



Consider Akbar As National Monarch- Character and Achievements

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

This paper examines the role of Akbar (1542–1605), the third Mughal Emperor, as a “national monarch” who worked for India’s various cultural, political, and regional communities. His policies inherited tolerance, cultural assimilation, and administrative innovations that contributed to political stability and social cohesion. By looking into Akbar’s religious and administrative policies, his beneficial governance approach, and his intension for a unified empire, we explore how Akbar laid the foundation for a centralized state that is identical with a modern concept of “Akbar as a national monarch”.

Key Words

Akbar, Achivement, National, Cultural, Regional.

Introduction

The Mughal Emperor Abu’l - Fath Jalal - ud - din Muhammad Akbar also known as Akbar the great is regarded as one of India’s greatest rulers, known

for his statesmanship, religious tolerance, administration reforms, and cultural achievements. He succeeded to the empire that was fragmented, marked by diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Despite these challenges, Akbar’s reign represented a golden era in Indian history, where the Mughal Empire flourished culturally, economically, and politically. In spite of his polices and reforms, Akbar promoted peace and unity, and thus termed as the “national monarch.”

This paper explores the concept of Akbar as a national monarch, inspecting his religious policies, administrative achievements, and the hyperphysical ways of combining different communities and religions together within his empire.

History

The great ruler and administrator “Akbar” was born in 1542 in Umerkot district (now in Pakistan). At a very young age of about 13 years Akbar resided to the throne. It had a challenging circumstances as his father, Humayun, lost the Mughal Empire briefly to the Afghan leader Sher Shah Suri, although his father Humayun regained the throne from Sher Shah Suru in 1555 but died soon after leaving Akbar to become emperor. Since Akbar was so young, he relied on his guardian and trusted general, Bairam Khan, who helped him in early battles and managed the empire on his behalf.

Akbar's Vision of a Unified Empire

Religious Tolerance and Policies

Akbar's approach to religion was revolutionary for his time. He implemented a policy known as Sulh-i-Kul, or "universal tolerance," which emphasized peaceful coexistence among all religions. This principle promoted harmony and tolerance among all religions in his empire, regardless of the beliefs held by individuals. This policy supported all diverse religions, including Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Muslims, was essential for political stability. Akbar believed that religious tolerance would bring loyalty and cohesion across his empire, an insight that placed him far ahead of many other rulers of his time.

In 1562, Akbar abolished the jizya (a tax imposed on non-Muslims), signaling his commitment and tolerance to all the religion which resulted in inclusive administration. He encouraged open dialogue between religious scholars of different faiths in his court and held regular discussions with Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and Christian scholars. This practice not only demonstrated his respect for other religions but also facilitated a deeper understanding between communities.

Integration through Matrimonial Alliances

Akbar also used matrimonial alliances as a political tool to increase closeness with the Hindu Rajput rulers. He himself got ties with a Hindu princess "Jodha". By marrying Rajput princesses and allowing them to retain their religion and customs within the Mughal court. These alliances were instrumental in building an administration that included leaders from both Muslim and Hindu communities, reflecting Akbar's vision of a unified and inclusive empire.

Religious Discussions and the Ibadat Khana

In 1575, Akbar built the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri, where he held regular discussions with scholars and religious leaders of various faiths, in which he included all the religious ethics of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Jainism.

These discussions revealed Akbar's genuine interest in understanding diverse religious perspectives. He himself believed and encouraged open dialogue, which built an environment of intellectual and religious pluralism.

Creation of Din-i Ilahi (Divine Faith)

In 1582, Akbar founded the Din-i Ilahi, or "Divine Faith" a syncretic religious philosophy that was a mixture of elements from various faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Din-i Ilahi emphasized ethics, tolerance, and loyalty to the emperor rather than strict religious practices. Although it did not gain a significant following, Din-i Ilahi represented Akbar's vision of a unified spiritual path that transcended sectarian boundaries.

