653 after his return from the disastrous siege of Qandahār. Dārā Šokōh's secretary Chandar Bhan Brahman, a noted poet and master of Persian style, recorded in Persian the text of the discussions, which were conducted in Hindi. These "entretiens de Lahore," as Clément Huart and Louis Massignon have called them, reveal the prince's sound knowledge of Indian mythology and philosophy, which is not amazing at all, as his great-grandfather Akbar (q.v.) had ordered Persian translations of numerous important Sanskrit works. The discussions ranged from purely philosophical concepts to problems of interpretation of the Ramayana.

A book that displays even more clearly Dārā Šokōh's interest in the terms common to Hindu thought and Islamic Sufism is *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn* (comp. 1065/1655). Its very title, taken from Qurʾān 18:60, underscores his intention to prove that on the level of monistic thought the "two oceans" of Islam and Hinduism become indistinguishable; the book in fact contains a number of Hindu technical terms, which he attempted to explain in Persian.

After finishing this work the prince, by then slightly more than forty years old, embarked upon his major undertaking, a translation of fifty-two Upanishads, for which he had invited the consultation of a good number of Brahmans and

pandits. The work, entitled *Serr-e akbar*, was completed in the first half of 1067/1657. Dārā Šokōh was strongly convinced, as he wrote in his introduction, that religious truth is not solely contained in the books explicitly mentioned in the Qurʾān: the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels. In the Qurʾān itself (56:78) a "hidden book," not yet discovered, is mentioned. He argued that this hidden book was the oldest revelation, as contained in the Vedas and in particular the Vedanta. The Upanishads, in his view, embody the same concept of the transcendental unity of the absolute as does the Qurʾān; hence he deemed it necessary to make this wisdom available to his fellow Muslims. To what extent Dārā Šokōh himself was responsible for the translation from Sanskrit is a matter of dispute. Erhard Göbel-Gross has tried to show that his knowledge of Sanskrit was restricted to a certain vocabulary and that he could not read complex texts; the actual work would thus have had to be done by pandits, whose explanations he wrote down in Persian. He could not possibly have foreseen that the Latin translation of this rendering of the Upanishads by A. H. Anquetil Duperron, which appeared in Europe in 1801 under the title *Oupnekʾhat, Id Est Secretum Tegendum*, was to stir immense interest in Indian mystical philosophy among European thinkers and to create an image of India as the home of all mystical wisdom.

Dārā Šokōh was deeply convinced of the reality of mystical experience and apparently believed firmly in miracles, some of which he described in his books. He took Muslim mystics and miracle workers, as well as yogis and sannyasis, with him on his ill-fated expedition to Qandahār. It was quite natural that the more orthodox circles around him should have disapproved of his predilection for mystical thought and practice, as well as of his disinterest in practical political activity. His brother Awrangzēb (q.v., Supp.), frustrated by Shah Jahān's persistent preference for Dārā Šokōh, despite his own greater political and military skills, incited the prince's younger brothers against him. Together they took advantage of Shah Jahān's illness in 1068-69/1657-58 to declare Dārā Šokōh a heretic (*molḥed*), whose possible ascent to the throne would be disastrous for Islam. They began to fight against Dārā Šokōh, who had to flee the capital and was defeated several times. He sought refuge in the southwestern part of the empire but found no support in either Rajastan or the borderlands of Sind. The death of his dearly beloved wife Nādera Begom, mother of his seven children, deprived him of his greatest spiritual support. He sent off some of his few remaining soldiers with her bier so that she might be buried close to Mīān Mīr in Lahore, where a graceful mausoleum had been built for her. The prince himself was shortly afterward

treacherously handed over to Awrangzēb's men by his host, Malek Jevān. After a trial for heresy he was executed on 22 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1069/12 August 1659 and buried in the mausoleum of his ancestor Homāyūn in Delhi.

