

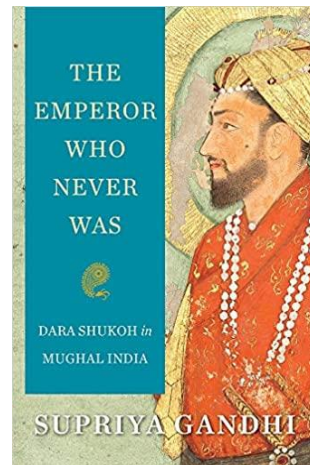
author's concluding reflections on the "internal other" such that the rich and continuing intellectual vitality and production of *madrasahs* and their scholars need to be engaged and encouraged by scholars and more broadly in the interest of a richer and more nuanced appreciation for Islamic thought. This work also exemplifies trends in the contemporary study of Islam through the author's approach that highlights the relevance of regional and historically specific and complex materials to broader questions of philosophy and theory that are debated across the humanities and social sciences within the global academy.

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Supriya Gandhi. *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 349. ISBN 9780674987296. Hardcover. Price: \$29.22.

Recently, there is much debate among the scholars of medieval Indian history about prince Dārā Shukōh (d. 1659), the heir apparent of Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-1658), who lost the battle of succession and his life to his brother Aurangzēb (r. 1658-1707). While Muslim orthodox historians of the day tried to portray Dārā as a heretic, historians from Hindutva-leaning ideology tried to picture him as a secular-minded prince who lost his chance to become the emperor due to the conspiracy of orthodox elements of the Mughal court. Supriya Gandhi's *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* highlights both sides of Dārā's life. The author keeps a balance between Dārā's administrative and military duties in his father Shāh Jahān's court, and the prince's urge for understanding various Indic and Abrahamic ideas. In her own words,



I had no wish to promote an outdated and flawed idea of history that privileges "great men." Neither did I seek to step inside Dara Shukoh's mind and try to ascertain his inner motivations. But I did want to explore his context in the court, along with the Mughal state's workings, and the ideas

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surrounding him. I also wanted to investigate the other people— women and men, famous and forgotten—whose paths crossed his, and the material conditions that allowed him to rule and write his books.” (p. 5)

The book is not a biographical work on Prince Dārā Shukōh, as “history is often too messy to enclose in the storyline of a single person” (p. 5). Chapter one, titled “Empire” mostly dealt with the reign of Jahāngīr (r. 1605-1627) with special emphasis on prince Khurram, the future emperor Shāh Jahān, the birth of Dārā Shukōh and empress Nūr Jahān (d. 1645) and her influence over the imperial court and the emperor. Chapter two, titled “Dynasty” describes the rise and fall of Khurram’s career engineered by Nūr Jahān. Khurram’s rebellion and its failure and Mahābat Khān’s (d. 1634) *coup d’état* were also described lucidly in this chapter. But Jahāngīr’s days were limited by that time and after his death, Khurram become the new emperor. This chapter apart from describing Khurram’s ascension to the throne also discusses the childhood of his children, especially prince Dārā Shukōh and Aurangzēb, who were being kept hostages in Lahore by Jahāngīr. It is the watchful eyes of Āṣaf Khān (d. 1641), the imperial vizier who was also their maternal grandfather that kept them safe from the prying eyes of Nūr Jahān and prince Shahryār (d. 1628). Finally, in this chapter, the author refers to the massacre carried out by Shāh Jahān on his way to the throne.

From the third chapter, titled “Youth,” the author started to put Dārā in the centre of all narratives. This chapter tells us about the death of empress Mumtāz Maḥall (d. 1631) while giving birth to Gōhar Ārā (d. 1706). With her, Shāh Jahān lost his friend, guide, and longtime confidant. In the meantime, Dārā started “cultivating his aesthetic sensibilities” (p. 74). Dārā’s marriage with Nādirah Bēgam (d. 1659) and subsequent celebration also was mentioned in this chapter. From now on princess Jahān Ārā Bēgam (d. 1681) became the dominant personality in the *haram*. The rest of the chapter deals with Dārā’s grief over the loss of his newborn and his encounter with his first Sufi master, Miyān Mīr (d. 1635) of the Qādirī Sufi order. The author has portrayed Dārā’s encounter with Miyān Mīr in a very realistic way. In this chapter, the author also describes a decree prepared by the foremost jurist of the empire to execute Mullā Shāh (d. 1661), who will later become the spiritual teacher of the prince. The prince stepped into the matter and was able to persuade “the emperor that, because Mulla Shah was a disciple of Miyan Mir, it would be inappropriate to act hastily. Shah Jahan praised Dara’s insight and promised to put a hold on the decree” (p. 90).

