



Tasawwuf And Vedanta: Exploring Dara Shikoh's Comparative Religious Approach

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Abstract: *Dara Shikoh, the Mughal prince and scholar, stands as a pivotal figure in comparative religious studies, particularly through his exploration of Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Vedanta, two profound mystical traditions within Islam and Hinduism. His seminal work, Majma al-Bahrain (The Confluence of Two Oceans), represents a groundbreaking attempt to bridge these traditions, highlighting their shared metaphysical truths and spiritual aspirations. Dara Shikoh argued that despite their different languages, rituals, and cultural contexts, both Tasawwuf and Vedanta converge on realizing divine unity and transcending the self. His vision of religious syncretism sought to dissolve the boundaries between Hinduism and Islam, promoting an understanding of religious traditions as interconnected paths leading to the same spiritual truth. This study examines Dara Shikoh's contributions to religious harmony and assesses the relevance of his work in fostering interfaith dialogue in historical and modern contexts. By analyzing the philosophical commonalities he identified, this study underscores the enduring significance of his work in contemporary discussions on religious pluralism, unity, and tolerance. Dara Shikoh's comparative approach offers valuable insights for promoting peace and mutual understanding among diverse faith communities, reaffirming the potential for different religious traditions to inform and enrich one another.*

Keywords: *Dara Shikoh, Tasawwuf, Sufism, Vedanta, religious syncretism, interfaith dialogue, religious harmony, Majma al-Bahrain, comparative religion, Mughal India.*

1. Introduction: Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, is a notable figure in the history of religious thought, not merely for his royal lineage but for his profound contributions as a philosopher and scholar. His intellectual pursuits and philosophical inquiries set him apart as a key figure in the promotion of religious harmony and syncretism, particularly in the context of Islamic and Hindu traditions. Dara Shikoh's efforts to bridge these diverse spiritual and philosophical traditions have left a lasting impact on the study of comparative religion, and his work continues to resonate in discussions of interfaith dialogue and unity.

Dara Shikoh's scholarly achievements are best encapsulated in his comparative exploration of Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Vedanta, two rich and profound traditions within Islam and Hinduism, respectively. Tasawwuf, or Sufism, represents the mystical dimension of Islam, focusing on the inward search for God, spiritual enlightenment, and unity with the divine. It emphasizes the experiential and personal aspects of faith, with the ultimate goal of achieving a direct and personal relationship with God, often articulated as the realization of divine oneness (Tawhid). On the other hand, Vedanta, one of the six classical schools of Hindu philosophy, emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge (jnana) as the path to understanding the nature of

reality and the self's relationship with the universe. Central to Vedanta is the concept of Brahman, the ultimate and unchanging reality, and Atman, the individual self, which Vedanta teaches are fundamentally the same.

In his seminal work, *Majma al-Bahrain* (The Confluence of Two Oceans), Dara Shikoh undertakes the ambitious task of comparing these two mystical traditions. His goal is not merely to highlight their differences but to uncover their shared metaphysical truths and spiritual aspirations. Dara Shikoh's analysis demonstrates that, despite the different languages and rituals employed by Tasawwuf and Vedanta, both traditions ultimately converge on the same spiritual goals: the realization of divine unity and the transcendence of the self.

The significance of Dara Shikoh's comparative work extends beyond its historical context. His exploration of the unity between Tasawwuf and Vedanta represents a pioneering effort in the field of interfaith dialogue. At a time when religious divisions often led to conflict and misunderstanding, Dara Shikoh's vision of religious syncretism was both radical and profoundly insightful. He sought to dissolve the boundaries between Hinduism and Islam, emphasizing their shared focus on inner realization and divine love. This approach laid the groundwork for future scholars and practitioners who seek to bridge religious divides and promote mutual respect and understanding.

