UNIT 14: RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN THE MUGHAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Religious policies of the Mughal Rulers

- Religious policy of Akbar
- Religious policy of Aurangzeb

14.4 Hinduism

14.5 Let us Sum Up

14.6 Further Reading

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.8 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to–

- explain the development of religious traditions under the Mughals,
- describe the religious policies of the Mughal rulers, and
- discuss about Hinduism and its development during the Muslim rule

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we discussed the art and cultural scenario under the Mughal rule. In this Unit, we will discuss the religious culture under the Mughal Empire.

The Mughal Empire was a purely Indian historical experience. Mughal culture was a blend of Central Asian Islamic features and regional Indian elements resulting in a distinct whole. Babur and Humayun had struggled against heavy odds to establish the Mughal Empire, while Akbar apart from consolidating and expanding its frontiers had provided the theoretical framework for a truly Indian state. The religious policy of the Mughal emperors from Babur to Shah Jahan provided an ideal for the ruling class of India viz. the ruling class of India should pursue a policy of religious toleration and

equality. Babur and Humayun had no time to pursue a clear cut religious policy. Akbar followed the policy of religious toleration. His policy won him the favour of the majority of his subjects. He therefore, succeeded in strengthening the Mughal Empire.

14.3 RELIGIOUS POLICIES OF THE MUGHAL RULERS

Babur, the first Mughal ruler was not strict in his religious observances and practices. He did not allow Islamic principles to interfere with his political ambitions of consolidating the most powerful state. He did not persecute any sect or creed. He is believed to have destroyed some temples and erected a mosque over its remains. His successor Humayun also followed the footsteps of his father.

Humayun's son and successor Akbar, displayed a spirit of toleration and harmony in all his actions and decisions. Akbar systematically initiated various experiments like the Sulh-i-kul, Din-i-Illahi and above all the promulgation of the Mahzar. Akbar was a Sunni Muslim, yet he abolished the Jaziya for his non-Muslim subjects.

Jahangir, the successor of Akbar was as liberal and enlightened as his father. He closely interacted with Brahmans, Jain scholars and Christian missionaries. He respected the teachings of Islam but also participated in the celebration of Hindu festivals. He imposed restrictions on animal slaughter on a particular day of the week. His relation with the Hindus was of a mixed nature. He destroyed the Jwalamukhi temple at Kangra. But at the same time he was also liberal to Hinduism. He did not revive the Jaziya or the pilgrim tax. The Hindus occupied high positions in his court. They had freedom to erect new temples. Many new buildings were built at Mathura, Gokul and Brindaban in his time. He had religious discourses with Hindu pundits. Jahangir permitted erection of churches and conversion to Christianity. He showed respect to the pictures of Jesus and Mary. At the same time, when offended by the conduct of Christians he had their church closed down. Jahangir started his reign by the persecution of the Sikh Guru Arjan on his refusal to pay fine. His son and successor, Guru Har Govind was also imprisoned and executed. He thus offended the Sikh community.

Jahangir's successor and son, Shah Jahan was relatively more attached to the tenets of Islam than his predecessors. He tried to reform the Muslim society. He prohibited unorthodox practices in the court, abolished Sijda and Zaminbos, introduced Chahar Tesleem, stopped Hindu-Muslim marriages in the Punjab and Kashmir, prohibited the Hindus from wearing the Muslim style of dress and discontinued practices which offended Muslim sentiments. He also revived the pilgrim tax which had been abolished by Akbar. He destroyed as many as seventy-six Hindu temples. Orders were issued prohibiting the erection of new temples. He encouraged mass conversions of Hindus to Islam. The Christians were also not spared.

However, he continued the Hindu custom of *Jharokha Darshan, Tuladan* and *Tilak* of Hindu Rajas as a symbol of his recognition of their succession. Nor did he deprive the Hindus of high office. He stopped the slaughter of cows at Cambay and punished a person in Orissa who killed a peacock. All these acts of Shah Jahan testify that he had no inborn hatred for the Hindus. Yet his twin headed policy proved harmful to the state and facilitated Aurangzeb's succession to the throne.



Tuladan: a ceremony of weighing the emperor's person against gold, silver and other precious articles

Sijda/Zaminbos: a form of respect paid to the Emperor or high authority or divine persona.

Chahar Tesleem: a form of salutation in which the hand is raised to the head four times as opposed to the traditional three of the taslim or tesleem.

