

Every day 3 to 4,000 active builders and strong-armed labourers carried on the work. From the foundations to the battlements, the fortress was composed of hewn stones, each of which was polished like a world-revealing mirror, and was ruddy as the cheek of fortune. And they were so joined together that the end of a hair could not find a place between them. This sublime fortress ... was completed with its battlements, breastwork, and its loop-holes ... in the space of eight years under the faithful superintendence of Musim Khan Mir Barr u Bahr.

The massive red fortress contained over five hundred buildings when completed. Still standing today it "was to be stable like the foundation of the domination of the sublime family and permanent like the pillars of its fortunes."¹³

Over the next two decades, Akbar, as part of his grand strategy, erected two other huge palace fortresses. Allahabad (formerly the Hindu city of Prayag), guarded the conjunction of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in the eastern Gangetic plain. Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, was the first line of defense against an assault over the northwest passes from Afghanistan or Central Asia – the classic invasion route. These three large fortress and palace complexes, defended by heavy cannon, were virtually impregnable to direct assault. The emperor further anchored this defensive line by building a strongly defended castle (begun 1570) at Ajmer, the gateway to the Rajasthan corridor. He strengthened the strategically placed frontier strongholds in the northwest at Attock and Rohtas on the Indus. In the east the bastion of Rohtas in Bihar stood guard.

The Lahore, Agra, Allahabad, Ajmer quadrilateral formed a protective framework for Mughal imperial power. The great walls of these bastions secured growing hoards of imperial treasure and massive arsenals, and provided ultimate safety for the person of the emperor and his court and household. Fortress commanders, who received their appointments directly from the emperor, were responsible directly to the imperial court. To ensure their autonomy the custom grew up of assigning revenues from those villages and lands surrounding each fortress to meet the needs of the garrison. The Mughals occupied and garrisoned many other famous strongholds as they expanded, including Gwalior, and the great forts of Rajasthan – Chitor, Ranthambor and Mirtha – as well as Asirgarh (near Burhanpur) and the massive hill forts of the Deccan provinces. Nevertheless, imperial security rested on the great strongholds in Hindustan – the very center of the empire.

¹³ Ibid., p. 372.

THE NEW EMPIRE

In 1571 Akbar moved twenty-six miles from Agra to Fatehpur Sikri, a newly built city that would be his capital until 1585. During his fifteen year residence at Fatehpur Sikri Akbar directed major conquests and surmounted his most dangerous political crisis. The new city was also the site of significant organizational and administrative initiatives – measures that put an indelible stamp upon the Mughal imperial system. Brilliant innovations in land revenue, coinage, military organization, and provincial administration emerged from the Fatehpur Sikri years.

Why Fatehpur Sikri in preference to the great Indo-Muslim political capitals like Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and Jaunpur? Why remove to the village of Sikri at a hard day's march from Agra? Agra and Fatehpur Sikri were in reality joint capitals. For security the bulk of the imperial treasure hoards as well as arsenals and other reserves were kept in Agra fort. The court, harem, and treasury could be quickly removed to Agra for safety.²

The newly constructed city bore a similarity to the movable imperial encampment also designed by Akbar. Fatehpur Sikri was an urban form in transition between camp and imperial metropolis. Akbar recreated his camp in stone within the boundaries of Fatehpur Sikri. The facades of the buildings strongly resembled the great wood and canvas structures erected in the imperial encampment. Like the camp, the capital gave the Mughal emperor a disciplined, controlled organism from which to write, rehearse, and play out the drama of imperial rule.

Fatehpur Sikri was also a refuge, a courtly city whose architecture and public spaces were very much an expression of the young ruler's passion for building and design. Here Akbar satisfied those creative, aesthetic impulses typical of the Timurids. Music was already well established under Tansen's leadership. In addition painting, calligra-

¹ For a full treatment of Fatehpur Sikri see Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, eds., *Fatehpur Sikri* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1987).

² Irfan Habib, "The Economic and Social Setting," in Brand and Lowry, *Fatehpur Sikri*, p. 80.

phy, poetry, history, comparative religion, architecture all flourished in an urbane and sophisticated setting.

AN ISLAMIC CITY

Akbar employed the design and construction of Fatehpur Sikri to symbolize, in those early years, the regime's Islamic foundation. Two nested sacred buildings dominated the city. The great congregational mosque and the tomb (*dargah*) of a widely revered and worshipped Sufi saint were the binary institutions of legal and mystic Indian Islam. The elegant marble tomb housed the remains of Shaikh Salim Chishti (d. 1571) from whom the young ruler frequently sought spiritual advice. Shaikh Salim's blessing and prophecy regarding the birth of Akbar's long-awaited male heir, Sultan Salim, caused the emperor to locate his new capital at the village of Sikri. By placing Shaikh Salim's tomb inside the great mosque, Akbar was able to draw upon the palpable sanctity adhering to it and assimilate this to his own authority.

