

Muhammad Akbar (محمد اکبر Jalāl ud-Dīn Muhammad Akbar), also known as Akbar the Great (November 23, 1542 – October 17 or October 27, 1605) [1][2] was the third Mughal Emperor. Born Badr-ud-din Muhammad Akbar, however, his name was changed to Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar and his birthdate was officially changed to October 15, 1542. He was the son of Nasiruddin Humayun whom he succeeded as ruler of the Mughal Empire from 1556 to 1605, and the grandson of Babur who founded the dynasty. On the eve of his death in 1605, the Mughal empire covered most of Northern India.[3]

Akbar, widely considered the greatest of the Mughal emperors, was only 13 years 6 months when he ascended the throne in Delhi, following the death of his father Humayun.[4] He is descended from Timurids who were Turko-Mongol.[5] It took him the better part of two decades to consolidate his power and bring parts of northern and central India into his realm. During his reign, he reduced external military threats from the Pashtun (Afghan) descendants of Sher Shah by waging wars against Afghan tribes, and at the Second Battle of Panipat he defeated the Hindu king Samrat Hemu Chandra Vikramaditya, also called Hemu.[6][7] The emperor solidified his rule by pursuing diplomacy with the powerful Rajput caste, and by admitting Rajput princesses in his harem.[6][8]

Akbar was an artisan, warrior, artist, armorer, blacksmith, carpenter, emperor, general, inventor, animal trainer (reputedly keeping thousands of hunting cheetahs during his reign and training many himself), lacemaker, technologist and theologian.[9] His most lasting contributions were to the arts. He initiated a large collection of literature, including the Akbar-nama and the Ain-i-Akbari, and incorporated art from around the world into the Mughal collections. He also commissioned the building of widely admired buildings, and invented the first prefabricated homes and movable structures.[9] Akbar began a series of religious debates where Muslim scholars would debate religious matters with Sikhs, Hindus, Cārvāka atheists and even Jesuits coming from Portugal. He founded his own religious cult, the Din-i-Ilahi or the "Divine Faith"; however, it amounted only to a form of personality cult for Akbar, and quickly dissolved after his death leaving his wife behind.[6][10]

The name Akbar

At birth Akbar was named Badruddin Akbar, because he was born on the night of a badr (full moon). After the capture of Kabul by Humayun his date of birth and name were changed to throw off evil sorcerers.[11] Popular myth records that Akbar, meaning "Great", was a title given to Akbar by the people of India. In fact he was given the name Akbar at birth after his maternal grandfather, Shaikh Ali Akbar Jami.

Early years

Akbar was born on October 15, 1542 (early morning of fourth day of Rajab, 949 AH), at the Rajput Fortress of Umarkot in Sindh, where the Mughal Emperor Humayun and his recently wedded wife, Hamida Banu Begum were taking refuge. Humayun was some thirty miles away when Tardi Muhammad Khan gave him the news and the delighted father forgave all his past offences, and later gave the child the name he had heard in his dream at Lahore, Jalalu-d-din Muhammad Akbar Ghazi [12][13]

Akbar on an elephant

Humayun had been driven into exile, following decisive battles, by the Pashtun (Afghan) leader

Sher Shah Suri.[14] Akbar did not go to Persia with his parents and soon they were transferred to the Princely State of Rewa (in present day Madhya Pradesh) where Akbar grew up in the village of Mukundpur. Akbar and prince Ram Singh who later became the Maharaja of Rewa grew up together and stayed close friends through life. Humayun was the eldest son of Babur. For some time, Akbar was raised by his uncle Askari and his wife in the eastern country of Persia what is now modern Afghanistan — rather than in the splendor of the Persian court. He spent his youth learning to hunt, run, and fight, but he never learned to read or write, the sole exception in Babur's line.[15] Nonetheless, Akbar matured into a well-informed ruler, with refined tastes in the arts, architecture, music, a love for literature, and a breadth of vision that tolerated other opinions.

Following the chaos over the succession of Sher Khan Suri's son Islam Shah, Humayun reconquered Delhi in 1555, leading an army partly provided by his Persian ally Shah Tahmasp. Months later, Humayun died. Bairam Khan cleverly concealed the report of Humayun's death in order to prepare for Akbar's accession to the throne. Akbar succeeded his father on February 14, 1556 Gregorian February 24, while in the midst of a war against Sikandar Shah for the reclamation of the Mughal throne. In Kalanaur, Punjab, the 13 year old Akbar donned a golden robe and Dark Tiara and sat on a newly constructed platform, which still stands,[16] and was proclaimed Shahanshah (Persian for "King of Kings"). The mosque built at the time of Akbar can still be seen and the place where he prayed can be visited.

