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Akbar, the Doctrine of Solh-i-Koll and Hindu-Muslim Relations

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Abstract

Jalal-al-Din Mohammad Akbar son of Humāyun, was unquestionably the greatest of all Mughul sovereigns who ruled over India around fifty years (1556-1605). The period of Akbar's rule has been regarded as one of the most significant and incomparable periods in Indian history involving very precious achievements on all political and socio-cultural grounds, including unity of the adherents of different religious particularly Muslims and Hindus.

This remarkable unity across such a wide territory where there are various religions, races and languages seemed to be a dream. However, it was achieved as a result of Akbar's distinguished character, his unparalleled farsightedness and exerting his religious policy based on the Sufi doctrine of *Solh-i-Koll* (The Universal Peace).

The present paper is organized into two major parts. The first part introduces the sundry internal and external factors that shaped Akbar's personality and religious policy. The second part discusses his exhaustive innovations and measures in paving the way for the realization of the doctrine.

Key words: 1. Akbar 2. Religious Policy 3. Religious Innovation 4. Universal Peace 5. Muslim India 6. Islam 7. Hinduism

1. Introduction

Muhammad Akbar, son of Humayun, was born on the night of the full moon, Thursday, November 23, 1542 (3, p: 126). In his veins flowed Turkish, Mongol and Persian blood. He was seventh in line from Timur Lang, and through the mother of his grandfather – Babur – he descended from Chengiz Khan (29, p: 353).

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The advent of Akbar marks the consummation of the process of unification in the two greatest houses of central Asia, those of Chengiz Khan and Timur Lang. Akbar combined in him all that the best of these ancestors of his in the middle ages (11, p: 16).

The age of Akbar has been described as an age of great rulers, and some hold that “of his contemporaries, Elizabeth of England, Henry IV of France, and Shāh ‘Abbās the Great of Persian, he was not the least.” (17, p.153) Some have even written of him as though he were no less than what his enemies alleged pretended to be. But with all his faults, he was by far the greatest of all who ruled India during the era of the dominance of Islam in that land (20, p: 121).

“Difference of religion was the chief bar between the nations of India and the ruling class, and to remove this Akbar first announced his adherence to principle of *Solh-i-Koll*, universal peace or toleration. He was so far ahead of his age that it was not surprising that he was misunderstood, for in that age toleration, in the East as in the West, was the symbol not of an enlightened and humane mind but of laxity of principle. But toleration would have served Akbar well had he remained content with it as a means to his end” (17, p: 153).

In this article I attempt first to examine various religio-cultural and social conditions prevalent in Muslim India at the time of Akbar and temperamental backgrounds of Mughul Emperors which influenced on and helped him to shape his religious policy based on the ‘*Doctrine of Solh-i-Koll*’ and then to review his expanded measures and reforms for realization of the doctrine and putting it in practice.

2. The Influential Factors and Trends on Akbar’s Religious Policy

2.1. The Influence of Islam upon Hinduism

During the century preceding Akbar’s accession, there had grown up in Hindustan a number of syncretic movements. Under the influence of Islam, various religious reformers such as Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, Namdeva, and Tukaram had challenged the social concept of caste, and had adopted monotheism (21, pp: 295-297; 26, pp: 456-485). Never had Hinduism accepted the values of an alien system as it did during the reform movements of that day.

“This Islamic influence upon Hinduism was remarkable, for the latter had triumphed over other religions in the past, reabsorbing Buddhism, and absorbing many foreign peoples and sects with in its complex system.” (16, p: 108) The victory of Islam over Hinduism in these various syncretic sects is called perilous by Qureshi, because, in accepting Islamic values, Hinduism was actually showing its absorptive capacity once again. (Ibid, p: 120)

All of these movements stressed what Hinduism and Islam had in common, thereby weakening the contrast in the common mind between the two faiths. “The emphasis on devotion to a personal God and the challenge to caste were defensive reactions on the part of Hinduism as much as they were the positive influence of Islam” (1, p: 119). The leaders of the Bhakti movement were throwing down the barriers of caste and community and creating a saintly brotherhood in which weavers, butchers, cultivators and shopkeepers were rubbing shoulders with the high caste leaders of Vaisnava thought (26, p: 456; 27, p: 115). It was only in such an atmosphere that Hindu teachers could be found willing enough to initiate the emperor into the mysteries of Hindu thought.

So in the sixteenth century, therefore, the former sharp line between Islam and Hinduism was becoming less well defined and religious situation through which India was passing at that time contributed to the final evolution of Akbar’s religious policy.

