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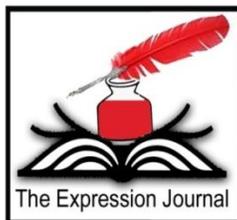
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THE EXPANSION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE: REINTERPRETATION OF AKBAR AS A GOOD OR BAD EMPEROR

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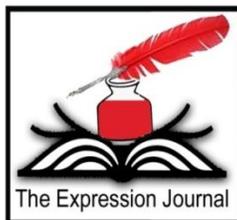
Rohtak, Haryana

Abstract

Jalaluddin was the son of Mohammad Akbar or Akbar the Great, Naseeruddin Humayun. Akbar was born on October 15, 1542 at Rajput Fort, Amarkot, Sindh. When Akbar was born, Humayun was thrown out of the country, so Akbar was nurtured by his uncle Askari and his wife in Afghanistan. Akbar had learnt to hunt and fight in his youth, but Akbar could not read and write but he had habits of listening good books through his royal readers. He was a well-known Emperor who was skilled in every work. After his father Humayun's death, he was throned on February 14, 1556. His age was merely thirteen years at that time. He was brought up and took raining under the guideship of his father's skilled minister Bairam Khan. After the Second Battle of Panipat, Akbar did not trust Bairam Khan also and established his own rule after coming to Delhi. He started taking his independent decisions which in the long run make him a successful Emperor of India. It is also said that he was the most powerful emperor of all the Muslim rulers. This paper examines and explores Akbar as a good or bad administrator, his policies of expansion of Mughal Empire and his contribution to Indian history.

Keywords

Medieval History, Akbar, Islamic Studies, Indian History, The Mughal Empire, Abul Fazl, Navratnas.



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Jalaluddin was the son of Mohammad Akbar or Akbar the Great, Naseeruddin Humayun. Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava writes in his book that "Akbar was born in on October 15, 1542 A.D. (p. 434.) at Rajput Fort, Amarkot, Sindh. When he was born, Humayun was thrown out of the country, so Akbar was nurtured by his uncle Askari and his wife in Afghanistan. Akbar had learnt to hunt and fight in his youth, but Akbar did not come to read and write. "His [Akbar] subject acclaimed him as Lord of the Universe" (Cavendish 1). Akbar was a famous ruler as well as an expert in each field. It is rightly said, "Akbar was successful with expanding his empire along with being able to get the conquered subject's trust" (Grimm, French, Pak 2).

For it, Akbar had to adopt new tactics. Sometimes he would use his powers to curb the protest or win a state and sometimes he would use his political tactics. He started marrying the Hindu princesses and thus, he would take their families in his favour. One good thing that he did was that he did not force his Hindu wives to convert their religion. This secular approach gave birth to a new religion called Deen-e-Elahi, the faith of God. His building "The Worship House" was used by him to promote religious debate.

Akbar's court had nine Navratnas, including Abul Fazal, Faiji, Tansen, Birbal, Raja Todermal, Raja Mansingh, Abdul Rahim Khan-e-Khana, Faqir Ajis-Day and Mullah two onions. The last year of Akbar's reign was not peaceful, because Akbar's son Salim, who is known as Jahangir, also openly revolted against his father. Akbar died in Agra and the body was buried in Sikandra, where Akbar's magnificent tomb is still located today.

Akbar has been described as great in history. Akbar was the only Mughal ruler who has given equal status to both Hindu and Muslim classes, if we look at the pages of history, we will get some such facts. But this is not true to a great extent. We are not told all this truth in the common books. Zelaldinus [Akbar] is so contemptuous of the instructions given by the false law-giver... wears garments of silk, beautifully embroidered in gold... [he is] never without arms... always surrounded... by a body-guard of about twenty men, variously armed" (Monserrate 1-2).

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During his early reign, Akbar had a lot of hatred and resentment towards Hindus. He broke many Hindu temples in his early life, and forcibly took Hindu women. And many others used to commit atrocities. But with the growing age, his empire grew and began to change. His hatred of Hindus began to diminish. He made marital relations with many Hindu Rajput princesses. And those princesses were never let go to her house. Akbar married Princess Jodha Bai of Amer, after marriage she became Muslim and called Mary-uz-Jamani Jodha Begum. He was abandoned by the Rajput family forever and he never returned to Amer after marriage. The Hindu princess's practice of marrying Muslim kings was long ago. But after most of the marriages, it was not successful because of the good relations.

Although Akbar showed a lot of quality in the matter, Akbar gave good respect to Jodha's family and replaced the Rajputs in his court. Prostitution was protected by Emperor Akbar in the then society. They had a very big harem with a lot of women. Most of the Hindu women were kidnapped there. Sati practice was very loud at that time. Then it is said that Akbar's soldiers, who were a beautiful woman, were forced to take the woman and put them in the harem. And on asking, Emperor Akbar's order was used.

Akbar developed a great social culture by a policy of harmony and coordination in the field of political, religious, economic, social and art. It contributed to all sections. This created a national spirit in all and established unity in all spheres.

The day-a-Elahi, etc., was an important task towards religious harmony and coordination. Scholars of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi and Jainism were invited to eat worship. One day a week, Akbar listened to his discourse and interacted on religious and spiritual issues.

Akbar started a new religion called Deen-e-Elahi (Tohid-e-Elahi) in 1582 to reconcile all religions. The principal priest of this religion was Abul Fazal. Akbar's policy was based on the maximum welfare of the subjects. He tried to divide the distance between the subjects and the ruler. In the entire empire, a well-organized administration mechanism was established through administrative unity, land revenue administration, equal tax system, appointments on merit in government posts.

Akbar also did important work for the development of culture. He made Persian an official language and established a translation department. By which he translated Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek and Turkish texts into Persian. He was a scholar of various languages in his court.