According to Principal Sri Ram Sharma, "This greatest of monarchs in his time, Akbar is sure of a high place among the rulers of mankind for his brilliant success in the great adventure of governing men. Among the rulers of India, he occupies a very high place for- among other things-his having attempted to bring Hindus and Muslims together with some 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 a strife of warring sects, when Roman Catholics were burning Protestants at the stake, when Protestants were executing Roman Catholics, Akbar guaranteed peace not only to warring sects, but to differing religions. In the modern age, he was the first and almost the greatest experimenter in the field of religious toleration if the scope of the toleration, the races to which it was applied, and the contemporary conditions, be taken into account."

Other Measures of Religious Inclusivity

Akbar appointed Hindu ministers to high-ranking positions and allowed religious practices and customs to be openly observed. Hindu festivals like Diwali and Holi were celebrated at the Mughal court. Akbar

showed respect for religious traditions by discouraging cow slaughter to honor Hindu sentiments and implementing laws that reflected the beliefs and practices of different religious communities.

Hence, Akbar's religious policies transformed the Mughal Empire, promoting an unprecedented level of religious tolerance and inclusivity. His ideas and actions in fostering unity among India's diverse communities made his reign a golden period of cultural synthesis and stability.

Akbar's administrative Reforms and Political Strategy

Centralized Administration and the Mansabdari System

Akbar created a highly organized central government with a hierarchy of officials who reported directly to the emperor. This centralized control helped maintain order and stability across the empire. To ensure effective governance and maintain loyalty among the nobility, Akbar introduced the Mansabdari system. This system ranked officials based on their military and civil responsibilities, creating a structured hierarchy that rewarded merit and loyalty over any kind of religious or ethnic backgrounds. Each mansabdar (rank-holder) was expected to maintain a specified number of soldiers for the emperor, aligning personal ambition with imperial stability.

The Mansabdari system allowed Akbar to decentralize power to trusted officials while retaining overall control in his hands. His administration included both Muslims and Hindus, and mansabdars were chosen based on merit, competence, and loyalty to the emperor rather than solely on religious or regional affiliation. This inclusiveness brought unity, as it allowed people from various backgrounds to contribute together for the empire's growth and stability. This system also helped him build a loyal, well-organized army and administration

Revenue Reforms: The Todar Mal System

Akbar's land revenue system, which assessed land productivity and taxes fairly, helped increase the empire's wealth and stability. This revenue system was managed by Raja Todar Mal, one of his most capable ministers. Under Akbar's finance minister, Raja Todar Mal, the Mughal Empire developed an efficient revenue system. The Dahsala system standardized land revenue collection, basing it on the fertility of the land and average prices over ten years. This reform enabled the empire to collect revenue more consistently and fairly, benefiting both the state and its subjects. By standardizing taxes, Akbar reduced the burden on peasants, which helped stabilize agricultural production and secure the economic foundation of his empire.

The revenue reforms also minimized the influence of local chieftains and zamindars (landholders) who had previously controlled regional tax collection. This direct connection between the state and its subjects strengthened Akbar's central authority and fostered economic unity across his empire.

Military Conquests and Expansion

Akbar was a brilliant military leader and expanded the Mughal Empire across much of the Indian subcontinent. He won major battles, like the Second Battle of Panipat in 1556, where he defeated Hemu Vikramaditya, an ambitious Hindu leader, securing the empire's control in northern India. Over time, Akbar's army conquered Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, and parts of the Deccan region (central India), making the Mughal Empire one of the largest empires in Indian history.

Cultural Assimilation and Patronage of Arts

Patronage of Language

Akbar's reign marked a period of cultural synthesis, where the arts, language, and literature flourished under his patronage. He promoted Persian as the administrative language, which served as a unifying cultural element across his diverse empire. Akbar's court attracted scholars, poets, and artists from different backgrounds, creating a cultural hub that celebrated Indian, Persian, and Central Asian influences.

Art and Architecture

Fatehpur Sikri: Akbar encouraged the fusion of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian architectural styles, which resulted in the creation of unique Mughal buildings. One of the most famous examples is Fatehpur Sikri, his capital city, built with red sandstone and blending Islamic, Hindu, and Persian architectural features.