In assessing Dara Shikoh's contributions to religious syncretism, it is important to recognize the historical and cultural context in which he operated. The Mughal Empire, under Shah Jahan and his successors, was a period of significant cultural and intellectual exchange. Dara Shikoh's work reflects this environment of pluralism and highlights the potential for different religious traditions to inform and enrich one another. His comparative study not only offers insights into the mystical traditions of Tasawwuf and Vedanta but also serves as a model for contemporary efforts to foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

This study will explore Dara Shikoh's comparative analysis of Tasawwuf and Vedanta, examining the philosophical and spiritual commonalities he identified and assessing the relevance of his work in the modern era. By delving into Dara Shikoh's contributions, we aim to shed light on his enduring impact on interfaith discourse and reaffirm the significance of his vision of religious harmony and unity in a diverse and interconnected world.

2. Literature Review:

- **Ananda,(1947)**, Coomaraswamy explores comparative aspects of Hinduism and Islamic mysticism, including shared philosophical ideas in Sufism and Vedanta.
- **Eaton, (1993)**, provides a socio-political context for religious syncretism in Mughal India and discusses Dara Shikoh's contributions.
- **Engineer, (2004)**, examines the importance of interreligious dialogue, including the relevance of Dara Shikoh's comparative studies.
- **Jilani's (2009)**, study focuses on Dara Shikoh's intellectual and spiritual contributions, highlighting his role in religious syncretism.
- **Nasr, (2007)**, provides an insightful comparison between Tasawwuf and Vedanta, aligning with Dara Shikoh's views on religious unity.
- **Rizvi, (2015)**, explores Dara Shikoh's comparative studies, focusing on how he bridged Islamic and Hindu mystical traditions.

- **Truschke, (2017)**, examines intellectual exchanges between Persian and Sanskrit traditions during the Mughal period, particularly focusing on Dara Shikoh's translations.
- **Chittick, (2005)**, explores the universal truths found in Sufism and Vedanta, resonating with Dara Shikoh's syncretic vision.

3. Research Gap: While Dara Shikoh's contributions to religious syncretism have been well-documented, key areas remain underexplored. First, there's a need to examine the modern relevance of his comparative studies in addressing contemporary interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism. Second, a deeper philosophical analysis of the convergences and divergences between Tasawwuf and Vedanta is lacking. Additionally, the long-term impact of his work on subsequent interfaith thought and the methodological approaches he employed in his comparative studies require further investigation. Addressing these gaps would enrich the understanding of Dara Shikoh's work and its applicability today.

4. The Objective of the Study

1. To examine Dara Shikoh's comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta.
2. To explore the philosophical and spiritual similarities between Sufism and Vedantic thought.
3. To analyze the concepts of Tawhid, Brahman, fana, and moksha in the context of comparative religion.
4. To study the significance of Majma al-Bahrain in promoting interfaith understanding and religious harmony.
5. To evaluate the relevance of Dara Shikoh's ideas in contemporary discussions on religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue.

5. Tasawwuf And Vedanta: A Philosophical Exploration: In the rich tapestry of religious thought, few figures stand out as remarkably as Dara Shikoh, the Mughal prince who sought to harmonize the spiritual traditions of Islam and Hinduism. His exploration of Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Vedanta reflects a deep commitment to understanding and unifying the core principles of these two mystical traditions. This philosophical exploration focuses on how these traditions, despite their different cultural and religious backgrounds, converge in their ultimate goal: the realization of the oneness of God and the unity of all creation. Through the lens of Dara Shikoh's interpretations, we can gain a profound understanding of the similarities between Tasawwuf and Vedanta, and appreciate how these traditions offer complementary paths to spiritual enlightenment.

5.1 Tasawwuf: The Mystical Dimension of Islam: Tasawwuf, or Sufism, is the mystical branch of Islam that emphasizes the inward, spiritual journey of an individual seeking closeness to God. Sufism arose in the early centuries of Islam as a reaction against what some perceived as the rigid formalism of religious practices and the increasing materialism of Muslim society. Instead of focusing solely on the outward aspects of religious life, Sufis stressed the importance of inner purity, spiritual discipline, and the direct experience of God.

At the heart of Sufism is the concept of Tawhid, the oneness of God. For Sufis, Tawhid is not just a theological concept but an experiential reality that one must strive to realize in one's life. The ultimate goal of the Sufi path is to attain a state of spiritual union with God, where the self (nafs) is annihilated (fana) and the individual becomes aware of the divine presence in every aspect of existence. This process of spiritual transformation involves various stages, including purification of the heart, rigorous self-discipline, and deep meditation (dhikr) on the names and attributes of God.

