

Religious Policy of Akbar:

If Akbar is remembered today, it is due to his famous religious policy. His real fame rests on his liberal religious policy. His knowledge on the essence of different religious philosophies at a later stage made him to promulgate a new religion famous in history as Din-i-Ilahi under whose banner Akbar had tried to unite Hindus and Muslims. For the vast Mughal empire to be enduring Din-e-Ilahi was probably the only alternative. However time, proved it as Akbar's 'Monument of Folly'.

A child of his time:

Akbar was born and brought up at a comparatively liberal religious society. Indian society by then had witnessed the Sufi and the Bhakti movement. As a result of which the religious animosity between the Hindus and Muslims in India had been reduced to a very lower point. They had come nearer as a result of better religious understanding. The intellectuals of both the communities realized that the inner essence of all religions was the same.

The Hindu and Muslim saints created a peaceful spiritual atmosphere in the country in contrast to the hatred and violence of the earlier days. When Akbar ascended the throne, the influence of the Sufi and Bhakti movement was at its height. Akbar was greatly influenced by that liberal spirit of the time. Not merely he was the child of his time, but also he became the representative as well as the leader of that time.

Mughal legacies:

Akbar inherited Mughal legacies in the matters of religion. His father Humayun and his grandfather Babur were not fanatics. They had not conquered India with a religious motive. Their motive was purely political. Though Babur had declared Jihad on the eve of certain important wars, his motive was only to unite and encourage the Muslim soldiers. Babur and Humayun were no doubt men of learning and liberal outlook.

Akbar's mother Hamida Banu Begum was a Shia Muslim and the daughter of a Persian scholar. She taught her son Akbar the fundamentals of religious toleration. As the descendant of liberal ancestors, Akbar maintained the religious toleration and Akbar maintained the family legacies of

liberal outlooks. Further his tutor Abdul Latif was a man of broad ideas who taught him sublime conceptions of divine and spiritual realities.

Hindu influence:

Akbar's father Humayun during his extreme distress as a homeless wanderer had kept his pregnant wife Hamida Banu Begum under the protection of the Hindu king of Amarkot. The Hindu king being sympathetic at his misfortune had given shelter to Hamida Banu Begum in his own house where Akbar was born. The gesture of that Hindu king even at the dangerous hours during the rule of Sher Shah was really an unforgettable memory of Akbar. This incident might have inspired the future emperor to adopt some liberal policy to Hindus.

Influence of Faizi and Abul Fazal:

Akbar had come in close contact with two of his advisors known as Faizi and Abul Fazal who were highly cultured and thoroughly liberal in their outlook.

Influence of Rajput Queens:

Akbar married the Hindu princess of Ambar, Bikaner, and Jaisalmer and established matrimonial and cordial relations with Rajput's. Though this matrimonial alliance was for a political motive, yet it had its religious results. With the presence of the Hindu women in the Mughal harem, Hindu religious ceremonies and festivals entered into the Mughal Palace. Almost all the great Hindu festivals like Diwali, Dussehara, and Holi were observed in the Mughal Palace. The emperor used to participate in all the festivals wearing the Hindu dresses. This also made the emperor Akbar liberal towards Hindu religion.

Influence of Contemporary Religious thinkers:

Akbar constructed a House of worship or Ibadatkhana at his capital city of Fatehpur Sikri and invited religious thinkers and preachers of different religions and faiths to that house for religious discussions. Religious leaders of various religions such as Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Parsi and Christian were invited for learned discourses. Akbar acquired knowledge by associating himself with these men and as a result he was much inspired by the religious ideas of these people, and it also gave him the idea of a new religion of mixing all the religions. Akbar, though illiterate, was a genius. His own way of thinking made him to realize that no single religion contained the

absolute truth of everything. Out of all these factors he developed his religious policy and created another religion called as Din-i-Ilahi.

Results:

He made it possible by paying respect to all religions and by accepting to the sameness of their inner meanings. He gave the Mughal government a secular colour by bringing a change in the traditional Muslim administration.