2. 2. The Sufi Thought and the Vedanta School

“During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the thought of Ibn Arabi gained increasing ascendancy among Muslim mystics, and particularly in one of the most active missionary brotherhoods in India, the Chishtis. The increasing acceptance of Ibn ‘Arabi’s monist philosophy among Muslim mystics was of particular significance in India, for it brought Sufi thought increasingly close to the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy” (2, p: 133 & p: 145). At the beginning of the Mughul era, therefore, a situation existed in India where devotionism in Hinduism and monist philosophy in Islam had been working to bring Islam and Hinduism closer together, “to a point where the differences between the two faiths were scarcely perceptible to the untutored mind” (16, p: 110).

2. 3. The Increasing Influence of Sunni ‘Ulamā

In the court and in the centers of power, however, the influence of the orthodox ‘Ulamā had increased. Not only did they have

control over the interpretation of Islamic law, but also the chief judge of the realm *Qādi-al-Qudāt* and the chief theologian *Sadr-al-Sudur* had control over the distribution of tax-free lands (12, p: 159). This situation gave them great power and was a source of considerable corruption (Ibid, p: 173). The increase in their power had not increased the 'Ulamā's tolerance in matters of Islamic jurisprudence.

Regarding the treatment of non-Muslims, the 'Ulamā by the large followed the tradition established under the Delhi Sultanate of treating them as *dhimmi*, or protected people. "The Hindus were allowed freedom of worship, but they were subject to the payment of *Jizya*, a special tax on non - Muslims." (Ibid, p.349) In the treatment of heterodox Muslims, however, the 'Ulamā were particularly severe. They persecuted any whose opinions differed from theirs (9, pp: 114-115). This intolerance inevitably led to factionalism among the jurists themselves. "The chief *qādi*, Makhdum al-Mulk, and the chief *sadr*, Shaykh 'Abd- al-Nabi quarreled and accused one another of being infidels in front of the Emperor Akbar" (6, vol. I, pp: 76-77; vol. III, p: 180). They gave such a poor account of themselves in religious discussions with the Emperor, that Akbar had to caution them with a view to mending their conduct (Ibid, vol. II, p: 205).

The difference amongst 'Ulamā of whom one would pronounce a thing as unlawful and another by some process of argument would pronounce the very same thing lawful, became to his Majesty another cause of unbelief (9, pp: 207-209; 31, pp: 164-165). Badayuni had more than once admitted that the 'Ulamā had fallen away from the proud dignity, which they held previously by their nefarious conduct (9, p: 202 & p: 210 & p: 255). So Akbar greatly turned away from the Sunni 'Ulamā and started some measures which limited their increasingly power. "He began to doubt whether all the power in their hands having religious control over the whole empire was a good thing?" (25m, p: 143).

2. 4. The Mahdist Movements

In addition to these trends within Islam - an ascendant form of Sufism, and an increasingly stiff - necked form of orthodoxy - there were in the sixteenth century a number of mahdist movements. Mahdism was associated with the belief, based on alleged prophecies of Muhammad that at the end of the last millennium of

Islam, a *Mahdi* or reviver, would appear and rejuvenate the faith (33, pp: 112-115).

Since by the time of Akbar was in India, the cycle of 1,000 years had just been completed, volumes of literature had been written in all parts of Islam regarding the appearance of *al-Mahdi* and in and outside India, many a claimant arose who professed themselves to be the promised *Mahdi*. The forces of these Mahdist movements gave a terrible shake to the orthodox Sunni interpretations of Islam and prepared the way for new doctrines to germinate.

The movement was in another way in consonance with the spirit of the time in India. The old stereotyped interpretations would not fit with the expanding empire of Islam as Akbar conceived it in the non-Muslim land. Liberal interpretations and adaptations were the needs of the moment. Without the spirit of a mahdist the orthodox would be far too strong for any Muslim empire-builder in Hindustan (11, pp: 114-115). And Akbar appeared in that age in which the hope of such a great religious leader was uppermost in many people's minds.

Such were the conditions within Indian Islam at the opening of the reign of Akbar. It was a period when many heterodox ideas had virtually become accepted as part of Islam when orthodoxy was notorious for its pettiness and rigidity, and when many leading figures in Indian Islam were looking for a *mujaddid*, or renewer, to revitalize Islam and signal the coming of the second millennium of the faith.

2.5. The Religious Background of Mughul Dynasty

Further clues to the religious ideas current in Akbar's day can be found by tracing the religious background of the Mughul dynasty. "The dynasty claimed descent from Timur, the Mughul conqueror who had embraced Sunni Islam but who also had retained his Central Asian belief in saints and shrines" (11, pp: 34-35; 13, vol. I, p: 189).

