

Theme V

Imagining the Sacred

افزای بودی پادشاهی روست از و انستوران نساری نفیم و فطرت نشان کجایی است دران بزم الهی که طراز



Time Line

- Akbar's Religious World-view
- Conflict with the Orthodoxy
- Ibadat Khana
- Mahzar
- Tauhid-i Ilahi
- Sulh-i Kul
- Akbar and the Jains
- Akbar and the Jesuits





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Jesuits (Rodolfo Acquaviva and Francisco Henriques) in the Ibadatkhana Assembly of Akbar, Fathpur Sikri; Miniature from *Akbarnama*, circa 1605

Painter: Nar Singh

Photograph Source: Chester Beatty Museum; <http://chesterbeatty.i.e>.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jesuits_at_Akbar%27s_court.jpg

UNIT 17 STATE AND RELIGION*

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17.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will know about the:

- nature of the contemporary writings on religion;
- observations of some historians on the religious policy of the Mughal Emperors;
- attitude of the Mughal Emperors towards religion, and
- influence of the Akbar's religious faith on his state policy,
- Akbar's conflict with the orthodox *ulama*,
- Establishment of *Ibadat Khana* by Akbar,
- proclamation of *Mahzar*, and

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- Akbar's policy of *sulh-i kul*.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The change in the composition of the upper ruling classes in North India after the Muslim conquests should be regarded as a watershed in Indian history. The most important political reason for demarcation from the preceding period is the bare fact that now the Muslims emerge as the dominant factor in the Indian polity – a process that continued for many centuries including the Mughal rule. This has naturally affected the periodization of Indian history. Some modern scholars are prone to call medieval period as 'Muslim' period. They think that since Muslims were the rulers, Islam must have been the state religion. But this perception is erroneous, because it places exclusive importance on religion of the upper ruling-classes, completely disregarding other significant components of medieval society like economic, political and social interests. Secondly, it is not rational to equate the religion of the ruler with that of the state. Such perceptions complicate the issue of state and religion.

In this Unit, at first, we will discuss the background in which the Mughal state was working. We shall also take note of the observations of contemporary sources. The attitude of the Mughal Emperors towards religious matters will also be examined. This includes the personal beliefs of the ruler, state policies and relationship with the non-Muslims. We have avoided the question of Mughal-Rajput relations as they will be discussed in detail in our Course **BHIC 112**.

We would like to stress here that one should be on his guard while using modern terminology to evaluate medieval Indian history, especially the issue of religion during this period. The terms like 'fundamentalism', 'fanaticism', 'communalism', 'secularism', etc. are thrown in wide circulation and are being freely used. Many times this leads to distortion of facts. For a better understanding of such issues, therefore, we should follow a disciplined historical perspective and carefully observe some characteristic features of medieval period.

17.2 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this Section we will discuss the attitude of the State and people towards religion. How the contemporary and modern historiographers view this delicate question of State and religion is also dealt with.

17.2.1 Contemporary Scenario

One feature of the period under study was the firm belief of the majority of the people in religion. Every educated person was expected to be well-versed in religious studies. Consequently, chronicles, etc. written during the period either by Hindus or Muslims were couched in religious idiom. A careless handling of this material, therefore, could blur our judgement of facts, leading to unwarranted interpretation.

Secondly, recognising the importance of religion in public life, the temporal heads freely used it in their personal and political interest. The rulers like Mahmud of Ghazni often gave the slogan of '*jihad*' (religious war) against their enemies, even though none of them really fought for the faith. 'We can hardly find an example of

a war', remarks P. Saran, 'which was fought by Muslim rulers purely on a religious basis and for a religious cause'.

Thirdly, the '*ulama*' (Muslim theologians) were held in high esteem. They wanted the rulers to follow Islamic code in their administration and treat the non-Muslims accordingly. But as P. Saran writes, 'The philosophy of the treatment of non-Muslims, chiefly idolators, by Muslims as developed by Muslim theologians, was nothing different in its nature from the philosophy of the Brahmanic theologians which allowed them, in the sacred name of religion, to treat with all manner of contempt, humiliation and disgrace, a very large section of their countrymen whom they condemned as untouchables.. .'.

On the other hand, some Muslim rulers in India often disagreed with the orthodox *ulama* on certain occasions relating to administrative matters. In most cases, they did not accept the verdict of the religious groups if it did not suit their policies. For example, 14th century chronicler Ziauddin Barani describes at length the attitude of Alauddin Khalji thus: 'He came to the conclusion that polity and government are one thing and the rules and decrees of Law (*Shariat*) are another. Royal commands belong to the king, legal decrees rest upon the judgement of *qazis* and *muftis*. In accordance with this opinion whatever affair of state came before him, he only looked to the public good, without considering whether his mode of dealing with it was lawful or unlawful.' The *qazi* of the Sultan, Mughisuddin of Bayana, suggested a very harsh and humiliating attitude towards the non-Muslim subjects; but Alauddin rejected the advice and told the *qazi* that the interest of his government and his people were of prime importance. He, therefore, issued orders and formulated policies almost disregarding the orthodox opinion. Alauddin's attitude towards religious orthodoxy and political affairs, in fact, became a precedent: administrative requirements and political needs were generally given priority over religious laws by the medieval rulers. A policy of appeasement of the *ulama*, however, continued simultaneously. The rulers at times gave various monetary benefits and other concessions to pacify this group and also to achieve certain political ends.

