

## Religious Policies of Emperor Akbar and Emperor Aurangzeb- an Analysis



### History

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Gurpreet Singh

Research Scholar Punjabi University, Patiala

### ABSTRACT

*The Mughal Emperors, Akbar and Aurangzeb won great reputation as ruler over extensive dominions. Both possessed extraordinary qualities of head and heart. Both of them were brave and energetic and were endowed with military talents of the first order. But the points of difference in their outlook and character are more pronounced than points of resemblance. The policies of Akbar and Aurangzeb were in sharp contrast to each other. The study deals with Life and religious policies of Emperor Akbar and Emperor Aurangzeb. The need of comparative of religious policies of these two Emperors arises to understand the circumstances leading to the adoption of such policies*

### Introduction

Upon entry to India under Arab rule, Muslims had been both culturally and religiously segregated from the rest of Indian society. The bulk of Muslim settlers were Turks, Arabs and Persians. As proselytization expanded and Islam began to sway more indigenous Indians to convert, different outlooks on Islam began to appear. These were the result of the influence of the Sufi ideologies being imported to the Indian subcontinent.

Soon a heterodox approach to Islam arose that removed categorization of religions and religious traditions. This ultimately became a sticky situation for the general Indian masses during the next reign of the Mughals as both orthodox Ulemic views and mystical Sufi views had reached two radically different extremes. These extreme differences could be highlighted by the examination of two Mughal reigns, that of Akbar (1542 – 1605) and that of Aurangzeb (1618 – 1707).

Each approach had its ultimate stance on the progression of Islam in India and its role on Indian society. Both the Emperors tried to influence policies that were in accordance to their teachings. The Mughal Emperors, who had their own religious convictions, were usually in agreement with one movement over the other. This usually exhibited itself in their policy- and decision-making, which usually leaned heavily in the direction of one movement over the other.

### Akbar: Life and Religious Policy

Akbar was born to the second Mughal Emperor Humayan and Hamida Banu Begum on October 14, 1542 in Sindh. Although the family was on the run after losing Babur's newly-established empire. Humayan was unable to regain northern India until 1555. With his parents in exile in Persia, little Akbar was raised by his uncle in Afghanistan. He practiced key skills like hunting, but never learned to read. Nonetheless, throughout his life, Akbar had texts on philosophy, history, religion, science and other topics read to him, and could recite long passages of what he had heard from memory. Without winning their confidence and active support, Akbar could not hope to establish and consolidate Mughal Empire in India. Akbar fully understood the centrifugal tendencies of the complex Indian socio-political order and made a serious attempt to eliminate these by separating religion from politics.

Akbar's religious policy was moulded and motivated by his parental and social heritage. All of Akbar's teachers and guides in his boyhood incidentally happened to be men of unorthodox religious views. His teacher Abdul Latif was a person of liberal views. Akbar learnt from him the Nobel lesson of Suleh-i-kul that means peace with all. Bairam Khan was another great personality who influenced his approach.

The socio-political environment also affected his attitude to-

wards the common people. Sher Shah Suri was the forerunner of Akbar in adopting the policy of religious toleration. However, Akbar was the first monarch in medieval India who raised the policy of religious toleration to the pinnacle of secularism. The first stage of his tolerant policy towards the Hindus was a spiritual awakening. He had fully realised that basic unity among religions. As a part of his secular policy he married Rajput princess from Amber in 1562 and received voluntary services of Rajput warriors. In 1562, Akbar declared that women and children of the enemy camp must not be molested by Mughal armies on any account.

Akbar encamped at Mathura in 1563 when he came to know that, in accordance with the old practice of the Muslim rulers, his government has also imposed a tax on the Hindu pilgrims who wanted to have a dip in the holy water of Yamuna. After this he abolished pilgrim tax throughout his dominions. In 1564, he also abolished Jaziya. Saikh Mubarak and his two sons Faizi and Fazal greatly influenced young Akbar. Badauni mentions that later on he was so influenced by the philosophies of Brahmanas and Sramanas that he started believing in the philosophy of transmigration of soul. He initiated the practice of holding religious discourses there with the learned and the saints of the age; the meetings were held on Thursday night which is a holy day for the Hindus.

Akbar's proclamation of Majhar was the greatest ever declaration made during the medieval period. The main objective of this declaration was to separate politics from religion and give more importance to royal decree than the orthodox Islamic laws. Akbar called himself Imam-i-Adil or the Chief interpreter of the Islamic Law. In this way, Akbar developed an effective control over Diwan-i-Kaza or the judicial cum religious department which was earlier dominated by Ulema or Muslim theologians who were always more sympathetic towards the Muslim community and rigid on established conventions of Islam. It seems that by calling himself Mujtahid and declaration of Majhar he made himself temporal as well as spiritual leader.

