Narratives of the 1658 War of Succession for the Mughal Throne

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The 1658 War of Succession for the Mughal throne is now remembered as a quintessential what-if moment of Indian history. People continue to be motivated by values supposedly represented by the personalities of Aurangzeb, the triumphant claimant, and Dara Shikoh, the tragic heir apparent. How exactly was the War seen in its own age? The War was written about in multiple languages during the seventeenth-century. We find accounts originating from London to Lahore, and in Persian, Manipuri and Italian. This presentation introduces certain Hindi and Persian narratives of the War to succeed Shah Jahan (r.1627-1658). All the narratives under study were written during the reign of Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707), the successor of Shah Jahan.

It evaluates the significance of the War as a landmark moment in the social history of India, especially in the formation and inter-relationships between religious communities. It demarcates the larger epistemological and ontological canvas on which these communities took shape and interacted with each other. What were the ways and the contexts in which terms such as Hindu, momin, musalman, Islam, din and Rajput were deployed in literary-historical texts of this period? Can we see Hinduism and Islam as two disparate traditions, as previous histories of the War and Mughal India had contended? Is it possible to see social communities of Hindus and Muslims as mutually and similarly circumscribed within an Islamic worldview and concept of din?

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