The reign of Akbar

Early conquests

Akbar decided early in his reign that he should eliminate the threat of Sher Shah's dynasty, and decided to lead an army against the strongest of the three, Sikandar Shah Suri, in the Punjab. He left Delhi under the regency of Tardi Baig Khan.[citation needed]

Flag of Mughals

[citation needed]

Sikandar Shah Suri presented no major concern for Akbar, and often withdrew from territory as Akbar approached. However, back in Delhi Hemu, a Hindu King, also known as Hemu Vikramaditya, captured Agra and then Delhi on 6 October 1556 and declared himself as Emperor of India. Tardi Beg Khan promptly fled the city. Hemu Vikramaditya, who during three years from October 1553 to October 1556, had won 22 successive battles and had captured areas from Bengal to Punjab, not only appointed himself the ruler, or Raja Vikramaditya, but also re-established Hindu Kingdom in Delhi.

News of the capitulation of Delhi spread quickly to Akbar, and he was advised to withdraw to Kabul, which was relatively secure. But urged by Bairam Khan, Akbar marched on Delhi to reclaim it. To bolster troop morale, he ordered that someone should "prepare fireworks as a treat for the soldiers" and "make an image of Hemu, fill it with gunpowder, and set it on fire". Tardi Beg and his retreating troops joined the march, and also urged Akbar to retreat to Kabul, but he refused again. Later, Bairam Khan had the former regent executed for cowardice, though Abul Fazl and Jahangir both record that they believed that Bairam Khan was merely using the retreat from Delhi as an excuse to eliminate a rival.

Silver coin of Akbar with inscriptions of the Islamic declaration of faith

Akbar's army defeated the more numerous forces of Hemu Vikramaditya at the Second Battle of Panipat, 50 miles (80 km) north of Delhi, thanks to a chance arrow into Hemu's eye. Hemu was brought to Akbar unconscious, and was beheaded. Some sources say that it was Bairam Khan who killed Hemu, but Akbar certainly used the term Ghazi, warrior for the faith, a term used by both Babur, his grandfather, and Timur when fighting Hindus in India. Hemu's body was cut into pieces, his head was hung outside Delhi Darwaza, while his torso was hung outside Purana Qila, opposite present day Pragati Maidan in Delhi. Acting out as a Ghazi ("victor") Akbar constructed a victory pillar made from the heads of the captured/surrendered army of Raja Hemchandra Vikramaditya and rebellious soldiers, just like Babur did. Pictures of such towers are displayed in the National Museum, New Delhi, and Panipat Museum in Haryana.

The victory also left Akbar with over 1,500 war elephants which he used to re-engage Sikandar Shah at the siege of Mankot. Sikandar surrendered and so was spared death, and lived the last remaining two years of his life on a large estate granted to him by Akbar. In 1557, Adil Shah, brother of Sikandar, died during a battle in Bengal.

Bairam Khan

Akbar hunting with cheetahs, c. 1602

Bairam Khan assassinated by Afghans

Akbar was only 14 years old when he became emperor, and so his general ruled on his behalf until he came of age. The regency belonged to Bairam Khan, a Shia (Turkmen) noble born in Badakhshan who successfully dealt with pretenders to the throne and improved the discipline of the Mughal armies. He ensured power was centralised and was able to expand the empire's boundaries with orders from the capital. These moves helped to consolidate Mughal power in the newly recovered empire.[citation needed]

Respect for Bairam's regency was not, however, universal. There were many people plotting his demise in order to assume the apparent absolute rule they saw in him. Much was written, critically, of his religion. The majority of the early court were Sunni Muslims, and Bairam's Shia'ism was disliked. Bairam knew about this, and perhaps even to spite that, appointed a Shia Sheikh, Shaikh Gadai Kamboh to become the Administrator General, one of the more important roles in the empire. Further Bairam lived a rather opulent lifestyle, which appeared to be even more excessive than that of Akbar.

The most serious of those opposed to Bairam was Maham Anga, Akbar's aunt, chief nurse and mother of his foster brother, Adham Khan. Maham was both shrewd and manipulative and hoped to rule herself by proxy through her son. In March 1560 the pair of them urged Akbar to visit them in Delhi, leaving Bairam in the capital, Agra. While in Delhi Akbar was bombarded by people who told him he was now ready to take full control of the empire and to dismiss Bairam. He was persuaded to fund an excursion for Bairam to go on Hajj to Mecca, which was to act, essentially, as a form of ostracism. Bairam was shocked at the news from Delhi, but was loyal to Akbar, and despite Akbar's refusal to even meet with the General, refused the suggestions by some of his commanders to march on Delhi and "rescue" Akbar.

Bairam left for Mecca, but was quickly met by an army sent by Adham Khan, approved by Akbar, which was sent to "escort" him from the Mughal territories. Bairam saw this as the last straw, and led an attack on the army, but was captured and sent as a rebel back to Akbar to be sentenced. Bairam Khan, whose military genius had seen the Mughals regain their lands in India, who had served both Humayun and Akbar loyally, and laid the foundation for a strong empire, was now before the emperor as a prisoner. Maham Anga urged Akbar to execute Bairam, but Akbar refused. Instead, in defiance of Anga, he laid down full honours to the General, and gave him robes of honour, and agreed to fund him a proper Hajj excursion. However, shortly after Bairam Khan's Hajj journey got underway, just before he reached the port city of Khambhat he was killed by an Afghan assassin whose father had been killed five years earlier in a battle led by Bairam. Bairam died on January 31, 1561.