The fourth chapter “Discipleship” opened with the imperial court’s visit to the valley of Kashmir, which the Mughals used to refer to as

“paradisical Kashmir” (*Kashmīr-i jannat nazīr*) or “matchless Kashmir” (*Kashmīr-i bēnazīr*) (p. 93). In Kashmir, Dārā Shukōh along with Shāh Jahān met Mullā Shāh. Citing Tawakkul Bēg, the author tells us that here the prince made up his mind that he is to be a disciple of Mullā Shāh. On their return journey to Lahore, Dārā again met with Miyān Mīr and completed his book *Sakīnat al-Auliāʾ*, which “is more than a mere collection of admiring anecdotes compiled by a faithful disciple about his teachers” (p. 119). This chapter also highlights princess Jahān Ārā’s interest in mystic thoughts.

The chapters titled “The Chosen” and “Mission” mostly deal with Dārā’s spiritual journey and military endeavours to recapture Qandahar. However, the author also gave us some information about Aurangzēb’s Central Asian campaign and his dissatisfaction with the court. From these chapters, the author gradually started describing Dārā’s scholarly activities. In this stage, Dārā completed another of his famous work *Risālah-i Haqqnumā*, in which he tried to simplify earlier Sufi literature. Gandhi writes,

Dara Shukoh is critical of the famous Sufi writings and manuals that had become standard fare for those wishing to advance their spiritual journey. These books are very difficult for people to understand, declares the prince; he lists such foundational works as Ibn Arabi’s *Futuhāt* and *Fusus*, the *Sawanih-ul-ushshaq* (Intuitions of Lovers) of Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126), the *Lamaat* (Celestial Flashes) of Fakhr-ud-Din Iraqī (d. 1289), as well as the *Lawaiḥ* (Rays of Light) and the *Lawami* (Heavenly Beams) of Abd-ur-Rahman Jami (d. 1492). The *Haqqnuma* distills the truth of these writings into an easier to imbibe “pure font of divine unity.” (p. 133)

These chapters also tell about other princes. At this juncture, Aurangzēb and Shāh Shujāʾ (d. 1661) made a pact and cemented it with matrimonial relation to confronting Dārā’s influence on the imperial court. The author also gave a vivid account of Dārā’s meeting with another of his Spiritual master Bābā Lāl in Lahore on his return journey from Qandahar.

The next two chapters titled “Confluence” and “The Greatest Secret” mostly deal with Dārā’s philosophical works with a little bit of information about state affairs, as the author constantly avoided making her work just all about the prince and his thoughts. The first chapter started with the building and beautification of Shāhjahanābād—the new imperial city—most of the members of the imperial family and high-ranking nobles all put their effort and wealth to make the city as grand as it could be. This chapter also tells us about the shrewdness of Aurangzēb while leading a campaign against the State of Golconda at Deccan. It was his chance to put himself as a contender for the throne before the nobility, as “the more

military victories he racked up, the better he would be placed to make a bid for the throne” (p. 179). The author also tells us about Dārā’s meeting with a Jewish ascetic Sarmad (d. 1661) who later converted to Islam. But the main theme of this chapter is Dārā’s greatest work *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn*. The prince himself describes this work as follows:

Apart from linguistic differences in discerning and knowing, I saw no divergence. From this perspective I brought together the words of both parties and collected some terms that are essential and valuable for the seeker of truth to know [and] arranged [them in] a treatise. Because it was a meeting place (*majma*) of the truths and mystical knowledge of two truth-knowing communities, it was named *The Meeting Place of the Two Seas*, in accordance with the saying of the eminent ones: “Mysticism is justice (*insaf*) and mysticism is the abandonment of gratuitous ceremony (*takalluf*).” (p. 180)