A further point worth stating here is that since religion was the basic component of the contemporary idiom, the rulers usually explained their policies and actions in religious terms.

17.2.2 Contemporary Historiography

According to the system of education, a medieval Muslim historian, too, had his training in the religious atmosphere of the *madrasas* (medieval centres of learnings). This profoundly affected his style of writing. For the army of his patron he would use the term *Lashkar-i Islam* (the army of Islam) and for that of the enemy *Lashkar-i Kufir* (army of the infidels). Similarly, he justified the casualties in the ranks of his patron as *shahadat* (martyrdom), and lost no time in sending the dead ones of the opposite side to hell. The application of such a style in Indian environment where the majority they ruled belonged to a religion different from that of the ruler, was bound to create confusion. A careless interpreter of these expressions may readily conclude that the nature of struggle in Medieval India was basically religious, and that it was a tussle primarily between Islam and *kufirs*. But this would not be a mature way of analyzing the facts, because these should in no way be confused with the contemporary state policies. The fact that it was basically a

matter of style, can be borne out by any number of examples from the same stock of material. Mohammad Salih (the author of the *Amal-i Salih*), a historian of Shah Jahan's reign, while describing the uprising of the Afghans, condemns the rebels under their leader Kamaluddin Rohilla as *dushman-i din* (enemy of the Faith). In 1630, when Khwaja Abul Hasan (a noble of Shah Jahan) resumed his Nasik expedition, Abdul Hameed Lahori, (the court historian of Shah Jahan), used the term *mujahidan-i din* (warriors in the defense of the Faith) for the Mughal forces in spite of the fact that the opponents comprised more Muslims than non-Muslims, and many non-Muslims were in the Mughal forces. It is also interesting that the same historian terms the Mughal soldiers *mujahidan-i Islam* (warriors in the defense of Islam) when they faced the Nizam Shahi army which overwhelmingly consisted of Muslims. Similar terms were used by historians when expeditions were sent against a non-Muslim chieftain or noble or official. The army sent to crush the uprising of Jujhar Singh Bundela was also termed as *lashkar-i Islam*, although there were a sizeable number of non-Muslims on the Mughal side. The use of religious terms like *mujahid*, *shahadat*, etc. during the Balkh and Badakhshan expeditions under Shah Jahan, where the Mughals were fighting exclusively against their co-religionists, shows literary trend and academic style rather than purely religious nature of these terms. One should, therefore, be very wary while handling such material.

17.2.3 Modern Historiography

The trend of exploring this theme was started long back by Elliot and Dowson, who launched a big project of translating Persian sources of medieval period into English. They picked up such portions from the text which either referred to the 'religious bigotry' of the ruling classes (which was predominantly Muslim by faith), or the suppression of the local Indian masses (who were predominantly Hindu by faith) by a handful of the Muslim rulers.

Unfortunately, the communal spirit breathed by the British for obvious political reasons, was inhaled by a number of Indian scholars like Jadunath Sarkar, Ashirwadi Lal Srivastava and Sri Ram Sharma, etc.

The point is that the term 'Religious Policy' is applied to the actions and reactions of the rulers and the ruled only when the two had different religions. If the rulers tackled their own religious community favourably or unfavourably, it ceases to be a matter of 'Religious Policy'. That is why the published curses poured upon Aurangzeb's head for his 'anti-Hindu' measures are available in abundance, but there is a virtual dearth of criticism for his suppressive attitude towards the leading Muslim scholars, philosophers and saints. Sarmad, Shah Mohammad Badakhshi, Mohammad Tahir and Syed Qutbuddin Ahmadabadi were executed on Aurangzeb's orders.

To set the matter straight, religion was often used by the rulers as a weapon to serve a variety of interests. Sometimes the rulers extended religious concessions to the local chieftains, on other occasions they preferred to suppress them by force. It would be injustice to history if the actions and reactions of the upper and lower ruling groups are viewed in religious terms only, disregarding the political and economic factors if they are clearly and really perceived to be operative.

Finally, there is yet another approach to this theme ('State and Religion') which is tremendously important but, unfortunately, rarely adopted by historians. We are

referring to the role of each ruler's exclusively individual beliefs, whims and their perceptions of the problems of their respective period and also ways to tackle them. This approach would lead us to the psycho-analytical exercise relating to the individual rulers and the high ranking personalities of the period. You will see how this approach helps us in understanding the actions and ordinances of the Mughal emperors to a great extent.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) How far can contemporary writings be held responsible for confusing the state policies with that of religion? Comment.

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- 2) Critically analyse Elliot and Dowson's approach towards the 'religious policy' of the Mughal rulers.

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17.3 ATTITUDE OF AKBAR TOWARDS RELIGION

In his personal faith Akbar appears continued to be a devout Muslim, performed five times prayers. Shaikh Farid Bhakhari informs that he even cleaned up mosque with his own hands and enforced strictly the laws of *Shariat*. He had deep respect for the Prophet. When Abu Turab on his return from Hajj pilgrimage brought the relic with Prophet's foot impression, Akbar went on foot several miles to receive that. Akbar even encouraged and funded Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and appointed for the purpose a separate *Mir-i Hajj*. Even he financed construction of a *khanqah* for the stay of Hajj pilgrimage in Hijaz. In 1575 Gulbadan Begum accompanied by several other royal ladies of the *Harem* were permitted to proceed on Hajj.

