

Akbar And Aurangzeb- The “Saint” And The “Villain”?

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Abstract;- Akbar and Aurangzeb- the ‘saint’ and the ‘villain’ of the Mughal episode of India’s history. Such an oversimplified view has tended to distort understanding of India’s past and is often based on narrow and one-sided examination of historical facts. Was Aurangzeb really the evil, bigot ruler who led the empire built by his ancestors on the basis of alliances with indigenous elements to decline? Were the discriminatory policies of jiziya and temple desecration carried out with the aim of waging war against idolatry or they had underlying shrewd political motives? Wasn’t he an able administrator and a pragmatic ruler as compared to his other brothers, especially Dara? If tyranny of the past is judged by today’s terms then even Akbar doesn’t escape from the scaffold. It should be kept in mind that the policies of bigotry either by Hindu or Muslim rulers are actually part of Machiavellian political and administrative strategies.

Keywords: *Jiziya, sulh-i-kul, divinity, intolerance, temple desecration, tyranny.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The precise history of medieval India is enveloped by the cloak of mystery and hence open to speculations although the textual and archaeological sources pertaining to this period are numerous yet reading and re-reading and subsequent interpretation of the sources often lead to clouded understandings of the past. The medieval period marked by the entry of Turks, Afghans and the Mughals who followed a different religious and cultural tradition from their subjects, the fact is often appropriated and misused by communalist sections to portray the other communities as “outsiders” and “invaders” who ought to be driven out or forcefully converted to the mainstream religion or worse exterminated. Justifications for communal riots and demolition of places of worship are often cited in the fictions and myths regarding similar supposedly committed by these non-Hindu rulers in the past. Among the six great renowned Mughal emperors, Abul Fath Jalal ud-din Muhammad Akbar or popularly known as Akbar and Abul Muzaffar Muhi-ud-din Muhammad Aurangzeb or Aurangzeb (also known as Alamgir)-the two monarchs have been the favourite subjects of discussion and speculation both among historians of academia as well as fundamentalists in the country of India and surprisingly in the neighbourhood of Pakistan too. While the former is fondly remembered and immortalised in paeans as the liberal, secular and kind monarch who led the Mughal dynasty to its zenith evident by the suffix added to his name i.e. Akbar, the Great while the latter is often portrayed as a villain, demonized in conventional memory because of his diabolical acts such as imprisoning his father, ordering the executions of his brothers, punishing one of his daughters with death sentence on charges of infidelity etc and his, often hyped, orthodox Islamic attitude and religious bigotry manifested through acts of temple desecration, beheading of liberal scholars, appointment of a corps of officials for ensuring the moral conformity of the subjects according to the Sharia or the Islamic Holy laws etc and hence accused for starting the process of the decline of the Mughal empire. This trend had continued in the conventional historical narrative printed in textbooks over the decades without any sort of major revisions of the discourse, although the “grand narrative” was at times challenged by eminent historians. However in the present age marked by the rise of saffronist elements and Hindutva Savarkarite nationalism, not only the Mughals but any Muslim ruler is being villainised as a blood-thirsty invader riding into India with the zeal of destroying the kafirs (infidels) and demolishing temples and villages on their march. Even the sublime and revered Akbar is now being compared to the fascist Hitler by the spokesperson of the saffronist elements and demands are being raised for renaming the Akbar Road in the national capital of Delhi as Maharana Pratap Road. Akbar’s great grandson has already lost the battle with the renaming of Aurangzeb Road into APJ Abdul Kalam Road with the added cries by the Shiv Sena for rechristening of Aurangabad after Shambhuji, the son of the valiant Chhatrapati Shivaji who is fondly looked upon by the saffronists as a Hindu hero who posed a potential challenge to the “despot” Aurangzeb. Such distorted histories tend to kindle the fire of communalism and bring to an end the very idea of India as described by Rabindranath Tagore as “the coast of the ocean of the great humanity”. The paper is an attempt not to glorify Aurangzeb or demean Akbar by highlighting his negative features but to bring about the deconstruction of certain myths surrounding both the great Mughal rulers of the subcontinent.

