

**AKBARSHA'S POLICY OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE****Ismoilov Shohruz****Karimov Javokhir****Dulanov Khusniddin**

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Annotation: *This study analyzes the policy of religious tolerance of Akbar, the ruler of the Mughal Empire, based on historical and modern sources. The research examines the principle of sulh-i kul as articulated in Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak's Akbarnama, the scholarly interpretations of modern historians such as Athar Ali and Peter Hardy, as well as the critical views of 'Abd al-Qadir Badayuni, who opposed Akbar's religious policies. The scientific novelty of this research lies in the fact that the sulh-i kul policy promoted by Akbar, the ruler of the Mughal Empire, is analyzed not as a traditional religious reform or a matter of personal belief, but as a model of political theology.*

Keywords: *Akbar the Great, religious tolerance, sulh-i kul, Mughal Empire, Akbarnama, religion and state relations, governance of a multi-religious society*

At the end of the 16th - beginning of the 17th centuries, Akbar Shah (1556-1605), one of the most powerful rulers of the Mughal Empire, with his policy of religious tolerance, occupies a central place not only in the history of India, but also in world historiography. During the reign of Akbar, who ruled a multicultural society, the issue of ensuring state stability was directly related to religious issues. Therefore, the principle of sulh-i kul ("general peace" or "general tolerance"), put forward by the ruler, became one of the central ideas of imperial policy.

Historical, comparative-analytical, and source study methods were used in this study. The historical method allows for the study of religious policy during Akbar's reign in close connection with the political and social conditions of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. With the help of the comparative-analytical method, the views of Abu'l-Fazl and Badayuni, as well as the interpretations of modern historians, were compared. The source study method serves to analyze the works *Akbarnama* and *Muntaxab-ut-Tavorix* taking into account the purpose of their writing, the author's position and ideological direction.

The theoretical foundations and practical aspects of Akbar's policy are described in detail in the work "Akbnarnama" by the court historian Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak. In it, the ruler's views on the recognition of freedom of belief for each religious group are interpreted as the main principle. This policy was also sharply criticized in the work "*Muntaxab-ut-Tavorix*" by Abd al-Qadir Badayuni, a contemporary of Akbar's time. It is considered a deviation from Islamic traditions and an innovation. These contrasting approaches reveal the complex and contradictory nature of religious politics during Akbar's reign.

Abu'l-Fazl says: *"As long as the owner of the world governs it on the basis of the principle of sulh-i kul, that is, universal tolerance, each nation can live fearlessly according to its creed, and everyone can worship God in their own way."* This sentence, first of all, shows how the **legitimization** of Akbar's power was justified. Abu'l-Fazl interprets Akbar not as an ordinary political ruler, but as the "master of the world" (in Persian-political literature, this is the image of a king with divine authority). Thus, he connects Akbar's rule not with religious or sectarian boundaries, but with **universal order and justice** .

The most important concept in the quotation *sulh-i kul*. This term has a broader meaning than simple "tolerance." It signifies not only tolerance for different religions, but also the state's **religious neutrality**, and the ruler's supremacy over all beliefs. According to Abu'l-Fazl, the ruler is not a defender of any religion, but a person who ensures justice over all religions. This approach was a serious departure from the traditional idea of "unity of religion and state" in Islamic political thought. The quote "each group lives fearlessly according to its beliefs" is not accidental. This shows that during Akbar's time, religion was not only a matter of personal belief, but also a factor of political security. Abu'l-Fazl here shows religious tolerance as a **condition of social stability**. That is, if a state prioritizes one religion over another, fear, discontent, and rebellion arise in society; conversely, tolerance strengthens peace.

The idea that "everyone can perform worship in their own way" reveals the **most radical aspect of Akbar's policy**. This sentence means that the state should not interfere in the form of worship, religious rites, or doctrinal differences.

In the history of medieval Muslim states, this view was very unusual and often contradicted the systems in which Sharia prevailed. For this reason, scholars like Badayuni sharply criticized Akbar.