Akbar's attitude towards religion and religious communities is generally looked by scholars into a number of phases on the basis of the decrees he passed and steps taken by him from time to time. K A. Nizami sees the transition in Akbar's religious ideas from 'hereditary faith' to 'orthodox rigidity' followed by 'enquiry and scepticism', leading to 'synthesis and universalism', 'secularism' and finally converging into 'religious leadership'.

17.3.1 Early Phase: 1560-1565

Akbar's attitude towards religion and religious communities is generally evaluated on the basis of the measures which he took between 1560-65 and which primarily affected the non-Muslim population of the Empire. In its early phase Akbar began with extremely liberal attitude towards the non-Muslims. It is suggested that his upbringing and various intellectual influences moulded his personal beliefs. Akbar's tutors Bairam Khan and Mir Abdul Latif (Irani Shia), as well as Munim Khan (Sunni Turani) were above sectarian prejudices. Iqtidar Alam Khan (1992: 18) also attributes the influence of Mongol *yasa-i Chinghizi* which in spirit instructed the rulers 'to consider all sects as one and not to distinguish them from one another'.

He even sees the persecution of Mahdavis and Shias as the declining Mongol influence in the 1560s.

During this period the Emperor established matrimonial relations with the Rajputs (In 1562 Akbar married Bihari Mal/Bhar Mal's daughter.); prohibited the enslavement of prisoners of war (1562); abolished the pilgrimage tax (1563) and *jiziya* (1564). These measures seem to have given Akbar the image of a 'secular' emperor. In his personal beliefs, however, Akbar was a devout Muslim.

Akbar's 'liberalism' has been explained in several ways. The current opinion, however, favours the view that these measures were political concessions. In the absence of any reliable Muslim support Akbar had little alternative but to seek alliance with the Rajputs and Indian Muslims. These measures were in fact concessions given to the non-Muslims to win their support.

From the very beginning Akbar had inclination towards Sufis. As early as 1562 Akbar established contacts with Ajmer. He paid several visits to Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti's *dargah* at Ajmer; one immediately after his victory at Chittor (1568) and another after the birth of Salim (1570). He set the affairs of the *dargah* and state funds were provided for its upkeep. During his Gujarat campaign he even made the shouts *Ya Muin* (seeking Khwaja Muinuddin's blessings). Even some of his soldiers during the campaign shouted Ajmeri, Ajmeri in the battlefield. In 1569 even he selected the site of Shaikh Salim Chishti's abode to be the site of his new capital town Fathpur Sikri as token of gratitude to the saint with whose blessings Akbar was blessed with son. He also paid visits at the *dargahs* of Baba Farid Ganj-I Shakar at Ajodhan (1571) and that of Fariduddin Yahya Maneri (1574). He also visited Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's *dargah* in 1564 and even paid respects at Saiyyid Salar Masud Ghazi's *dargah* at Bahraich and those of Shaikh Nizamuddin of Narnaul and Saiyyid Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior.

17.3.2 Second Phase: 1566-1578

A change however appears in his attitude after 1565. This phase is marked by Akbar's attempt to win over the *ulama*. The works like *Gulzar-i Abrar and Nafais-ul Ma'asir*, suggest that the emperor showed deep respect to the *ulama* and bestowed upon this group abundant favours. There is 'a marked retrogression in his attitude in matters pertaining to religion'. Akbar appointed grandson of Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, as *Sadr-us Sudur* and Akbar himself used to visit Abdun Nabi's house to listen to lectures in *Hadis* (tradition of the Prophet).

A document signed by his *wakil* Munim Khan (August-September 1566) refers to the order regarding the collection of *jiziya* in the vicinity of Agra. In 1568, Akbar issued the famous *Fathnama* of Chittor (preserved in the *Munshat-i Namkin*) which is full of terms and idioms that can be compared with any other prejudiced and bigoted declaration. It was couched in religious terminology and it declares his war against the Rajputs as *jihad*, takes pride in destroying temples and in killing the *kafirs*. Then we have *Sharaif-i Usmani* which tells that the Emperor ordered Qazi Abdus Samad of Bilgram to check the Hindus from practicing idol-worship there. To crown all this, in 1575, according to Badauni, Akbar reimposed *jiziya* though it did not work.

Encouraged by emperor's bounty some of the *ulama* persecuted even the non-Sunni sects of the Muslims. The suppressive measures taken against the **Mahdavis**

and the Shias (who were unpopular among the orthodox *ulama*) pass almost unnoticed in the chronicles of this period. In 1567 Akbar also ordered at the instance of Shaikh Abdun Nabi exhumation of the remains of renowned Shia scholar Mir Murtaza Sharifi Shirazi from the vicinity of Amir Khusru's tomb on the pretext that a 'heretic' may not be buried so close to the renowned Sunni saint. In 1569 Mirza Muqim of Isfahan and Mir Yaqub of Kashmir were ordered to put to death at the recommendation of Abdun Nabi and other *ulama* on account of Shia-Sunni hostilities. Akbar dealt with Mahdavis more seriously and suppressed them during his Gujarat campaigns (1572-1573). The Mahdavi saint Miyan Mustafa Bandgi was not only arrested but in humiliating circumstances brought to the court in chains.