Thirdly, Akbar abolished the pilgrim tax and Zaziya imposed earlier on his Hindu subjects. It pleased the Hindus everywhere. As a result of mass support of Hindus, the foundation of the Mughal empire got strengthened. He also gave full freedom to the Hindus to observe their festivals.

Din-i-Ilahi:

Din-i Ilahi “the religion of God,” was a system of religious beliefs introduced by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1582 CE. His idea was to combine Islam and Hinduism into one faith, but also to add aspects of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jainism. Akbar took a deep personal interest in religious matters. He founded an academy, the Ibadat Khana, “the House of Worship,” in 1575, where representatives of all major faiths could meet to discuss questions of theology. Listening to these debates, Akbar concluded that no single religion captured the whole truth and that they instead should be combined.

Din-e Ilahi emphasized morality, piety and kindness. Just like Sufi Islam it regarded the yearning for God as a key feature of spirituality; just like Catholicism it took celibacy to be a virtue and just like Jainism it condemned the killing of animals. As for its rituals, it borrowed heavily from Zoroastrianism, making fire and the sun objects of divine worship. The new religion had no scriptures, no priests, and in fact it never had more than a handful of followers – mainly the members of Akbar’s closest circle of advisers. The most prominent person among them was Abul-Fazl ibn Mubarak, the emperor’s vizier or prime minister. Abul Fazl was the author of the *Akbarnama*, “the Book of Akbar,” a history of Akbar’s reign written in three volumes, which provides a rich description of India at the height of the Mughal’s power. Among the Hindus only

Raja Birbal accepted this religion. Raja Bhagwan Das and Man Singh refused to accept this religion. Muslims also did not take any interest in Din-i-Ilahi.

Principles of Din-i-Ilahi:

1. According to Din-i-Ilahi feasts served after the death of a person for the liberation of his soul is meaningless. A man should give such feasts in his life time. So, that his journey after death becomes smooth.
2. A man should arrange community feasts on his own birthday. He must also distribute alms on that day which brings better in his next life.
3. The followers of the Din-i-Ilahi should address a co-religionist with Allah-o-Akbar and the other should respond with 'Jalla Jallalhu'.
4. A follower of Din-i-Ilahi should not eat flesh, onion and garlic. Dining with executioners, fishermen and untouchables was not permissible.
5. According to Din-i-Ilahi a man's marriageable age was 16 years and that of a woman was fixed at 14 years.
6. Marriage with widows, old women and pre-puberty girls were forbidden.
7. All should lead a life of purity and good moral character.
8. People must sleep with their heads towards the east and legs towards the west.
9. A man must take a vow to sacrifice four essentials for the emperor. Such as life, wealth, religion and honour.
10. No one should grow beard.
11. Followers of Din-i-Ilahi should believe in one God and should be tolerant towards all religions.

12. When a follower of Din-Ilahi dies his neck should be tied with a brick and some grains and set afloat in a river. Afterwards the brick and the grains were to be removed from his neck and submerged in the water and the dead body should be consigned to flames at a place where there was no water.

Din-i-ilahi and its analysis:

Din-e Ilahi is best viewed as a state religion with the emperor himself at its center. As the single authority on all religious matters, Akbar was not only going to interpret and apply the religious law, but to actually make it. In the end, the new faith had more to do with politics than with religion. Din-e Ilahi was his solution to the thorny problem of how a Muslim ruler could govern a predominantly Hindu state.

Among the Muslims the Din-i-Ilahi was extremely unpopular. Yet the Din-e Ilahi was fiercely opposed by many Muslims clerics who declared it a heretical doctrine. The women also secretly incited the people not to accept this religion. During Akbar's lifetime this religion never gets any popular acceptance. It was totally eclipsed after the death of Akbar. Although the new religion did not survive its founder, it triggered a strong fundamentalist reaction among India's Muslims.

Akbar's Din-i-ilahi has been criticised by different historians. V.A. Smith says, "Din-i-Ilahi was a monument of Akbar's folly and not of his wisdom. According to Professor S.R. Sharma, Din-i-Ilahi was a vivid manifestation of Emperor Akbar's nationalist spirit. Prof. Ishwari Prasad Summarises the Din-i-ilahi as a unique combination of mysticism, philosophy and nature worship. However, the religion was an exposition of Akbar's liberal trait. In order to preserve the unity of India and to maintain religious harmony between Hindus and Muslims, Akbar promulgated the Din-i-Ilahi.