Sufi teachings often employ rich symbolism and metaphors to convey spiritual truths. For example, the journey of the soul is frequently likened to the journey of a lover seeking union with the beloved. The poetry of famous Sufi mystics like Rumi and Hafiz is filled with expressions of this intense longing for God, where the divine is often portrayed as the ultimate beloved.

The Sufi path, or *tariqa*, is typically guided by a spiritual master or sheikh, who provides instruction and guidance to the disciple. The sheikh-disciple relationship is central to Sufism, as the master helps the disciple navigate the spiritual journey and overcome the obstacles of the ego. Through this relationship, the disciple learns to cultivate qualities such as humility, patience, and compassion, which are essential for spiritual growth.

One of the key aspects of Sufi practice is the remembrance of God or *dhikr*. This can take various forms, including the repetition of God's names, chanting of devotional poetry, or silent contemplation. The purpose of *dhikr* is to keep the mind and heart constantly focused on God, thereby drawing the individual closer to the divine presence.

In Sufism, the world is seen as a reflection of God's attributes, and every part of creation is a sign (*ayat*) that points to the Creator. Thus, Sufis seek to perceive the divine reality underlying the physical world and to live in a state of constant awareness of God's presence. This awareness leads to a deep sense of love and compassion for all beings, as they are all manifestations of the divine.

5.2 Vedanta: The Pinnacle of Hindu Philosophy: Vedanta is one of the six classical schools of Hindu philosophy, and it represents the culmination of the philosophical and spiritual thought of ancient India. The term "Vedanta" literally means "the end of the Vedas," referring to the teachings found in the Upanishads, which are considered the concluding part of the Vedic scriptures. These teachings focus on the nature of reality, the self, and the ultimate truth, known as Brahman.

At the core of Vedanta is the concept of Brahman, the ultimate, unchanging reality that pervades the entire universe. Brahman is described as infinite, eternal, and beyond all dualities such as form and formlessness, existence and non-existence. According to Vedanta, everything in the universe is a manifestation of Brahman, and the individual self (*Atman*) is not separate from this ultimate reality. The fundamental teaching of Vedanta is encapsulated in the phrase "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art), which asserts the essential oneness of the individual soul and the universal soul.

Vedanta emphasizes the path of knowledge (*jnana*) as the means to realize this oneness. This path involves a deep inquiry into the nature of the self and the universe, leading to the direct experience of Brahman. The process of self-inquiry begins with the discernment between the real and the unreal, the permanent and the impermanent. The seeker is encouraged to transcend the identification with the body, mind, and ego, and to recognize the true nature of the self as pure consciousness.

In the Vedantic tradition, the realization of Brahman is often described as the state of liberation (*moksha*), where the individual soul is freed from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) and attains unity with the divine. This state of liberation is characterized by supreme bliss (*ananda*) and the dissolution of all dualities. The liberated soul is said to exist in a state of perfect peace and knowledge, having transcended all limitations of time, space, and causality.

There are various schools of thought within Vedanta, the most prominent being Advaita Vedanta, which was expounded by the philosopher Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century CE. Advaita Vedanta teaches that Brahman alone is real and that the world of multiplicity is an illusion (*Maya*). The apparent diversity of the world is a result of ignorance (*avidya*), and the goal of spiritual practice is to dispel this ignorance and realize the non-dual nature of reality.

Other schools of Vedanta, such as Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita, interpret the relationship between the individual soul and Brahman in different ways. Vishishtadvaita, for example, teaches that the individual soul is a part of Brahman but retains its individuality, while Dvaita maintains a dualistic view where the soul and God are distinct but eternally related.

Despite these differences, all schools of Vedanta share the common goal of realizing the unity of the self and the ultimate reality. The teachings of Vedanta have had a profound influence on the spiritual and philosophical landscape of India and continue to inspire seekers of truth around the world.