Establishment of *Ibadat Khana* (House of Worship)

In 1575 Akbar established *Ibadat Khana* with the aim to have free discussion on various aspects of Islamic theology. Every Friday discussions were held after the Friday prayers and continued till late in the night. Qazi Jalaluddin and other *ulama* were asked to read and elaborate on *Quranic* exegesis. Abul Fazl mentions that it was established to 'ascertain the truth and to discover the Reality'.

An interesting aspect of this phase was that despite 'an atmosphere of religious intolerance' most of the Rajput chieftains joined his service during the years 1566-73. The total share of the Rajputs and non-Muslims among Akbar's *mansabdars* became the highest (see **Table 1**).

Table 1

Period	Total Number of Nobles	Turanis	Persians	Indian Muslims	Rajputs and Other Hindus	Unspecified
1555	51 (52.9%)	27 (31.37%)	16	-	-	8 (15.68%)
1565-75 (500 and above)	96	38 (39.58%)	37 (38.54%)	9 (9.37%)	8 (8.33%)	4 (4.16%)
1580	272	66 (24.26%)	47 (17.27%)	44 (16.17%)	43 (15.83%)	72 (26.47%)
1575-1595 (500 and above)	184	64 (34.78%)	47 (25.54%)	34 (18.48%)	30 (16.30%)	9 (4.89%)

Source: Khan, Iqtidar Alam, (1968) 'The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policy', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April, Nos 1/2, p. 35

Even during this time he married niece of Raja of Bikaner and daughter of Raval Har Rai of Jaisalmer (1570) and also daughter of Raval Askaran of Dungarpur and daughter of Rai Maldeo of Jodhpur (1576). Even, Akbar conferred *madad-i ma'ash* grant of 200 bighas of land to Gopal Das, priest of Madan Mohan temple, Vrindavan. Later in 1568 also at the recommendation of Raja Todar Mal Akbar entrusted the management of Madan Mohan and Govind Dev temples to Jiv Goswami. Religion, thus, was not the main concern of the Mughal Emperor. The

significant issue before Akbar was to subdue the local chieftains. Religion was used only as a tool to attain political goals. When this strategy did not yield substantial gains, Akbar dropped it.

17.3.3 Third Phase: 1578-1580

But soon the Emperor got disillusioned and gradually got estranged the way Muslim jurists used to quarrel over questions of jurisprudence. Akbar commented on *ulama* behaviour in utter dismay during the *Ibadat Khana* proceeds: 'I wish I had not heard such differences of opinion from teachers of traditional subjects, nor were confounded by different interpretations of the *Quranic* verses and the traditions of the Prophet.' Gradually, even Abun Nabi's behaviour becoming intolerable and overbearing to Akbar not only in matters of unrestrained powers enjoyed by in governing the office of the *sadr* and in matters of distribution of land grants. Once Shaikh not only objected to Akbar wearing bright colours like saffron but also attempted physical assault by throwing a rod towards him in anger. The spark provided over Abdun Nabi's order of execution of a Brahman at Mathura on the charges of blasphemy.

These *ulama* even amassed huge wealth. Abdullah Sultanpuri, who was *Shaikh-ul Islam*, had collected huge wealth, which Akbar, later confiscated to the state treasury after his death.

Gradually Akbar started developing a rebellious attitude towards these conservative *ulama* who were 'rigid in outlook, self-centred and arrogant' and often indulged in 'petty wranglings'. On the issue *ulama* on the one side and the ladies of the *harem* and Hindu nobles got divided. Akbar too felt the severity of the punishment and realized that the country cannot be ruled on such rigid lines. Not only he got disgusted with the attitude of these *ulama* but also developed distrust over their traditional wisdom.

In the beginning only the Sunnis were permitted to take part in the *Ibadat Khana* discussions. But, from September 1578, the Emperor opened the gates of *Ibadat Khana* to all religious communities, the sufis, shi'as, Brahmins, Jains, Christians, Jews, Parsis, etc. Inspired Akbar decreed for complete freedom of religious worship and to build a church or an idol temple or a fire temple. Thus, 'compulsion in religious matters was forbidden'. The discussions at *Ibadat Khana* proved to be a *turning point* as they convinced Akbar that the essence of faith lay in 'internal conviction' based on 'reason'. The chief motivator of Akbar's ideas on rationalism and reason was Fathullah Shirazi. It was he who introduced Akbar to Iranian rationalist thinkers Muhaqqiq Dawwani, Mir Sadruddin, Mir Ghiyasuddin Mansur and Mirza Jan.

This was the period when Akbar came under the philosophical influences of Shaikh Mubarak and his sons Abul Fazl and Faizi and other rationalist thinkers, Ghazi Khan Badekhshi, Hakim Abul Fath, etc. and got introduced by the philosophy of *wahdat-ul wujud* of Ibn al-Arabi.

