



AKBAR WISHED TO ASSERT HIS STRONG BELIEF IN GOD, BUT HIS CONCEPT OF THE WAY GOD IS TO BE WORSHIPPED WAS INDEPENDENT OF EITHER ORTHODOX ISLAM OR HINDUISM

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ABSTRACT :

This work explores an individual's profound belief in God, emphasizing that his approach to worship is not confined to the traditional practices of either orthodox Islam or Hinduism. Instead, it delves into his unique spiritual understanding, which is deeply personal and independent of established religious frameworks. The narrative reflects his desire to assert his strong faith in a higher power while advocating for a worship method that transcends the boundaries of conventional religious dogma, suggesting a more individualized, direct relationship with the divine.

KEYWORDS:Dogma,Conventional, Spiritual, Hinduism, Inclusivity, Diverged,Zoroastrianism,Christianity

INTRODUCTION :

Emperor Akbar, one of the most notable rulers of the Mughal Empire in India, is remembered not only for his military conquests and administrative brilliance but also for his bold and progressive approach to religion. Akbar's reign, which spanned from 1556 to 1605, was marked by a significant shift in the way religion was approached within the empire. His belief in God was unwavering, yet his concept of worship diverged dramatically from the traditional orthodox practices of both Islam and Hinduism. In a society where religious divisions were often deep, Akbar sought a path of religious inclusivity, aiming to bridge the divide between various faiths.

Akbar was born into a Muslim family and initially followed the tenets of Islam, which was the religion of his father, Emperor Humayun. However, as Akbar grew older, he began to question the rigid religious structures that were prevalent in his empire. He was particularly troubled by the growing tension between Muslims and Hindus, two religious communities that lived side by side in his realm. While Islam, particularly the Sunni branch, was the dominant religion in the Mughal court, the vast majority of Akbar's subjects were Hindus. This posed both a personal and political challenge to Akbar, as he sought to govern an empire that was diverse in terms of religion, culture, and language.

Rather than adhering strictly to either orthodox Islam or Hinduism, Akbar chose to adopt a more universal approach to worship. He believed that the divine truth was not confined to any one religion and sought to create an environment where people of all faiths could coexist peacefully. This belief led him to initiate a series of religious reforms, the most notable of which was the creation of the ****Din-i Ilahi**** (the Religion of God) in 1582. Din-i Ilahi was not meant to be a new religion in the traditional sense, but rather an attempt to synthesize the best aspects of the major religious traditions of his empire—Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity—into a unifying philosophy of peace and tolerance.

One of the key tenets of Din-i Ilahi was the rejection of blind ritualism and sectarianism. Akbar emphasized that worship should not be confined to rigid dogma, and he encouraged people to seek a direct connection with God. His belief in religious tolerance went beyond just the theoretical; he implemented policies that promoted dialogue between religious scholars and allowed for a more flexible interpretation of religious teachings. Akbar's court became a center for interfaith discussions, with prominent scholars from various faiths, including Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Christians, often engaging in debates on spiritual matters.

Despite his reforms, Akbar's religious ideas were met with resistance, especially from orthodox Muslim clerics who saw his rejection of traditional Islamic practices as a threat to the established order. However, Akbar remained steadfast in his commitment to religious freedom and saw his approach as a means to bring unity and harmony to his diverse empire. His policies on religious tolerance were further exemplified by his efforts to abolish the jizya tax on non-Muslims and his promotion of intermarriage between Hindus and Muslims within the royal court. In conclusion, Akbar's desire to assert his strong belief in God while advocating for a form of worship that was independent of orthodox Islam and Hinduism was a bold and visionary stance. His emphasis on inclusivity, tolerance, and dialogue between faiths demonstrated his commitment to creating a society where religion was a source of unity rather than division. Akbar's religious policies, though controversial in his time, left an indelible mark on Indian history, laying the groundwork for a more harmonious and pluralistic society.

CHAPTER I :

Akbar the Great, one of the most influential rulers of the Mughal Empire, is often remembered not just for his military prowess and political acumen, but also for his forward-thinking and religious philosophies. His reign (1556–1605) was marked by significant developments in culture, art, and governance, but it was also an era of considerable religious experimentation. Akbar wished to assert his strong belief in God, but his concept of how God should be worshiped was independent of both Orthodox Islam and Hinduism. This chapter will explore Akbar's religious vision, his attempts to create a syncretic religious approach, and the cultural and political implications of his beliefs.