Babur, the grandfather of Akbar, when was placed between the Sunni supremacy of the khalifah of Rum and the Shi'a domination of the Shāh of Persia, he was forced to accept the latter but as soon as found opportunity, he returned away from Shi'ism (18, p: 146).

Humāyun continued his father's faith, and at the time of Akbar was born, he was by faith and ritual a Sunni (11, p: 74). But during his stay at the court of Shāh Tahmāsp in Persia, Humāyun's family

had to observe the customs of the Shi'as (18, p: 146-148). His wife Bānu Beygum, was a Persian lady of Transoxiana and his brother-in-law Bairum khān, was a staunch and orthodox Shi'a. This contiguity of geography and family association with the Shi'as had, of course, unconsciously molded the thought process of Akbar (11, p: 79). "When he came to Hindustan along with Humāyun and Bairum, was still under virtual tutelage of Bairum, whose attachment to the Shi'a sultan of Persia was very pronounced. Akbar's religious tendencies were very well marked in that early age and he used to visit the house of Shaikh Gadai and take lessons from him in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. The early Shi'a influence on him was so pronounced that he named his first two sons Hassan and Husain, the two religious leaders of Shi'a (20, p: 85).

The importance of Shi'ism in Akbar's religious thoughts is seen particularly in his desire to be both spiritual and temporal leader of the Muslim community, an idea adopted from Shi'ism and propagated by Akbar's Shi'ite advisors (16, p: 112).

2.6. The Temperamental Background of the Central Asian Mughuls

Besides the influence of Shi'ism, there was also the influence of the Mughul's Central Asian temperament in Akbar's background. Sufism and devotion to the cult of saints particularly influenced Central Asian Islam, since there, as in India, the Sufis were active in the spread of Islam. "In Central Asia also, there had been a long - standing culture with a monastic structure similar to the Sufi brotherhoods" (Ibid). Devotion to saintly figures was reflected by Mughul's dynasty in their frequent pilgrimages to shrines through their peripatetic careers, (11, p: 41 & p: 44). And by Akbar in his frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of Shaykh Mu'in-al-Din-Chishti at Ajmir (Ibid, p: 53).

"The bloody Timur spent most of his hours in talk with green-turbaned holy men who had visited the shrines of Islam and gained sanctity thereby" (Ibid, p: 21). The spirit of free-thinking was common trait in the family of the Mughuls of Central Asia. They were not fettered by any belief, or restrictions of dogmas (Ibid, p: 17). In religious belief they respected all religions and were often present at all religious ceremonies of their subjects (34, p: 17).

A spirit of inquiry was a native instinct in them. "Though not an originative people, says H.G. Wells, yet as transmitters of

knowledge and method their influence upon world's history has been enormous'. Every evening often the turmoil of the war were over, *Institutes of Timur* says that he called the group of the pious and the learned men and had discussions with them" (11, p: 17).

In short, a spirit of cultural eclecticism, free-thinking, religious toleration, discipline and Human virtues, existed in the two great houses of Central Asia, those of Chengiz Khān and Timur Lang. The advent of Akbar marks the consummation of the process of unification in the two dynasties. He combined in him all that was best in the two of the greatest men of Central Asia in the Middle Ages.

2.7. Akbar's Mystical Experiments

In addition to his devotion to saints, Akbar showed certain mystical tendencies himself which without doubt was rooted to a sufficient extent in his own innate temperament inherited from his predecessors and in his familiarity with Persian mystical poems and Sufi teachings during his early life in the Persia (5, vol. II, p: 178 & p: 108; vol. III, p: 178 & p: 198; 9, p: 253). Although outwardly he was a great warrior and administrator but inwardly a mystic and contemplative. Concerning the latter "Akbar led an austere and semi - monastic life in the midst of his many duties, eating one substantial meal a day and sleeping only three hours each night" (23, p: 31). He refrained from animal food and meat - eating and advised others that it is not right that a man should make his stomach the grave of animals (6, vol. I, p: 35 & p: 38).

It is universally acknowledged that Akbar was intensely religious and mystical by temperament. His spiritual exercise included long hours of meditation. "Jahāngir, his son and successor, declares that he never, for one moment, forgot God" (30, p: 349). Abul Fazl who knew him closely averred that he passes every moment at his life in self - examination or in adoration of God. (Ibid) Akbar is also reported to have had several mystical visions and inner openings during his life time which separated him from his worldly engagements and made a deep impression on the young man who regarded it all as a Divine intimation (6, vol. I, p: 157; 6, vol. III, pp: 378-379; 11, p: 32; 17, p: 111; 30, pp: 158-160 & pp: 344-349).