Dārā Šokōh was a great lover of art and a fine calligrapher. His refined taste is shown by an album (*moraqqaʿ*) that he had prepared for Nādera Begum in 1051/1641, preserved in the India Office Library, London (ms. no. Add. Or. 3129); it contains seventy-eight folios, on which paintings and pieces of calligraphy alternate, as was traditional in Mughal albums. His master in calligraphy was Rašīdā, a nephew of the famous Persian calligrapher Mīr ʿEmād Ḥasanī who, after his uncle's assassination in 1024/1615, found a refuge at the Mughal court. Dārā Šokōh not only mastered *nastaʿlīq* but was also skilled in *nasḵ* and *rayḥānī* (see Calligraphy). Among surviving manuscripts written by him is a copy of a *maṯnawī* by Jālāl-al-Dīn Rūmī's son Solṭān Walad (d. 712/1312); he sent a Quran in his hand to the shrine of his patron saint, ʿAbd-al-Qāder Jīlānī (d. 562/1166), in Baghdad. In many calligraphic pieces written by him or for him his name was later erased, lest people remember him for his love of art and his skill.

It is difficult to provide a balanced assessment of Dārā Šokōh, the "unfortunate aesthete" with his "uninhibited imagination" (Huart and Massignon, p. 287). European visitors to India in the 17th century, like François Bernier, accused him of having "too exalted an opinion of himself" (p. 6) and of never showing his true religious loyalty, "behaving as a Christian with Christians, as a gentile with gentiles." Niccolò Manucci thought that he had no religion at all (p. 223). Some of the misunderstandings and misgivings about Dārā Šokōh may have originated in his life style and can be explained by the presence of the strange people with whom he surrounded himself, in particular the Persian Jewish merchant Sarmad, who, after studying Christianity, converted to Islam and then, under the shock of his infatuation with a Hindu boy, began to walk around stark naked, reciting daring Persian quatrains. The Muslim nobility understandably did not find the prince's association with such people fitting for a future ruler. Sarmad was executed two years after his master. One may also think of the Hindu secretary Chandar Bhan Brahman and of Moḥsen Fānī (d. 1081/1670), a mediocre Kashmiri poet and disciple of Moḥebb-Allāh Allāhābādī (Schimmel, 1980, pp. 100-01).

Shah Jahān's two sons Dārā Šokōh and Awrangzēb manifested in themselves the two possibilities of Indian Islam: Awrangzēb certainly gained the love of those Muslims more oriented to the Šarīʿa, with their attention centered on

Mecca and a distinct Muslim identity; he was equally disliked by mystically minded Muslims and most Hindus. Dārā Šokōh, on the contrary, has been considered truly Indian in spirit. In our century the poet-philosopher Moḥammad Eqbāl (see Iqbāl) spoke of Dārā Šokōh's perpetuation of "the seed of heresy that his ancestor Akbar had sown, while Awrangzēb was sitting in this idol temple like an Abraham [ready to destroy the idols]" (p. 113). The fact that during the days of the emperor Jahāngīr the Naqšbandī reformer Aḥmad Serhendī (d. 1034/1624) had heavily attacked Akbar's attempts to bridge the gap between the two major religious systems of his country and had alerted the Mughal nobility to the necessity of avoiding any rapprochement between Islam and Hinduism may have contributed to the aversion of a good number of Sunni officeholders to the heir apparent; nevertheless, an important faction of the Shiʿite population, among them the influential Bārhā *sayyed*s, sided with him against Awrangzēb (Schimmel, 1980, pp. 92-93, 103). It must not be forgotten, however, that Dārā Šokōh's interest was not so much in the reconciliation of Islam and Hinduism on the political and practical level, on which Akbar had focused; rather, it was focused on the experiential realization that esoteric understanding of both religions provides proof of a single divine principle behind the variety of outward manifestations, just "as the ocean is one and the waves and foam flecks cannot be distinguished from it once they disappear" (*Resāla*, p. 17).

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