Buland Darwaza: A monumental gateway at Fatehpur Sikri, built to commemorate Akbar's victory over Gujarat, is a striking example of Mughal architecture and grandeur.

Tomb of Akbar: Located in Sikandra, near Agra, Akbar's tomb was built after his death and is an excellent example of Mughal architecture, combining Islamic, Persian, Hindu, and local elements.

Painting and Miniature Art

Akbar's court became a center for the development of Mughal painting. He brought together skilled artists from Persia, India, and Central Asia, which led to the creation of a distinct Mughal style of miniature painting. Akbar's atelier produced many famous works, including illustrations for the Akbarnama (the official history of Akbar's reign), commissioned by the emperor himself. The paintings in the Akbarnama are rich in color and detail, showing court scenes, battle depictions, and historical events. Artists like Basawan, Mir Sayyid Ali, and Kesu Das created masterpieces during Akbar's reign, combining Persian influences with local Indian art forms.

Literature and History

Akbar was an avid reader and supported the growth of literature, especially in Persian, which was the language of the Mughal court. The Akbarnama, written by his court historian Abul Fazl, is one of the most important historical texts of the Mughal era. It chronicles Akbar's life, reign, and accomplishments. Akbar also encouraged the translation of important works into Persian. One notable example is the translation of Hindu scriptures such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana into Persian, making them accessible to a wider audience.

Music and Performing Arts

Akbar was a lover of music and patronized musicians, poets, and dancers. His court was home to some of the greatest musicians of the time, including Tansen, one of the nine jewels (Navratnas) of his court. Akbar encouraged the development of Indian classical music and other performing arts, creating a rich cultural atmosphere at his court.

Patronage of Scholars and Historians

Akbar employed scholars and historians like Abul Fazl, Faizi, and Nizamuddin Ahmad to record the history of his empire and write about the great deeds of his reign. His encouragement of scholars to document history and record events set the stage for the creation of detailed Mughal chronicles, which are valuable sources of information about the period.

Social and Cultural Integration

Akbar's rule is often credited with fostering cultural integration between Hindus, Muslims, and people from other backgrounds. His inclusive policies helped bring together various cultures, leading to the development of a unified Mughal identity. Through his military conquests and alliances with Rajput rulers, Akbar helped merge various regional cultures, blending local traditions with Persian and Central Asian influences.

Akbar possessed a large measure of humanity in his character. He hated pride and arrogance. When he started the Din-i-Ilahi, many requested Akbar to guide them, but his reply was : "Why should I claim to guide men, before I myself am guided." Akbar was fond of music and no wonder he patronized a large number of musicians. He possessed a large amount of knowledge of many kinds. According to Dr. V.A. Smith, "Anybody who heeded him arguing with acuteness and lucidity on his subject of debate would have credited him with wide literacy."

According to Father Monserrat who knew Akbar closely. "He was in face and stature fit for the dignity of king. So that anybody, even at the first glance, could easily recognize him as the king. His shoulders were broad and his legs slightly bandy and adapted to riding. His complexion was fair, but slightly suffused with a darker tint. He carried his head slightly inclined to one side, towards the right shoulder, his brow was broad and open and his eye sparkled as does the sea when lighted by the sun. His eye-lids were heavy as those of Sarmatians, the Chinese, the Niphonians, and nearly all Asiatics of the more Northern regions.

He was sympathetic towards the people and was always ready to do all that he could to win over their affection. "He always found time gladly to hear their cases and to respond graciously to their requests. Their little offerings, too, he used to accept with such a pleased look, handling them and putting them on his bosom, as he did not do with the most lavish gifts of the nobbles, which with discrete pretence, he often seemed not even to glance at." (Du Jarric). He was a deeply religious man. He was always ready to learn the good points of all religions. It is wrong to say that he gave up Islam towards the end of his life. We have testimony of Jahangir that his father was a Muslim up to his death. He often used to say that "there is no need to discuss the point that a vacuum in nature is impossible. God is omnipresent." Again, "Each mean according to his condition gives the Supreme Being a name, but in reality to name the unknowable is vain." "There exists a bond between the creator and the creature which is not expressible in language."