Expansion

Mughal empire under Akbar

Akbar is recorded as saying "A monarch should be ever intent on conquest, lest his neighbours rise in arms against him", and he went on to expand the Mughal empire to include Malwa (1562), Gujarat (1572), Bengal (1574), Kabul (1581), Kashmir (1586), and Kandesh (1601), among others. Akbar installed a governor over each of the conquered provinces, under his authority.

Akbar did not want to have his court tied too closely to the city of Delhi. He ordered the court moved to Fatehpur Sikri, near Agra, but when this site proved untenable, he set up a roaming camp that let him keep a close eye on what was happening throughout the empire. He developed and encouraged commerce.

Akbar's tax reforms were especially noteworthy, and formed the basis of the Mughal Empire's immense wealth in succeeding generations. His officials prepared a detailed and accurate cadaster (land register) noting each land parcel's soil quality, water access, etc., and so assessed their value, taking account of prevailing prices for various crops in each region. This was a distinct improvement on earlier land tax systems, including the Egyptian and Roman ones, which had levied land taxes as an in-kind share of the harvest. By making taxes reflect the value of the land rather than the harvest, this stimulated both improvements in investments and more productive use of the land.

Fatehpur Sikri

Diwan-i-Khas – Hall of Private Audience

Main article: Fatehpur Sikri

Starting in 1571, Akbar built a walled capital called Fatehpur Sikri (Fatehpur means "town of victory") near Agra. Palaces for each of Akbar's senior queens, a huge artificial lake, and sumptuous water-filled courtyards were built there. However, the city was soon abandoned and the capital was moved to Lahore in 1585. The reason may have been that the water supply in Fatehpur Sikri was insufficient or of poor quality. Or, as some historians believe, Akbar had to attend to the northwest areas of his empire and therefore moved his capital northwest. In 1599, Akbar shifted his capital back to Agra from where he reigned until his death.

Navratnas, the nine jewels in Akbar's court

Main article: Nine courtiers of King Akbar

* Abul-Fazel - was the Grand Vizier (Wazīr-e Azam) of Akbar, and author of the Akbarnama, the official history of Akbar's reign in three volumes, the third volume is known as the Ain-i-Akbari and a Persian translation of the Bible.[17] He was also the brother of Faizi, the poet laureate of emperor Akbar.

* Faizi - was the poet laureate of Akbar's Court. He was the brother of Akbar's historian Abul Fazl. He composed beautiful poetry in Persian and is estimated by his contemporaries to have composed nearly 100 poetic works. He wanted to produce a Panj Ganj (lit. five treasures) in imitation of the Persian poet Nezami, but died after writing only three out of the five works. Towards this end he wrote Nal u Daman, MakHzan ul-advar, and Bilqis va Salman. These were in imitation of Nezami's Layla va Majnun, MakHzan ul-Asrar, and Shirin va Khusrau, respectively. Akbar highly recognized the genius in him and appointed him teacher for his son and gave place to him among his decorative 'Nav Ratnas'. He also wrote a commentary on the Quran and translated Lilavati, a Sanskrit work on mathematics, into Persian. His father was Mubarak Nagori, a scholar in the philosophy and literature of Greece as well as in Islamic theology.

* Miyan Tansen - was a musician in Akbar's court and is considered among the greatest composer-musicians. He was an extraordinarily gifted vocalist, known for a large number of compositions, and also an instrumentalist who popularized and improved the rabab (of Central

Asian origin).

* Birbal - was the only person other than Akbar who was a Din-i-Ilahi believer. Birbal's duties in Akbar's court were mostly military and administrative but he was also a very close friend of the emperor, who liked Birbal most for his wit and humor, as a result of which they frequently had witty and humorous exchanges between them. These exchanges and stories have become part of a rich tradition of folklore and legend.

* Raja Todar Mal- rose to become the Finance Minister in Akbar's Darbar. Todar Mal overhauled the revenue system of Akbar's Mughal empire. He was from the Khatri (or Khattri/Khattree) community of Punjab. Todar Mal had developed his expertise in Sher Shah's employment.

* Raja Man Singh- was the Kacchwaha Rajah of Amber, a state later known as Jaipur. He was a trusted general in Akbar's army. However, he was a devotee of Shri Krishna, and not an adherent of Akbar's religion, Din-i-Ilahi.

* Abdur Rahim Khan-I-Khana- was a poet in Akbar's darbar, and one of his main nine ministers (Diwan) in his court, also known as the Navaratnas; he is most known for his Hindi couplets and his books on Astrology.[18] The village of Khankhana, named after him, is located in the Nawanshahr district of the state of Punjab in northwest India.

* Fakir Aziao-Din - (Faqr means Sage or Ascetic in Urdu) was one of Akbar's chief advisors, and belonged to his inner circle. Akbar regarded his advice in high esteem.

* Mullah Do Plaza- was among the Mughal emperor Akbar's chief advisors. Akbar regarded his advice in high esteem and included him among the nine gems of the Mughal court, or Navratnas, as he was known for his intelligence.