The emperor encouraged the sons and grandsons of Shaikh Salim to enlist as high-ranking officers in the imperial service rather than to remain at the shrine as heirs to their familial tradition. Incorporation of the Chishti mystical aura into Fatehpur Sikri and its eventual subordination to the Emperor was an essential part of the religiosity Akbar claimed for the regime. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Akbar made his appeal cloaked in the symbols of the broadest, most appealing, form of Sufi devotionism possible. The Chishtis were esteemed for their austerity and rejection of secular power and influence. It is noteworthy that the young emperor did not choose to so identify himself with the Naqshbandis of Northern India despite his family's long association with that orthodox Central Asian order.

Akbar juxtaposed this appeal with an unambiguous affirmation of the orthodox Muslim foundations of his regime. The great congregational mosque at Fatehpur Sikri is the largest and certainly the dominant building in the city. For nearly a decade after its erection the emperor took an active interest in the operation of the mosque. His devotional acts – under the tutelage of Shaikh Abdul Nabi, the chief jurist of the empire – included sweeping the floor of the mosque and acting as prayer leader.

During this period Akbar gave further evidence of Islamic piety by actively organizing and sponsoring an official pilgrimage to Mecca

each year. After 1574 the conquest of Gujarat permitted direct access to the Holy Cities from the west coast port of Surat across the Arabian Sea to Jiddah. The emperor enlarged the pious trust (*waqf*) established by the last Sultan of Gujarat which sent the revenues of several coastal villages as donations to Mecca and Medina. In 1576 the first Mughal pilgrim caravan, under the command of a specially appointed Mughal officer known as the Mir Haj, left Agra for Surat port. There a special pilgrim ship, the *Ilahi* waited. All expenses were paid entirely by the emperor who also sent large sums for charity and several thousand honorific robes of honor for the pious. The first party included Gulbadan Begam, Akbar's aunt, the Empress Salima Sultan Begam and other high-born women. Akbar himself was dissuaded from travelling only by the pleas of Abul Fazl.³

The emperor further underscored his piety by travelling on foot from Fatehpur Sikri on an annual royal pilgrimage to the tomb of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti at Ajmer. Regular visits to Ajmer, the strategic site for imperial dominance over Rajasthan, served also to remind the Rajputs of Timurid power. At the beginning of his nineteenth regnal year:⁴

[Akbar] took the generous-hearted and noble minded prince Sultan Salim, with himself for the circumambulation of the auspicious and heavenly illuminated tomb at Ajmer. When the eye of that fortunate, God-gifted and successful prince fell on the tomb of the great Khwaja, he, following the example of his illustrious father, bowed with great humility to the noble tomb and sacred threshold, and performed the ceremony of circumambulation, and the duty of pilgrimage.

Immediately thereafter followed the ceremony of weighing both ruler and prince against gold and silver and other precious commodities.

We cannot find a clearer statement of the spiritual reference point sought by Akbar for his rule than in this episode. In addition to his own prostration and public worship at the tomb the emperor proclaimed his son Salim's devotion as well. These recurring ceremonies acted out the same devotional message expressed in stone within Fatehpur Sikri. Royal heirs, royal victory, and royal authority flowed from devotion to the Chishti saints.

³ N. R. Farooqi, "Mughal-Ottoman Relations: A Study of Political and Diplomatic Relations Between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986), pp. 191-196.

⁴ Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, English translation by B. De and Bani Prashad, (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 3 vols., 1927-39) II, 429.

NEW CONQUESTS

Akbar's new capital became headquarters for a new phase of expansion southwest toward Gujarat and the Arabian Sea. The appeal of Gujarat to Akbar, as it was to his father Humayun before him, is not difficult to discern. The coastal region possessed areas of rich agricultural production in its central plain; an impressive output of textiles and other industrial goods; and the busiest seaports of the Indian subcontinent. To link this maritime kingdom with the massive resources of the Indo-Gangetic plain would greatly strengthen Akbar's growing empire.

Akbar could take advantage of Gujarat's political troubles. A weak king, Muzaffar Shah III, had lost control of his kingdom to several parties of Muslim nobles engaged in continuing conflict. The Timurid Mirzas, having found refuge in Gujarat in the past several years, had seized power in the southern portion of the kingdom. The opportunity to put a final end to the sedition of these rebels was appealing. The threat of Christian intervention by sea also existed. The Portuguese in Goa, who already dominated sea traffic in the Arabian Sea, might try to seize the west coast ports if political fragmentation continued. When a Habshi (Abyssinian) noble who headed one of the losing factions invited Akbar to intervene and annex the kingdom, the emperor did not hesitate.

In July, 1572, Akbar occupied Ahmadabad, the capital, and other northern cities and was proclaimed the lawful sovereign of Gujarat in the Friday prayers. The puppet king, Muzaffar Shah, submitted readily as did virtually all the Muslim nobles of the north. By January, 1573, Akbar had driven out the Mirzas who, after offering only token resistance, fled to refuge in the Deccan. The emperor left the new Mughal province in the hands of an imperial governor and returned to Fatehpur Sikri.

