

AKBAR'S RELIGION WAS THE PRODUCT OF HIS CURIOUS MIND AND HIS IMPERIALIST POLICY

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Abstract: Akbar is one of the rulers of India who is said to be great in history. The reasons for his greatness are mainly two, first his great empire and the other his religious and reformative works. This article is mainly an attempt to discover religious aspects of Akbar and the development of religious tolerance. It will be also to find about which motivated him to established Din-I-Ilahia a new religion. At the same time, an effort will also be made to know his policy dealing with other religious rulers. Akbar was Muslim or he changed himself in the search of truth which he used to. Did he continue to be a Muslim, or was influenced by Hindu religion, or he did not believe in any religion and became an atheist? Was Din-I-Ilahi a religious policy inspired by his imperialist policy or was his religion a logical religion free from religious curses and customs of a curious king which revealed in the form of Din-I-Ilahi? Knowing the answers to these questions in my understanding, it is very important to know Akbar. Knowing his greatness without knowing these aspects is difficult in my understanding.

Key Words: Akbar's Religious Policy, Din-I-Ilahi, Religion of Akbar, Social Religious Reform.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Akbar was raised in a liberal family environment. His father was Sunni and mother was Shia of Persia. His father Humayun was conservative in religious matters, but had to adjust with Shia sect. Akbar was born in a Hindu Sardar family¹. He grew up illiterate. Early attempts to teach him to read and write failed from the very beginning. As a child, Akbar displayed far greater interest in outdoor sports, and in animals, particularly camels (because they were the largest animals in the region) and Arabian horses². Bairam Khan first loyal Sardar of Humayun and later he became guardian of Akbar. Since Bairam Khan was Shia, it is likely to be possible that he had influence on him. This contiguity of geography and family association with the Shias had, certainly, unconsciously as moulder, whatever may be the extent, the thought process of Akbar.³

Akbar's teacher Abdul Latif was also very generous in religious matters. He had taught him the principle of keeping peace with everyone. In this way, the environment of a country like India which has many religions and people in his family found in the childhood had a profound effect on his mind. Although in the days to come when he took possession on throne, he took strong action against some narrow minded Muslims, yet he did not introduced religious fanaticism. He also shut down the rule of making war captive soldiers into Muslims. As a ruler, Akbar established a great empire and the administration which did not get to see before him in India. The amazing confluence of both military power and religious liberality made her rule great in history.

When we talk about Din-I-Ilahi, the relationship with other rulers, sometimes it seems that he was a very generous emperor, but it is unlikely to be true. His Rajput policy was based on suppression and agreement. Akbar made marital relations with the Allies and gave the right to rule in the patrimony; on the contrary he suppressed the opponents with rigor. Due to his Rajput policy, he removed the pilgrimage tax in 1563 and after one year he removed Jajia. His superior Rajput policy helped establishing a permanent, powerful and elaborate empire. So we can see that the religion to him was a way of fulfilling his intended objectives.

2. RELIGIOUS POLICY:

Akbar wanted to establish a strong kingdom as a ruler, but he was also curious human being about the religion. This required religious tolerance among all communities. So he adopted *Sulehkul* means treating with peace with everyone. Under his religious policy, he took many initiatives. The construction of the *Ibadatkhana* was the most important among them. The purpose of the construction of the *Ibadatkhana* was to debate on philosophical and religious themes. It was founded by Akbar in Fatehpur Sikari in 1575. It is interesting to know that before he used to call the preachers of Islam in it, but later dissatisfied with his conduct, he started calling all the scholars of all faiths

and it became like a religious parliament. The Mullah and Kazis were not happy with the decisions taken by Akbar with authority. This is why they called him sometime irreligious, but its not true. The charges of apostasy or irreligiousness that have been leveled against Akbar would not have come if he not attacked the Mulla interests from the secular point of the state.⁴

In addition to the teachers of Islam, he called people like Devi and Purushottam from Hinduism, Harivijay Suri, Jinachand Suri, Vijayasen Suri, and Shanti Chand from Janism, Dastur Mehar ji Rana from Parsi religion, Ekabiwa and Monserat from Christianity among few who were invited.

1579 is a significant year of his religious policy, when he announced the Mazhar, which made him supreme in the affairs of religion. Akbar took the title of *Sultan-E-Adil* or Imam-E-Adil after being declared of Mazhar, which means the 'just ruler'.

3. INITIATION OF DIN-I-ILAH:

In 1582, Akbar initiated a new religion called Din-I-Ilahi (Divine Monotheism) for reconciliation among all religions. The Sunday was fixed, if anyone wanted to adopt this religion. During the initiation, the person had to say *Allahu-Akbar*, which was beloved exclamation to Akbar. The head priest of this new religion was Abul Fazal. Among Hindus, this religion was adopted by Birbal only.