Personality

Akbar is said to be a wise ruler and a sound judge of character. His son and heir, Jahangir, in his memoirs, wrote effusive praise of Akbar's character, and dozens of anecdotes to illustrate his virtues.[19]

According to Jahangir, Akbar's complexion was like the yellow of wheat. Antoni de Montserrat, the Catalan Jesuit who visited his court described him as plainly white. Akbar was not tall but powerfully built and very agile. He was also noted for various acts of courage. One such

incident occurred on his way back from Malwa to Agra when Akbar was 19 years of age.

The court of Akbar, an illustration from Akbarnama

Akbar rode alone in advance of his escort and was confronted by a tigress who, along with her cubs, came out from the shrubbery across his path. When the tigress charged the emperor, he was alleged to have dispatched the animal with his sword in a solitary blow. His approaching attendants found the emperor standing quietly by the side of the dead animal.[20]

A similar incident occurred when Bhar Mal (a prince of Rajput state Amber), his son, grandson and few retainers were paying Akbar a visit at an imperial camp near elephants. Visiting Rajputs witnessed Akbar subdue an elephant by coaxing it to kneel after having mounted the animal.

Abul Fazal, and even the hostile critic Badayuni, described him as having a commanding personality. He was notable for his command in battle, and, "like Alexander of Macedon, was always ready to risk his life, regardless of political consequences". He often plunged on his horse into the flooded river during the rainy seasons and safely crossed it. He rarely indulged in cruelty and is said to have been affectionate towards his relatives. He pardoned his brother Hakim, who was a repented rebel. But on rare occasions, he dealt cruelly with offenders, such as his maternal uncle Muazzam and his foster-brother Adham Khan.

Akbar and Tansen, visit Swami Haridas at Vrindavan, a painting c. 1750

He is said to have been extremely moderate in his diet. Ain-e-Akbari mentions that during his travels and also while at home, Akbar drank water from the Ganga river, which he called 'the water of immortality'. Special people were stationed at Sorun and later Haridwar to dispatch water, in sealed jars, to wherever he was stationed.[21] According to Jahangir's memoirs, he was fond of fruits and had little liking for meat, which he stopped eating in his later years. He was more religiously tolerant than many of the Muslim rulers before and after him. Jahangir wrote:

"As in the wide expanse of the Divine compassion there is room for all classes and the followers of all creeds, so... in his dominions, ... there was room for the professors of opposite religions, and for beliefs good and bad, and the road to altercation was closed. Sunnis and Shias met in one mosque, and Franks and Jews in one church, and observed their own forms of worship.[19]"

To defend his stance that speech arose from hearing, he carried out a language deprivation experiment, and had children raised in isolation, not allowed to be spoken to, and pointed out that as they grew older, they remained mute.[22]

Akbar, the third generation Mughal emperor who lived from 1542–1605 A.D, has been extolled as the greatest of all Mughals, righteous in deed and noble in character.

Relation with Hindus

Akbar's reign was chronicled extensively by his court historian Abul Fazal in the books Akbarnama and Ain-i-akbari. Fazal gave a positive spin to Akbar's reign by glossing over uncomfortable facts of the emperor's reign related to his interaction with other communities of his empire, which has been repeated by numerous historians over the years. Other contemporary sources of Akbar's reign like the works of Badayuni, Shaikhzada Rashidi and Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi were written outside of court influence and hence contain more authentic information and less flattery for Akbar. Historian Vincent A. Smith concludes:

Injudicious flatterers of Akbar have printed much canting nonsense about his supposed desire to do good to the conquered peoples by his annexations.[23]

Rajput Wives of Akbar

Akbar persuaded the Kacchwaha Rajput, Raja Bharmal, of Amer (modern day Jaipur) into accepting a matrimonial alliance for his daughter Harka Bai. This marriage proved to be a turning point in the history of the Mughal empire, as this was the first instance of royal matrimony between Hindu and Muslim dynasties in India. Harka Bai was rechristened Mariam-uz-zamani. After her marriage she was treated as an outcaste by her family and in the

61 years of married life she never visited Amber/Jaipur.[24] Her position in the Mughal household was not of much importance because she was not assigned any significant place either in Agra or Delhi. Instead she was assigned a small village of Barah near Bayana in the Bharatpur district where she passed her time till her death.[24] She died in 1623 and her tomb is near Agra.[25] As a custom Hindus were cremated and never buried. Her burial signifies she converted to Islam after marriage.

Rajput ladies who entered the Delhi royal harem became Muslims and were buried in Muslim cemeteries, they could no longer visit their parents' houses or dine with them.[26]

Subsequently a mosque was built in her honor by Jahangir in Lahore, Pakistan which is called Mariam-uz-zamani mosque.[27] She was given this name after the birth of her son Jahangir as a Muslim ruler had to be given birth by a Muslim mother. Other Rajput kingdoms soon established matrimonial alliances with the Emperor of Delhi. The law of Hindu succession has always been patrilineal, so the Hindu lineage was not threatened in marrying their princesses for political gain. Rajputs who did give their daughters to Mughals still did not treat Mughals as equals. They would not dine with Mughals or take Muslim women as their lawful wives.[28]