II. AKBAR-THE SAINTLY MUGHAL

Abul Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar was born on 15th October, 1542 to Mughal emperor Humayun and Hamida Banu Begum in the Rajput fortress of Umarkot in Sind. However the untimely death of Humayun following an accident and the invasion mounted on Delhi mounted by the forces of Adil Shah Sur and his Hindu general Raja Hemu proved to be hindrances in Akbar's path to the Mughal throne in Delhi. After the second battle of Panipat in 1556 Akbar was crowned the Mughal emperor under the guidance of Bairam Khan, a close friend and ally of Humayun. Akbar, the Great is often celebrated in history as the gem of the Mughal dynasty who led the Empire during its zenith and was highly revered and worshipped not only by his Muslim subjects, but those of other faiths as well. However in this section we will discuss only the policy of religious toleration and his attempts at establishing of a secular state for which he is widely cherished by people hailing from various communities till date. Akbar's religious policy was moulded and motivated by his parental and social heritage. All of Akbar's religious teachers and guides incidentally happened to be men with unorthodox views. His early teacher Abdul Latif was a person holding liberal Sufi ideals who introduced young Akbar to the concept of sulh-i-kul or religious tolerance. (Singh, 2016, p. 1). Although many earlier Muslim rulers had realised the need for adopting a policy of mutual toleration among their subjects it was Akbar who raised the policy of religious toleration to the pinnacle of secularism. The first major attempt by Akbar towards the realisation of the secular character of the Mughal empire was the separation of the state and religion. His declaration of Majhar was the greatest ever declaration made during the medieval period. The main objective of this decision was the separation of state from religion and give more importance to royal decree than the orthodox Islamic laws (Singh, 2016, p. 1). Akbar tightened the reins over the Diwan-i-qaza or the judicial cum religious department which was dominated by the Ulemas who often tended to favour the Muslims and exhibited a bias attitude towards other traditions by vehemently trying to impose the Sharia laws in the Mughal empire. Akbar declared himself the Imam-i-Adil or Chief Interpreter of the Islamic law which allowed the emperor final say in all matters pertaining to justice (Singh, 2016, p. 1). The declaration of Majhar and the portrayal of the emperor as the spiritual leader of his subjects severely curtailed the power of orthodox Sunni Islamism which once held sway in most courtly matters. Another important step in his efforts towards building goodwill with his subjects hailing diverse tax was the abolition of jiziya tax and the tax which had to be paid by Hindu pilgrims for visiting their holy sites. Akbar came to know about this discriminatory taxation in 1563 while encamping in Mathura where he came across taxation levied upon Hindus for a holy dip in the Yamuna river. Citing such a measure as discriminatory and biased towards the subjects Akbar ordered for the revocation of such taxes in 1564. As evident, this measure led to heated debates in the court between the Mughal emperor and the Ulemas who emphasised on strict adherence to Sharia laws. However Akbar was supported in his endeavour by his prime minister Abul Fazl the author of Akbarnama the official history of the Mughal empire in Akbar's lifetime. Abul Fazl was noted by Akbar for his non-conservative stand and often defended the liberal policies of Akbar by engaging in heated debates with the Ulema. By arguing that Hindus were as loyal to the state as Muslims, Abul Fazl sought to remove the chief prop of the theological argument in favour of jiziya. He also stressed that levying jiziya was against justice and political expediency (Chandra, 1969). The concept that no distinction could be made between subjects on the grounds of loyalty and the ideal of sulh-i-kul that all religions were road to one God tended to put the state as an institution above religion which highlights Akbar's deep understanding of the idea of a secular state. Akbar's liberal views and secular nature was embodied by the Ibadat Khana or "House of Worship" located at Fatehpur Sikri, the Mughal capital in present day Agra. Stimulated by the example of Suleiman Kirani, the late ruler of Bengal who used to spend nights in the company of 150 holy men "listening to commentaries and exhortations" (Smith, 1917) the house of prayer was constructed immediately in 1575 after the successful siege of Puna initially with the aim of receiving the Sufi saint Mirza Suleiman of Badakhshan by providing a large debating hall suitable for the accommodation of a large number of Muslim theologians. Gradually the Ibadat Khana became the meeting point of Muslim Ulemas, Sufi Shaikhs, Jain munis, Buddhist bhikshus, Hindu Brahmins and later Christian missionaries as well. The debates enabled Akbar to grasp the essence of the varying faiths and he came to realise the innate oneness of all religions as the final aim being unity with the Supreme Being. The debates used to be conducted in Fridays keeping view the Islamic tradition of Friday being regarded as holy and auspicious. However the passing of the Infallibility Decree (Majhar) of 1579 which empowered Akbar to act as supreme arbitrator of all questions regarding Muslim theology rendered vain the debates by the various schools of Islamic thought and gradually the house o worship fell into decay and dereliction and the structure was probably put down with later debates being carried out in the interior chambers of the imperial palace. The attitude of secularism was also evident in the composition of the nobility and officials. The nobles and mansabdars (rank holders) under Akbar consisted of Turanis, Afghans, Persians, Turks as well as the newly added members of the Rajput nobility and other Hindu castes. Notable among them is Raja Todar Mal, who was an expert in affairs of land revenue and hailed from the Hindu Khatri caste. Rajput nobles like Raja Man Singh, Raja Bhagwan Das, Raja Bhaarmal of Kachhwaha etc were men of repute and highly revered in Akbar's court. Mahesh Das, popularly known as Birbal was a Hindu