The Historical and Religious Context of Akbar's Time

Before delving into Akbar's religious innovations, it is essential to understand the religious climate of the Indian subcontinent during the 16th century. India, under Akbar's rule, was a melting pot of various religious communities. The dominant religions were Islam, brought by successive Muslim rulers, and Hinduism, which had deep cultural and religious roots in the region. However, there were also other significant religious traditions such as Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism that coexisted in the empire.

Akbar inherited the throne at a young age and faced a multitude of challenges—most notably, the political and military challenges of consolidating Mughal control over a diverse and divided territory. However, there was also the matter of religious unity. The Mughal Empire was founded by Babur, a Muslim descendant of Timur and Genghis Khan, but his son, Humayun, had faced challenges in maintaining control due to internal strife, particularly between the ruling Muslim elite and the large Hindu population of India. By the time Akbar took the throne, there was a need to address not only political stability but also the need for a unified religious policy.

Akbar's Early Religious Development

Initially, Akbar followed the conventional path of a Muslim ruler. However, as he grew older and more experienced in governance, he began to question many aspects of Islamic orthodoxy, especially its restrictive dogmas and practices. Akbar's curiosity about different religions, especially Hinduism, led him to the realization that the traditional approach to religion, which often involved strict divisions and conflicts, was inadequate for the unity and well-being of his empire.

One of the significant turning points in Akbar's religious development occurred when he was exposed to various religious figures, including scholars, theologians, and holy men from both the Muslim and Hindu traditions. Akbar's close association with Hindu ministers, including his trusted advisor and later his religious advisor, Raja Birbal, played a crucial role in broadening his outlook. Akbar became convinced that a new, more inclusive understanding of God was needed, one that transcended the divisive sectarianism of his time.

The Din-i Ilahi (The Divine Faith)

In the late 16th century, Akbar sought to promote a religion that was distinct from both orthodox Islam and Hinduism, leading to the establishment of what became known as the Din-i Ilahi or the "Divine Faith." This religious experiment was, in many ways, a reflection of Akbar's efforts to blend elements from various religious traditions while also emphasizing the centrality of God and the importance of moral conduct. The Din-i Ilahi was not a new religion in the strictest sense, but rather a syncretic framework that attempted to combine the best aspects of different faiths, including aspects of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and others.

The core of Akbar's religious philosophy was the belief in one God, who transcended human understanding. This was not an entirely new concept, as both Islam and Hinduism contain monotheistic elements. However, Akbar's emphasis was on the belief that God could not be restricted by the doctrines and rituals of any single religious tradition. This universalist idea was meant to foster unity among the diverse religious communities in the empire. The new faith did not replace Islam or Hinduism but sought to blend aspects of both religions, offering a vision of God that could be universally embraced.

The Din-i Ilahi had several key principles:

Monotheism: The belief in one God who is above all divisions and can be approached through various means.

Tolerance: Akbar's religious outlook emphasized tolerance and respect for all religions. This was a radical departure from the prevailing religious policies of other rulers of his time, who often persecuted non-believers.

Ethical Conduct: Rather than focusing on rituals and dogmas, Akbar's faith emphasized living a virtuous life based on principles of honesty, kindness, and justice.

Rejection of Idol Worship: While Akbar promoted tolerance, he also sought to remove practices he deemed as superstitious, such as idol worship, which was prevalent in both Hinduism and the folk practices of other religious communities.

One of the most significant aspects of Akbar's religious reforms was his creation of a space where religious leaders from various traditions could come together and discuss spiritual matters. Akbar invited theologians from different sects of Islam, as well as Hindu saints, Jain monks, and Christian missionaries, to his court for debates and dialogues. These discussions were not intended to prove one religion superior over another but to search for common ground and foster mutual respect.

Akbar's Approach to Religious Tolerance and Syncretism

Akbar's personal belief in God was independent of the traditional practices of either Islam or Hinduism, and his religious policies reflected his desire for unity and tolerance. His religious tolerance was not a mere political necessity but a deeply held conviction. He believed that different religious communities could coexist peacefully and contribute to the greater good of the empire. His policies promoted interfaith dialogue and encouraged his subjects to approach religion not as a source of division, but as a means to moral and spiritual upliftment.