Proclamation of *Mahzar*

In 1579 proclamation of *mahzar* was the culmination of the break-away from the *ulama*. *Mahzar* was carefully drafted by Shaikh Mubarak and Abdun Nabi, Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri were forced to sign the decree along with four other leading

ulama of the time. Later, Abdun Nabi and Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri were asked to proceed on Hajj. The chief clauses of *mahzar* proclaimed:

- a) that Akbar was the *Khalifa* of the age;
- b) that the rank of *Khalifa* is higher than that of a *mujtahids*, Akbar can select any one opinion;
- c) Akbar himself may issue decrees which do not go against the *nass*. (Hasan 1943: 125)

Akbar made an attempt by proclaiming himself *mujtahid* (interpreter of law) and declaring himself as *Imam-Adil*, to claim the right to interpret all legal questions on which there existed a difference of opinion among the *ulama*. *Sultan-i Adil* was placed above *mujtahids*. Through *mahzar* Akbar attempted to 'usurp' the spiritual leadership. Akbar assumed the title of *Amir-ul Muminin* and in the *khutba* read in Akbar's name addressed Akbar as *Khalifa*, thus suggestive of Akbar's desire to dislocate caliphal powers from the Ottomans to the Mughals. F.W. Buckler Akbar attempted to fix his position in the Muslim world eliminating the importance of the king of Persia without acknowledging his allegiance to the Ottoman Caliph. M. Roy Choudhury also echoes the same voice when he acknowledges that *Imam-i Adil* (Akbar) place himself above the *mujtahid* of Persia. R.P. Tripathi also puts forth the similar opinion that *mahzar* was a challenge to 'pretensions of the Sultan of Rum' [Ottoman]. Van Noer calls the declaration of *mahzar* as the 'funeral oration' of the *ulama*. Shaikh Taj-ul Arifin declared him *Insan-i Kamil*, while Faizi called him *Khuda-i Majazi*. Nurul Hasan (1943: 133) argues that, 'This document placed the sovereign above the machinations of the *ulama* class [he accuses *ulama* being highly vulnerable and easily influenced by the rich and powerful nobles].

This led to violent protests from a section of the Mughal society. The most powerful reaction to Akbar's religious attitude came from Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, a Naqshabandi saint from Sirhind. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi blamed the Muslims of his time by saying that they estranged themselves from the traditional religious values instead 'sunk' in '*bidat*' (innovations; deviation from the tradition of the Prophet). He questioned *ijtihad* (fresh interpretation) and called it heresy in the garb of *ijtihad*. He criticized Akbar's religious experiments were 'misguided' and based on 'erroneous concepts'.

The sharpest reactions came from the *ulama*. For the first time scholars found the religious atmosphere incongenial and decided to turn towards Hijaz. Maulana Jalaluddin refused to sign *mahzar* left for Hijaz. Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar left for Hijaz with Akbar's proclamation of *Tauhid-i Ilahi*. As protest Haji Ibrahim Muhaddis of Akbarabad refused to prostrate. However, one major reason for the protest of Akbar's policy was Akbar's strict steps to clean the working of the religious department and put a check against the embezzlement of *madad-i ma'ash* grants and later heavy curtailment of it. The country came under the grip of such protests from Kabul to Bengal during 1580-1581. Hamida Khatoon Naqvi has calculated the number of such protests to 144 during Akbar's reign. In 1580 Mulla Muhammad Yezdi, *qazi* of Jaunpur issued a *fatwa* against Akbar leading to rebellions of Muhammad Masum Kabuli, Muhammad Masum Khan Farankhudi, Mir Muiz-ul Mulk, Nayabat Khan, Arab Bahadur rose in rebellion. Masum, though belonged to Kabul, had his *madad-i ma'ash* grant in Patna. He even conspired to

put half-brother of Akbar Mirza Hakim to place him to the throne. Thus such serious proportions the *ulama* rebellions assumed that it even posed threat to the very crown of Akbar. Akbar succeeded ultimately in curbing the predominance of the orthodox elements by 1584. However, R.P. Tripathi (1973: 132) believes that 'The scope of the Mahzar was limited. It only emphasized the right of the emperor to select from among the divergent views of the legists what seemed to him to serve the best interests of the State and the people; and issue ordinances not incompatible with the *nas* and the good of the people.'

Akbar even dissociated himself abruptly from his frequented visits to Ajmer to Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's shrine. In 1580 he sent Murad instead.

In 1579 Akbar finally repealed *jiziyah*. Repealing of *jiziyah* marked the intend of Akbar to eliminate all distinctions between his Hindu and Muslim subjects. *Shariah* principles no longer be enforced upon his Hindu subjects.

This was the period when Akbar interacted and came under the influence of various cultural and religious traditions, particularly Hindu scholars, Jains and the Jesuits. Orthodox scholars even blamed him being estranged from the principles of *Shariat* and favouring Shias and Hindus.

Akbar and the Hindus and the Jains

Akbar interacted with a number of scholars expert in Indian philosophic tradition: Madhu Saraswati, Madhusudan, Damodar Bhatt. Debi and Purushottam instructed him in the traditional Hindu legendry texts, informs Badauni. In 1576-1577 Akbar invited Vitthaleshwar from Mathura and granted Gokul to him; even in 1593 Akbar issued a *farman* forbidding killing of hunting of peacocks in the *parganas* of Mathura, Mangotah and Od. Akbar's frequently interacted and had discussions with the *jogis* and even established a separate locality *jogipura* just outside Fathpur Sikri. Even he personally visited the shrine of Balnath in Rohtas. Hindu festivals were regularly celebrated in the court. Even, after the death of his mother Hamida Bano Begum (1604) Akbar shaved his moustaches and head, a Hindu way of mourning. As a mark of respect Akbar banned the killing of cows in his empire. Akbar even appointed Sur Das Brahman to teach Indian philosophy to Prince Khurram.