2.8. Akbar's Intelligence and his Innovative and Truth-Finding Nature

Besides the different external factors, which played a vital and fundamental role in the evolution of Akbar's religious views, we should have an overlook on the Akbar's personality and temperament in particular.

Though Akbar is often stigmatized as 'illiterate' and he steadfastly refused to learn either to read or write (30, pp: 158-159), yet this is in no way interfered with his becoming a man of wide culture and learning. He had a memory of almost superhuman power, which enabled him to remember accurately the contents of books, he had them read to him (Ibid, p: 337).

Furthermore, Akbar owned an unusual amount of imagination and initiative. His adventurous mind prepared him to make experiments in every field. "He knew intimately the works of many Muslim historians and theologians, a large amount of Asiatic literature, and the teachings of the Sufi mystics, especially Rumi, Hāfīz, Sa'adi, and Jāmi" (15, p: 155-159; 23, p: 158).

Besides Akbar was an orthodox Muslim and profoundly religious in the correct sense of the term. He is reported to say his daily five prayers, go through other observances of his religion and spend early hours of dawn every day in meditating on the Almighty for bestowing on him territory, wealth and power (6, vol. I, p: 28 & p: 78 & p: 106; 6, vol. III, p: 179 & p: 185).

It was, therefore, his inquisitive mind, religious temperament and rational attitude towards the comprehension of the religious realities, which made him an ardent seeker after truth that loves it no matter where it exists and was responsible for acquiring a fairly complete account of the basic doctrines of various religions prevailing in his time in India.

3. Akbar's Innovations and Measures towards Realization of the Doctrine of *Solh-i-Koll*

As we mentioned in the previous section there were various factors and trends played a part in predisposition of Akbar's religious background and outlook. But as we said before, it was his innovative and inquisitive mind and polymath character that gave definite shape to the tendencies displayed therein. Many of these factors if they tended to create a liberal atmosphere were themselves in their turn created by Akbar's natural liberalism and political farsightedness, which finally led to underlying of his

religious policy centered on the *Doctrine of Solh-i-Koll*. The doctrine which constitutes the foundation of Akbar's religious thoughts and perspectives has been frequently specified in Abul Fazl's works.

In Akbar Nāma after enumerating the qualities that an ideal monarch should possess, he concludes: "In spite of these qualities, he cannot be fit for this lofty office if he does not inaugurate universal peace. If he does not regard all conditions of humanity and all sects of religion with the single eye for favor and not be mother to some and be stepmother to others, he will not become fit for the exalted dignity" (8, vol. II, p: 421).

Akbar expresses the same view in a letter to Shāh 'Abbās of Persia in which he writes that divine mercy attaches itself to every form of creed and supreme exertions must be made to bring oneself into the vernal flower garden of 'peace with all' *Solh-i-Koll* (16, p: 113; 23, p: 25; 31, p: 187).

In this part of the article, Akbar's innovations and socio-cultural and legal measures and reforms towards achieving and consolidation of the doctrine will be examined.

3. 1. 'Ibādat Khāna

Possessed of an impulsive bent of mind, Akbar desired to understand the principles of his religion. With this object in view, early in 1575, he erected a building at Fatahpur Sikri, entitled *'Ibādat Khāna* (House of Worship), in which regular religious discussions were held on Thursday evenings (5, vol. III, pp: 113-119; 29, pp: 715-722; 30, p: 133). In the beginning, the debates were confined to the Muslims: *Shaikhs*, *Sayyids*, *'Ulamā* and *Umarā* alone were invited to attend the meetings (5, vol. III, p: 112; 9, pp: 201-202; 30, p: 132). The orthodox Sunni party, headed by Mullā 'Abdullāh of Sultānpur, and Shaikh 'Abd-al-Nabi, the chief *Sadr*, took a prominent part in the discussions. But as it was divided against itself, it soon lost its influence with Akbar. "They quarreled among themselves on fundamental questions of Islamic theology and openly exhibited unworthy intolerance to each other's views. Some of the learned scholars called their opponents names and all imputed motives to one another... Their irresponsible behavior and quarrels, their inability to explain satisfactorily the fundamental doctrines of Islam and their personal greed and unworthy conduct convinced Akbar that the truth must be sought

outside their bickering” (7, vol. I, p: 183; 9, p: 202 & p: 210 & p: 255; 31, pp: 164-165).