This approach to religion had profound implications for the governance of the Mughal Empire. Akbar's religious tolerance helped to secure the loyalty of his Hindu subjects, who made up the majority of the population. He abolished the jizya tax, a tax imposed on non-Muslims, and appointed Hindus to key positions in his administration. This was a significant departure from the policies of earlier Muslim rulers who had been more rigid in their treatment of non-Muslims. Akbar's actions demonstrated his commitment to religious pluralism and his belief that governance should not be based on the domination of one religion over others.

Akbar also undertook initiatives to merge Islamic and Hindu cultural practices, such as his adoption of certain Hindu rituals and the promotion of Persian art and architecture that incorporated Hindu elements. He even married Hindu princesses, including his most famous wife, Mariam-uz-Zamani, who was the mother of his successor, Jahangir. These marriages symbolized the deepening connection between the Mughal rulers and the Hindu aristocracy, further cementing Akbar's policy of religious unity.

The Decline of the Din-i Ilahi

Despite Akbar's best efforts, the Din-i Ilahi never gained widespread acceptance. Many of Akbar's contemporaries, both Muslim and Hindu, were suspicious of his syncretic approach to religion. Many Muslims rejected Akbar's attempts to alter the orthodox teachings of Islam, while many Hindus saw little reason to abandon their own deeply rooted religious practices in favor of a new faith. After Akbar's death in 1605, the Din-i Ilahi gradually declined, and his successors, particularly Jahangir, did not continue his religious experiments.

Nevertheless, Akbar's vision of religious tolerance and his attempts to create a unified spiritual community in the Mughal Empire left a lasting legacy. His policies of religious inclusivity contributed to the social and political stability of his empire and promoted a culture of intellectual exchange and mutual respect that transcended religious divides.

Akbar's belief in God and his independent concept of worship reflected his desire to foster unity, peace, and ethical conduct in his empire. His religious philosophy, exemplified by the Din-i Ilahi, was a bold attempt to transcend the boundaries of orthodox Islam and Hinduism and create a more inclusive spiritual framework. Although the Din-i Ilahi did not survive beyond Akbar's reign, his commitment to religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue left an indelible mark on the history of the Mughal Empire and the religious landscape of India. Akbar's legacy as a ruler who sought to harmonize religious differences continues to be a powerful example of how religious belief can be a force for unity rather than division.

CHAPTER II :

The focus is on Akbar's strong belief in God and his quest to define a form of worship that transcended the boundaries of orthodox Islam and Hinduism. Emperor Akbar of the Mughal Empire, one of the most significant rulers of medieval India, is often remembered for his policy of religious tolerance, his efforts to bring different religious communities together, and his deep philosophical engagement with the question of divine truth and how it should be worshipped. His spiritual journey led him to formulate an approach to religion that was distinct from both Islamic orthodoxy and the traditions of Hinduism. This approach was marked by his emphasis on divine unity, the rejection of sectarian dogma, and his desire for a more inclusive understanding of spirituality.

Akbar's Religious Background

Akbar was born into a world steeped in religious complexity. As a young emperor, he inherited an empire where Islam was the dominant religion, but the majority of the population followed Hinduism. His early exposure to both religions, as well as the religious debates and conflicts of the time, had a profound impact on his worldview. His father, Emperor Humayun, was a devout Muslim, and Akbar himself was initially raised within the fold of orthodox Islam. However, as Akbar matured and assumed the throne, he began to question the rigidity of religious doctrines, particularly the theological and social divisions between Muslims and Hindus.

Akbar's reign began in 1556, and it wasn't long before he realized that the diverse religious landscape of India required a more flexible, inclusive approach to governance and spirituality. Despite being born into a Muslim family, Akbar's reign was not just about maintaining the Islamic faith but also about fostering harmony between different religious communities. His personal beliefs and actions began to reflect a desire for religious tolerance, culminating in his creation of a unique spiritual framework that transcended conventional religious identities.