At the time of his father Humayun's death, he was in a place called Kalnaur in Punjab. His patron, Bairam Khan, declared him a successor to Humayun by making him a simple platform of bricks. Akbar reigned for 4 years after his accession to the president.

There were nine special talented persons in the court of the famous Emperor Akbar for the preservation of vidya and scholars. The collective name of these persons was nine gems. These nine gems were as follows: Abul Fazal, Birbal, Todermal, Bhagwandas, Mansingh, Tansen, Abdul Rame Khankhan, Mulla two Onion and Faiji.

Abul Fazal was born in 1550 AD. He was the son of the famous Sufi Sheikh Mubarak of that era. He was an officer of literature, history and philosophy. He had a major role in the formation and operation of Deen-e-Elahi. It was difficult to defeat him in the debate. He had special

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significance in the inter-courtiers of Emperor Akbar. Because of his ability, he rose from 20 Mansabdar to a position of five thousand Mansabdar. He was a good writer. Akbarnama and Ain Akbari are his classics. These writings provide important information about the history of that era. The other introduction of his writing power comes from his letters which have been published in the name of Insha-e-Abul. He was a learned historian and writer and also a qualified ambassador and army hero. However, Akbar's friend and favoured man was murdered by Veer Singh Bundela at the behest of Shahzade Saleem in 1602 AD. Akbar was deeply shocked by his death.

Birbal was born in 1528 AD. According to Dr. Aashiwadi Lal Srivastava, his birth place was Orchha in Madhya Pradesh. Bebal was born in a Brahmin clan. His real name was Mahishdas. A few years after coming to the service of the emperor, Akbar became the ultimate friend and Akbar's grace became famous as a five-court clown. Because of his speech, cleverness, self-devotion and natural abilities, he got a place in Akbar's Navratnas. He had the unique quality of comic juice and attendance. His jokes based on this quality are still heard with great gusto. Birbal was a mansabdar of 2000. In 1586 AD, the emperor appointed him as the High Authority of the Department of Justice and conferred him with the title of king. In 1586 AD he died fighting against the Yusufis. According to Abul Fazal and Badayuni, Akbar had a lot of grief over his death. In this context, one thing is worth noting that Birbal was the only Hindu to obey Deen-e-Elahi established by Akbar.

Todermal was one of Akbar's Navratnas. He was a resident of modern Uttar Pradesh. Initially, he had a job with Sher Shah Suri. After the end of the Survansh, he came into the service of Akbar and acquired an important position in 1562 AD. He was appointed as Diwan of Gujarat Pradesh in 1572 AD. Because of the various positions of governance, Todermal had become aware of many subtle things of governance. Todermal was an expert on financial affairs, so Akbar appointed him as his minister of economics. During Akbar's reign, the significant reforms that were made in the land-settlement and the lease system were the architects of Todermal. Todermal is also named with Akbar for these reforms.

Raja Man Singh was the grandson of Bharmal. He participated in many important wars. It is said that Mansingh was instrumental in making Akbar's approach towards Hindus more generous.

Tansen also had an important place in the nine gems of Akbar. He had a great knowledge of Indian music and he is known as a 'Sartaj' of the music world. It is said that they were Hindus earlier, later became Muslims. He invented many ragas. His ragas are still considered to be very important ragas of traditional or classical music.

Abdulrahim Khan-Khana was the son of Bairam Khan and was the teacher of Jahangir. He translated Praneeth Babarnama into Persian in Turkish language. He had the knowledge of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, not only Sanskrit, Hindi and Rajasthani. His couplets are still being vocal in the voice of the people as an invaluable fund of Hindi literature. Abdulrhim Khankhana and the great poet of this era had a close relationship. Akbar was influenced by his scholarship and was honoured with the title of Khankhana.

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Abul Fazl introduced Akbar as the spiritual guide of the people, he who had no choice but to reveal himself. The earlier phase of concealment which has been described by Fazl was necessary to complete Akbar's claim to prophethood as Prophets are born, not made. It can be contested that the use of religious medium for realisation of political objectives might have weakened secular institutions.

Mulla was a resident of two onion Arabs. He came to India at the time of Humayun. Because of the high choice of two onions at the time of meal, Akbar used to address him in the name of two onions. Because of his ability and allegiance to the emperor, he also became one of Akbar's Nauratnas. Historian Abul Fazal was the older brother. He was in the court of Akbar as a rajkavi. He was a staunch supporter of Deen-e-Elahi. Furthermore it is also said, "Akbar the Great showed the rulers of all nations everywhere that tolerance is not weakness, and open-mindedness is not the same thing as indecisiveness" (Szczepanski 3).

Akbar did so many works for the non-Muslim people also. He did not force others to embrace Islam like Aurangzeb. He took part in the Hindu festivals also. He took many Hindus in his favour by marrying them. "By elevating the status of the princesses' families, Akbar removed this stigma among all but the most orthodox Hindu sects" (Grimm, French, Pak 2).

As a conclusion, it can be said that Akbar was a great emperor and he did several good works for the Muslims but it cannot be ignored that he was prejudiced in his behaviour but due to some loyal people in his family and court, he had to change his attitude. Akbar was not only a winner but also a skilled administrator and founder of the empire. He arranged an administration that was higher than the system of its earlier states. His monarchy depended on his personal despotism and bureaucracy. His aim was to increase the king's personal authority and the exchequer. He did several reforms apart from good administration and abolished some bad practices:

He [Akbar] forbade child-marriage, trial by ordeal, and animal sacrifice; he permitted widows to marry again, and set his face resolutely against the burning of widows on their husband's pyres: wholly to abolish suttee was beyond his power...(North Carolina 16-17)

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