Two major Rajput clans remained against him, the Sisodiyas of Mewar and Hadas (Chauhans) of Ranthambore. In another turning point of Akbar's reign, Raja Man Singh I of Amer went with Akbar to meet the Hada leader, Surjan Hada, to effect an alliance. Surjan grudgingly accepted an alliance on the condition that Akbar did not marry any of his daughters. Surjan later moved his residence to Banaras. Surjan Hada's son, Bhoja Hada, opposed the marriage of his granddaughter (his daughter's daughter. His daughter was married to Prince Jagat Singh, son of Man Singh I of Amer) to Jahangir which caused Jahangir to move against Bhoj.[29] After his death, his granddaughter was married to Jahangir. A daughter of Raja Man Singh I was also married to Jahangir and she committed suicide.[30]

Rajput nobles did not like the idea of their kings marrying their daughters to Mughals. Rathore Kalyandas threatened to kill both Mota Raja Udai Singh (of Jodhpur) and Jahangir because Udai Singh had decided to marry his daughter Jodha Bai to Jahangir. Akbar on hearing this ordered imperial forces to attack Kalyandas at Siwana. Kalyandas died fighting along with his men and the women of Siwana committed Jauhar.[31]

Maharana Pratap

Entering into alliance with Rajput kingdoms enabled Akbar to extend the border of his Empire to far off regions, and the Rajputs became the strongest allies of the Mughals. Rajput soldiers fought for the Mughal empire for the next 130 years till its collapse following the death of Aurangzeb. Akbar could trust the rajputs because he held their dearest (eldest son) hostages in perpetuity.[26]

However, Maharana Pratap of Mewar declined to accept Akbar's suzerainty and till the end was opposed to Akbar whom he considered a foreign invader. Pratap also stopped the marriage etiquette of Rajputs who had been giving their daughters to Mughals and his supporting Rajputs instead:

With such examples as Marwar and Amer (of giving their daughters to Mughals), and with less power to resist the temptation, the minor chiefs of Rajasthan, with a brave and numerous vassalage, were transformed into satraps of Delhi.

But these were fearful odds against Pratap. The arms of his country turned upon him, derived additional force from their self-degradation, which kindled into jealousy and hatred against the magnanimous resolution they lacked the virtue to imitate. When Hindu prejudice was thus violated by every prince in Rajasthan, the Rana renounced all matrimonial alliance with those who were thus degraded. To the eternal honour of Pratap and his issue be it told that, to the very close of the monarchy of the Moguls, they refused such alliances not only with the throne, but even with their brother princes of Marwar and Ambar. It is a proud triumph of virtue to be able to record from the autograph letters of the most powerful of the Rajput princes, Bukhet Singh and Sawai Jai Singh, that whilst they had risen to greatness by the surrender of principle, as Mewar had decayed from her adherence to it, they should solicit, and that humbly, to be readmitted to the honour of matrimonial intercourse and "to be purified," "to be regenerated," "to be made Rajputs" and that this favour was granted only on condition of their abjuring the contaminating practice (of giving daughters to Mughals) which, for more than a century, had disunited them.[32]

Hindu temples saved

Akbar sent a golden umbrella for an idol which was destroyed. He also allowed conversion of a mosque into Hindu temple at Kurukshetra. This temple had previously been destroyed and converted into a mosque.[33] Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, a contemporary of Akbar, does not credit him for saving the temple instead gives credit to the "infidels" (Hindus) for building their own temple by demolishing the mosque.[34]

Hindu temples destroyed

Contrary to popular belief Akbar, continued the policy of Babur and Humayun in the destruction of Hindu temples.

Kangra Fort at Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

It is recorded by Bayazid Biyat, personal attendant of Humayun, that Akbar gave two villages for the upkeep of a mosque and a Madrasa which was setup by destroying a Hindu temple, this was done under the supervision of 'Todar Mal' who was highly regarded Hindu minister (vizir) of Akbar.[33] In Akbar's time Todar Mal was called a simple one (sada-lauh) because he mourned the loss of the idols he used to worship and he was also called "a blind follower of custom and narrow mindedness" for being a Hindu.[35]

Akbar's army was responsible for demolition of rich Hindu temples which had gold idols in the Doab region between Ganga and Yamuna.[33]

Historian Abd al-Qadir Badauni records that during Akbar's reign at Nagarkot, near Kangra, 200 cows were slaughtered, numerous Hindus killed and a temple was demolished[33]

On the 1st Rajab 990 AD 1582 Akbar's forces encamped by a field of maize near Nagarkot. The fortress (hissār) of Bhîm, which has an idol temple of Mahāmāî, and in which none but her servants dwelt, was taken by the valour of the assailants at the first assault. A party of Rajpûts, who had resolved to die, fought most desperately till they were all cut down. A number of Brāhmans who for many years had served the temple, never gave one thought to flight, and were killed. Nearly 200 black cows belonging to Hindûs had, during the struggle, crowded together for shelter in the temple. Some savage Turks, while the arrows and bullets were falling like rain, killed those cows. They then took off their boots and filled them with the blood and cast it upon the roof and walls of the temple.[36]

During the third siege of Chittor many temples were destroyed. The shrine of Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer was presented brass candlesticks by Akbar which were taken after the destruction of Kalika temple by Akbar during the third siege of Chittor.[37]

Jesuit Father Monserrate, Aquaviva and Enrique arrived at Akbar's court in early 1580 and Monserrate recording his journey in a travelogue comments that religious zeal of Mussalmans has destroyed many Hindu temples and in their places countless tombs and shrines of mussalmans have been erected in which these men are worshipped as if they were saints.[38] Monserrate also tutored Emperor's son Murad.