Under Aurangzeb, however the trend of religious toleration was reversed. The religious policy adopted by Aurangzeb was different from that of his predecessors. He was a staunch Sunni Muslim and therefore abandoned the policy of separation of religion and the state, turning away from the policy of religious toleration followed by earlier Mughal rulers. He forbade the Hindu festivals of Holi, Dipawali and spring festivals. Aurangzeb's chief aim, in following Islamic religious dictates against the Hindu infidels was to convert them to Islam by means of persecution and pressure. He also lured them to be exempted from bearing extra burdens if they embraced Islam. Many Hindu prisoners were liberated after they were converted. Stipends and free gifts were granted to converted Hindu students. Aurangzeb's direct interference with the Hindu religion is best evinced in his endeavour to demolish Hindu temples all over the country. Besides innumerable small temples in many places, 240 temples were demolished in Rajasthan alone. Mathura was renamed as Islamabad. On April 1669,

the emperor issued an order to demolish all the schools and temples of the infidels to put down their religious teachings and practices. The strong pro-Islamic policy of Aurangzeb contributed to the dissolution of most of the liberal structures of Mughal society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Which Muslim ruler closely interacted with the Brahmans, Jain scholars and Christian missionaries?

_____

Q.2. Who destroyed the Jwalamukhi temple at Kangra?

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Q.3. Who abolished Sijda?

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Q.4. Who imprisoned Sikh Guru Har Govind?

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Q.5. Which Muslim ruler stopped the practice of slaughtering cows at Cambay?

_____

- **Religious Policy of Akbar**

Of all the Muslim rulers who ruled in India, the reign of Akbar was of great significance because he followed a liberal policy towards the Hindus and other non-Muslim subjects. Though he belonged to an orthodox Sunni Muslim family, Akbar observed toleration in his religious policy. His attitude towards religion was conditioned by various factors. His relatives and friends had a liberalising influence on him. His mother, the daughter of a Persian scholar, taught him the lessons of toleration. Moreover, under the influence of his tutor Abdul Latif, Akbar became liberal in his religious views. His religious views underwent a great change with the passage of time. He adopted the policy of Sulh-i-Kul (peace for all)

to unite the people of all religions. After the suppression of Maharana Pratap, Akbar sought to conciliate the Rajputs by establishing matrimonial relations. Akbar married Man Bai and Jodha Bai, two Rajput Hindu princesses. In the year 1582 Akbar started a new faith Tauhid-i-Illahi which afterwards was popularly known as Din-i-Illahi. This new religion promulgated by him drew from the essence of different religions like Islam, Hinuism and Christianity. Akbar granted freedom to people of all religions. He abolished all the religious restrictions imposed by previous Muslim rulers. He granted freedom to Hindus to worship in temples and public places. He also allowed Muslims to change their religion. He never discriminated on the basis of caste and religion and gave equal opportunity to all to hold government positions. Because of the policies adopted by Akbar, the Ulemas lost their positions and were annoyed to such an extent that they issued a Fatwa against him.



LET US KNOW

The main principles of Din-i-Illahi were as follows-

1) God is one and Akbar is his Khalifa or representative on earth, 2) The members of the new faith on meeting each other uttered Allah-ho-Akbar and Jalla-Jallalhu, 3)Every member of the new faith was expected to be always ready to sacrifice to the emperor, his property, life, honour and religion, 4) All the members were required to bow their heads before the emperor and offer Sijdah, 5) Every member was required to give a party on his birthday and provide a grand feast, 6) Meat eating was prohibited in this religion, 7)The members were expected to show respect to other religions, 8) They were not to marry old women and minor girls, 9) The worship of the sun was practised daily, 10) Each member was required to use his intellect and to give up blind faith, 11) Everyone was required to lead a pure life and to do good to everyone, 12) The new members were inducted into this new faith only on a Sunday.

Akbar realised that it was the Hindus who formed the bulk of the population in India and that he could never establish a united and strong empire without their co-operation. In order to win the good will of the Hindus, he abolished the pilgrimage tax in 1563 which the Hindus had to pay to visit Hindu pilgrimage sites. Next he put an end to the much hated Jaziya which all the non-Muslims living in the empire had to pay. The liberal views of Akbar resulted in the formulation of a new religious policy. People were given the freedom to follow the religion of their choice. Persecution of Hindus and conversion of Islam became less frequent. New mosques were not to be built and neither was old ones repaired. Cow slaughter was prohibited, preparations were made for the appearance of a *mandi* or saviour; beards were to be shaved; and certain food items like garlic, onions and beef were prohibited. Arabic language suffered a setback. In January1575, the Ibadat Khana was constructed at Fatehpur Sikri with the purpose of bringing together men of learning to explain their core beliefs and discuss the tenets of their religions. In 1582 he formulated a new religion - the Din-i-Illahi. It upheld no dogma and recognised neither creeds nor prophets. He did not compel anybody to accept it nor did he force anyone to convert to the new faith. Akbar gave no religious book to his followers. But this faith started by Akbar could not become popular and very few people embraced this religion. Akbar did not preach his religion in the spirit of a missionary. A few of his courtiers like Birbal embraced this new religion. In 1579 Akbar issued the Infallibility Decree according to which the Emperor was to be accepted as the supreme arbiter in all cases, both civil and ecclesiastical.