Suddenly, within three months, the nobles of Gujarat, disgruntled by their exclusion from imperial service, joined together in an attempt to drive the Mughals out of the kingdom. Husain Mirza retook Cambay, Broach, and Surat, the major ports. Afghan nobles supported by the Rajput ruler of Idar were advancing on the Mughal governor at Ahmadabad. Akbar responded immediately to this crisis by mustering a stripped-down 3,000 man field army. Mounted on the swiftest female camels he and his followers covered the 800 kilometers to Ahmadabad

in just eleven days — on a route that caravans required two months to traverse. Akbar's smaller imperial army crushed the rebellion by soundly defeating 15,000 rebels in a bloody cavalry engagement. The victorious emperor, reassured by the death or flight of the rebel leaders, returned to Fatehpur Sikri forty-three days after his departure. The reconquest of Gujarat was the most dramatic episode of Akbar's long career. Speed, decisiveness, and luck were with him. His reputation for invincibility, already rising, swelled even further.

THE DRIVE TO THE EAST: BIHAR AND BENGAL

The Timurid ruler's second major objective lay in Bihar and Bengal where nominally tributary Afghan rulers and nobles still controlled the riverine domains of northeastern India. Akbar could not afford to leave his long-standing enemies, the Afghans, in power in an area so productive and strategic. In 1574, the young Sultan of Bengal, Daud Karrani, repudiated Akbar's nominal sovereignty by having his own name and titles read in the Friday prayers. After a Bengali raid into Mughal territory, Akbar himself led his armies in a difficult siege and assault of the Afghan-held fortress at Patna. The Afghan armies retreated before the Mughal onslaught until Daud was forced to take refuge in Orissa. Akbar returned to Fatehpur Sikri and left command of his armies in the east to his celebrated confidant and revenue minister, Todar Mal.

Todar Mal, commanding the Mughal army in the east, pursued the Afghan king until he forced a battle at Tukarori, near Midnapur. A ferocious elephant charge by the Afghans would have nearly destroyed the Mughal army had not Todar Mal held firm and rallied the left wing. This victory permitted Akbar to formally annex Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa to the Mughal empire, but Daud remained at large, although nominally a Mughal fief holder with lands in Orissa. When the Mughal troops stationed in Bengal suffered epidemic disease and retreated from Bengal, Daud reasserted his control. In 1576 a relief force sent under the command of Khan Jahan, governor of the Punjab, forced a decisive battle at Rajmahal where the Afghans were routed. Daud was finally captured and killed.

Continuing warfare and reverses followed the hard-won Mughal victory in 1576. Bengal remained a region controlled by Afghan nobles and Hindu rajas who deeply resented the Mughal military occupation.

Dwindling numbers of bitter Afghan commanders fought rear-guard actions against the superior Mughal armies. Finally, by the late 1580s virtually all overt resistance ended. Akbar sent Raja Man Singh, one of his most capable Rajput nobles, to set up a regular system of imperial administration in Bengal and Orissa.

CHANGING ROYAL ATTITUDES

The overall cultural and religious climate of sixteenth century India was more open and tolerant of change. Mughal expansion occurred as Indian society and culture was experiencing a richly creative phase. Several centuries of dominant Indo-Muslim power had forced Hindu institutions to adapt to that reality by strengthening popular devotional expression. Generations of Muslim life in north India and the Deccan had gradually shaped accommodation and sympathy to Indian society and even to Hinduism.

In both Hinduism and Islam many mystics, scholars, intellectuals, and more ordinary folk were actively seeking some form of synthesis. Kabir and other poet-saints in the popular devotional *bhakti* tradition of Hinduism offered a middle ground where Ram/Rahim could be worshipped freely in a rejection of the formalism of both religions. Others such as Daud Dayal (1544-1603) shared devotional beliefs and practices with sympathetic Sufis. An avowedly synthetic movement led by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) began in the Punjab. In folk culture there was substantial sharing of customs, ceremonies, and beliefs between ordinary Muslims and Hindus. Such practices as the worship of the smallpox goddess Sitla were often practiced as ardently by Muslims as Hindus in the countryside.

Throughout his residence in Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar engaged in a systematic study and discussion of comparative theology and religion. In 1575, he constructed a large hall to house debates in religion and theology. His personal inquiry into religion grew out of his own disquiet and ongoing spiritual quest. The emperor suffered from a recurring spiritual and personal crisis. At times he was subject to trances which were probably a mild form of epilepsy. Signs of chronic depression were also reported by observers close to him.

At first the debates were confined to issues of Islamic theology, but later, after 1579, participants included learned Jains, Hindu saints, and

Parsi priests. In 1580 the emperor enrolled two Jesuit priests, Aquaviva and Monserrate, who had travelled from Goa at Akbar's invitation to instruct him and his entourage in Christianity.

Akbar's active intellectual role is the more remarkable because he was illiterate. Although brought up in a highly literate family culture, at least four tutors tried and failed to teach the young prince to read. His son Salim, later Jahangir, commented:⁵

My father always associated with the learned of every creed and religion, especially with the Pandits and the learned of India, and although he was illiterate, so much became clear to him through constant intercourse with the learned and wise ... that no one knew him to be illiterate, and he was so acquainted with the niceties of verse and prose compositions that his deficiency was not thought of.