Brahmin adviser in the court of Akbar and counted among the Nine Jewels (Navratna) of Akbar. The numerous tales and anecdotes involving both the emperor and his adviser are well known and loved throughout the country. The bond between the Mughals and the Rajputs were also sealed by marriages between the Emperor and Rajput princesses. It was often remarked that the nobles constituted the different flowers of a bouquet held together by love and devotion to the emperor. Another aspect of Akbar's deviation from the tenets of orthodox Islamic doctrine was the projection of the monarch as a divine being. Such an act went directly against Quranic injunctions of the ideal Muslim state where the true ruler was God and the earthly kings were merely meant to carry out the propagation of the faith. This divinity is nowhere more evident than in the official history of Akbarnama. The author Abul Fazl, influenced by the Shurawardi tradition of Sufism, places the Mughal emperor at the pinnacle in the hierarchy of things in the world receiving the divine light (farr-i-izadi). The divine light then emanated from the emperor to all other earthly things and he became the source of spiritual and divine grace for his subjects (Lal, 2001). The nature of the genealogy of the Mughal rulers was dramatically changed with the lineage being inversely traced to highlight that the previous rulers and events which happened during their reigns was preparing the way for the birth of the divine child i.e. Akbar. This is apparent from the following lines of the Akbarnama- it is by the weddings of heavenly sires and earthly mothers, and after various cycles of lunar aspects, and of applications... of conjunctions of the superior and inferior planets, risings and settings...that the unique one comes forth from the secret inner chambers into the palace of manifestation....The man of experience knows that many years must elapse before a ruby develop in the embryonic sac of the mine and arrive at maturity, so as to be fit for a royal diadem, it was after thousands of years had been spent, womb after womb, in the cradle of preparation, that the broidery of existence was bestowed on her Majesty Alanqua, so that she might become worthy of that world-illuminating Light (Lal, 2001). Thus the family tree was drawn placing at the centre- the all important birth of Akbar, the carrier of the divine light while his Turkish-Mongoloid ancestors were merely actors preparing the stage of the world for a larger, divine cause-the birth of Akbar. Abul Fazl traces the ancestry of Akbar from Adam, the Biblical prophets, Joseph and his son and then comes into picture the Turkish Mongoloid line of kings till the ninth generation when the ruling house was defeated and forced to flee from their homelands. In the aftermath, the instance of the Mongol princess Alanqua getting impregnated by a ray of divine light while resting in a camp has been emphasised upon by Abul Fazl as symbolically marking the divine child which was about to come and grace the genealogy by his birth (Lal, 2001). Moreover, Abul Fazl goes on to depict the sublime and sacred nature of the "divine boy-king" by highlighting miracles to have happened since his early childhood days like the incident when Akbar, in his teens, came out of the roof of the house where he sheltered to take a glance at the invading army etc. and the divinity of the emperor is further pronounced by the high and mighty titles used to refer to him like khedive-i-jahan (the khedive of the world); gawhar-i yekta-i khilafat (the unique jewel of the Caliphate); zat-i muqqadasi , afif-u-pak (the holy personality who was pure and chaste) etc (Lal, 2001). Lastly the policy of religious toleration culminated with the propagation by Akbar of a new religious tradition known as Din-i-ilahi. It was a syncretic religion propounded by Akbar with the view of forging unity between the traditions of Hinduism and Islam by blending practices and the basic tenets of both the traditions. The followers of this tradition were to abide by simple rules such as abstaining from having meat, giving alms to the poor, observing celibacy etc. The religion stressed on prohibition of lust, slander, sensuality and pride and the purification of soul through the constant yearning of God was desired. The tradition didn't follow any form of codified laws or scriptures and there was no presence of any priestly hierarchy. The attitude of religious toleration was also reflected in the domestic sphere of the Mughal empire. This is evident from another chronicler of Akbar's reign Badauni who was more inclined towards the conservative Islamic trend and who distastefully writes about the adoption by Akbar of Hindu traditions such as abstaining from consuming beef and garlic, worshipping of the rising sun, trees and "bowing down before the cow and even its dung". Hence, keeping in view the above citations and instances it is no wonder Akbar is often celebrated in public memory of both the communities as evident from a chapter dedicated to this great monarch in the Hindu scripture of Bhavishya Purana where Akbar is depicted as the incarnation of an ancient sage who was a "miraculous child" and would prove to the greatest monarch of the people.

III. AURANGZEB-"THE VILLAIN"

Abul Muzaffar Muhi-ud-din Aurangzeb was born on 3 November 1618 to Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. However the circumstances by which he ascended the Mughal throne after the War of Succession (1657-1658)-defeat and execution of his brothers, especially the eldest Dara Shikoh; the imprisonment of his father etc and other horrific acts supposedly to have been committed by him have painted a picture of him in the popular memory as an evil, diabolical bigot who started the decline of the Mughal empire primarily by discarding the policy of sulh-i- kul or religious toleration and setting out to establish an Islamic state in accordance with the Sharia laws. However in the conventional discourse of historical narrative his competence and achievements as a Mughal ruler are often overlooked. The Mughal Empire came to include nearly the whole of the sub-continent (barring present-day Kerala and a major portion of North-Eastern India)