The last straw for Akbar seems to have been a discussion centered on the subject of marriage in Islam. Makhdum-al-Mulk, the *Qādi-al-Qudāt*, maintained that no Muslim may marry more than four wives, and that *mut‘a*, concubines and temporary marriages were unlawful (9, pp: 207-209; 11, p: 79). Akbar who had many wives and concubines, was angered by this effrontery, and there after he also invited shi‘ites to the discussions (11, p: 82). Besides, Akbar had also become aware of the corruption in the offices of *Sadr* and *Qādi* in the administration of tax-free lands (Ibid, p: 60). The marriage discussion may only have provided the occasion Akbar had been waiting for to assert his own power over that of these narrow-minded men.

Short thereafter, not only were Shi‘ites admitted to the *‘Ibādat Khāna*, but also learned men and divines of other faiths: Hindu yogis, Jain monks, Parsi *mobads*, and Roman Catholic missionaries from Goa (5, vol. III, p: 275; 9, p: 118; 30, p: 133). “Akbar was a true rationalist, he carried on his investigation into the truth in a scientific spirit. Day and night writes Badāyuni, His majesty has passed through the various phases and through all sorts of religious practices and sectarian beliefs, and has collected everything which people can find in books... . The result of his lifelong enquiry was the conviction that these were sensible men in all religions and abstemious thinkers... . If some true knowledge was thus everywhere to be found, why should truth be confined to one religion or creed like Islam which was comparatively new and scarcely a thousand years old” (31, p: 167).

So he attempted to seek consolation in other religions, freely mixing with Hindu sanyasis, Christian missionaries and Zoroastrian priests. So intense was his curiosity to know the truth that he denied himself rest even at bedtime and held discussions with the Brahmin scholars, Purushottam and Devi, and reputed theologians of other faiths in the balcony of his bedroom during the night. But each of those faiths, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity failed to appeal exclusively to his expanding soul (5, vol. III, pp: 113-119 & p: 179 & p: 275; 6, vol. I, p: 183; 9, p: 118 & pp: 201-202 & pp: 207-209 & p: 211 & p: 255).

3. 2. The Theory of Kingship

Another step in Akbar's religious move was his Theory of Kingship which was in turn the result of gradual evolution.

During the early years of his reign, his conception of his position and duty was that of an orthodox Muslim monarch. He was *Amir-ul-Mu'minin* and defender and missionary of Islam bound to carry out God's will as expressed in the *Qurān*, and responsible to him only. "Like other Muslim monarchs he was at least in theory subordinate to the wishes of *millat* or the Muslim brotherhood in the empire. The public opinion of the Muslim brotherhood was guided and controlled by the '*Ulamā*, who consequently claimed the right to influence the State Policy, and who wielded great influence" (31, p: 178).

Akbar sought to remove this check to his will and become the supreme authority over his Muslim subjects without being controlled either by the '*Ulamā* or the *millat*. He attained this object by reading *Khutba*-bidding prayer-on June 22, 1579 at the principal mosque at Fatahpur Sikri, and promulgating the *Mahzar* - so-called Infallibility Decree - in September of that year (11, p: 39).

3. 2. 1. Khotba: In June 1579 Akbar introduced what is considered a starting innovation. He removed the regular preacher at the chief mosque at Fatahpur Sikri and occupied the pulpit himself. To draw attention to his position as *Imām-i-Ādel* he resorted to an alleged ancient precedent and proceeded to recite the *Khutba* himself in verse which was composed for him by Faizi (9, p: 268). This address included a prayer for the sovereign, customary in such cases, and its lines read:

*"The lord
to me the
kingdom
gave
He made me
prudent,
strong and
brave
He guided me
with right and
ruth
Filling my*

*heart with
love of truth
No tongue of
man can sum
His State'
Allahu Akbar!
God is great."*

(24, p: 279) for Persian text see:
(6, vol. III, p: 171; 9, p: 268)

To these impressive words were added some verses from the *Qurān* expressing thanks for favours and mercies, and having repeated the *Fātiha*, or opening section of the *Qurān*, he came down from the pulpit and said his prayers (7, vol. I, p: 166 & p: 188 & p: 190 & pp: 205-206).

3. 2. 2. Mahzar: Some months later, the next step towards the compilation of Akbar's theory of kingship was taken. In September Shaikh Mubārak, the father of Faizi and Abul Fazl, produced at the emperor's instance a formal document-*Mahzar*- giving Akbar the supreme authority of an arbiter in all controversial causes concerning Islam in the country whether they were ecclesiastical or civil. This document which was signed by all important Muslim divines, including Makhdum-al-Mulk and 'Abd-al-Nabi stating:

"We have agreed and do decree that the rank of Sultān-i- 'Ādil - just ruler - is higher in the eyes of God than the rank of Mujtahid-jurist-

Further we declare that the sultan of Islam, the refuge of mankind, the leader of the faithful, the shadow of God in the world Abul Fath Jalāl-al-Din Muhammad Akbar Pādshāh-i-Ghāzi - whose kingdom God perpetuate - is a most just, wise and God-fearing

king. Therefore, if there be a variance of opinion among the Mujtahids upon questions of religion, and his majesty, in his penetrating understanding and unerring judgment, should incline to one opinion and give his decree for the benefit of mankind and for the due regulation of the world, we do hereby agree that such a decree is binding on us and on the whole nation” (16, pp: 114-115), for Persian text see: (6, vol. I, p: 166 & p: 188 & p: 190; 9, vol. I, p: 336; vol. II, pp: 186-190).