5.3 Dara Shikoh's Interpretation: Bridging Tasawwuf and Vedanta: Dara Shikoh's fascination with both Tasawwuf and Vedanta led him to explore the commonalities between these two traditions in a way that had never been attempted before in the Islamic or Hindu world. His intellectual and spiritual journey culminated in the writing of *Majma al-Bahrain* (The Confluence of Two Oceans), a text that compares and harmonizes the mystical teachings of Islam and Hinduism. In this work, Dara Shikoh argues that the ultimate truth sought by both Tasawwuf and Vedanta is the same, despite the differences in their external practices and terminologies.

Dara Shikoh viewed the concept of Tawhid in Sufism and the idea of Brahman in Vedanta as expressions of the same reality—the oneness of God. He believed that both traditions emphasize the unity of all existence and the importance of realizing this unity through spiritual practice. For Dara Shikoh, the differences between these traditions were merely superficial, rooted in cultural and linguistic variations, while their core teachings pointed to the same metaphysical truths.

One of the most significant contributions of Dara Shikoh's work was his effort to translate the Upanishads, the foundational texts of Vedanta, into Persian. This translation not only made the teachings of Vedanta accessible to the Muslim world but also allowed Dara Shikoh to draw direct parallels between the spiritual concepts of Islam and Hinduism. He argued that the Upanishads' teachings on the nature of the self and the universe were in harmony with the Sufi understanding of divine oneness and the human soul's journey towards God.

In *Majma al-Bahrain*, Dara Shikoh also explored the parallels between the Sufi concept of fana (the annihilation of the self) and the Vedantic idea of moksha (liberation). He observed that both traditions emphasize the dissolution of the ego and the realization of the self's unity with the divine. For Sufis, fana represents the state where the individual self merges with the divine presence, while for Vedantins, moksha is the realization that the individual soul is not separate from Brahman but is Brahman itself.

Dara Shikoh's work was revolutionary in its approach to interfaith dialogue and religious syncretism. He sought to transcend the boundaries that often separated religious communities and to highlight the shared spiritual goals that unite them. His belief in the essential unity of all religions was deeply rooted in his personal experiences of Sufi mysticism and his study of Hindu philosophy.

5.4 Spiritual Oneness and Universal Truths: The central theme of Dara Shikoh's comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta is the idea that all spiritual traditions ultimately seek the same truth—the realization of the oneness of God and the unity of all creation. This idea is not unique to Dara Shikoh but is a recurring theme in many mystical and philosophical traditions around the world. However, Dara Shikoh's contribution lies in his ability to articulate this unity in a way that resonated with both Islamic and Hindu audiences.

In both Tasawwuf and Vedanta, the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey is the realization of divine oneness. For Sufis, this is expressed through the concept of Tawhid, the belief that there is no reality other than God and that all creation is a manifestation of the divine. Sufis strive to experience this oneness through practices such as dhikr, meditation, and the cultivation of love and devotion for God.

Similarly, in Vedanta, the ultimate truth is the oneness of Atman and Brahman. Vedantins believe that the individual self (Atman) is not separate from the ultimate reality (Brahman) and that the realization of this unity leads to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This realization is achieved through knowledge (jnana), meditation, and the practice of discrimination between the real and the unreal.

Both traditions emphasize the importance of inner transformation and the transcendence of the ego in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. In Sufism, this process is often described as the “death of the self” (fana), where the individual ego is annihilated and the soul is united with God. In Vedanta, the dissolution of the ego is seen as the recognition that the self is not the body or mind, but pure consciousness, identical with Brahman.

Dara Shikoh’s interpretation of these concepts reflects his deep understanding of the spiritual essence of both traditions. He saw the teachings of Tasawwuf and Vedanta not as competing or contradictory but as complementary paths leading to the same ultimate reality. By emphasizing their shared focus on divine oneness and the unity of all creation, Dara Shikoh sought to promote a vision of religious harmony and mutual understanding.

6. Dara Shikoh’s Vision on Religious Harmony: Dara Shikoh’s exploration of Tasawwuf and Vedanta represents a bold and innovative attempt to transcend the religious divisions of his time and to promote a vision of spiritual unity. His work laid the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious understanding of religious diversity, one that recognizes the common spiritual aspirations shared by all faiths.