Ibadat Khana: the House of Worship

Fatwa: an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious law pertaining to a specific issue



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6. What was the name of the religion that Akbar preached?

_____

Q7. Who abolished Jaziya?

_____

Q8. When and where was the Ibadat Khana established?

_____

Q9. With what purpose did Akbar adopted Sulh-i-Kul?

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- **Religious Policy of Aurangzeb**

Aurangzeb was an orthodox Sunni Muslim and the great object of his life was to make India a land of orthodox Sunni Islam. He aimed at transforming Dul-ul-Harb (a non-Muslim country) into a Dar-ul-Islam or the realm of Islam. All his actions, public or private, were influenced by this desire. He began to adopt measures which antagonised Hindu sentiment. He allowed religious considerations to override politics. Aurangzeb tried his best to live up to the strict tenets of the Quranic Law and bring the lives of the people into closer accord with it. To give effect to his puritanical view of life he banned music from his court; and by 1668 he ended the practice of celebrating the *Nauroz* ceremony. He forbade the public use of wine and *bhang* (hemp) and appointed Censors of Public Morals (*Mahtasibs*) to enforce strictly the laws of Islam. He discontinued the use of the *Kalima* (Muslims confession of faith) on the coins lest the sacred words should be defiled by the touch of non-Muslims. His private life was ascetic and austere and thus, he was regarded by his Muslim subjects as a *Zinda Pir* or living saint. From 1669, he began to act upon his policy of making India a land of orthodox Islam.

This implied the suppression of idolatry and a sustained *jihad* against all non-Muslims like the Hindus and Sikhs. He issued orders to the provincial governors to destroy the temples and schools of the Hindus and to put a stop to the teachings and practice of idolatrous forms of worship. Varanasi, as the centre of Hinduism was the first to feel the brunt of his bigotry. In 1669, the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple and Keshav Rai temple at Mathura was destroyed and out of its materials a stately mosque was erected to dominate the city. Moreover he also ordered the destruction of the Somnath temple. Even the temples in the cities of the friendly Rajput states did not escape defilement and destruction. His next measure was to forbid the appointment of Hindu officers in the revenue department. The crowning act of Aurangzeb's bigotry was the re-imposition of Jiziya in 1679.



Nauroz: Persian New Year

Jihad**:** a Holy War



LET US KNOW

Aurangzeb put an end to the practices of *Tuladan* and *Jharokha-Darshan* which the preceding Mughal emperors - Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan had followed before him.

Aurangzeb abolished many un-Islamic practices and replaced them with Islamic ones.

- The Solar Calendar was abolished and the Arab Lunar Calendar was introduced
- Practice of engraving Kahima on coins was stopped.
- The Islamic theory of kingship was introduced and the Mughal Empire became a theocratic state like that of the earlier Delhi Sultanate.
- Jharokha Darshan was discontinued

Aurangzeb's religious policy proved to be politically disastrous as it roused a tempest of revolts all over the country. The Jats,

Bundelas, Satnamis, Sikhs, Rajputs and Marathas all raised arms against the emperor in protest against his policy of discrimination and persecution. After a life long struggle, the old emperor died in 1707 a lonely, despondent, frustrated man, under whom the vast empire of his forefathers began to disintegrate.

14.4 HINDUISM

One very important result of the influence of Islam was the rise of new schools of religion which aimed at liberalising the religious practices of the Hindus, so as to bring about some sort of rapprochement between the Hindu and Muslim faiths. The prominence which Islam gives to the unity of god and its democratic principles in social and religious matters prompted the saint reformers of the time to reinterpret Hinduism in terms of these new ideas. They preached a religion which was non-ritualistic and open to all without any distinction of caste or creed. Its cardinal principle was Bhakti or unflinching devotion to a personal god whose grace was the only means of attaining salvation. It should be noted that the Bhakti cult is much older than Islam and owes little to it. But it sprang into new life and became a living force in Hinduism as the result of new ideas which Islam brought to bear upon Hindu thinkers.