and he is often regarded as the last effective Mughal emperor before the fall of the dynasty with the rise of regional powers and the advent of European powers. Although his reign witnessed the rise of regional powers like the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats etc as a result of his bigoted and discriminatory attitude towards other religious traditions (according to popular perception) yet many other aspects of his character like strong-mindedness, practicality and especially shrewd political handling of affairs- which was the main motive behind many of his discriminatory and bigoted decrees and acts. In this section we will focus on the allegations and the measures taken by Aurangzeb for which he is often regarded as the black sheep of Mughal history. Aurangzeb had claimed the throne as the Champion of pure Islam against the heretical practices of Dara Shukoh (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 53). Soon after his second coronation in June 1659 he issued the following ordinances to restore the rules of orthodox Islam in the administration and lives of people as well in accordance with the Quranic injunctions. Any form of deviation from the Sharia laws was seen as heresy and therefore subject to the highest level of condemnation. Some of the measures taken by him towards the realisation of this goal include- The Mughal emperors before him used to stamp the Muhammadan confession of faith (kalmia) on their coins. This practice was forbade by Aurangzeb, lest the holy words should be spitefully trampled under foot or defiled by unbelievers (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 53). The celebration of Nauroz or the Iranian New Year was observed by the subjects and the Mughal court as piously like the two annual Ids. However Aurangzeb, viewing it as an innovation of Islamic laws forbade the observance of the day and the customary celebrations of the court were transferred to the coronation festivity in the month of Ramzaan (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 53). At the commencement of the 11th year of his reign, court musicians were forbidden from performing before him "as he had no liking for pleasure, and his application to business left him no time for amusement. Gradually music was totally forbidden at court" and the state musicians and singers, who were once honoured with noble rank, were pensioned off. The royal band was however retained (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 55). However the most important step taken was the establishment of the Censor of Morals (muhtasib) whose job was to ensure that the lives of the people were regulated and guided by the Holy Law or Sharia. Their duties included the abolishment and imposing strict penalisation of forbidden acts such as drinking distilled spirits or fermented beer, gambling, illicit commerce of the sexes etc. The punishment of heretical opinions, blasphemy and omission of fasts and prayers by Muslims also lay within the province of this Inquisition. The provincial governors were ordered to assist the work of moral reform within their own jurisdictions by enforcing the canonical rules about amr and nahi (things to be done and things to be avoided) (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 54). The former practice of the emperors to apply a spat of paint (tika) with their own fingers to the forehead of great Rajahs when investing them was abolished as savouring of Hinduism and un-Islamic (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 57). The earlier customary practice of jharokha darshan where the Mughal emperor used to appear every morning at a balcony on the wall and receive the salute of the people assembled outside, which was akin to the Hindu rite of catching a glimpse of one's tutelary idol before the beginning of one's day, was banished by Aurangzeb on grounds of violation of Sharia laws (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 58). The re-imposition of jiziya and pilgrimage tax and the official decree banning construction of new temples led to feelings of alienation among the Hindu populace and gradually discoloured the fabric of communal unity which reached its zenith during the reign of Akbar. These are some of the primary allegations cited by historians for the portrayal of this eccentric Mughal emperor as a dark chapter of the glorious legacy of the Mughals and who apparently sparked the process of the disintegration of the Mughal empire. But in doing so, the mainly shrewd political considerations and motives behind the discriminatory policies are often overlooked and dumped in the dustbin of history. His qualities like of an able administrator, a valiant commander and a practical ruler are always blotched by the emphasis played upon the darker side of his personality. The instances of his reign such as the increase in the number of Hindu nobility in the court, granting of tax-free land endowments to various temples, removal of numerous unnecessary cesses and taxes earlier wrung from helpless peasants and finally ruling over an empire which included much of pre-1947 India which laid the basis for the strong feeling of nationalism exhibited in the revolt of 1857.

IV. WAS AURANGZEB REALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE?

This section examines the various allegations made regarding Aurangzeb- Was he really a bigot who wanted to establish dar-ul-Islam (the land of pure faith)? Was he responsible for destroying the secular fabric of the Mughal empire built by Akbar with the goodwill of people hailing from other traditions? Were the discriminatory and communal policies implemented during his reign with the aim of bringing about large-scale religious conversion of the subjects or there lay subtle political calculations behind such moves? Was he really the anti-Hindu, demonic ruler of Hindustan who sounded the death knell for the glorious Mughal dynasty? Firstly we shall examine his conventional picture as a religious bigot inclined towards establishing an Islamic state in a land whose populace was non-Islamic. In the light of this accusation, the two main points brought up