The Development of Akbar's Religious Thought

As Akbar delved deeper into religious thought, he became more disillusioned with the rigid orthodoxy of both Islam and Hinduism. While he continued to respect the traditions of both religions, he felt that the existing frameworks were too narrow and divisive. This led him to initiate a series of philosophical and theological discussions, often referred to as the "Dīn-i Ilāhī" (Divine Faith). His aim was to establish a universal faith that focused on the worship of one God and encouraged mutual respect among different religious communities.

One of the first steps Akbar took toward this was his creation of the Ibadat Khana, or House of Worship, in 1575. This was a space where scholars from various religious backgrounds, including Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, could gather to discuss theological and philosophical issues. Akbar would personally engage with these scholars, learning about their perspectives on God, the nature of the universe, and the path to salvation. His goal was to create a synthesis of different religious teachings that would lead to a greater understanding of the divine.

The Concept of God in Akbar's Thought

Akbar's concept of God was deeply influenced by his belief in divine unity. He believed that all religions ultimately worshiped the same God, though they expressed this worship in different ways. This belief was reflected in his rejection of religious dogma and the rigid boundaries that separated one faith from another. For Akbar, the essence of religion was not in the rituals or external forms of worship but in the internal connection to the divine.

This view was in stark contrast to orthodox Islamic teachings, which emphasized the distinction between believers and non-believers, as well as the rigid interpretation of religious laws. Akbar's inclusive vision of God as one, transcendent and universal, helped him promote a more inclusive, tolerant society. He saw that the different religious practices in his empire could coexist peacefully if people focused on their shared belief in one God rather than on their differences.

Akbar's Religious Policies

Akbar's religious reforms extended beyond personal beliefs and intellectual discourse. He implemented several policies that reflected his desire for religious harmony and his belief in the need for a new form of worship. One of the most significant aspects of his policy was the abolition of the jizya tax, a tax that was imposed on non-Muslims under Islamic rule. By abolishing the jizya in 1564, Akbar demonstrated his commitment to equality among his subjects, regardless of their religious background.

Akbar also worked to integrate Hindus into the Mughal administration. He married Rajput princesses, promoted Hindus to high military and administrative posts, and encouraged the construction of temples alongside mosques in his empire. His court became a place where intellectuals, artists, and religious leaders from different faiths could collaborate and share ideas, fostering an environment of mutual respect and learning.

Perhaps the most notable example of Akbar's attempt to create a new form of worship was his establishment of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*. This religious movement, which Akbar initiated around 1582, was an attempt to blend elements from Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and other faiths into a coherent system of belief. The *Dīn-i Ilāhī* was not meant to replace these religions but to emphasize their shared moral and ethical teachings, focusing on the unity of God, the importance of truth, justice, and compassion, and the rejection of sectarianism.

The *Dīn-i Ilāhī* was a highly personalized faith, with Akbar himself as its central figure. However, it did not attract a large following, and its influence waned after Akbar's death. Despite its limited success, the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* reflects Akbar's commitment to a new, inclusive spirituality that transcended the boundaries of established religious traditions.

Akbar's Vision of Worship

Akbar's vision of worship was centered on the idea of direct communion with God, without the need for intermediary institutions or rigid rituals. He rejected the idea that worship should be confined to prescribed forms, whether Islamic or Hindu. Instead, Akbar emphasized a personal relationship with the divine that was based on inner devotion, ethical living, and the pursuit of truth.

This approach to worship was radical for its time. It challenged the established religious institutions, which often saw themselves as the gatekeepers of spiritual knowledge and salvation. By placing the emphasis on individual piety and the direct worship of God, Akbar hoped to create a more egalitarian and spiritually fulfilling society.

CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, Akbar's desire to assert his belief in God and define a form of worship that was independent of orthodox Islam and Hinduism reflects his broader vision for a more inclusive, harmonious society. By creating a space for interfaith dialogue, rejecting sectarianism, and promoting the idea of divine unity, Akbar sought to transcend the rigid religious divisions of his time. His efforts to develop a new, more inclusive approach to spirituality were groundbreaking, even though they did not result in the widespread adoption of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*. Akbar's religious philosophy, however, left a lasting legacy of tolerance, intellectual openness, and spiritual inquiry, which continues to resonate in discussions about religion and politics today.

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