The opening of the doors of *Ibadat Khana* for scholars of different sects and religions provided favourable background for further interactions for the Jains. In his quest for search Akbar invited Jain scholar Hiravijaya Suri, leader of the Jain Tapa gaccha branch, who reached Akbar's court at Agra in 1583 along with sixty-seven Jain monks and stayed there till 1585. Akbar conferred on him the title *jagat guru*. Under Jain influence Akbar banned the animal slaughter for twelve days during Jain Paryushana festival. Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i Akbari* (*Ain* 30) mentions Hiravijaya Suri and his disciples Bhanuchandra and Vijaysen Suri as scholars *par excellence*. Jain scholar Bhanuchandra wrote commentary explaining one thousand names of the sun (for details see **Unit 2**). Jain scholar Shantichandra was the joint author of the said commentary and also wrote Sanskrit poem *Kriparasakosha*. Bhanuchandra succeeded in getting concessions from Akbar to secure control over Mount Shatrunjaya (the revered Jain pilgrim centre). At Bhanuchandra's request Akbar even agreed to release the rebel prisoners of Saurashtra. Akbar even granted a piece of land in the proximity of Lahore fort for building a Jain temple there. In 1590 and 1592 Akbar issued two *farmans* favouring

Jains (1590 *farman* against harassment of Jains in Cambay and 1592 *farman* favouring Shvetambar Tapa gaccha branch confirming control over pilgrimages of Shvetambar Jains in the hands of Tapa gaccha. Akbar also invited the rival Khartar gaccha leader Jinachandra Suri who reached the Mughal court in Lahore in 1592 along with his thirty-one disciples including Jayasom and Kanaksom. Akbar even conferred the title *Yug Pradhan* on Jinachandra in 1593). As favour to Jinvijay, Akbar issued a *firman* granting the protection to Jain pilgrim centres in Gujarat. Akbar even granted a *firman* favouring Jinavijay ban of animal slaughter in the entire kingdom for a week in the month of Ashadh (from 9th to 15th [*navmi to purnima*]). Hiravijaya Suri's disciple Vijaysen Suri visited Akbar's court at Lahore in 1593 and Akbar entrusted him the title *kalisaraswati*. Vijaysen successfully countered Brahman allegations on Jain 'disbelief' in God. Vijaysen's disciple Nandivijaya was also adorned with the title *khushfaham*. Vijayasuri even influenced Akbar to ban fishing in the Indus water for months in a year. Clearly, Akbar's encounter with the Jain leadership speaks high of Akbar's pluralistic approach towards religion and religious communities.

Akbar and the Jesuits

Akbar invited Jesuits to participate in the *Ibadat Khana* proceeds and received them with warmth. Three Jesuit missions visited Akbar's court: First under Rudolf Aquaviva along with Father Monserrate and Francis Henriquez (1580-1583); Second mission under Edward Leiton and Christopher di Vega (1591-1592); and the third mission headed by Father Jerome Xavier, Father Emmanuel Pinheiro and Brother Benedict de Goes (1595-1617). Akbar was impressed by seeing the simple living and unity of thought of the Jesuit Fathers in contrast the greed of the *ulama*. He also showed great interests in the Christian precepts. Father Monserrate was made teacher of Murad. Father Monserrate even accompanied the king to Kashmir. A biography of Jesus, *Mirat-ul Quddus* in Persian was compiled during Akbar's period. Christians were granted permission to establish their churches and schools in Agra, Fathpur Sikri and Lahore. The Christian school at Lahore was attended to by the sons of nobles and other elites, including the sons of the chief of Badakhshan. Akbar himself inaugurated the opening of the church at Agra and reported to have performed prayers as per Christian tradition (for details see **Unit 2**). Akbar even had in possession paintings of Christ and Virgin Mary presented to him by Jesuit Fathers. Jesuits vehemently desired Akbar to be converted to Christianity. However, Akbar's interest in Christianity, though, was deep but largely remained confined to his curiosity to know the precepts of the Faith and discover the 'truth'.

Akbar even interacted with the *jogis*, *sanyasis*, and *qalandars*. Even significant number of them joined his new faith.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Analyse Akbar's attitude towards religion and religious communities up to 1565.

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2) Write 50 words on the *Ibadat Khana*.

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3) Discuss the process of estrangement of Akbar with *ulama*.

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4) Explain *mahzar* and its significance.

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17.3.4 Fourth Phase: 1581-1605

The final phase is marked by a number of decrees. *Ibadat Khana* debates were finally stopped by Akbar in 1582 accompanied with the declaration of his *Tauhid-i Ilahi*. In 1584 Akbar abandons the Hijri era introduces Ilahi era (which later withdrew by Shahjahan), and in 1592 issues the millennial coins thus, what K. A. Nizami (2009: 132) call it, thus, ‘Both ideologically and structurally the process of drifting away from the central traditions of Islam was completed’. Akbar’s attempt to celebrate the millennium is equally important where he attempted to attempt to establish the unity of ideas by bridging the gap between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘practice’. In this context claiming himself the title *mujaddid-i alf-i sani* (reformer at the beginning of the second millennium) is of crucial importance and attempted to project himself a ‘promised messiah’.