A recent analysis suggests that Akbar was probably dyslexic and thus physically unable to read.⁶ Because he was deeply interested in the contents of manuscripts, Akbar developed the practice of having himself read to daily. Possibly because of his affliction he possessed a truly remarkable memory.

Father Monserrate gives a vivid picture of a series of bitter disputations with the ulema at the Mughal court. On these occasions, from the Jesuit viewpoint at least, Akbar was noticeably sympathetic to the Christian point of view and impatient with the inability of the Muslim theologians to argue effectively against them.⁷ As his inquiries proceeded Akbar seems to have become less and less enchanted with orthodox Islam and its defenders. His own religious views matured as he interrogated holy men; listened to heated religious disputes; and learned the doctrines of each sect. Increasingly, Akbar moved away from his former devotion to Islam and toward a self-conceived eclectic form of worship focused on light and the sun. In so doing he became more tolerant of non-Muslim practices and less inclined to insist on rigorous enforcement of discriminatory practices aimed at non-Muslims.

⁵ Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (Delhi, 2 vols. in one, reprint edition, 1968), translated by A. Rogers and edited by H. Beveridge, 1, 33.

⁶ Ellen Smart, "Akbar, Illiterate Genius," *Kaladarshana* (1981), pp. 99-107.

⁷ Monserrate, Antonio, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J., On his Journey to the Court of Akbar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), translated by J. S. Hoyland, annotated by S. N. Banerjee, pp. 50-51.

CROWN VERSUS ULEMA

The young Timurid monarch presided over a predominantly non-Muslim society. By the mid-sixteenth century it was clear that no reasonable prospect existed for large-scale conversion of large numbers of Hindus to Islam. Already deeply immersed in his own speculative inquiries, Akbar faced a familiar political problem: how could he maintain his status as a Muslim ruler worthy of support by the faithful without engaging in such harsh and repressive measures against his Hindu subjects that they were disaffected and rebellious? More importantly, how to elicit active, as opposed to merely passive, political support from non-Muslims? Was the test for full political participation in the imperial system to be the Islamic profession of faith, or could Akbar open a broader, more flexible, notion of the political community of early modern India?

As Akbar's piety and reverence for the leading imperial jurists of the day declined, tension between him and the men learned in the sacred law of Islam, the ulema, grew into a full-blown political conflict. Partly as a result of this struggle, Akbar formulated a new, broad-based political appeal centered on a radically new dynastic ideology. At Fatehpur Sikri the free-thinking emperor and his clutch of radical advisers devised a coherent political doctrine for the empire.

Conflict between the ulema and Akbar fell into several areas. First, the learned men of Islam looked to the Timurid prince to display those qualities of piety and devotion that would serve as a model for the rest of his subjects. Akbar must do all in his power to ensure that Muslims could live a godly life in conformity with the Sharia in a land that could truly be called the *Dar-al-Islam*. The piety and zealotry of the ruler, whose every statement and action was scrutinized and reported daily, determined the behavior of his officers and set the tone of the relationship between Islam and the state in Mughal India.

Linked with the above was the question of active leadership and patronage. Would Akbar furnish Muslim theologians and jurists with jobs and grants? The ulema depended upon the state to fund, organize, and manage the mosques, charitable trusts, and seminaries as well as the annual pilgrimage to the Holy Cities. The state relied upon the ulema to staff its law courts and to exercise social and moral leadership in local Islamic communities.

The young emperor became increasingly unsympathetic toward

worldly ulema. Most Mughal theologians and jurists were neither speculative intellectuals nor serious religious thinkers. Many were corrupt and worldly. Maulana Abdullah, the chief patronage officer (*sadr*) of the empire, possessed a large estate near Lahore. He avoided paying the one-fortieth obligatory charitable tax on property levied on Muslims each year (*zakat*) by the device of assigning the estates to his wife's ownership for a part of each year when the tax came due. When Akbar discovered this deception he was unimpressed by the piety or sincerity of one of his leading ulema.

As his inquiries progressed, Akbar discovered that Muslim learned men held a large proportion of the lands of the empire as tax-exempt religious grants. Many grants were obtained illegally or fraudulently. Large numbers of these holdings, originally dispensed for the lifetime of the beneficiary, had been allowed to transfer illegally to heirs. Furthermore, a sizable number of pious grant-holders were Afghans who had obtained their holdings from the Sur or the Lodi rulers. This was especially true in the Punjab where they formed a majority of grant-holders.

By 1578 Akbar was confident enough to undertake a series of sweeping reforms. He ordered a wholesale inspection and verification of titles for all pious land grants. All those that could not be authenticated were immediately resumed. Thereafter he sharply constricted the area and number of grants and strictly prohibited the practice of unchallenged inheritance. Heirs had to apply for the benefice; their request might be granted or more likely not. But the most bitter blow was to dispense pious grants of land to learned and religious men of all religions — not just Islam. Yogis living in monasteries (*maths*) received lands. Zoroastrian divines (*Parsis*) obtained lands. Even Brahmin priests enjoyed Akbar's largess.