In Mughal India, especially in Akbar's time, the general position of Hindus underwent a change, Akbar used to hold discussions with saints in order to ascertain the religious truth. Akbar listened to recitations of theVedas and respected the Hindu saints. Akbar's liberal approach in matters of religion was appreciated and acclaimed by saint Tulsidas. Akbar also promulgated a decree, which declared that no person was to be interfered with, on account of his religion. A strict action was taken against those who tried to impose their religious convictions upon others. His ministers were vigilant to ensure that the state remained secular and stood for justice. When a Mughal official converted a Hindu temple into a Muslim school, he was severely punished by Todar Mal. The Hindus were made to feel that the emperor considered himself as much their protector as of anyone else. In

deference to the Hindu sentiments, he prohibited the slaughter of the cow. He prohibited the eating of beef and he himself abstained from eating beef, garlic and onions. In 1563, he abolished the tax on Hindu pilgrims at Mathura and other Holy places and in 1564 Jaziya was abolished throughout his dominions. For all his respect for Hinduism, however, Akbar was averse to a few of its customs, especially sati or the burning of widows. Akbar also admired widows who wished to be cremated with their deceased husbands. Jahangir the son and successor of Akbar followed the path shown by his father. He respected Hinduism, held religious discourses with the Hindu saints, sought their guidance and visited the Hindu shrines. Jahangir continued Akbar's practice of inviting Hindu scholars and philosophers to the court and held discussions with them. Besides he maintained the previous orders of not slaughtering animals twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays. This was strictly enforced. He used to visit the city in disguise in order to ensure that meat was not being sold on these days. Following Jahangir, Shah Jahan and his son Prince Dara too had a liberal outlook in religious affairs. Dara Shukoh made attempts to bridge the chasm between the two great religions of the empire. The great dream of Dara's life which was shattered by his untimely death was the brotherhood of all faiths and unity of mankind. For long he studied Sanskrit and along with her sister Jahanara read the Hindu Epics and Vedas with great ability. At his command many sections of the Vedas were translated into Persian. Dara's study of Hinduism and Islam had convinced him that there was no difference between the two. He and his wife like Akbar and Jahangir made their obeisance to the sun every morning and when the lamps were lighted in the evening, every members of their household stood up in reverence to the goddess of fire. Even the orthodox Emperor Aurangzeb, who was known for demolition of temples held Hindu saints in respect and conferred Jagirs on the temples and the pundits and jogis. Besides throughout his reign he continued to uphold the strict enforcement of the prohibition against cow-slaughter.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.10. What was the religion that Aurangzeb sought to establish in his empire?

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Q.11. Which Mughal ruler discontinued the practice of Jharokha Darshan?

_____

Q.12. Name two temples destroyed by Aurangzeb.

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14.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt about–

- The religious condition of the Mughal rulers
- The aims and objectives of Akbar's new religion, namely 'Din-i-Illahi'
- The religious policy of Aurangzeb and his attitude towards the Hindu subjects
- Development of Hinduism during the Mughal period



14.6 FURTHER READING

1. Chandra, Satish. (2011). *A History of Medieval India*, New Delhi, India: Orient Blackswan.
2. Chaudhuri, K.C. (2016). *History of Medieval India*, Kolkata, India: New Central Book Agency.
3. Farooqui, Salma Ahmed. (2011). *A Comprehensive History of Medieval India*, New Delhi, India: Pearson.
4. Maiti, Provatansu. (2014). *Medieval India*, Kolkata, India: Sreedhar Publishers.

14.7 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q No.1: Jahangir

Ans. to Q No.2: Jahangir

Ans. to Q No.3: Shah Jahan

Ans. to Q No.4: Jahangir

Ans. to Q No.5: Shah Jahan

Ans. to Q No.6: Tauhid-i-Illahi (Din-i-Illahi)

Ans. to Q No.7: Akbar

Ans. to Q No.8: January 1575, in Fatehpur Sikri

Ans. to Q No.9: To unite the people of all religions

Ans. to Q No.10: Dar-ul-Islam

Ans. to Q No.11: Aurangzeb

Ans. to Q No.12: Kashi Vishwanath temple, Keshav Rai temple, Somnath temple, etc.

14.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each within 50 words)

Q. 1. Who was the son and successor of the Sikh Guru Arjan Das?

Q. 2. Who and in which year re-imposed the Jaziya?

Q. 3. Which Mughal emperor was known as a 'Alamgir'?

B) Short Questions (Answer each within 150 words)

Q. 1. What are the main principles of Din-i-Illahi?

Q. 2. Write a brief note on the condition of the Hindu subjects under Jahangir.

Q. 3. What were the differences between the religious policy of Akbar and Aurangzeb?

C) Long Questions (Answer each within 500 words)

Q. 1. Critically examine Akbar's religious policy.

Q. 2. How far was Aurangzeb's religious policy responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire?

Q. 3. Discuss the religion of Aurangzeb and his treatment towards the Hindus?

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