Badauni and Jesuits even asserted that from 1581 onwards Akbar ceased to be a Muslim. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi even asserted that Akbar’s tolerant attitude towards non-Muslims was mainly due to his antagonism towards Islam.

Tauhid-i Ilahi

Akbar’s *Tauhid-i Ilahi* (mistakenly called *Din-i Ilahi*) is another significant measure of this reign.

Sunday was fixed for initiation of disciples to the fold of the new religion...The novice approached the Emperor with his turban in his hands and put his head at the feet of the Emperor who raised him up and replaced the turban on his head. As a symbol of initiation a *Shast* was given to the new entrant.

Its followers had to exchange greetings with the words *Allah-o-Akbar* and *Jalla Jallalhu*.

[The new entrant] was to surrender property, life, religion and honour for the founder of the faith.

The entrants of the faith comprised: ...Sanyasis, jogis, servas, Qalandars, Hakims and Sufis and thousands of such as follow worldly pursuits as soldiers, tradespeople, mechanics, and husbandsmen...

[Entrants] were not *murids*, but *chelas*, and Akbar was not a *pir* but a prophet.

Only a few of the courtiers joined the faith. The prominent among them were Shaikh Mubarak and his two sons Abul Fazl and Faizi and Birbal. His prominent nobles Raja Bhagwan Das, Raja Man Singh and Todar Mal refused to join the new faith.

R.P. Tripathi (1956: 285-89) had examined this theme in detail. It is appropriate to cite him at length: 'Shrewd as Akbar was, he must have felt that it was neither possible to melt all religions down into one, nor to launch a new religion which would have added one more to others. But he felt himself caned upon to propagate his ideas among those who cared to listen to them ... The sect had no sacred book or scripture, no priestly hierarchy, no sacred place of worship and no rituals or ceremonies except that of initiation... a member had to give a written promise of having... accepted the four grades of entire devotion, viz., sacrifice of property, life, honour and religion... [(it)] was not a religion and Akbar never intended to establish a church ... neither force nor money was employed to enlist disciples... It was entirely a personal matter, not between the Emperor and the subjects, but between Akbar and those who chose to regard him as their *pir* or *guru*.' What seems to us is that Akbar wanted to build up a devoted band of people around him, acting as their 'spiritual guide'. Thus *Tauhid-i Ilahi* had nothing to do with Akbar's religious or political policy. Tripathi (1956: 288) rightly argues that, 'The *Din Ilahi* was not a religion and Akbar never intended to establish a Church.' He did not go beyond 'his spiritual guidance and infuse in them [people] his own catholic spirit' (Tripathi 1956: 289).

Van Noer believes it nothing but Akbar's attempt to consolidate his political fraternity. He comments, 'The *Din-i Ilahi* had an importance of pre-eminent practical value; it was a political fraternity the members of which had bound themselves by oath to stand by the emperor in good and ill-fortunes, in joy and in trouble.'

17.4 *SULH-I KUL* (PEACE WITH ALL; ABSOLUTE PEACE)

The elements of Akbar's *sulh-i kul* can be seen in his early anxiety to study other religious traditions. K.A. Nizami argues that through his *sulh-i kul* Akbar attempted to emphasise upon the 'social dimension of his religious thought'. For Akbar most important was religious good-will and toleration. Abul Fazl argues, 'Among monarchs, divine worship is expressed by their justice and good administration' (Streusand 1999: 137). 'For him religion was an instrument to unite and not a pretext for conflict' (Nizami 2009: 224). For Akbar 'religious strife was a basic cause of human misfortune and upholds *sulh-i kul* as a fundamental good' (Streusand 1999: 137).

K.A. Nizami sees period between 1569-1585, when he was stationed at Fathpur Sikri, busy constructing his new capital, as a period of Akbar's quest for searching unity in diversity, with stone (construction of the capital city), brush (paintings) and pen (extensive Sanskrit translation works commissioned in the *maktab khana*). The 'state under him came to represent a conglomeration of all traditions of Indian culture' (Nizami 2009: 182). Jahangir mentions, 'in his father's empire the Sunnis and Shias prayed in one mosque'.

Abul Fazl even argued that Akbar was moving further from *sulh-i kul* to *muhabbat-i kul* (love with all). The hallmark of Akbar's attitude towards religious classes was his 'deep humanitarianism and catholicity of approach. Akbar's *sulh-i kul* is beautifully summed up by Sujan Rai Bhandari:

Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Christians and believers of other religions should pray to God according to his own religion and Law.

17.5 AN ASSESSMENT

Jahangir beautifully sums up Akbar's attitude towards religion and religious groups: 'My father always associated with the learned of every creed and religion'...He associated with the good of every race and creed and persuasion, and was gracious to all in accordance with their condition and understanding.' Akbar's policy towards religion is also beautifully expressed by a contemporary poet: 'Religion has gained such grandeur through your [Akbar's] justice that a Hindu [reference is to Man Singh] wields the sword of Islam.' In conclusion we may say that Akbar, in the interest of political consolidation, did not generally resort to religious discrimination. Yet he never hesitated in taking strong measures against those who threatened his position or exceeded the limits of social or ideological values regardless of their faith or creed. It should also be noted that stern actions were taken against individuals, and not against the religious groups as such.

