

However it can not be denied that such favourable conditions also gave rise to extraordinary experiments in religious tolerance and accommodation of groups. It also led to a rich and varied output of the arts of such as music, architecture, painting etc. This glorious record was somewhat sullied under Aurangzeb as he professed a more hardline view of religion which coloured most of his actions. We are fortunate that many of the Mughal emperors were enlightened rulers who encouraged scholarship of various sorts. Records of contemporary sources for the period under study are available. Therefore it is proposed to undertake a study of the various aspects of the Mughal empire during the reigns of Akbar and Aurangzeb mainly through *contemporary sources* to gain an insight into areas of convergence which were preponderant and some areas of divergence between the two. This study is proposed to be based primarily on contemporary chronicles such as *Abul Fazl's Akbar Nama and Ain-i-Akbari*, *Abdul Qadir Badauni's Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, *Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad's Tabaqat-i-Akbari Alamgir Namah by Mirza Mohammed Kazim Shirazi*, *Muntakhab ul Lubab of Khafi Khan*, *Maasir -i-Alamgiri of Saqi Mustad Khan etc.* There are also several European travellers who visited India in that period and have left accounts of their travels such as Johann Albrecht Von Mandelslo's *Travels in Eastern India*, *Francois Bernier's Travels in the Mughal Empire AD 1656-1668*, *Jean Baptiste Tavernier's Travels in India*, *Antonio Monserrate's The commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on his journey to the court of Akbar*, *Niccolao Manucci's A Pepys of Mughal India etc.* These will be referred to as well.

### **Statement of the problem**

Akbar is recognized today as one of the two greatest rulers India has ever known, the other being Ashoka. He was a tough act to follow and his successors had a towering legacy to

live upto. Akbar laid the foundations of a solid empire which survived him by several centuries. This paper is an attempt to study the system of empire as instituted by Akbar and the manner in which it was taken forward by his heirs mainly Aurangzeb based on a reading of contemporary chronicles. Aurangzeb was certainly not made of the same stuff as his forefathers and infact overturned many of their policies. It would therefore be interesting to compare and contrast various aspects of the structure of the Mughal Empire in the time of Akbar and Aurangzeb based on contemporary chronicles such as Abul Fazl's Akbar Nama and Ain-i-Akbari, Abdul Qadir Badauni's Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, Khafi Khan's Muntakhab-ul-Lubab, accounts of foreign travellers such as Bernier, Antonio Monserrate etc. The areas of focus would be the monarchy, nobility, the army, administrative system, land revenue system, the economy, role of religion, social mores and certain aspects of art. The effort is to compare and contrast these two momentous eras as gleaned from various primary as well as some secondary sources to get a better understanding of that period in history. At the end of the study it is proposed to bring out essentially areas in which the superstructure of empire as instituted by Akbar continued and changes that were instituted by Aurangzeb.

### **Purpose or Objectives**

The purpose or objective of the study is to compare and contrast the reigns of Akbar and Aurangzeb in the realms of politics, administration, monarchy, religion, society and the arts based on contemporary accounts of the era. The best known Mughal history is Abul Fazl's voluminous Akbar Nama, an annual recounting of events for 47 regnal years of Akbar's reign and its equally bulky appendix: the three volumes of the Ain-i-Akbari, an imperial manual and gazetteer. The Ain-i-Akbari is the third volume of the Akbar Nama and is the Administration Report and Statistical Return of the Government. The Ain-i-Akbari contains

details of statistical data regarding revenue rates, tax collections, prices etc. and is invaluable to reconstruct the economic history of the time. It covers all aspects of the reign of emperor Akbar to the extent of providing recipes for dishes at the royal court! These works are highly laudatory of all emperor Akbar's policies and actions. By all accounts they are a truly invaluable source of contemporary history. It could almost be termed a hagiography whereas Abdul Qadir Badauni's *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* is the other end of the spectrum. It is highly critical of Akbar and declares him a heretic from Islam. The *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* of Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad on the other hand is a fairly balanced account of the reign of Akbar. It is a plain narration of events in chronological order.

We are extremely fortunate that there are several original sources available for the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb such as the *Alamgir Namah* by Mirza Mohammed Kazim Shirazi which was panegyric in the extreme being a court sanctioned account of the first 10 years of Aurangzeb's reign. While it employed a great deal of flattery and praise of emperor Aurangzeb, his brother Dara Shikoh was termed as *Be-Shikoh* or the undignified and Shuja is called *Na-Shuja* or unvaliant.<sup>4</sup> *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* by Saqi Mustad Khan is laudatory of Aurangzeb specially of his religious policy while the *Muntakhab- ul-Lubab* of Khafi Khan which was written 30 years after the death of Aurangzeb is highly critical of the emperor. It records several instances where the emperor's decrees were simply disregarded by his subordinates and is a sure sign of the unravelling of a once mighty empire. Manucci says that in Aurangzeb's time 'Those who were at a distance pay very little attention to the emperor's orders'<sup>5</sup>

The account of Father Monserrate a Portugese priest who accompanied Akbar on his expedition to Kabul and went with him as far as Peshawar is invaluable. Till the Jesuit Father

was hopeful of Akbar converting to Christianity, he was all praise of the emperor but later as this venture seemed doomed, his opinions became coloured. He writes that, "Yet all these fine qualities both of body and mind lose the greater part of their splendor because the luster of the True Faith is lacking."<sup>6</sup> Similarly for Aurangzeb's reign we are fortunate to have the accounts of French travelers Francois Bernier and Jean Baptiste Tavernier which contain minute details of their observations. Bernier's is an account that includes a great deal of bazaar gossip along with deep insights into the mores of this country. He was very close to the scene of action and treated an inmate of Prince Dara Shikoh's harem when he was on the run during the war of succession. Later he was under the patronage of a prominent noble at the court of Aurangzeb called Danishmand Khan. Tavernier's account is written from the point of view principally of a foreign trader in India. While referring to the accounts of foreign travelers we have to keep in mind that a lot of what they report may be hearsay and not very credible. However what they observe may be of real value as what strikes them as extraordinary may not be considered noteworthy by a native of this country. Thus it is clear that a wide spectrum of contemporary records are available which can be referred to draw a portrait of the empire at that time. Of course we have to be careful in the inferences we draw as no writing of history in any era can be free of prejudices of the person writing it. This is specially true of this paper which relies mainly on primary sources when sensibilities of people were entirely different. This aspect will be kept in mind while an effort will be made to analyse the course of contemporary events to the extent possible and to draw comparisons or contrasts between these two eras from mainly primary and some secondary sources as well.