This assumption of religious authority on the part of Akbar has been variously construed and misconstrued (10, pp: 591-593; 11, pp: 35-36 & p: 46 & p: 162 & p: 179; 14, vol. I, pp: 280-290; 14, vol. II, p: 322; 17, vol. IV, p: 123; 24, p: 279; 25, p: 148 & p: 169).

In any way the *mahzar* was interpreted, this in practice meant uniting ecclesiastical authority with that of secular power in his person. And getting superior authority in the case of disagreements by the ‘*Ulamā*, in the interests of peace and security in his empire.

This policy which first introduced the emperor as the sole head of the orthodox Muslims of India was developed later and led to the theory of ‘Universal Kingship’ according to which kingship is recognized as a divine attribute. It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one (28, p: 454).

This theory was propounded by Akbar’s scholarly secretary, Abul Fazl, who sought to prove that the king was something more than an average human being. He was *Zill-i Elāhi* (8, vol. II, p: 421). God’s representative on earth and his shadow - and greater knowledge and wisdom were given to him than to any other human being.

This theory tends to declare the king’s role to be that of an arbitrator, not only between the orthodox schools of law, but also between the various religions and sects.

The theory of divine origin of monarchy was accepted by a vast majority of the people. “The Hindus accepted it, as it was akin to the ancient Indian ideal of sovereignty, and as they were assured of protection, justice and equality with Muslims” (31, p: 179). The theory was one of benevolent despotism, and eminently suited the conditions and circumstances of the age for major reforms and measures in a many of grounds.

3. 3. Din-i-Ilāhi

The next stage in the development of the religious policy of Akbar came in 1581 when he promulgated the *Din-i Ilāhi* or *Tawhid-i-Ilāhi*. “Dissatisfied with tradition and authority, Akbar prescribed human reason as the sole basis of religion and extended complete religious toleration to every creed in the empire. He was grieved to see narrow minded religious zealots preaching hatred against one another. In his anxiety to do away with religious discord in the empire he made an attempt to bring about a synthesis of all the various religions known to him, and styled it *Tawhid-i-Ilāhi* or Divine Monotheism. It was not a religion, but a socio-religious order or brotherhood, designed to cement diverse communities in the land. It was based on the principle of universal toleration” (31, p: 168) and was “a curious mixture of beliefs and ritual observances which had impressed Akbar during the discussions in the ‘*Ibādat Khāna*’” (16, p: 116).

The basic features of the *Din-i-Ilahi* only has been narrated by Mohsin Fani in his famous work *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib* in the course of a dialogue propounded the *Din-i-Ilāhi* in ten virtues :

- 1) “ Liberality and beneficence
- 2) Forgiveness of the evil-doer and repulsion of anger with mildness.
- 3) Abstinence from worldly desires.
- 4) Care of freedom from the bounds of the worldly existence and violence as well as accumulating precious stores for the future real and perpetual world.
- 5) Wisdom and devotion in the frequent meditation on the consequences of actions.
- 6) Strength of dexterous prudence in the desire of marvelous actions.
- 7) Soft voice, gentle words, pleasing speeches for every body.
- 8) Good treatment with brethren, so that their will may have the

precedence to our own.

9) A perfect alienation from creatures and perfect attachments to the Supreme Being.

10) Dedication of soul in the love of God and union with God the preserver of all” (11, pp: 178-179).