Jihad against Hindu Kings

During his time Akbar was looked upon by orthodox Muslim elements as a pious Muslim committed to defending Islam against infidelity.[39] Rizqullah Mushtaqi, a well known Shaikhzada of Delhi, writing around 1580, says that Akbar was sent by God to protect Islam from being suppressed by Hemu.[40]

Chittorgarh Fort

Akbar spread Islam in India by waging a holy war (Jihad) against Hindu kings. During the siege of Chittor in 1567 CE, 8000 rajputs had remained inside the fort to defend various temples after the cavalry sallied out to meet Akbar's army in the plain below. These 8000 died fighting to the last man in defense of Hindu temples when Akbar's army stormed the fort and attacked the temples. In addition there were 30,000 plus Hindu peasants inside the fort who were unarmed and massacred in cold blood by Akbar's forces[41] by his order on February 24, 1568 CE. Carthaginian on gaining the Battle of Cannae measured his success by bushels of rings taken from the fingers of equestrian roman soldiers and similarly Akbar measured his by the quantity of cordons of distinction (Janeu or the sacred thread) collected from the fallen rajput soldiers and other civilians of Chittor, which amounted to seventy four and half man (a unit of weight in India equalling 40 kg) by weight. To eternise the memory of this deed the number 74.5 is accursed and marked on a banker's letter in Rajasthan it is the strongest of seals, for "the sin of the sack of Chittor" is invoked on him who violates a letter under the safeguard of this mysterious number.[42]

Akbar celebrated the victory over Chittor and Ranthambore by laying the foundation of a new city, 23 miles (37 km) W.S.W of Agra in 1569. It was called Fatehpur Sikri (city of victory).[43]

Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri

Akbar, bolstered by his success, was looking forward to widespread acclamation as a great conqueror of Islam and his vigorous Islamic policy is illustrated by Fatahnama-i-Chittor issued by him after the conquest of Chittor at Ajmer, where he stayed for some time en route to Agra, on Ramazan 10, 975/March 9, 1568, where the infidels (Hindus) are reviled:

..the Omnipotent one who enjoined the task of destroying the wicked infidels (Hindus) on the dutiful mujahids through the blows of their thunder-like scimitars laid down: "Fight them! Allah will chastise them at your hands and He will lay them low and give you victory over them".[44]

Further on the call to Jihad against Hindu kings of India is raised and also a call to the destruction of Hindu temples:

This is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful — we spend our precious time to the best of our ability in war (ghiza) and Jihad and with the help of Eternal Allah, who is the supporter of our ever-increasing empire, we are busy in subjugating the localities, habitations, forts and towns which are under the possession of the infidels (Hindus), may Allah forsake and annihilate all of them, and thus raising the standard of Islam everywhere and removing the darkness of polytheism and violent sins by the use of sword. We destroy the places of worship of idols in those places and other parts of India.[45]

The reimposition of jizya in 1575 is also symbolic of vigorous Islamic policy.[46] Abd al-Qadir Badauni who was then one of Akbar's court chaplains or imams, states that he sought an interview with the emperor when the royal troops were marching against Rana Pratap in 1576, begging leave of absence for "the privilege of joining the campaign to soak his Islamic beard in Hindu infidel blood". Akbar was so pleased at the expression of allegiance to his person and to the Islamic idea of Jihad that he bestowed a handful of gold coins on Badauni as a token of his pleasure.[47]

Akbar boasted that he was a great conqueror of Islam to the ruler of Turan, Abdullah Khan, in a letter in 1579:

Places and lands (India) which from the time of rise of the sun of Islam has not been trod by the horse-hooves of world conquering princes and where their swords had never flashed have become the dwelling places and homes of the faithful (Muslims). The churches and temples of the infidels (Hindus) and heretics have become mosques and holy shrines for the masters of orthodoxy. God (Allah) be praised![48]

Taxation on Hindus

Jizya was repealed in 1562 by Akbar but was reinstated in 1575,[49] before being again repealed in 1580. This tax had been used as a weapon by Muslim rulers in India to convert poor Hindus to the fold of Islam because this tax could not be imposed on Muslims.[50] This tax

caused most burden on the poor, and on their inability to pay the poor Hindus faced execution but by converting to Islam their life was spared. Firoz Shah Tughlaq explained how jizya was used to help conversions:

I encouraged my Kafir (infidel) subjects to embrace the religion of the prophet, and I proclaimed that everyone who repeated the creed and became a muslim should be exempt from jizya Great numbers of Hindus presented themselves and were admitted to the honor of Islam.[51]