A second set of issues emerged from tension between freethinking and orthodoxy in medieval Islamic India. The most narrowly fundamental of Islamic orthodox leaders in Akbar's reign shared the view that the Sharia must be rigorously enforced. Flexibility or concessions were weaknesses to be avoided. All those who might be suspected of heresy were to be brutally suppressed. For example, many Sufis or mystics tended to express views in their trances or later recollections of these states that were close to, if not, monist. Most Sufi masters were therefore suspect. Heterodox Shia, whether of the Persian branch or the Ismailis found in the coastal cities of Gujarat, were targets for persecution.

Muslims in India were subject to rising chiliastic emotions as the Islamic millennium – the thousandth year of the Hijra beginning September 27, 1592 – drew closer. A tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that he would only remain in his grave a thousand years and return as the *Mahdi* gained currency. During the fifteenth century a heretical sect based on this tradition emerged. The founder, Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpur (b. 1443) who claimed to be the Mahdi, won large numbers of disciples and followers during his lifetime. Mahdawis, as they were known, were especially strong in Gujarat and western India and seemed to have a special appeal to Afghans of varying stations in life. Sayyid Muhammad rejected the legalism and formalism of the contemporary ulema and of the four schools of law. Instead he prescribed ardent devotion, renunciation, and meditation for his followers. Despite recurring persecution by orthodox ulema, Sayyid Muhammad and his sons and other successors continued to preach and found new circles of followers in Gujarat, Sind, and northern India.⁸

Akbar, who came in direct contact with Mahdawis after his conquest of Gujarat, did not persecute either leaders or followers of this heretical sect. Instead he permitted the Mahdawi saints to explain and defend their doctrines in religious discussions held at court in Fatehpur Sikri.

Third, citing Sharia provisions for treatment of *dhimmis*, the ulema expected to exert direct influence over official policies toward the non-Muslim majority. Faced with the plasticity and resilience of Hinduism, the Mughal ulema rightly feared blurring of boundaries and loss of the community's identity and strength. Therefore, doctrinal purity demanded harsh treatment for idolaters in all spheres of life.

Akbar's conflicts on this question with the Muslim religious establishment began early. In 1563 the young emperor abolished the practice of collecting a heavy tax from Hindu pilgrims when they gathered on festival occasions. In contravention of the Sharia, the emperor also granted non-Muslims permission to repair aging temples or to build new structures. In another controversial measure orders were issued that former Hindus who had been forcibly converted to Islam should be allowed to apostasize and escape the death penalty of the Sharia. He prohibited enslavement of war captives and the common practice of involuntary conversion of non-Muslim slaves.

⁸ S. A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries* (Agra, 1965), pp. 68–134. See also K. A. Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 42–51.

The most sweeping policy change, which had a direct impact on nearly all Hindus, occurred in 1579.⁹ Akbar abolished the graduated property tax levied exclusively on non-Muslims, the *jizya*. This was an annual tax imposed on the property of individual non-Muslims, who were legally classified as *dhimmis* or client groups tolerated and protected by Muslim rulers. State officers, usually ulema, collected sums based upon the wealth or possessions of the individual ratepayer. Only the indigent were exempted from payment. The regressive scale placed a real burden on the poorest taxpayers who paid an annual sum equivalent to a month's wages for an unskilled urban laborer.

The symbolic value of this measure was very great. The *jizya* defined the status and public obligations of non-Muslims protected by the Islamic community. Payment entitled *dhimmis* to a peaceful existence under state protection and exempted them from military service. Terminating this tax implied that the unequal compact between Muslims and non-Muslims was also abolished – hence Akbar's action was bitterly resented by orthodox Muslims.

Other symbolic statements aimed at the political inclusion of non-Muslims. Emperor and courtiers celebrated the most important Hindu festivals such as Diwali, the festival of lights. The emperor adopted the Hindu custom of giving alms to the poor by having himself weighed against gold, silver, grains, and other commodities. Once or twice a year on auspicious dates the proceeds of these ceremonies were distributed to the destitute and needy. An especially dramatic political statement was employment of Rajputs and other high-caste Hindus in critical military/administrative roles (see above). Actions such as these touched some of the deepest sensibilities of members of the Muslim community.

Strains in the relationship between Akbar and the Muslim religious elite came to the fore in 1578. In that year the chief imperial *qazi*, Abdul Nabi, tried a Brahmin accused of insulting the name of Muhammad – a capital offense under the Sharia. Finding him guilty, the imperial *qazi* sentenced the priest to death. Abdul Nabi carried out the sentence even in the face of Akbar's express disapproval.

Finally, in 1579, Akbar assumed sweeping powers in matters of Islamic doctrine. An imperial edict publicly stated the Mughal emperor's prerogative to be the supreme arbiter of religious affairs within his

⁹ Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, pp. 107–108. Nizami concludes that mention of abolition of the *jizya* earlier in 1564 by Abul Fazl in the *Akbar-Nama* is erroneous.

realm – above the body of Muslim religious scholars and jurists. In this edict Akbar stated that if leading scholars disagreed on a point of religious law, the Timurid ruler would decide which opinion would be authoritative and binding upon all Muslims. The edict also sought to claim for Akbar authority as *Khalifa* in preference to the Ottoman Sultan who had claimed that title since seizing control of the Holy Cities in 1517.¹⁰ Under heavy pressure from the throne, the chief judge, the imperial *sadr*, and several other eminent scholars signed the document before it was published. The only person who signed willingly was Shaikh Mubarak, a distinguished liberal theologian. The declaration was a stunning defeat for the powerful religious hierarchy of the empire.