These bear striking resemblance to stages in the Sufi way of life. The word ‘initiate’ is a more accurate term than ‘believe’ for the cult had no systematic doctrinal base. The ceremony of ‘conversion’ to the *Din-i Ilāhi* was similar to an initiation into a Sufi order. When a person desired to be a member, he was introduced by Abul Fazl, who acted as the high priest. The man with his turban in hand put his head at the feet of the emperor. The emperor raised him up, placed the turban back on his head and gives him the *Shast* (his own likeness) upon which were engraved God’s name and the phrase *Allah-o-Akbar*. The order had its own salutations, which were *Allah-o-Akbar* and *Jall-a-Jalāl-o-Hu*. The members had to abstain from eating meat as far as possible, and from using the vessels of butchers, fishermen and bird catchers. They were not to marry old women or minor girls. They were expected to sacrifice property, life, honor, and religion in the service of the emperor. These were the four grades of devotion, and one who sacrificed one of these four things was supposed to have possessed one degree of devotion (6, vol. I, pp: 16-18 & pp: 67-71 & pp: 107-110 & p: 135 & p: 179 & pp: 195-198; 6, vol. III, p: 178 & p: 183 & pp: 389-390; 9, vol. II, p: 171 & pp: 215-218 & p: 227 & pp: 279-283).

The number of the followers of the order was not large (19, p: 121). That was partly due to the fact that Akbar was not a missionary. He was not prepared to use force or pressure to convert people to the new faith. Birbal was the only Hindu who joined the new faith and after Akbar’s death the new faith disappeared completely (30, p: 221).

3. 4. Socio-Cultural and Legal Measures and Reforms

So alongside with innovations in religious perspectives and views, Akbar tried to accomplish some reforms and measures in different aspect and grounds in order to level the way for complete realization of his ideal i.e. *Solh-i-Koll* which was the center part of his religious policy.

By nature liberal and tolerant of other’s views Akbar broadened

his outlook through philosophical and religious discussions with outstanding men of different communities and sects. He respected social customs of all religions but was never prevented, on that account, from lifting a hand of reform against whatever was insupportable on humanitarian and ethical grounds. Following I will briefly review these measures:

I) Abolition of *Jizya* in 1564 which was a tax on the conscientious faith of any man. This measure went a long way in removing the deep-rooted bitterness in the minds of the Hindus against the Muslim rulers (5, vol. II, pp: 203-204).

II) Removal of all restrictions on the public worship of non-Muslims. Churches, prayer rooms, Hindu temples, Zoroastrian fire altars, and Jain places of worship were allowed to be built (28, p: 312). These had implied some restriction on the building of new public temples and a tax on pilgrimage to Hindu places of worship (5, vol. II, p: 190).

III) Permission to followers of different faiths to make converts. Such Hindus as had been forcibly compelled to accept Islam earlier in his reign were permitted to reconvert to their faith. (9, p.391) The fruit of this measure was living of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects together in peace without any fear of checking of their religious activities by Islamic state (5, vol. II, p: 159).

IV) Objection to the occupation of high public appointments by the Muslim ruling class as a monopoly. (Ibid, p.670) In order to remove all civic disabilities of non-Muslims, Akbar appointed some distinguished Hindus as governor of provinces and even Todar Mal as Finance Minister and for sometimes as Prime Minister as well (5, vol. III, p: 80). Further Akbar devised another channel for the utilization of the administrative talents of the Hindus. Cases between Hindus and Muslims had hitherto been decided by the Muslim jurists, but Akbar set up new courts with Brahman judges to decide such cases (9, p: 356).

V) Participating in some of the Hindu festivals and celebrating some others in the court to show respect to the sentiments of the vast majority of his subjects. As Badayuni puts it, on learning further how much the people of the country prized their institutions he began to look on them with affection (Ibid, p: 261). Use of beef was forbidden as cow was considered to be a sacred animal by the Hindus (Ibid). In 1590-1 Akbar is said to have forbidden the flesh

of oxen, buffaloes, goats or sheep, horses and camels (5, vol. III, p: 380; 6, vol. I, pp: 58-63).

VI) Organizing of a translation department which among other things was entrusted with the task of translating the religious books of the Hindus into Persian. In this way by Akbar's order, the *Atharva Veda*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Hairvamsa*, and the *Ramayana* were translated into Persian. Most of these translations were completed to enrich the Persian literature and to extend toleration to Hindu religious books (9, p: 212 & pp: 319-320 & p: 326).

VII) Prohibition of the burning of young Hindu wives at the funeral pyre of their husbands if the marriage had not been consummated. Special inspectors were appointed to keep a watch on the voluntary or forced Sati. No woman was to be burnt against her will (5, vol. III, p: 402 & p: 256; 6, vol. I, p: 198).

VIII) Marriage with Hindu princesses. Before his time, such marriages had taken place. But Akbar improved upon the earlier practice by allowing his Hindu spouses to perform their religious rites in the palace (6, vol. II, p: 156 & p: 358; vol. III, p: 451). This had its effect upon his religious policy. If idol worship was tolerated in the palace, it would have looked rather unreasonable to prohibit it outside.