Akbar's apparent measures of tolerance such as abolition of pilgrimage tax and jizya on Hindus were episodic and had no real benefit for Hindus.[52]

Impression of Hindus about him

Akbar forced many Hindus to convert to Islam against their will[53] and also changed the name of some of their holy places to Islamic ones, an example being, the changing of Prayag to Allahabad[54] in 1583.[55]

During Akbar's reign, his general Husain Khan 'Tukriya' forcibly made non-Muslims (Hindus) wear discriminatory[56] patches of different colours on their shoulders or sleeves.[57]

Historian Dasharatha Sharma says that we are prone to idealise Akbar's reign with court histories like Akbarnama and give Akbar more than his due.[58] If one looks at other contemporary works like Dalpat Vilas it becomes clear that Akbar used to treat his Hindu nobles very badly.[59]

Akbar's grave

When Akbar began his Qamargah hunt in the Bhera-Rohtas-Girjhaka area, many of the (Hindu) Rajput chiefs accompanying the emperor were encamped on the bank of the river Jhelum. On Akbar's reaching there the chiefs went to meet him. One Rajput chief, Danhaji, was a bit late. Akbar whipped him himself. A young Rajput prince, Prithvidipa, was allowed to play on by his maternal uncle. Akbar ordered the poor uncle to be whipped, and the self-respecting Rajput, unable to bear the insult, stabbed himself thrice with his own dagger, thereby infuriating the emperor even further and making him pass an order for having the dying rajput trampled to death by an elephant. ... When prince Dalpat Singh of Bikaner and his companions saw Akbar after cremating the Rajput's body they found him shouting "Let the Hindus consume cows". Stories of the way Akbar treated Hindu rajputs must have reached Maharana Pratap and made him realize the utter ignominy of submitting to Akbar.[59]

Consequently[citation needed] Hindus did not hold Akbar or his Hindu generals in high regard[citation needed] which became apparent[citation needed] when they boycotted the

Vishwanath temple built by Akbar's general Man Singh after taking the emperor's permission.

Gate of the Akbar's mausoleum at Sikandra, Agra, 1795

Hindus boycotted this temple because Man Singh's family had marital relations with Akbar.[60] Akbar's Hindu generals could not construct temples without emperor's permission. In Bengal, Man Singh started the construction of a temple in 1595 but Akbar ordered him to convert it into a mosque.[61]

The contempt for Akbar came to fore when Hindu peasant community leader, Raja Ram, tried to ransack Akbar's mausoleum at Sikandra, Agra. But his attempt was foiled by the local faujdar, Mir Abul Fazl. After a short while, Raja Ram reappeared at Sikandara in 1688[62] and taking advantage of the delay in coming of Shaista Khan, the governor-designate of Agra, he attacked and plundered Akbar's mausoleum and carried away the precious articles of gold and silver, carpets, lamps etc. and destroyed what he could not carry.

Rajaram and his men removed the bones of Akbar and burnt them, a grave insult to a Muslim:[63]

... breaking the massive bronze gates, tearing away the costly ornaments, and destroying

everything which they could not carry off. Their wrath against their Mughul oppressors led them to a still more shocking outrage. Dragging out the bones of Akbar, they threw them into the fire and burnt them.[64]

Relations with other Muslims

In 1567 Akbar had the grave of Mir Murtaza Sharifi Shirazi exhumed because of its proximity to the grave of Amir Khusrau in Delhi on the argument that a 'heretic' (since Mir was a Shia) could not be buried so close to the grave of a Sunni saint.[65] Akbar sent a farman in 1572 to Abdu's Samad, the muhtasib of pargana Bilgram directing him to 'help in eradicating heresy and deviationism from the pargana'. This indicates that Akbar had a persecutory attitude towards Shi'ism.[65]

Akbar suppressed Mahdavi's quite brutally in 1573 during his campaign in Gujarat. Leading Mahdavi divine Bandagi Miyan Mustafa Gujrati was arrested and brought in chains to the court and was later executed.[65]

Relation with Ottoman Empire

Akbar sent a Hajj caravan to holy city of Mecca and Medina in October 1576 from the port city of Surat. Ladies of the Imperial Harem also went on this journey and reached the holy city in

time for the pilgrimage of 1577. Four more caravans were sent from 1577 to 1580 laden with gifts and sadaqat for the authorities of Mecca and Medina. The pilgrims in these caravans were poor and they overstayed, which strained the resources of these cities.[66] Ottoman authorities requested that the pilgrims return home. The ladies of the royal harem did not want to leave Hejaz but Khwaja Yahya, at the Ottoman emperor's request, forced them to return.

Hejaz

The ladies of the royal harem of Akbar were insulted by the Governor of Aden on their way back to India in 1580. This treatment of Akbar's caravans and of the ladies of the harem persuaded him to stop sending Hajj caravans and sadaqat to Mecca and Medina.

Akbar, thus disillusioned, wanted to become the caliph or the undisputed leader of the Sunni world. To this effect a Mahzar was signed by important ulama and issued in September 1579. The Mahzar asserts:

- * that Akbar was the Khalifa of the age;
- * that the rank of the Khalifa is higher than that of a Mujtahid;
- * that in case of a difference of opinion among the mujtahids, Akbar can select any one opinion, and

* Akbar may issue decrees which do not go against the nass.