Akbar's spiritual enlightenirent is reflected in his doctrines related with Tauhid-i-illahi which was later on called Din-i-illahi. By founding Din-i-illahi, he was eager to weld all the Indians, irrespective of their caste, creed and religious belief and practices, into a homogenous society. So it seems that like Akbar's Dhamma the whole approach of Din-i-illahi was national integration and developing peace and amity in the society.

### Aurangzeb: Life and Religious Policy

Mui-ud-din-Muhammad Aurangzeb, born on 3rd November, 1618, ascended the throne in 1658. It is believed that he killed all his three brothers and imprisoned his father Shahjahan at Agra. By doing so he proved himself as a man of merciless character but still he ruled for long 50 years which was up to the end of

1707.

Religious policy of Aurangzeb was based on the Islamic theory of kinship. Aurangzeb felt that he was superior not only had he become superior to administer the empire in a better way but also to protect and strengthen Islam particularly its Sunni faith. He was a strict follower of the Sunni sect, to the extent that he persecuted the members of the Shia sect. He also compelled the Rajputs, the Jat, the Sikhs and the Marathas to rebel, destroyed the states of Bijapur and Golkonda and imposed political, economic, and social disabilities on his Muslim subjects with a view to convert them to Islam. Aurangzeb believed that all Mughal rulers who ruled prior to him committed one blunder of not trying to establish the supremacy of Islam in India. He attempted for it during his life time because he believed that it was the foremost duty of a Muslim king.

Aurangzeb was non-tolerant towards other religious beliefs besides Islam. He stopped celebrating the Hindu festivals like Holi, Diwali etc. at the court. Nearly all famous temples of northern India including the temple of Vishwanath at Varanasi and Somnatha at Patna were destroyed during the reign of Aurangzeb. Jazia was re-imposed and other taxes were also revived.

As regards Islam, he reinforced the religion rather stringently on its followers. He framed certain laws to be observed by the Muslims as their religious duty and appointed a new class of officers who were assigned the duty to enforce these laws. These officers were given powers to punish all the people who were found guilty of blasphemy. That is why even liberal Shias and Sufis were also punished during the reign of Aurangzeb. He displayed a particular animosity towards the Shia sect and persecuted them with an intent of trying to establish the superiority of the Sunni sect. There were a number of different ways in which he tried to put down the Shias and curb their practices. One such measure was the banning of the Tazia procession. Shias observe ten days of mourning in Muharram in remembrance of the martyr Imam Hussein. It is an emotionally charged march that many times led to conflict. Even though he allowed this practice to be followed in the early part of his reign, he later banned the Tazia procession.

There was a strange contradiction in the general policy that Aurangzeb followed towards the practitioners of Shiasm. While on the one hand he did everything possible to curb their religious influence on the other hand he also seemed to have adopted a liberal attitude towards the believers at times.

The religious intolerance practiced by Aurangzeb led to several revolts by the Marathas, Satnamis, Sikhs and the Jats. These revolts destroyed the peace of the empire, disrupted its economy and weakened its military strength which, ultimately, led not only to the failure of Aurangzeb but also to the downfall of the Mughal Dynasty.

### Conclusion

The Mughal Emperors, Akbar and Aurangzeb won great reputation as ruler over extensive dominions. Both possessed extraordinary qualities of head and heart. Both of them were brave, industrious and energetic and were endowed with military talents of a first order. The religious policy of Akbar was very liberal. He had equal regard for all religious system and he believed in the essential unity of all religions. But Aurangzeb was sectarian in his views and often carried them to excesses. The non-Muslim who were the bulk of the population became completely alienated from him. Akbar did not subordinate religions to political interests. He realized the supreme value of enlisting the goodwill and moral support of the Hindus. Accordingly he entered into the matrimonial relations with the princely families of Rajputana, removed the various indignities imposed on

the non-Muslims and felt no scruple in appointing suitable Hindus to responsible posts under the Government. By this liberal and enlightened policy, Akbar succeeded in securing the whole-hearted co-operation of all classes of these subjects. But Aurangzeb reversed the wise and benevolent policy of his predecessor. Aurangzeb removed many Hindus from state offices, re-imposed the Jizya, imposed the additional indignities of them and even violated their religious sentiments. This policy of religious intolerance produced its inevitable result, viz., the alienation of the Hindus. The alienation of Hindu sentiments was one of the potent factors which contributed to the decline of the Mughal Empire. The Empire that Akbar had built up with the goodwill of the Hindus perished as a result of Aurangzeb's bigotry and intolerance.

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