4. Summing-up and Conclusion

Considering the situation of India at the time of Akbar's ascension in 1556, we find out that the country was a congeries independent states and there was no paramount power in it. Akbar did not possess any kingdom and the Mughul position in India was insecure. Thus in this context he had first to establish his control over the scattered land then weld this collection of different states, different races and different religions into a whole. For achieving the aim Akbar did his best through socio-cultural reforms and his religious policy based on the doctrine of *Solh-i-Koll*.

Concerning the later it should briefly be mentioned that apart from external factors discussed in part one of the present article, marriage with Hindu wives and association with leaders and sages of different religions in *'Ibādat khāna* and close companionship with Abul Fazl and Faizi who largely inclined towards Sufism, exercised a tremendous influence on Akbar's religious Policy. All

these plus his inquisitive and adventurous mind prepared him to make experiments in every field and show respect for sentiments on non-Muslims which finally led to the policy of reconciliation particularly towards Hindus.

It has been mentioned sometimes by way of approach that Akbar's religious policy was due to political rather religious reasons. Even if that were true, it would not detract much from his greatness. Akbar's great achievement lay in liberating the state from its domination by the Muslim Church. Even if for the toleration he granted to the vast majority of his subjects, he found sanctions outside orthodox Islam it was not fault. Akbar's religious policy was intricately connected with his own religious views. It was the realization of the fact that there is some truth in every religion that finally completed the process, which may have been begun earlier by Akbar's political sagacity.

Adjudging on Akbar's religious policy it is important to remember that this policy manifested itself in two distinct sets of measures which were separated from each other by an interval of several years, and which differed sharply in their nature and usefulness. On the one hand was Akbar's adoption of the principle of *Solh-i-Koll* and the political and administrative measures which he took to broaden the basis of his government and secure the goodwill of all his subjects. During his reign he created a coherent empire in which Muslims and Hindus were equally eligible to the highest posts, carrying equal honours and privileges. No longer was an arbitrary rule of foreign chieftains imposed upon an alien population. The Hindus began to play a part in the building up of the Empire and were proud of it. The Rajputs became the supporters of the Mughul throne and helped to spread the Mughul rule in the country. Akbar also provided a unifying cultural basis. He made Persian compulsory for all state officials. For the first time in Medieval India, the Hindus and Muslims received their education in common schools and read the same books on all subjects. Besides Akbar was the first person to fight against the narrow superstitions and evil customs of his people and thereby to blaze a way to a more rational life. It is true that he could not and did not try to abolish completely evils like sati or drinking but that was due to factors over which he had little or no control. For his policy of religious tolerance and giving adequate share in

administration to all classes of people there can be nothing but praise, and it was this part of his policy which stood the test of time, and became a part of the Mughul political code.

The second set of measures relates to the regulations laid down for royal disciples and other steps taken up by Akbar in his role of the 'spiritual guide' who would end all religious conflicts and controversies. These measures, such as *Khotba* and *Mahzar* which later writers designate as *Din-i-Ilāhi* were set in motion more than fifteen years after the enunciation and implementation of *Solh-i-Koll* policy and were a product, as Badāyuni's account shows, of the differences and debates of the *'Ibādat Khānah*. They stand on a different footing from the earlier measures. Through them, Akbar endeavored to assume the position of an interpreter of Islamic law and a legislator and to found his sovereignty on his spiritual authority. But his attempt to set himself as a *Jagat Guru*, the spiritual guide of his people, within the framework of Islam proved abortive. More over, it did not solve the problem of spiritual authority in relations with his non-Muslims subjects. This is what, Dr. Vincent Smith considering as a monument of Akbar's folly, not of his wisdom.

Akbar's Hindu well-wishers like Rāja Bahagwan Das and Raja Man Singh left him in no doubt about their dislike of his religious innovations. The only prominent Hindu who became his disciple was Birbāl, regarded by succeeding generations as Akbar's court jester. Muslims were, however, greatly offended and a reaction started against Akbar's policy which was to have results quite different from those which he wished to achieve. But we must not lose sight of his great object, which was to make all his subjects one people.

Here, as the last word, I would like to refer to Dr. Sharma's assessment in this regard: "Among rulers of India he occupies a very high place for his having attempted to bring Hindus and Muslims together with success. If he did not succeed in creating a nation it was because he could not hurry the march of events. It is worth remembering that at a time when Europe was plunged into strife of warring sects, when Roman Catholics were burning Protestants at the stakes, and Protestants were executing Roman Catholics, Akbar guaranteed peace not only to sects but to differing religions. In the modern age, he was the first and almost the great

experimenter in the field of religious toleration if the scope of his toleration, the races to which it was applied, and the contemporary conditions are taken into account” (28, p: 475).

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