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Akbar



Akbar was born on 15th October 1542, to Emperor Humayun and his recently wedded wife, Hamida Banu Begum. The Rajput Fortress of Umarkot in Sind, where Humayun and Hamida were taking refuge, became the birthplace of this great emperor. In 1540, Humayun was forced into exile by Afghan leader Sher Shah and Akbar spent his childhood in Afghanistan, at his uncle Askari's place. His youth was spent in running and fighting, rather than learning to read and write. However, this could never impair his interest in art, architecture, music and literature. Humayun recaptured Delhi in the year 1555, with the help of his Persian ally Shah Tahmasp. However, a few months after his victory, he met with an accident and died. On 14th February 1556, Akbar succeeded the throne, in the midst of a war waged by Sikandar Shah for the Mughal throne.

Early Rule

The first battle fought by Akbar was against Sikandar Shah Suri of Punjab. However, when Akbar was busy leading assault against Sikandar Shah, Hemu, a Hindu warrior, launched an attack on Delhi, which was then under the regency of Tardi Beg Khan. Tardi fled from the city and Hemu claimed the capital. On the advice of his general, Bairam, Akbar launched an attack on Delhi and reclaimed the city. On 5th November 1556, 'Akbar the Great' fought the Second Battle of Panipat against General Hemu. Following soon after was the battle with Sikandar Shah at Mankot. In 1557, Adil Shah, who was the brother of Sikandar, died in a battle in Bengal. Along with fighting against the other rulers, Akbar also solidified his support by revoking the jizya tax on non-Muslims. At the same time, he started wooing the favor of the powerful Rajput caste, at times by marrying Rajput princesses. He expanded the Mughal Empire by including Malwa, Gujarat, Bengal, Kabul, Kashmir and Kandesh, amongst others. In no time, the rule of Akbar was firmly established over the entire Hindustan (India).

Akbar the Great Moghul emperor ruled Northern India from 1556 to 1605. He was a great leader, warrior, hunter, a lover of nature and the arts, expert sportsman and philosopher. Akbar was a multifaceted man - a master of all arts, yet one of his most revered qualities and greatest legacies was his great love for and practice of religious tolerance. Viewed in the context of the era in which Akbar lived this is all the more astonishing and impressive. In a time where wars constantly waged in the name of religion, prejudice was rife in many parts of the world and would remain so for hundreds of years, Akbar practiced an unprecedented kindness, compassion and reverence for many religious other than his own Muslim faith.



Fatehpur Sikri – Akbar's Capital

Akbar ruled Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians, and Jains, members of which were all treated equally under his philosophy of sulahkul or "universal tolerance. With Akbar as their ruler, for the first time in their history India had a Muslim leader who not only tolerated the many other religions, but actively sought out their guidance and wisdom.

One of the first of Akbar's actions that endeared him to the Hindu population was his abolition of two fiercely resented taxes. The first tax was on all Hindu pilgrims when they visited their shrines, the second tax was the jizya - a severe tax on all non muslims. The abolition of these two taxes were greatly appreciated by Akbars Hindu subjects and lent strength to his rule.

Akbar unified India as no other ruler had done before. He secured allegiance from the Rajput emperor of Amber by marrying his daughter thus making him a powerful ally. His new wife who was given the revered title Maryam az-Zamani was allowed to practice her own religion, this was a first time a Hindu woman was allowed to worship freely in a Muslim harem and it set a precedent. From that day forward all Hindu women within the harem were free to follow their own faith.

In 1575 Akbar created the Ibadatkhana, the House of Worship, as a place of religious debate and dialogue.

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Wise men of all religions were invited to come to the Ibadatkhana on Friday nights to discuss religion and philosophy. After presiding over many of these discussions Akbar became more and more convinced of the value and righteousness of all religions, he felt confined by the narrow limits of one religion and sought more spiritual answers from Hinduism. He adopted many of their customs, he fasted regularly, abstained from meat, visited the holy places that Hindu's worshipped, he drank the holy water from the river Ganges and sought advice from Hindu sages and holy men.