In 1579 Akbar startled and offended religious Muslims by displacing the regular preacher at the mosque and mounting the pulpit where he recited verses composed by Faizi, the elder son of Shaikh mubarak. At about this time, he began to indicate that he had lost faith in the creed of the prophet of mecca.[67]

From 1584 onwards, Akbar seriously considered attacking the Ottoman port of Yemen with the help of the Portuguese. To forge an alliance, a Mughal envoy was stationed in Goa permanently as of October 1584. In 1587 the Portuguese fleet, which had sailed to attack Yemen and Habash, was defeated and the captain, Dokondo Pirino, captured. The Mughal-Portuguese alliance fell through.[68]

Relation with Christians

In 1603 a written firman was granted at the request of the Christian Fathers allowing them to make willing converts.[69] The fathers, even armed with the firman, found it extremely difficult to carry out their work. Staunch Muslim officials as the Viceroy of Lahore, Qulij Khan, was so harassing in his tactics that many Christians fled from Lahore and Father Pinheiro went in fear of death.[70]

New Sect

It is alleged that Akbar created a new sect [71], religious movement known as Din-i-Ilahi, a claim which has been refuted by modern scholars who have cogently argued that Akbar aimed at initiating no religion and certainly did not coin and did not use the word Din-i-Ilahi.[72]

Akbar held debate on philosophical and religious issues and this led to the creation of the Ibadat Khana ("House of Worship") at Fatehpur Sikri. These debates were acrimonious and lasted for a very short period as no religious head engaged in these debates was ready to accept other religions as superior. Use of Ibadat Khana was discontinued soon thereafter.

The purported Din-i-Ilahi was more of an ethical system and is said to have prohibited lust, sensuality, slander and pride, considering them sins. Piety, prudence, abstinence and kindness are the core virtues. The soul is encouraged to purify itself through yearning of God.[73] Celibacy and the slaughter of animals was forbidden and there were no sacred scriptures or a priestly hierarchy.[74] Though leading Noble of Akbar's court, Aziz Koka, wrote a letter to him from Mecca in 1594 and accused him that starting of the new cult by Akbar amounted to nothing more than a desire on Akbar's part to portray himself as "a new prophet".[75]

Misconceptions about Akbar propounding a new religion arose because Blochman, translator

of Ain-i-Akbari into English in 1873, erroneously rendered A'in-i Iradat Gazinan which literally means Regulations for those privileged to be his disciple as Ordinances of the Divine Faith. Also when Blochman translated Badayuni he again mistranslated halqa-i iradat and silsilah-i muridan as Divine Faith and the new religion respectively when these terms literally stand for circle of disciples.[76] Another mistranslation by Blochman has altered the meaning of Abul Fazl's words. Fazl says a few were accepted from many into "the circle of discipleship" while Blochman renders it erroneously as "candidates to the New Faith".[77] At the time of Akbar's death in 1605 there was no discontentment amongst his Muslim subjects and the impression of even a theologian like Abdu'l Haq was that Akbar remained a Muslim King.[78]

In media

* In 2008, director Ashutosh Gowariker released a film telling the story of Akbar and his wife Hira Kunwari (known more popularly as Jodha Bai), titled Jodhaa Akbar. Akbar was played by Hrithik Roshan and Jodhaa was played by Aishwarya Rai.

* Akbar was portrayed in the award-winning 1960 Hindi movie Mughal-e-Azam (The great Mughal), in which his character was played by Prithviraj Kapoor.

* Akbar and Birbal were portrayed in the Hindi series Akbar-Birbal aired on Zee TV in late 1990s where Akbar's role was essayed by Vikram Gokhale.

* A television series, called Akbar the Great, directed by Sanjay Khan was aired on DD National in the 1990s.

* A fictionalized Akbar plays an important supporting role in Kim Stanley Robinson's 2002

novel, *The Years of Rice and Salt*.

* Akbar is also a major character in Salman Rushdie's 2008 novel *The Enchantress of Florence*.

* Amartya Sen uses Akbar as a prime example in his books *The Argumentative Indian* and *Violence and Identity*.

* Bertrice Small is known for incorporating historical figures as primary characters in her romance novels, and Akbar is no exception. He is a prominent figure in two of her novels, and mentioned several times in a third, which takes place after his death. In *This Heart of Mine* the heroine becomes Akbar's fortieth "wife" for a time, while *Wild Jasmine* and *Darling Jasmine* centre around the life of his half-British daughter. His end was an unfortunate luck to both Persian and Indian.

* Akbar is also the AI Personality of India in the renowned game *Age of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties*.

* The violin concerto nicknamed "Il Grosso Mogul" written by Antonio Vivaldi in the 1720s, and listed in the standard catalogue as RV 208, is considered to be indirectly inspired by Akbar's reign.

* In Kunal Basu's *The Miniaturist*, the story revolves around a young painter during Akbar's time who paints his own version of the *Akbarnama*.