Likewise, there is another view which finds Akbar having forsaken Islam, repressive towards orthodox Islam and being hypocritical in his tolerant attitude. Nimatullah Harawi is critical of the religious atmosphere prevailed during Akbar's period. Shaikh Farid Bukhari who wrote the chronogram of Shaikh Mubarak's death as *Shaikh mulhid* (heretic Shaikh) echoes the resentment of the *ulama* against Akbar's policies. Badauni accuses Akbar 'adopting the Cross' and renounced Islam. However, Christian missionaries were even denied audience to Akbar when he lay on his death-bed.

Sujan Rai Bhandari, in contrast, sums up, 'Some Muslims who were not free from bigotry accused *Khaqan-i Azam* of deviation from religion and indulged in defamation'. We do hear in 1592, Raja Man Singh building a huge mosque at Raj Mahal. However, it appears that there were definite reductions in the financial assistance given to orthodox Islamic institutions and personnels and in some of his orders he did banned performance of *namaz* and closure of the mosques. Akbar's principle of *sulh-i kul* estranged him from public participation of the rituals of Islam. Akbar's actions did indicate his estrangement from such public participation during 1595-1601. Akbar's this avoidance of public participation in Islamic rituals looked by the orthodox element as if Akbar had forsaken Islam. But that was, as Iqtidar Alam Khan argues, a brief phase (1595-1601), and the accusation that Akbar had forsaken Islam appears to be far from the truth. During the last four years of his reign there appears no widespread discontent among the Sunni orthodoxy and 'despite all his innovation', he remained a Muslim till the end' (Khan 1992: 28). R.P. Tripathi (1956: 284) also argues that, 'Akbar lived and died a Mussalman...he never identified himself with any particular school of law and thought, and this was the chief reason why people doubted his religion.'

1) Analyse major features of Akbar’s *Tauhid-i Ilahi*.

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2) Explain *sulh-i kul*.

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17.6 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have discussed the policies of the Mughal rulers towards the major religious communities. Since Mughal sovereigns were not restrained by any constitutional provisions, they were autocrats not responsible to anyone. Therefore, in one sense, their measures and policies could be said to have been those of the state itself. There was no constant religious policy *per se* of the Mughal state. It varied according to the whims and personal perceptions of the Mughal Emperors. Babur and Humayun did not have time to formulate any clear and definite policy. Akbar, however, tried to project himself as the universal monarch and put forth the idea of...He was liberal and tolerant to a large extent and rejected the orthodoxy of the *ulama*. The ‘core’ of his religious world-view was *sulh-i kul*.

17.7 KEYWORDS

<i>Ibadat Khana</i>	In 1575 Akbar established <i>Ibadat Khana</i> , originally established for the purpose of religious discussion with Muslim theologians. However, later its doors were opened for the scholars of all religions
<i>Inam-i Adil</i>	Just ruler
<i>Jiziya</i>	Poll tax
Mahadawi	Islamic movement founded by Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri in the late fifteenth century. In 1496 he declared himself a Mahdi
<i>Muezzins</i>	One who calls for prayers in a mosque
<i>Mujtahid</i>	‘Infallible’ authority
<i>Nass</i>	Statements of the <i>Quran</i> and the <i>Hadis</i>
<i>Shariat</i>	Islamic Law
<i>Ulama</i>	Plural of ‘ <i>alim</i> who calls for prayers in a mosque ; Muslim theologians
<i>Wakil</i>	Prime Minister

17.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sub-sections 17.2.1, 17.2.2 Discuss that it was the contemporary style of writing that confused the modern scholars who did try to analyse their meanings in the proper perspective. It was common practice to call a war as jihad and the enemy as *kafir*, etc. Elaborate it.
- 2) See Sub-section 17.2.3 Analyse how Elliot and Dowson's translation of Mughal Chronicler's accounts, in which they have chosen, mostly, the events where either the Mughal ruling class is reflected as 'bigot' or oppression of the 'Hindu' (Indian) masses is reflected by a 'Muslim' (Mughal rulers).

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 17.3.1 Discuss that religious concessions to various groups during 1556-1568 were motivated by the political exigencies. Akbar had to rely on Indian Muslims and Rajputs in the Wake of Turani nobles' rebellion. But when he realized that rigorous measures are required he took no time to revert back and give it a religious tone as the political need was (he did it in 1568). Elaborate.
- 2) See Sub-section 17.3.2 Analyse how the religious discussions in *Ibadat Khana* put him in total disarray and led him to conclude that the 'essence of faith lay in internal conviction based on reason'.
- 3) Sub-section 17.3.2
- 4) Sub-section 17.3.3

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Sub-section 17.3.4
- 2) Section 17.4

17.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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17.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Akbar's Religions Views

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=da13YsMaOQU>

Akbar's Religious Ideas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CvMQILCIBo>

Religion and the Medieval Indian Rulers - V: Akbar Sulh-i Kul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ueh04cSeK4>

Sulh e Kul : from 16th century till date

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1_k3AJW8Uc