Dara Shikoh’s legacy is particularly relevant in today’s world, where religious conflict and intolerance continue to pose significant challenges. His belief in the essential unity of all religions offers a powerful antidote to the divisiveness and exclusivism that often characterize religious discourse. By highlighting the shared spiritual goals of different traditions, Dara Shikoh’s work encourages us to look beyond external differences and appreciate the underlying unity that connects all of humanity.

In the context of contemporary interfaith dialogue, Dara Shikoh’s vision of religious harmony remains a valuable resource. His comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta provides a model for how different religious traditions can engage with one another in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. By focusing on the commonalities rather than the differences, Dara Shikoh’s approach offers a way to bridge the gaps between religions and foster a more inclusive and peaceful world.

Dara Shikoh’s philosophical exploration of Tasawwuf and Vedanta stands as a testament to the possibility of finding common ground between seemingly disparate religious traditions. His work demonstrates that, at their core, both Tasawwuf and Vedanta share a deep commitment to the realization of divine oneness and the unity of all creation. By emphasizing the underlying unity of these traditions, Dara Shikoh sought to promote a vision of religious harmony that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. Today, Dara Shikoh’s insights continue to inspire those who seek to build bridges between different faiths and to promote a more inclusive understanding of spirituality. His legacy reminds us that, despite the diversity of religious practices and beliefs, there is a common thread that unites all of humanity in the pursuit of truth, love, and enlightenment. As we navigate the complexities of a multicultural and multi-religious world, Dara Shikoh’s vision of spiritual unity and religious harmony remains as relevant and urgent as ever.

7. Dara Shikoh’s Majma Al-Bahrain: Dara Shikoh, the Mughal prince and philosopher, made a notable contribution to interfaith dialogue through his work *Majma al-Bahrain* (The Confluence of Two Oceans). This significant treatise represents a groundbreaking effort to bridge the spiritual and philosophical traditions of Islam and Hinduism. In *Majma al-Bahrain*, Dara Shikoh delves into the mystical dimensions of both Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Vedanta, aiming to demonstrate their fundamental unity despite their apparent differences. His work underscores the shared metaphysical truths and spiritual goals of these two traditions and has had a lasting impact on the discourse of religious harmony and syncretism.

Dara Shikoh's *Majma al-Bahrain* is a pioneering effort in comparative religion, focusing on the mystical teachings of Tasawwuf and Vedanta. His central thesis is that both traditions, though distinct in their expressions and practices, converge on the same ultimate truth: the oneness of God and the unity of all creation. This idea is encapsulated in Dara Shikoh's exploration of the unity in diversity within these two religious systems.

In *Majma al-Bahrain*, Dara Shikoh presents a detailed comparison between the core tenets of Sufism and Vedanta. He argues that the Sufi concept of Tawhid (the oneness of God) and the Vedantic notion of Brahman (the ultimate reality) are essentially the same. For Dara Shikoh, the diverse ways in which these traditions articulate their understanding of the divine are merely different reflections of a single truth. He demonstrates that both Tasawwuf and Vedanta emphasize the experiential realization of this divine unity, albeit through different linguistic and cultural frameworks.

The work examines various Sufi and Vedantic concepts side by side, illustrating their similarities and shared spiritual objectives. For instance, Dara Shikoh equates the Sufi practice of fana (the annihilation of the self) with the Vedantic concept of moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death). Both, according to Dara Shikoh, involve the dissolution of the ego and the realization of the self's essential unity with the divine.

By highlighting these parallels, Dara Shikoh sought to transcend the barriers of sectarianism and to foster a deeper understanding of the common ground between Hinduism and Islam. His comparative study was not merely an academic exercise but a heartfelt endeavor to promote religious harmony and mutual respect.

Dara Shikoh's exploration of the unity in diversity between Tasawwuf and Vedanta was central to his vision of religious syncretism. He argued that the oneness of God is a fundamental principle in both traditions, and his work aimed to demonstrate that, despite their different expressions, both Hinduism and Islam ultimately seek the same spiritual truth. This exploration was not merely an academic exercise but a deeply spiritual endeavor to bring out the shared focus on inner realization and divine love in both traditions.