THE REVOLT OF 1579–1580

Embittered and humiliated, the imperial *qazi* and *sadr* took sanctuary in a mosque, and claimed publicly that they had been coerced into signing. Simultaneously a truculent group of imperial officers stationed in the eastern provinces of Bihar and Bengal went into rebellion. Never all that happy with Mughal domination, these fiercely orthodox officers, who counted many Afghans among them, were upset by the recent decree. They were also provoked by tightening administrative controls over the army. A new order commanded that all cavalymen bring to the muster mounts meeting imperial specifications for size and quality. Once inspected and approved the mounts were to be certified by branding with an imperial mark. This would mean a considerable expense for those commanders whose mounts were deficient.

Mughal nobles of the Central Asian Qaqshals, a Turkish tribal group, led the Bengal rebels. They crossed the Ganges, joined with the Bihar nobles, and defeated the remaining Mughal loyalists in open battle. They captured and killed Shah Muzaffar, the governor of Bengal. The rebel leaders then arranged for a prayer leader to pronounce the name of Mirza Muhammad Hakim of Kabul as the legitimate Muslim ruler of the empire in the Friday congregational prayers. At the same time, the Islamic judge in the city of Jaunpur in the eastern Gangetic plain issued a ruling (*fatwa*) requested by the nobles that enjoined all good Muslims to rise in revolt against Akbar. According to this judgment, the emperor had become an infidel who was hostile to orthodox Islam and should be deposed in favor of his

¹⁰ Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, pp. 177–178.

half-brother, the king of Kabul. The Afghan aristocracy of Bengal seized this opportunity to join the rebels and fight the Timurid conqueror. Their ongoing resistance thus fused with and gained a new impetus from the revolt of the imperial officers in the east.

Akbar sent a relief army to Bihar under the command of Raja Todar Mal, the imperial financier. The loyalist forces retook Bihar's major forts and cities. He himself brought a large well-equipped army to Kabul and deposed his half-brother. This effectively ended the threat posed by Mirza Muhammad Hakim's claim to the throne. Harsh punitive measures against the Muslim jurists and theologians who had supported the rebels quieted the ideological challenge. Nevertheless, five years elapsed before Mughal field generals were able to reassert their control over west Bengal and put the remaining rebels and their Afghan allies into flight.

At Agra the emperor put a definitive end to further religious opposition by appointing Shaikh Abdul Nabi and Malauna Abdulla as joint leaders of the Haj caravan for 1579. They were to remain in exile at Mecca in order to oversee the orderly distribution of Timurid largess every year. One additional caravan set out for the Hijaz in 1580, but thereafter Akbar, despite a written promise to the Sharif of Mecca, sent no further caravans from India. In this area, as in many others, Akbar's ardent profession of orthodoxy had waned.

AKBAR AS MILITARY COMMANDER

Assigned to tutor Prince Murad, Akbar's second son, the Jesuit priest, Father Antonio Monserrate became a part of the imperial household after his arrival. Present during the lengthy march to Kabul in 1581 he had an unusual opportunity to observe the emperor during a crisis.¹¹ In his extended Latin report sent back to Rome, Monserrate described and evaluated Akbar's qualities as a war leader.

When news arrived of the revolt in the east and his brother's invasion of the Punjab, Akbar left his mother in charge at Fatehpur Sikri with a garrison of 12,000 cavalry. He sent Raja Todar Mal at the head of a large army to quell the rebellion in Bihar and Bengal. In February, 1581 the emperor "gave instructions for a great quantity of gold and silver and of other stores" to be loaded on camels and elephants, selected a

¹¹ Monserrate, Antonio, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. On his Journey to the Court of Akbar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), translated by J. S. Hoyland; annotated by S. N. Banerjee, p. 90.

few of his principal wives and his other daughters, and moved to his "immense white pavilion" in the great camp set up four miles outside the city.¹² The symmetry and disciplined order of the massive encampment "made in the traditional Mongol style" thoroughly impressed Monserrate.¹³

The ancient custom is that the royal pavilion ... should be placed in a pleasant open space, if such can be found. On the right are the tents of the King's eldest son and his attendant nobles; these are placed next to the royal pavilion. On the left are those of the second son and his attendants. ... the most important nobles ... have their quarters to the right and left in the second line, next to the King's pavilion. Behind these come the rest of the troops in tents clustered as closely as possible round their own officers. To avoid crowding and confusion they are divided into messes, each with its own location. A separate bazaar is established for the King and each of the princes and the great nobles. ... Those of the King and the princes are very large and very well-stocked, not only with stores of grain and other provisions, but also with all sorts of merchandise, so that these bazaars seem to belong to some wealthy city instead of to a camp. They are always made on one plan, so that anyone who has spent a few days in camp knows his way about the bazaars as well as he does the streets of his own city ... During the advance for a campaign the artillery is grouped together in front of the camp, opposite the entrance to the royal quarters, in the broadest part of the open ground.