### **Justification**

As already stated, we are extremely fortunate to have access to several contemporary historiographies from the Mughal era. The effort of this paper is to view events through the lens of contemporary chroniclers of the era i.e. the reigns of Emperors Akbar and Aurangzeb to enquire whether their conduct of affairs of state, society and religion converged or differed in a significant way. While a great deal of material on Mughal history is already available, this paper would like to focus on information as obtainable from original sources for a study of the monarchy, administration, nobility, religion et al for a comprehensive view of how the Mughal Empire was structured under these two monarchs. Secondary sources will be referred to as well.

### **Research Questions or Hypotheses**

The Research Questions will be as follows:

- 1) What was the structure of the state, society and religion under Akbar and Aurangzeb according to contemporary sources?
- 2) What were the commonalities and contrasts between the eras of Akbar and Aurangzeb as emerge from contemporary and other sources?

### **Scope/Limitations/Delimitations**

The scope of the study is limited to the period of Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) and the emphasis will be to etch a portrait of the times based on a reliance on contemporary sources. The main focus of the study will be contemporary sources but secondary sources will obviously be referred to as well.

## **Literature Review**

Literature review has not revealed any article specifically comparing and contrasting the two periods of Akbar and Aurangzeb. A search was made of the Indian Council of Historical Research Journal, the Medieval History Journal and other on line journals as well. However there are innumerable sources of information on this topic and it can easily be researched from primary as well as secondary sources of which there is no dearth. I have referred to Abul Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari which is a kind of detailed gazette of Akbar's reign and contains fascinating details of every aspect of contemporary life. It is proposed to make a detailed study of Akbar's nobility, administration, court life, social and religious mores and aspects of art. Alamgir Namah by Mirza Mohammed Kazim Shirazi for the first 10 years of Aurangzeb's reign and Maasir-i-Alamgiri by Saqi Mustad Khan written after Aurangzeb's death as well as other sources will also be referred to. References have also been made to Harbans Mukhiya's book on the Mughals of India and Abraham Eraly's The Mughal World. Ruby Maloni's article on Propaganda and Legitimacy of Regime: Akbar and Abul Fazal has also been referred to. References have been mentioned at the end of each chapter.

## **Methodology**

The study relies mainly on primary sources i.e. autobiographies and biographies of emperors as well as travelogues of foreigners who came to India in those days i.e archival material. Secondary sources include books, journals and web based sources of historians and scholars and efforts will be made to analyse and present information in a lucid manner.

## **Characterisation Scheme**

**Chapter 1- Introduction:** A brief view of the essential premise of the paper is presented that the superstructure of administration under the Mughals whether revenue, military, central or provincial was firmly established by Akbar and mostly continued uninterrupted in the time of Aurangzeb. The answer to the research question is mainly in terms of changes made by Aurangzeb who altered the mansabdari and revenue systems due to the challenges he faced in the Deccan. He also turned the state into a theocracy which was a major break from the past.

**Chapter 2: Mughal Monarchy, Polity and Administration under Akbar and Aurangzeb** Etiquette at court, the role of the nobility, structures of the central and provincial administrations, the mansabdari and revenue systems, military structures are outlined in this chapter. It is assumed that most aspects of the administrative structure as established by Akbar continued uninterrupted under Aurangzeb. However the changes as introduced by Aurangzeb as part of deliberate policy or due to force of circumstances are highlighted.

**Chapter 3: An Economic Overview of the Mughal Empire under Akbar and Aurangzeb** Contrary to the general view that the Mughal period was a time of prosperity, the lot of the common man was pathetic. There was a great deal of exploitation of peasants and artisans by the ruling classes. There was some advancement in trade, urbanization etc. but not nearly enough.

**Chapter 4: Social Mores of the Mughal period under Akbar and Aurangzeb:** Social and cultural practices of the times underwent change as Islamic mores were adapted to

Indian conditions. We have a fascinating glimpse into the practices and mores of the Mughal court especially from contemporary writers.

**Chapter 5: Mughal Art under Akbar and Aurangzeb:** This is a brief chapter highlighting an inter mingling of Hindu and Muslim traditions in the arts whether painting, architecture or music apart from literature which saw many Indian classics translated into Persian and other languages. Comments of contemporary chroniclers have been emphasized.

**Chapter 6: Religious Policy under Akbar and Aurangzeb:** This chapter is significant as contemporary chroniclers have left us a great deal of detail regarding religious policy under both Akbar and Aurangzeb. The prejudice or sensibility of the writer is reflected in the observations made by them as already pointed out. Deconstructing the policy thus is a very interesting exercise.

**Chapter 7: Conclusion:** This chapter will conclude the paper and try to answer the research question with an emphasis on areas of convergence which are assumed to be covered in details as provided in each chapter. The conclusion concentrates on divergence between the reigns of Akbar and Aurangzeb in terms of policy in various spheres.

**Chapter 8: Bibliography**