by conventional historians in defence of their claims are jiziyah tax and temple desecration. For permission to live in an Islamic state the unbeliever i.e. non- Islamic people had to pay a toll tax called Jiziyah which means substitute money or the price of indulgence. Non-Muslims live under a contract (zimma) with the state according to which a commutation tax known as jiziyah had to be paid to the state. The reimposition of jiziyah by Aurangzeb in 1679 is generally regarded as a turning point in the history of the Mughal empire marking the culmination of religious bigotry, which led to feelings of alienation among Rajputs, Jats, Marathas etc. The conventional view of the reimposition of the tax as a mark of religious intolerance claims support from the writings of contemporary or near- contemporary observers. Muhammad Saqi Musta'id Khan who can be regarded as an official historian of Aurangzeb who wrote on the basis of official papers say "As all the aims of the religious Emperor were directed to the spreading of the law of Islam and the overthrow of the practice of the infidels, he issued orders to the high diwani officers that from Wednesday, the 2nd April 1679/ 1st Rabi I 1090, in obedience to the Quranic injunctions 'till they pay commutation money (jizyah)with the hand in humility' and in agreement with the canonical traditions, jizyah should be collected from the infidels (zimmis)of the capital and the provinces" (Chandra, 1969, p. 323) . Contemporary Europeans like Thomas Roll, the president of the English factory at Surat or the Italian traveller Manucci state in their writings that the imposition of the jiziyah tax was with the aim of replenishing the dry treasuries of the state and to 'force poorer sections of the population to become Mohammedans'. But shouldn't it occur as a surprise that the jiziyah tax was should be imposed by Aurangzeb, who was well-versed with the Sharia, on the twenty-second year of his reign? As far as concerning religious conversion, there is no account of large-scale conversion despite the jiziyah being a regressive tax; the Hindus clung stubbornly to their faith. Any large scale acceptance of Islam by the Hindu population would have been recorded by the Emperor's eulogists as a victory of his policy but no such records exist in the official chronicles of the reign of Aurangzeb. Keeping in view the economic aspect, it is true that when Aurangzeb reviewed his finances in the thirteenth year of his reign, it was found that expenses had exceeded income during the preceding twelve years. Continuous warfare and campaigns in the Deccan, which intensified after 1676, frontier wars with the Ahoms of north-eastern India, intermittent clashes with Afghan tribesmen and later conflicts with the Rathors and the Sisodias had drained the treasury. In order to sail over this crisis, Aurangzeb ordered retrenchment in the expenditure of the Emperor, the Begums and the princes and abolished a number of unnecessary customary cesses in the jagirs or plots of land held by the imperial officials. It was expected that the jagirdars would make these remissions out of their sanctioned income. But only a few nobles complied with the order while the majority demanded monetary compensation in lieu of the income they were asked to give up; the order remained a dead letter in the imperial decree with the revenue department continuing to include income from the forbidden cesses in their evaluation of income from the jagirdars. Therefore it refutes the claim that by abolishing the other unnecessary cesses which went against the Islamic charter Aurangzeb was justified in the levying of jiziyah. However we do not possess any figures regarding the yield of jiziyah from the reign of Aurangzeb. According to Shivdas Lakhnawi, an eighteenth century writer who wrote that the realisation (hasil) from all the provinces of the Mughal dominion was 40 million rupees although this figure is given at the instance of the re-abolition of the tax by Raja Jaswant Singh following the defeat of the Saiyid brothers in 1720. Jagjiwandas the hasil of the empire around 1708-09 was a little over 260 million rupees (Chandra, 1969, p. 326). From these figures it can be inferred the share of jiziyah to be about 15 per cent of the total income. Thus the yield from jiziyah was not a negligible sum and the proceeds were lodged in a separate treasury called Khazanah-i-jizyah where the amount was earmarked for charitable purposes. Thus the jiziyah can be seen as a device for relieving the pressure on the general treasury to the extent that the state could economise on the disbursement of amounts to cash-stipend holders or yaumiyadars (Chandra, 1969, p. 328). The army of stipend holders included theologians, recluses, widows and orphans, a section of the literati and a large number of nondescript beneficiaries were always a problem for the medieval Sultans of India as well as Mughals- it was the duty of the Islamic state to provide for some sort of sustenance to the able-bodied Muslims especially those who possessed some learning of the Holy laws. Attempts were made to meet this challenge since the time of Akbar by setting aside some villages for granting to the a'imadars but the problem renewed during the reign of Aurangzeb. Among the stipend holders the theologians formed a considerable force in the medieval empires of India. They had a monopoly over education and the services of the Ulemas and the Qazis were often utilised by the Sultans in the administration of the empire. However the ever present rift between the Ulema who wanted to establish an Islamic state according to the Sharia in India emulating the example of West Asia and the Sultan and his nobles who were guided by political considerations and the need to strike alliances with the indigenous ruling powers was a source of tension and conflicts in the court and affairs of the state. The Ulemas stressed upon the need to impose jiziyah as a basic tenet of the Canonical Laws and its exaction from Hindus and other non-Muslims as a means to demean their "false religions" and as a constant reminder of the inferior status of the non-Muslims as being dependent upon the Islamic state. The debate between the orthodox trend of treating the Hindus as perpetual enemies subject to constant humiliation and the liberal notion of trying to win over Hindu rajas by various concessions remained part a political and intellectual life in the country well into the eighteenth century. It is in this background the decision of re-imposing jiziyah by Aurangzeb must be placed and examined critically.