This quote from Abu'l-Fazl also reflects the overall spirit of *Akbarnama*. The work served not only as a historical chronicle, but also as a **political-philosophical manifesto**. In it, Akbar is depicted as a "perfect king": he is not a ruler over religions, but a figure who keeps them in balance. Peter Hardy and other contemporary historians emphasize this aspect and consider Abu'l-Fazl the main ideologue of

Akbar's rule. If we consider this quote in a broad historical context, it also reflects the real structure of Indian society during Akbar's reign. The population of the empire was predominantly Hindu, and the strict religious policy of the Muslim ruler posed a threat to political stability. Therefore, the idea of sulh-i kul, put forward by Abu'l-Fazl, arose not only as a philosophical, but also as a practical-political necessity. This need, combined with Akbar's personal intellectual pursuits, led him to a truly tolerant policy.

According to the research results, the quotation of Abu'l-Fazl is considered the most accurate and theoretically perfect source for expressing the policy of religious tolerance of Akbar Shah. In it, the ruler's power is based on the principles of divine justice, the state is shown as religiously neutral, and interfaith peace is perceived as the basis for the stability of society. For this reason, historians consider this quote the main ideological formula of Akbar's policy.

Athar Ali emphasizes a particularly important point: Akbar's tolerance was not a complete rejection or abandonment of Islam, but a **departure from Islamic orthodoxy**. That is, while maintaining himself as a Muslim ruler, Akbar strived not to elevate Islam to the level of a unified state ideology. For this reason, Athar Ali is wary of calling Akbar a "secular" ruler, but assesses him as a **ruler who consciously attempts to deviate from the Islamic state model**. This approach prevents both the over-idealization of Akbar's policy and its reduction to purely political opportunism.

Peter Hardy analyzes Akbar's religious policy from a slightly different angle, that is, **through the political-philosophical image created by Abul-Fazl**. In his work *"Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect*

Padshah," the main focus is not on Akbar himself, but on how he is depicted and idealized. According to Hardy, Abu'l-Fazl In *the Akbarnama*, while portraying Akbar as a "perfect king," elevates religious tolerance to the level of a ruler's **basic political virtue** .

Akbar's universalistic views in Peter Hardy's analysis are not accidental. Abu'l-Fazl describes Akbar as a person who stood above all religions, balanced them, and represented divine justice. According to Hardy, this depiction served to connect Akbar's power not only with political power but also with **moral and cosmic order** . Therefore, religious tolerance here manifests itself more **as a means of legitimizing power** than personal beliefs.

Hardy takes a critical approach to the texts of Abu'l-Fazl, emphasizing that they should be read not as a direct reflection of historical reality, but **as an ideologized political text** . So, for Hardy, however real Akbar's tolerance may be, we know it mainly through the conceptual framework created by Abul-Fazl. This places a responsibility on the historian to carefully interpret the source.

An important conclusion can be drawn from a comparative analysis of the approaches of both historians. Athar Ali pays more attention to the **internal content and real practice** of Akbar's policy, while Peter Hardy analyzes the **ideological expression and palace narrative** of this policy. While for Athar Ali sulh-i kul is Akbar's conscious choice, for Hardy it is the central concept in the creation of the image of a perfect ruler by Abul-Fazl.

At the same time, both scientists agreed on one issue. Akbar Shah made religious tolerance not a random element of state governance, but a **central pillar**. However, while Athar Ali links this pillar to the

intellectual evolution of a historical figure, Peter Hardy interprets it as a political-philosophical construction.

In general, the analyses of Athar Ali and Peter Hardy do not contradict each other, but rather complement each other. Through their works, Akbar's religious tolerance is manifested not only as a historical phenomenon, but also as a complex intellectual, political, and ideological process. For this very reason, the personality of Akbar Shah and his *peaceful* politics remain relevant in modern historiography.

Abd al-Qadir Badayuni's *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* work is considered one of the most important contrastive sources in **illuminating Akbar's religious policy**. Although Badayuni lived and worked in the court of Akbar, he approaches the ruler's policy of religious tolerance with sharp and open criticism. His main objection is that Akbar deviated from traditional Islamic norms and directed the ruler's duty towards limiting Sharia rather than protecting it. For Badayuni, the ruler was primarily meant to be a guardian of Islam, while Akbar consciously pushed this duty to the background.