The following chapter starts with Dārā’s dream, in which he met Ramchandra or Ram and Vasishta as Basisht (p. 195). Inspired by his dream, he took up the translation of two Sanskrit works, i.e., the *Jog Basisht* (*Yogavasishtha*) and the *Laghu Yogavasishtha*. The author continues giving us information about Dārā’s meeting with “the ecstatic mystics whose sayings Dara recorded in the *Hasanat-ul-arifin*. And finally the Hindu ascetics, including Baba Lal—the ‘monotheists,’ whose ideas the *Majma-ul-bahrain* gathers into a bricolage of mystical verities” (p. 201). The author also tried to show that Dārā was not going to leave the rule to pursue his religious activities, as his brothers princes Murād (d. 1661) and Shāh Shujā‘ also patronized learned Sufis and Hindu ascetics. The rest of the chapter deals with another of Dārā’s greatest works, the Sanskrit translation of Upanishad titled *Sirr-i Akbar* (the Greatest Secret). With this work, “Dara makes the bold move of identifying the Upanishads with the “hidden book” mentioned in the Quran. His interpretation sweeps aside traditional explications of the verse, which either identify the hidden book with the Preserved Tablet, that is, the archetype of God’s words inscribed upon a heavenly tablet, which has not been sent down to earth, or more generally with a celestial book” (p. 207).

The last chapter titled “Succession” dealt with the war of succession which followed after the illness of Shāh Jahān. The chapter opened with the account of the illness of Shāh Jahān and Dārā’s effort to keep this news confined within the imperial court, he imposed censorship over all the incoming and outgoing correspondence from the imperial capital. Prince Shujā‘ and prince Murād took the opportunity and declared themselves emperors in their provinces. However, shrewd Aurangzēb bided his time for the right moment. Dārā sent his son Sulaimān Shukōh and Mirzā Rājā Jai Singh to counter Shujā with the approval of his father. Shujā’s army

was far from battle-ready and in no way was matched for the imperial army, and “it was an easy victory for the imperial army, but Shuja managed to escape” (p. 217). Aurangzēb on the other hand kept his calm and engaged with his brother with a series of letters and devised a plan for dividing the empire among themselves. His battle-hardened army from Deccan met with a fresh army of Murād from Gujrat and together they overpowered the imperial army headed by Dārā Shukōh, but he was no match for an experienced general like Aurangzēb, who over time cultivated a good relationship with many Hindu chiefs like Champat Rai Bundela who helped him to cross Chambal River and their army overpowered imperial army at Dharmat. Dārā had to retreat and again was defeated at Samugarh. Based on numerous sources, the author shows that it was never a battle fought against Hindu-liberal-minded forces by the orthodox forces of Aurangzēb who was able to muster more support from the Hindu quarter than Dārā. “Aurangzeb’s household and army at Samugarh reflected the striking range and depth of his support across all levels. There is no evidence that Aurangzeb roused a widespread Sunni military revolt against his brother and the imperial army” (p. 226). The rest of the chapter dealt with Dārā’s flight from the battlefield and his capture by one of his trusted landlords whose life he had saved earlier. Dārā was executed in prison in 1659.

This well-researched work sheds light on some less-known areas of prince Dārā Shukōh’s life. Gandhi has surely consulted numerous contemporary sources. However, this work mostly tells about Dārā’s spiritual and scholarly endeavours and his role in the court as heir apparent but somehow overlooks his incompetence in military and state affairs and does not fully appreciate Aurangzēb’s shrewdness and superior military expertise. In conclusion, referring to the title of the book *The Emperor Who Never Was*, the author acknowledges that though Dārā ruled the empire since 1650 with full cooperation from his father Shāh Jahān, he failed to create a group of loyal supporters and took the support of high dignitary of the empire to his father Shāh Jahān as his own, and that was his undoing.

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