At the center of this great assemblage "every night a flaming torch [was] erected on the top of a tall mast, to act as a guide for stragglers."¹⁴ Despite its size the Mughal encampment was designed to be transported with the entire army on march. The emperor possessed two identical pavilions "which are employed for alternate marches, one being carried on ahead, while he occupies the other."¹⁵

Similar descriptions of the Great Mughal's encampment became a staple for later observers.¹⁶ Estimates of the size of the imperial camp frequently went as high as 100,000 persons. Precisely replicated at site after site, this huge movable city was visible testimony to the authority and power of the emperor. In this fashion at least, the Turco-Mongol heritage continued to wield a powerful influence over Akbar and his successors.

The discipline and organization of the Mughal army was as

¹² Ibid., p. 75. ¹³ Ibid., pp. 75-76. ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 76. ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶ M. A. Ansari, "The Encampment of the Great Mughals" in *Islamic Culture*, 37 (1963), 15-24. N. Manucci, *Storia de Mogor or Mughal India* (Calcutta, 4 vols., 1907-8), translated by William Irvine, II, 62-80.

impressive as that of the imperial camp. For this campaign Akbar had mustered 50,000 cavalry, 500 war elephants, and "an almost countless number of infantry."¹⁷ The Jesuit was quick to notice the heterogeneity of the cavalry. Mughal horsemen ranged from Rajputs who typically dismounted their small horses to fight, to Central Asian Turks and Persians who "are most dangerous when they seem to be flying in headlong riot [retreat]."¹⁸ His artillery consisted only of twenty-eight field guns too small for siege work. These were always parked in front of the king's pavilion at each stop.

Marching in a crescent formation with the emperor at the head, the army soon "extended over the breadth of a mile and a half, covering the fields and filling the woods."¹⁹ Despite its size this vast assemblage was kept well supplied and watered. Akbar directed the army toward the foot of the mountains to best afford access to streams for water. Monserrate "was astonished by the cheapness of grain amongst so great a multitude." Royal agents combed the countryside to purchase provisions and to encourage traders to come to the travelling bazaars. Beyond the imperial boundary the emperor sent "heralds" to the petty chiefs and kings along the route with publicly proclaimed promises and threats. If they did not take up arms against the Mughals they would suffer no harm and would be amply rewarded when he returned from his certain victory. If they brought supplies to the camp these could be sold freely, without paying taxes. However, if these local rulers disobeyed him they would be severely punished. Overawed by the size of the army and gratified by Akbar's generosity, all obeyed the emperor "out of self-interest."²⁰

Beyond the imperial frontier Akbar sent out 300 scouts who were posted at a distance of eighteen miles from the army in every direction. When approaching narrow defiles the emperor sent out outposts "all around." Consequently, "the army, when on the march, spread itself as freely abroad, in the search for shade and water, and slept as securely at night, as if it had been in its own country."²¹ Sappers and miners went on ahead to level roads and to build temporary boat bridges for river crossings. Strict rules forced men and animals to cross the bridges in single file to prevent disaster in mid-span.

Monserrate illustrates Akbar's command of his troops by describing his reaction to an order disobeyed. An officer was sent north along the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 85. ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79. ²⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

²¹ Ibid., p. 82.

Indus river bank to a particular spot to see if the river could be forced by cavalry. After travelling twenty-five miles, but not reaching the spot named, the officer was told by the local inhabitants that no such ford existed. He returned to report that a bridge must be built across the Indus. When the emperor learned that his scout had stopped short of his destination:²²

the King ordered him to be seized, dragged to the place which he had told him to go to, bound prostrate on an inflated bag of ox-hide, and launched upon the river. When the report of this was spread through the camp, almost the whole army flocked to the river-side to see this strange sight. The officer was being carried hither and thither in the middle of the river at the mercy of the current. He was weeping, imploring pardon with miserable cries, and trying to move the King to mercy. As he was carried past the royal pavilion, the King gave orders for him to be rescued from the river, entered in the inventories as royal property, exposed for sale in all the bazaars, and finally auctioned as a slave.

The bedraggled offender was bought by one of his friends for eighty pieces of gold and Akbar thereafter pardoned him. Monserrate comments Akbar "showed by this example how much store he set by military discipline and obedience."²³ At the same time, Akbar did not indulge in gratuitous cruelty in this incident. The dramatic impact of this incident was sufficient to make his point.

DYNASTIC IDEOLOGY

From his early youth Akbar displayed an extraordinarily appealing personality. He possessed all the desired qualities of the warrior-hero. He was brave, athletic, generous, and likable. He combined powerful charismatic qualities with exceptionally acute organizational and strategic abilities. Akbar's persona was imposing and attractive beyond the usual hagiography and image-making clinging to any ruler or leader. One of his greatest admirers, his eldest son, Salim, later Jahangir, described his father's appearance in the following terms:²⁴

In his august personal appearance he was of middle height, but inclining to be tall; he was of the hue of wheat; his eyes and eyebrows were black, and his complexion rather dark than fair; he was lion bodied [i.e. thin-flanked], with a broad chest, and his hands and arms long. On the left side of his nose he had a fleshy mole, very agreeable in appearance, of the size of half a pea. . . . His

²² Ibid., p. 82-83.