Administration:

As an administrator Akbar was second to none among the Muslim rulers of India. The basic principles on which his administration rested were nationalism, liberalism and impartiality. He abandoned the traditional Muslim policy of administration and ruled the country on a number of sound principles. According to him, the state being a secular institution should not spend on religious foundations. To him religion is purely a personal matter and it has nothing to do with

state administration. That is why Akbar did not allow the Ulemas or the orthodox Muslims to interfere in politics.

Akbar's administration was completely impartial. All subjects irrespective of their different religious background were treated equally. Akbar gave appointments to the people on the basis of their merit and talent but not on the basis of their religion. Raja Man Singh, Raja Todar Mai and Birbal being Hindus enjoyed high offices during Akbar's rule. His administration presented a national colour. These had made the foundation of his government very strong and stable.

Abul Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari gives a detailed account of his administration. However in brief it could be said that his administrative arrangement was known as Mansabdari System. Officers of different categories were in this system. High officials were Dewan, Mir Bakshi, Khan-i-Jahan and Sadar-i-Sadar. Akbar divided his empire into 15 Subas (provinces) and each Suba was under the charge of a Subedar. Different departments such as military, judicial and revenue performed their duties well.

Akbar's revenue administration was a continuation administration of that of Sher Shah. But it had received a sea change by the Todar Mai's Bandobast System. It was infact a very popular measure in the direction of Land-settlement. Some of his other measures were also very popular. The liberality and utility of his administration was enjoyed by each Indian.

Place of Akbar:

Akbar was one of the greatest monarchs of the world. The time of Akbar like the Elizabethan era of Great Britain was also a glorious epoch in the history of India. He was a great conqueror and was the second or real founder of the Mughal empire. He saved the Mughal rule at Delhi which had gone to the hands of the Afghans with the death of his father Humayun. In a crucial battle against Hemu, he had to exhibit tremendous courage and ability to re-occupy the throne of Delhi.

After that he had not looked back. As a conqueror of high repute he had conquered almost a major part of the country to his credit. His empire extended from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhyas in the south and from Hindu Kush in the west to the river Brahmaputra in the east.

As an administrator, he excelled all the Muslim rulers of the history of India. Alauddin Khilji and Sher Shah may be compared with him as administrators of high repute. His military, economic and revenue administration was out and out excellent. He brought a drastic change by introducing Mansabdari System in administration. His Land revenue system under the able guidance of his revenue minister Todar Mai was a mile-stone. As a far-sighted administrator, he looked into the interest of the people of all communities.

His Rajput policy was an act of clever statesmanship. He knew without the support of the Rajput's his dream of a vast and prolonged empire could not be materialized. He made Rajput's his friends instead of his enemies.

His real greatness was seen in his religious achievements. In a land of multi-religions like India, he adopted a liberal policy and allowed the people of all religions to profess their faith independently. He abolished certain objectionable taxes like Jaziya and pilgrim tax imposed on Hindus.

He respected the saints of the religions and invited them to his Ibadat Khana for religion discourses. To Hindus he was a great liberal. To him, the Hindus and Muslims were the sons of the same soil and children of the same God. They were given equal status before law, equal rights in administration and equal freedom in matters of religion.

Akbar was far away from the narrow circles of his time. Through his Din-i-Ilahi he thought of establishing spiritual unity among the people of different communities of India. Though he did not succeed in his mission but his attempt for spiritual unity among the people of India was a praise worthy step. Akbar was a great patron of learning and had men like Abul Fazl, Faizi, Todar Mai, Birbal, Man Singh and Tansen at his court. He himself though illiterate had developed tremendous passion for learning in association with the wise men.

He was also a patron of art and architecture. He laid foundation of many majestic edifices. He was a great conqueror, administrator, diplomat and a statesman of high repute. He was also a lovable husband, affectionate father and an obedient son. Above all he was one of the greatest men of history.