At the outset in the battle of Samugarh where the forces of Dara Shikoh clashed with those of Aurangzeb and Murad Baksh, Aurangzeb who had allied with the Rajput nobles like Rana Raj Singh of Mewar and Raja Jai Singh of Kachhwaha, refrained from raising slogans against Islam. But his eventual accession raised the expectations of the Ulema who wanted the establishment of the dar-ul-Islam and feared a reversion to the secular state of Akbar, in this context embodied by Dara Shikoh (Chandra, 1969, p. 334). After his accession Aurangzeb maintained somewhat the secular tradition of his forefathers by building alliances with indigenous ruling classes where Raja Jai Singh and Raja Jaswant Singh were promoted to higher positions in imperial rank and hierarchy than had been granted to any other Hindu since the days of Raja Man Singh. In the initial stage the separation between state and religion was maintained with the Ulema having no decisive say in the affairs of administration. However the clerical elements gained power when Aurangzeb began using religion as a weapon against the popular revulsion directed towards him for his inhuman treatment of his father and brothers. The question of jiziya was postponed in the court keeping in mind political exigencies. Aurangzeb had hoped to reach some accord with the emerging power of the Marathas. But the failure of talks between Bahadur Khan and Shivaji in 1676 compelled the Mughal empire to adopt an offensive stance. A minimum objective of establishing a position in Bijapur and Golconda, thereby preventing them from falling into Maratha hands and using the resources of the two kingdoms against the Marathas was adopted as part of the war strategy. With having failed to accomplish these limited objectives in 1678 Aurangzeb felt the need to make a striking declaration which would rally popular Muslim opinion behind him. Earlier rulers had rallied popular support by cries of jihad; Aurangzeb used the rhetoric of an Islamic state and the re-imposition of jiziya marked the reversion to orthodox Islamic tenets and Sharia laws (Chandra, 1969, p. 336). Another factor in the reimposition of jiziya was the growing unemployment among the Ulemas and other members of the clergy. By earmarking the proceeds of jiziya for distribution among the clerical elements and the staffing of the department responsible for collection predominantly by members of the clergy Aurangzeb hoped to bribe the Ulema and hence add legitimacy to his aim of conquering Bijapur and Golconda as jihad. But the clerical elements took advantage of the situation to amass fortunes for themselves and heap insults upon Hindus and other non-Muslims. The Italian traveller Manucci states that the amins (collectors) used to retain half or even three-fourths of the Jiziya proceeds for themselves (Chandra, 1969, p. 337). But to claim the jiziya as an- anti Hindu measure can be refuted on the grounds that the re-imposition was not marked by decrease in the number of Hindu nobles in the court; rather the Rajput nobility in Aurangzeb's time increase from 24 per cent in the time of Shah Jahan to 33 per cent in 1679 (Daniyal, 2016). Besides despite the attempts to woo the Muslim theologians by the reimposition of jiziya, many of the Ulema like Qazi Shaikh ul-Islam (Chandra, 1969, p. 336) who refused to issue a fatwa of jihad against Bijapur and Golconda and Qazi Abdullah (Chandra, 1969, p. 336) who suggested peace with Golconda shows that the calculated move of Aurangzeb did not yield the desired results. In addition even Muslims were opposed to the reimposition especially nobles like Bahadar Khan, Mahabat Khan who were opposed to clerical influence in administration; Jahanara Begum, the sister of Aurangzeb, was herself in the forefront of the opposition and eventually the tax was abolished by nobles Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan thereby showing the high distaste for the tax even among the Muslims. Lastly there remains doubt whether the jiziya was fully realised as it allowed for concessions in times of drought and to the poorer sections (women, children, daily wage labourers, poor peasants, orphans) and in the reign of Aurangzeb when the Deccan and other parts of the empire were constantly hit by long spells of parched land exemptions were granted regularly hindering effective collection. The next issue of temple desecration and destruction is often used to mount attack on Aurangzeb by conventional historical narrative. Historians often cite the demolition of Vishwanath temple at Kashi, Keshava Deva at Mathura etc to justify their picturisation of the emperor as a defiler of temple and Hindu sentiments. To begin with, temple desecration was a policy followed by Hindu kings as well before the advent of Turks and Mughals in the subcontinent. The instance of Rajtarangini by Kalhana in the 12th century which mentions frequent raids on temples and Buddhist monasteries launched by the Hindu kings of Kashmir to fill their coffers can be cited as evident of the practice being carried much before the entry of Islam in India. Conventional history says Aurangzeb began his attack on Hinduism by issuing a charter in the first year of his reign to a priest of Benares where he avowed that his religion forbade him from building any other temples, but did not enjoin the destruction of older ones (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 174). This is evident from the words of the Benares Farman- "It has been decided according to our Canon Law that long standing temples should not be demolished, but no new temples allowed to be built.... Information has reached our.... Court that certain persons have harassed the Hindu resident in Benares and its environs and certain Brahmans who have the right to holding charge of the ancient temples there and that they further desire to remove these Brahmans from their ancient office. Therefore our royal command is that you should direct that in future no person shall in unlawful ways interfere with or disturb the Brahmans and other Hindu residents in those places"- Aurangzeb's " Benares farman" addressed to Abdul Hasan dated 28th Feb, 1659 (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 185) . During his viceroyalty of Gujarat in 1644 Aurangzeb had desecrated the recently built Hindu temple of Chintaman in Ahmedabad by killing a cow in it and then turned the building into a mosque but the ground was returned to Hindus on the orders of Shah Jahan. Another instance cited by historians is the order issued in the 12th year of his reign which

mandated "destruction of all schools and temples of the infidels and to put down their religious teachings and practices". The order is cited in a passage from the Ma'athir-i 'Alamgiri which goes – "Orders respecting Islamic affairs were issued to the governors of all the provinces that the schools and places of worship of the irreligious be subject to demolition and that with the utmost urgency the manner of teaching and the public practices of the sect of these misbelievers be suppressed" (Eaton, 2001, p. 74) . The order did not state that schools or places of worship be demolished, but rather that they be subject to demolition, implying that local authorities were required to make investigations before taking action. More importantly, the sentence immediately preceding this passage provides the context in which we may find the order's overall intent (Eaton, 2001, p. 74). On April 8, 1669 Aurangzeb's court received reports that in Thatta, Multan and especially in Benares Brahmins in "established schools" had been engaged in teaching "false books" to the masses and that both "Hindu and Muslim" admirers had been travelling over great distances to study the "ominous sciences" taught by this "deviant group" (Eaton, 2001, p. 74). Thus the court was more interested in curbing a certain kind of teaching within the imperial domain and the order called for investigations of institutions which propagated such teachings rather than the general destruction of temples all over the empire. Moreover following the traditions of his ancestors, Aurangzeb viewed the existing temple as state property and strict punishment was meted out to Hindu as well as Muslim officers who desecrated temples with which they were associated. The "evil emperor" is also known to have bestowed land grants to Someshwarnath temple at Allahabad, Dattatreya Guru Mandir at Mohanpur (Maharashtra), Dantadhavan Mandir at Ayodhya, Umananda temple at Guwahati; borne the cost of ghee for lighting of lamps in the Mahakal temple at Ujjaini and even constructed a Ram temple at Chitrakoot. Then one is bound to wonder that why some temples were particularly targeted whereas others were left intact? The reasons behind such selective destruction is purely political and hardly to do with religious sentiments. The trend of attacking temples and images of deities patronized by enemy kings was integrated into the Indian sub-continent from about sixth century AD onwards. Royal temple complexes were pre-eminently political institutions as the site of intermingling of the divine and human kingship. Especially the patron deity, housed at the garbagriha or "womb chamber" was the embodiment of the shared sovereignty of the king and the deity. The temple priests endowed the deity of a royal temple with attributes of transcendent and universality, the same deity was also understood to have a special relationship with the particular geographical site and with that of the sovereign monarch i.e. the king derived legitimacy to rule by claiming descent from the state deity and supposedly his power is drawn from the presence of the deity and the temple in the kingdom. This relationship between king, god, temple and land in early medieval India is apparent from a passage in the Brhatsamhita- "If a Shiva linga, image, or temple breaks apart, moves, sweats, cries, speaks, or otherwise acts with no apparent cause, this warns of the destruction of the king and his territory" (Eaton, 2001, p. 65). Considering politically charged relationship between a royal Hindu patron and his client temple, later rulers like the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals were aware that even if the earlier ruling classes accepted the ruler's suzerainty, there always remained the possibility and occasional suspicion that the temple's latent political significance might be activated in times of rebellion and provide a platform to further the interests of the patron. This explains the destruction of especially those temples which were associated with sub-ordinate rajas or officials who had declared rebellion against the sovereign ruler as the demolition of the patronized temple symbolically represented the end of the power of the patron and the supremacy of the demolisher over the patron. The very same logic is evident behind the destruction of Keshava Deva temple at Mathura as a result of the Jat rebellion. In 1669, there arose a rebellion among the landlords in Benares and it was believed that some of the landlords, prominent among them Jai Singh had aided Shivaji, Aurangzeb's bitter enemy, from imperial detention and consequently the Vishwanath temple built by the latter's grandfather Raja Man Singh and patronized by Jai Singh was brought down. Similarly the temples in Udaipur and Chittor were pulled down after its patron Rana Raj Singh had withdrawn his loyalty to the Mughals. Temples patronised by his arch-foe and elder brother Dara Shikoh were to ground to dust, including the removal of a stone railing gifted to the Keshava Deva temple by Dara Shikoh. However acts of temple desecration were never directed at the populace, but at the enemy king and the image of the state deity. In the 1661 Mughal expedition led by Mir Jumla in Cooch-Bihar, the Qazi in Mughal Bengal ordered the confiscation of the treasury of the defeated king Bhim Narayan and the smashing of the state idol but warned the soldiers against any mistreatment to be meted out to the conquered population. From all the above instances it can be justified that acts of temple desecration carried an underlying political motive than the spirit of bigotry and opposition to Hinduism as stated by Katherine Butler Schofield from King's College, London- " Aurangzeb built far more temples than he destroyed" (Daniyal, 2016).