It is interesting to know that only 18 people adopted Din-I-Ilahi. An emperor like Akbar, if he wished, he can motivate and force to follow thousands of people his religion, but he never did that. Maybe he wished not people merely to follow his religion, but understand and follow. This seems similar to Asoka, the Mauryan king, who although followed Buddhism, but never forced people to follow his religion. Neither we get any documents which mention Akbar like Asoka declared his religion as state religion.

4. AKBAR'S APPROACH TO ISLAM:

Akbar never enforced Islam as a state religion to be adopted and followed by the people. He even allowed to celebrate the festivals of other faiths in the royal palace, as they can celebrate Muslim festivals. Maybe Akbar was well aware that the general public as well as small kingdoms were mostly Hindu and if he had to win their confidence in him, an emperor should respect people's sentiments of all faiths. To Akbar in making familial relationships, he went beyond Islamic families and marry to Hindu women from small kingdoms. This way he got the support and agreement to rule on their kingdoms. Although in the beginning of political Islam into India, with the invasions of Mahmud in the early years of eleventh century, two kinds of religious opinions were in practice among specialists. These were the *ulma*, doctors of shariah, and the Sufi mystics in search of direct religious experience. The *ulma* urged the kings to uphold *shariah* and to be vigilant on behalf of their own religion rather than tolerant of other misguided faith.⁵ In this regard, we can say Akbar was among few exceptions who accepted all faiths openheartedly.

5. APPROACH TO OTHER FAITHS:

Akbar adopted a policy of tolerance towards all religions and sects. During his reign, he permitted Christians to build churches in Agra and Lahore. Akbar gave financial support to Vitthalnath, the son of Vallabhacharya and Dastur Mehar Rana, the priest of Parasi religion. He also gave titles to religious teacher, as Acharya Harivijay Suri from Jain religion was given title of 'Jagatguru', similarly Jinchandra Suri was also given title of 'Yugpradhan'. Akbar did not limit himself with any religion or tradition in this matter. According to his curiosity, understanding and in the best interest of the state, he did what he fit in religious matter as an emperor. In 1584, Akbar changing tradition replaced the Hizri Era with Ilahi Era and issued new calendar.

He started Parasi traditions also like '*Jharokha Darshan*', '*Tuladan*' and '*Paybos*'. He was equally generous towards Sikhs and Christians. Akbar met the third Guru Amardas of Sikhs. He provided 500 bigha (a measuring scale) land to the Sikh Guru Ramdas in 1577, which also included a natural pond. The Jesuit mission of Christians came three times in the court of Akbar. Father Ekabiwa was the leader of the Jesuit mission come first time in AD 1580 in the court of Akbar in Fatehpur Sikari.

6. SOCIAL RELIGIOUS REFORM:

Akbar wanted not only to make a big empire, but he also used to think about social justice and equality of ordinary people. That is why he never limited himself to any particular religion while making socio-religious reform.

In Hindu religion, that time, some evil practice continued and Akbar tried to put an end to these social evils. He was particularly sensitive about women's rights and equality. In this direction, he did two important works, first he tried to stop the practice inhuman practice of Sati and second, widow marriage got legal recognition. In addition, he banned the sale of the liquor and fixed minimum age of marriage 16 and 14 for boys and girls respectively.

7. CONCLUSION:

Akbar was a curious ruler who was virtually in the goodness of all religions, but did not like the false and illogical practices of religion. Being an emperor was favorable situation in expressing his religious views freely and publicly. Akbar's religious policy and reform was no doubt that it essentially contributed in his politics gaining faith and support of other Hindu kings and common mass, but it would not be right to say that his religious policy was completely inspired by his imperialistic thinking.

Personally, even though he did not believe in any religion completely, he did not try to impose his Din-I-Ilahi or other religious ideas on anyone as king. These same things make Akbar different from other Mughal rulers and give the title of greatness in history. His religion was the search and initiative of a curious person who as an emperor tried reconciliation among all faith religiously. Like a true inquisitive, Akbar was engaged in scientific search for truth. First Islam, then other religions he tried to be satisfied from the scholars and priests. Finally when could not satisfied with any, in the end established Din-e Ilahi.

It can also be said that he was very generous as an emperor in religious matter and wanted to please the followers of all religions to a degree, in which he was also successful. As Stuart Carry Welch writes in the book, 'Anwari's Divan'⁶,

"Although Akbar is now considered to rank with the Buddhist Asoka in the forefront of Indian philosopher-kings, such was not the case when he inherited the very shaky Mughal throne as its third padshah (emperor) at the age of thirteen."

This is the reason, that whenever and wherever there is discussion of religious harmony of all faiths in history, Akbar's name comes with the rulers like emperor Asoka.

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