8. Spiritual Significance And Modern Relevance: Dara Shikoh's work has profound spiritual significance and remains highly relevant in contemporary interfaith discourse. His approach to comparing Tasawwuf and Vedanta exemplifies a vision of religious syncretism that emphasizes the shared spiritual aspirations of different traditions. By focusing on the underlying unity of these traditions, Dara Shikoh's work challenges the notion of religious exclusivity and encourages a more inclusive view of spirituality.

In today's diverse and interconnected world, Dara Shikoh's emphasis on the unity of spiritual truths offers valuable insights for promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. His vision of religious harmony resonates with contemporary efforts to bridge the gaps between different faith communities and to foster a climate of tolerance and mutual respect. In societies where religious conflicts and misunderstandings persist, Dara Shikoh's comparative approach provides a model for engaging with diverse traditions in a spirit of empathy and openness.

Furthermore, Dara Shikoh's work highlights the importance of recognizing the common spiritual goals shared by different religious traditions. His comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta underscores the idea that, despite the diverse expressions of faith, there is a fundamental quest for divine realization that transcends sectarian boundaries. This perspective is crucial for fostering a sense of global spiritual solidarity and for addressing the challenges of religious pluralism.

9. Conclusion: Dara Shikoh's contributions to religious syncretism through his comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta stand as a profound testament to the possibility of bridging diverse spiritual traditions. His seminal work, *Majma al-Bahrain* (The Confluence of Two Oceans), demonstrates that

despite the apparent differences between Islam's mystical dimension (Tasawwuf) and Hinduism's philosophical framework (Vedanta), both traditions share a deep-seated philosophical and spiritual commonality. This realization is not only significant in its own right but also offers a timeless framework for addressing contemporary issues of religious diversity and conflict.

Dara Shikoh's comparative study reveals that at their core, both Tasawwuf and Vedanta seek the same ultimate truth: the realization of divine unity and the oneness of all existence. He meticulously compares the mystical experiences and philosophical teachings of these two traditions, highlighting their mutual emphasis on the inner realization of God and the unity of the self with the divine. By equating the Sufi concept of Tawhid with the Vedantic notion of Brahman, and the Sufi practice of fana with the Vedantic pursuit of moksha, Dara Shikoh underscores the underlying unity that transcends doctrinal and ritual differences.

In today's world, where religious diversity often leads to conflict and division, Dara Shikoh's vision of religious harmony remains particularly relevant. His work offers a model for fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding by focusing on the common spiritual goals shared by different traditions. In contemporary discussions on religious pluralism, Dara Shikoh's insights provide valuable guidance for promoting peace and unity. His comparative approach encourages individuals and communities to look beyond superficial differences and appreciate the deeper spiritual connections that bind humanity together.

Furthermore, Dara Shikoh's emphasis on the shared quest for divine realization serves as a powerful antidote to the exclusivism and sectarianism that often characterize religious discourse. By highlighting the universal aspirations of various faiths, his work challenges the notion that religious traditions are inherently antagonistic or incompatible. Instead, Dara Shikoh's study reveals a shared quest for truth and enlightenment that transcends cultural and religious boundaries.

In reaffirming the relevance of Dara Shikoh's contributions, this study underscores the enduring significance of his comparative religious scholarship. His work not only enriches our understanding of Tasawwuf and Vedanta but also provides a framework for addressing the challenges of religious diversity in the modern world. As societies continue to grapple with issues of faith and identity, Dara Shikoh's vision of spiritual unity and religious harmony offers a beacon of hope for a more inclusive and empathetic world.

Dara Shikoh's comparative study of Tasawwuf and Vedanta serves as a testament to the power of religious syncretism and the potential for interfaith understanding. His work remains a valuable resource for promoting peace, unity, and mutual respect among different faith communities, reaffirming the idea that, despite our diverse paths, we share a common journey toward spiritual truth and enlightenment.

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