Akbar also invited Catholic priests from Goa to his palace to enlighten him on Christianity and the words of the Christ. When they presented him with their gift - Europe's newest and most lavish printed edition of the Bible, a seven-volume set with many illustrations. Akbar prayerfully kissed each volume, and then touched each one to his head.

Akbar sought to unite all his subjects no matter their creed or faith. He accomplished this enormous feat and as a result his kingdom flourished. Akbar was revered and loved by his subjects and is remembered as India's greatest ruler.

Akbar came to the throne at a young age of 13 in 1556, following the sudden death of his father Humayun. In the early part of his rule Akbar had to fight many opponents who opposed his rule. However under the guidance of Bairam Khan, Akbar began seizing more territory throughout Hindustan. By the time of his death (1605) Akbar controlled most of northern India and Afghanistan his Empire was greater than that under Babar.

However Akbar wasn't just a great conqueror, he also proved adept at winning the trust and support of the Hindu population who came under his control. This was partly due to the many enlightened policies he introduced. For example in 1579 he abolished the Jizya, a tax imposed on most of the non-Muslims. In addition Akbar rescinded a "pilgrimage" tax payed by Hindu's who travelled to various Hindu pilgrimage sites.

Akbar called himself an orthodox Muslim however he displayed an increasing degree of unorthodox behaviour. His tolerance towards Hinduism extended to taking part in various Hindu practises. Akbar is said to have been deeply moved by a meeting with the Hindu princess Mirabai. Towards the end of his life Akbar tried to develop a new religion called Din-i Ilahi , or "The Religion of God." This was a synthesis of all the religions based on the idea of God as the Supreme Being, but also the idea of divine Kingship. This was an idea heretical to the Muslim orthodoxy.

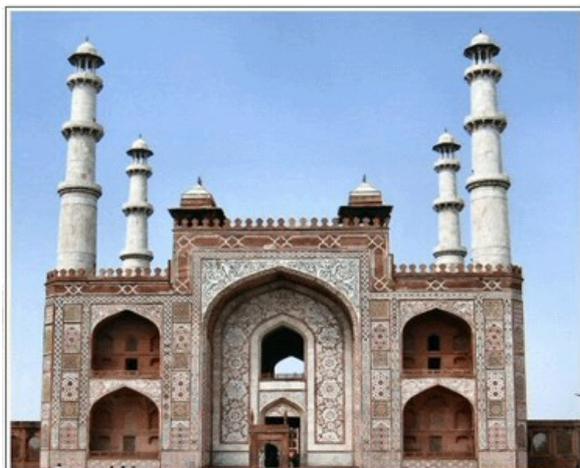
Akbar had a liking for intellectual discussion and was very fond of his scholars and advisers. Birbal, Abul Fazl and Tansen. Akbar also had a great respect for the Sufi Mystic Shayk Salim Chishti. It was Chisti who prophesised the birth of his son Jahangir.

Towards the end of his life Akbar experienced an abortive attempt by his own son to overthrow the rule of Akbar. Jahangir claimed to be the "defender of the faith". Akbar was able to put down this rebellion although after this he did soften his stance towards Islam. At his death he was again considered to be an orthodox Muslim.

Final Years

Akbar was greatly troubled in the last few years of his life due to the misdemeanors of his sons. Especially his third son, Salim, was frequently in rebellion against his father. The last conquest of Akbar comprised of Asirgarh, a fort in the Deccan. Thereafter, he faced the rebellion of his son and breathed his last on 12th October 1605. His body was entombed in a magnificent mausoleum at Sikandra city, near Agra.

Akbar is remembered by both Eastern and Western historians as one of the most enlightened rulers of the medieval ages. Akbar's religious tolerance was unusual for the time period; partly this tolerance was born out of practicalities. However Akbar also displayed a genuine interest in spirituality, which sought to absorb the best of all religions.



Akbar's Tomb at Sikandra