Finally we come to the allegation that the process of decline of the rich Mughal tradition and legacy in India was started by Aurangzeb. The conventional historical narrative put to blame his intolerant behaviour and strict adherence to orthodox Islam, the rise in the power of the nobility in the court and the emergence of regional players like the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats etc which dealt the final blow to the Mughal empire. However one does not take into account the factors considered responsible had started gaining ground since the time of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Out of the 14,500 mansabdars in 1695, 8,000 existing in 1647 had been

received as a legacy from his ancestors along with the Mughal crown in 1658 (Naqvi, 1977, p. 191). The mansabdars had arrogated to themselves the right to decision-making in vital aspects of the empire by the middle of Akbar's reign and in addition to executive and military powers came to have more or less complete rights over the non-khalisa (lands outside the direct control of the Mughal emperor) lands' revenue- a move which rendered them virtually supreme in the empire. The successors of Akbar - Jahangir and Shah Jahan continued to utilise the services of the mansabdars, both of them elevating and expanding their ranks. In such a background, the addition of 7000 more mansabdars by Aurangzeb did not lead any sort of improvement in the situation. Another view is that the blunder caused in the handling of the Marathas signalled the imminent decline of the Mughals. However it should be noted that the rise in the power of the Marathas had started from the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan with their principle asset being the ever-swelling ranks of the Maratha rebels. Aurangzeb did not try to investigate and ascertain the reasons behind the outflow of men from imperial dominion into the forces of Shivaji and instead embarked upon a twenty-five years long campaign in the Deccan i.e. he omitted to trace the causes of the trouble and chose directly to confront the resultant phenomenon of the troubles-Shivaji. As a matter of fact social and economic changes were slow indeed in medieval times; the rebel forces of Aurangzeb's reign did not crystallise at one stroke. The process of the migration of able-bodied men leaving their settlements and trades prompted by political instability, economic or social barriers; imperial campaigns leaving behind homeless conquered populations who end up joining rebel camps, increase in agricultural productivity of the provinces allowing the ruling classes of their respective provinces to increase their ground; these process which led to the rise of the Jats, Sikhs, Marathas etc had their origins from the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. In other words Aurangzeb had merely reaped what his predecessors had sowed and it would be unjustified to hold him fully responsible for the rise of regional contenders to Mughal supremacy.