He was a man of deep affections. He was a dutiful son of his parents. He was kind towards his brother, Hakim, although the latter gave him a lot of trouble. He loved his son, Salim, very much and in spite of his rebellions, forgave him towards the end.

Akbar's Legacy as a National Monarch

Akbar was born soldier and great conqueror like his grandfather Babar. Imperialist by instincts, he transformed a small and shaky Mughal kingdom into a mighty empire. He recognized the Mughal army by introducing the mansabdari system and increased its fighting skill and efficiency by making use of the latest techniques of warfare then known to the Asians. Akbar imparted a political philosophy to his aggressive warfare and the territorial conquests, it was the political unification of India and the establishment of an all-powerful central government with a uniform system of administration throughout the country although a foreigner by blood, and 'Akbar was every inch an Indian who, like the ancient imperial rulers of India, had developed a firm faith in the principle of one country, one government, and one people. He granted complete religious freedom to his subjects and threw upon the gates of imperial services to all without discrimination. Under him, the Mughal state retained its traditional character as the police state which was ruled predominantly by the foreign Muslim nobility and the alien bureaucracy, but according to K.T. Shah, Akbar himself was 'thoroughly Indianised' and 'his genius perceived the possibilities, and his courage undertook the task of welding the two communities-Hindus and Muslims, into a common nation by universal bond of common services and equal citizenship of a magnificent empire.'

Akbar was an innovator in the field of administration. He laid the foundations of an imperial structure of administration under which the country was successfully governed by his descendants for over a century after his death. He was a great patron of art and architecture. He took keen interest in the planning of palaces, mosques, tombs, forts and even the new townships and had own ideas about the construction of buildings by the free amalgamation of the Turko-Afghan and indigenous styles. It resulted in the evolution of what was called the Mughal architecture which was, in fact the national Indian architecture of that age. Akbar created an elaborate public works department for undertaking the construction of public buildings, gardens, roads, sarais, wells and canals. He was a great lover of fine arts, including calligraphy, painting, music, dancing and the like. He nationalized all these arts by extending liberal patronage to the artists of all communities and races, and by encouraging them to evolve out new forms by complete synthesis of foreign and indigenous traits.

Akbar identified himself completely with the land and its people and did his best to impart socio-cultural unity to the country. Persian as court language was compulsory for recruitment to the imperial civil services,

but the translation department of the Central Government rendered into Persian ancient Indian scriptures, including the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other Sanskrit literature. Arabic and Turki literature was also translated into Persian to make it available to the scholars to all communities. Besides Persian and Arabic, Akbar also patronized Sanskrit, Hindi and regional languages. Urdu the offspring of Persian and Hindi, received due attention from him although its use was confined to the common people during his days.

Akbar's policies and reforms laid the foundation for a strong and unified Mughal Empire, creating a legacy that subsequent rulers would build upon. His approach to governance, grounded in tolerance, inclusion, and administrative efficiency, is a model of how a monarch can transcend personal and religious biases to create a cohesive and prosperous state. By integrating different communities and fostering a sense of shared identity, Akbar pioneered a form of governance that resonates with the modern concept of a "national monarch"—a ruler who unifies people across cultural and religious lines to create a stable and prosperous nation.

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Conclusion

Akbar's reign marked a transformative period in Indian history. Through his policies of religious tolerance, administrative reforms, and cultural patronage, he fostered unity and stability within the diverse Mughal Empire. Akbar's inclusive approach to governance exemplifies the qualities of a national monarch, as he sought to transcend sectarian divisions and promote a sense of collective identity among his subjects. His legacy of unity, tolerance, and reform has continued to shape the history of India, and his reign serves as a testament to the power of inclusive governance in building a cohesive and enduring state.

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