Badayuni especially considers the initiative of Din-i Ilahi as an innovation, that is, an innovation, which is not permitted from the point of view of Islam. In his view, Akbar attempted to subordinate religion to the ruler's will by combining elements from different religions. In Badayuni's view, this was dangerous not only from a religious, but also from a moral point of view. At the same time, he sharply criticizes the decline in the status of ulema during Akbar's reign, the exclusion of religious scholars from political processes, and the prioritization of the ruler's personal decisions over religious judgments.

Din-i Ilahi One of the most controversial issues in Akbar's politics, it was sharply criticized by Badayuni. However, in modern historiography, it is interpreted not as an independent religion, but as a system of moral and political loyalty. Through this initiative, Akbar aimed to connect the palace elite to the ruler's personality rather than merging religious beliefs. Religion-i Ilahi is not widespread among the general population, is not obligatory, and is not declared an official state religion. In this respect, it is a logical continuation of the sulh-i-kul policy, expressing the ruler's striving for political, not religious, centralization. While in Badayuni's criticism this initiative is regarded as heresy, modern historians view it as Akbar's experiment aimed at strengthening the power of the ruler in a multicultural society.

The historical significance of Badayuni's criticism is that it does not present Akbar's policies as a one-sided ideal model. Through his work, we learn that the policy of religious tolerance during Akbar's reign was not supported by everyone, and this policy caused serious contradictions and discontent within society. In this respect, Badayuni maintains the balance of the historical landscape as the "inner voice of opposition" of Akbar's policy. If he had relied solely on court historians like Abul-Fazl, Akbar's personality could have been over-idealized; And Badayuni balances this image.

Modern historiography analyzes Akbar's policy not according to Badayuni's religious criteria, but based on the medieval political and social context. Scholars such as Athar Ali, Peter Hardy, Azfar Moin consider Akbar's policy of religious tolerance a progressive phenomenon for his time. In their opinion, sulh-i kul was not a change in religious

doctrine or a denial of Islam, but a political and philosophical model of governance aimed at protecting the state from religious conflicts.

Modern historians are cautious in calling Akbar a "secular ruler" in full, but interpret him as a person who has moved away from the traditional model of a religious state, not limiting the power of the ruler to only one religion.

Secularism is not understood here in the modern sense; it refers to Akbar's striving for religious neutrality, his attempt to see the state as a common space for all beliefs. For this reason, modern historiography evaluates Akbar not as an absolute religious or irreligious ruler, but **as a historical figure who created a new political model for governing a multi-religious society..**

Although Badayuni's criticism and modern historiographical evaluation seem to contradict each other, in reality they complement each other. While Badayuni reveals the religious consequences of Akbar's policies from within, modern historians explain the broader historical significance of this policy. As a result, Akbar's religious tolerance is seen not only as a praiseworthy ideal, not only as a heresy, but also as a political experience, a product of complex, contradictory, and historical conditions. It is precisely this complexity that makes Akbar's personality important and controversial in history.

The analysis shows that the policy of religious tolerance pursued by Akbar Shah was a conscious and systematic state policy, formed on the basis of the multi-religious and multicultural social structure of the Mughal Empire. Abandoning religious coercion, granting freedom of worship to representatives of different faiths, and involving them in state

governance were important factors in ensuring the stability of the empire.

The research results also prove that Akbar's policy was not universally accepted in his time. Abd al-Qadir Badayuni's critical views show that the policy of religious tolerance caused heated debates within the empire and was assessed by a segment of the clergy as a deviation from Islamic norms. This means that it is necessary not to idealize Akbar's policy, but to analyze it in conjunction with historical reality and internal contradictions.

Thus, sulh-i kul is not a religious reform, but a model of political theology. It was not aimed at denying Islam or creating a new religion, but at creating a mechanism for governing a multi-religious society by prioritizing the power of the ruler over religious contradictions. Through this model, Akbar sought to present the ruler as a source of justice above all beliefs, without limiting the state to a particular religion. Therefore, sulh-i kul was not a personal tolerance, but a conscious and systematic political concept aimed at ensuring the stability of the empire.

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this initiative is regarded as heresy, modern historians view it as Akbar's experiment aimed at strengthening the power of the ruler in a multi-religious society. Akbar understood that the unity of two opposing Indians and Muslims in society, necessary for the prosperity of the empire, could only be achieved through spiritual rapprochement.

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