As far as his intolerant nature and orthodox bend of mind is concerned, as shown above the acts of jiziya reimposition and temple demolition had underlying political calculations rather than the motive of "waging war against infidels". As stated above the number of Hindu employees and nobles in the Mughal administration was highest in the time of Aurangzeb than compared to any other ruler. Even the Maratha king and hero Shivaji was a mansabdars under Aurangzeb and even expected himself to be appointed the Mughal viceroy of Deccan. Similarly Guru Govind Singh, the last Sikh guru who led the armed rebellion against Aurangzeb was previously a jargirdar under the latter with Govind Singh petitioning for forgiveness and return of his jagirs from Aurangzeb. If considering his "anti-Hindu" measures of banning Hindu fairs, the celebration of Holi, construction of new temples etc then one must also consider the crackdown launched upon the Shia Muslims of the Mughal empire with the spiritual guide of the Bohra tradition, Sayyid Qutb-ud-din of Ahmedabad along with his 700 followers were massacred on the orders of Aurangzeb (Sarkar, 1912-24, p. 65). Aurangzeb went further and issued a ban forbidding the observance of the Tazia procession by Shia Muslims during Muharram. Even liberal Sufi thinkers who went against Sunni Islam like Shah Muhammad and Sarmad, the mystique were imprisoned and executed on charges of heresy (with the tacit and real reason being that both the scholars were teachers of Dara Shikoh). Another common allegation against Aurangzeb is the ban on music which started the process of the decline of the cultural tradition of the Mughals. However, histories of music under Aurangzeb begin with his enthronement in 1658 with an acknowledgement that he tolerated musical performances during the early years of his reign (Brown, 2007, p. 82) . Historians often overlook the major episode when music and love entered Aurangzeb's life in the form of Hira Bai 'Zainabadi'. She was an accomplished dancer and singer in the household of Mir Khalil Khan Zaman, the husband of Aurangzeb's maternal aunt and who later become the love of Aurangzeb's life. In the words of Manucci she was an 'extreme hypocrite, good and holy to look at but in reality an ill doer and devil' who made Aurangzeb "to neglect for some time his prayer and austerities, filling up his days with music and dances; and going even farther, he enlivened himself with wine, which he drank at the insistence of the said dancing girl. The dancer died and Aurangzeb made a vow never to drink wine again nor to listen to music" (Brown, 2007, p. 83). However the musical connection with the death of Hira Bai has been challenged by accounts of other contemporaries where it is mentioned that the heartfelt episode of love and the demise of Hira Bai occurred when Aurangzeb was still the viceroy of Deccan before his coronation as Mughal emperor where the ceremony was marked by the melodies of musical instruments and the emperor's notable bestowal of 7000 rupees on his principal musician Khushal Khan Kalwant. As regards the later part of his reign, the European jeweller Jean Baptiste Tavernier was struck by the sweet and melodious performance put by court musicians in the darbar of Aurangzeb in 1665. A number of dhrupads composed in his honor are still preserved in oral and written traditions signifying his patronage of music. In the *Mirat-e-Alam*, the author Bakhtawar Khan praises the emperor as having 'a perfect expert's knowledge' of music and the *Rag Darpan*, a musical treatise by Mughal noble Faqirullah lists the favourite singers and instrumentalists by name (Daniyal, 2016). In later life, Aurangzeb became more inclined to religion and stopped listening to music but that should not be taken as antagonism towards music. His act of removing court musicians and dancers from the court can be seen in the context of the economic crisis, accentuated by military campaigns in the Deccan and other expeditions which had drained the state treasury, led to the abolishment of unnecessary costs including indulgence in pleasures like music and costly ceremonies and the

monetary resources were instead directed towards the rebuilding and repair of forts, strengthening the army, investing in maritime trade and commerce etc. In the midst of this, Aurangzeb's fondness of music can be made by the instance of his son Azam Shah who went on to become an accomplished musician and Udaipuri Bai, a courtesan singer and dancer who later became his sweetheart in his last days. As said by Katherine Butler Schofield – "More musical treatises in Persian were written during Aurangzeb's reign than in the previous 500 years of Muslim rule in India, and all of them make significant references to current music making" (Daniyal, 2016).

V. CONCLUSION

The sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb is mostly remembered for the darker shades of his character, often emphasised and exaggerated by proponents of the communal discourse of history according to whom the medieval period was an age of darkness even if it witnessed the reign of wise and far-sighted, tolerant rulers like Akbar. By conventional history Akbar was the 'great Mughal', Jahangir continued the secular trend of his father and Shah Jahan built the seventh wonder of the world- the Taj Mahal. But the memory of Aurangzeb is marked only by streaks of violence and religious bigotry. If one cites the blood-filled circumstances leading to the crowning of Aurangzeb as justification for his portrayal as a diabolical ruler, then Ashoka, the great Mauryan emperor of ancient India is also tainted by the instance described in Buddhist texts as ascending the throne of Pataliputra after murdering 99 of his brothers. As far as the question of tolerance is concerned, Akbar too does not escape scrutiny. It should be mentioned that after the suppression of the Uzbek rebellion, Akbar's attitude towards Rajputs changed and orthodox sentiments came to be given precedence in the court. The victory over Chittor was proclaimed as a victory of Islam over infidels and there is documentary evidence of a farman issued to Abdul Samad, the muhtasib of Bilgram and other officials to prevent Hindus from practising idol –worship (Khan, 1968, p. 32). As far as regards jiziya and temple desecration, both were carried with shrewd political motives for furtherance of imperial interests. Even the later Marathas who replaced the Mughals in the Deccan used to exact zakat- an exact replica of jiziya from the Muslim subjects and the temple of Shankaracharya was razed to the ground by Marathas for the reason that it was built and patronized by Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore. As far as atrocities on subjects, the heinous caste system with its inhumane treatment of Dalits and Mahars took place widely under the rule of the Maratha Peshwas. The evaluation of tyranny through the lens of modern ideals would make every historical figure look guilty to the posterity. Besides such evaluation only fans the fire of communalism with demands for liberation of Vishwanath and Keshava Deva temple grounds from the 'clutches of Islam' after the "redemption" of Ayodhya. No human is perfect and this principle of nature applies to rulers in history as well despite their claims of divine grace. Bigotry on the part of either Muslim or Hindu rulers were actually part of shrewd administrative and political strategies. As historian Satish Chandra remarks regarding Aurangzeb that "he was neither a hero nor a villain but a somewhat unimaginative politician who failed to understand the societal problems at work in the country, and often took recourse to religious slogans in order to meet complex socio-economic and political problems". Lastly as a concluding remark one should be aware of the following words by EH Carr while examining the historicity of any figure who lived in the past- "History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him."

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