²³ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁴ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, 1, 35.

august voice was very loud, and in speaking and explaining had a peculiar richness. In his actions and movements he was not like the people of the world, and the Glory of God manifested itself in him.

Other contemporary descriptions are similar. Monserrate, who first met Akbar when the emperor was thirty-eight, mentioned that "His forehead is bright and open, his eyes so bright and flashing that they seem like a sea shimmering in the sunlight."²⁵ Monserrate noted that Akbar generally wore uncut hair bound in an Indian turban "as a concession to Indian usages and to please his Indian subjects."²⁶ The Jesuits were also struck by Akbar's openness:

It is hard to exaggerate how accessible [Akbar] makes himself to all who wish audience of him. For he creates an opportunity almost every day for any of the common people or of the nobles to see him and converse with him; and he endeavors to show himself pleasant spoken and affable rather than severe toward all who come to speak with him.

Akbar's personal qualities enabled him to be as successful as he had been in politics and war. However, in the latter half of his reign, new advisers, themselves attracted to Akbar's persona, began to build a larger ideological structure centered on their master.

In the Fatehpur Sikri years, Abul Fazl's breadth of vision and political acuity brought him to prominence as the leading Timurid ideologue and propagandist. In his new capacity, Akbar's intellectual began to erect a scaffolding for a Timurid dynastic ideology—an edifice aimed at establishing a new legitimacy for Akbar and his successors. In discussions at court, in a wide-ranging official and private correspondence, and in eulogistic poetry Abul Fazl and his brother, the poet Faizi, began to assert Akbar's divinely illumined right to rule lesser human beings.²⁷ The most systematic expression of this doctrine is found in the *Akbar-Nama*, the voluminous annual recounting of events for forty-seven years of Akbar's reign, with the bulky *Ain-i Akbari* appended as a manual. At the core of this work, permeating every passage, Abul Fazl embedded ultimate legitimacy for Akbar that transcended the accidents of conquest, coup, or succession.

The *Akbar-Nama* portrays Akbar as a superior being, existing closer to God, to true reality. Akbar was the recipient of the hidden light

²⁵ Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 196. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 197.

²⁷ The discussion following is based upon J. F. Richards, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir" in J. F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison Wisconsin, South Asian Studies No. 3, 1978), pp. 260-267.

whose ineffable radiance emanating from his brow was perceptible only to superior men. Only an elect group could pierce the veil which guarded the outpouring of light from the Timurid brow. Akbar had esoteric knowledge and authority greater than the recognized interpreters of the Sharia, the *Mujtahid* of the Age, than the most saintly of Sufi masters (*Pirs*) or the eagerly anticipated charismatic savior (*Mahdi*).

The more than fifty paintings illustrating the manuscript now in the Victoria and Albert museum in London (probably the original presented at court) contrast the divine order, harmony, and self-control of the emperor's person with the turgid, struggling disorder of those unwieldy masses of men and beasts surrounding him. The emperor's will calmed and directed the energies of his subjects and all of mankind.

The illuminationist theme is borrowed directly from the Eastern school of Persian Neoplatonic philosophy found in the teachings of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul (d. 1191). Suhrawardi argues that all life is given existence by the constant blinding illumination from the East of the Light of Lights or God. All men possess a divine spark, but only the highest of three grades of men are the true theosophists or masters of the age—men such as Suhrawardi himself, Plato, or in Abul Fazl's interpretation, Akbar. A chain of dazzling angels was the means for revealing God's illumination to man. At their head was the Angel Gabriel, identified with the true spirit of the Prophet Muhammad.

Abul Fazl explicitly states the central provisions of this ideology in the introductory passages describing Akbar's ancestry. Beginning with Adam, the ancestor of all men, the eulogist follows the passage of the hidden divine refuence until it reaches and illumines the spirit and intelligence of Akbar in 1556. From Adam through the Biblical prophets, Abul Fazl traces this illumined descent through the Biblical prophets to Joseph who fathered Turk, ruler of Turkestan. Turk's son Mughal Khan was the first of nine generations of Turco-Mongol kings. The last ruler in the line was defeated and dispersed by an enemy.

The ruler and his tribe retreated in confusion to Mughalistan where they remained in obscurity and seclusion for two millennia. Finally, in a mountain valley far to the east, a most important event occurred: Alanquwa, a Mughal queen married to the king of Mughalistan, became a childless widow when her husband died prematurely. But Alanquwa was a woman of the utmost purity from whose brow the divine light shone. As she lay sleeping in her tent one night, a ray of light miraculously entered her body and impregnated her.

The three brothers, triplets, born of this event were called the Nairun or "light-produced." From the eldest the hidden light passed through nine Turco-Mongol rulers including Chingiz Khan to ultimately reach Amir Timur Gurgan, the great fourteenth-century conqueror. Formal legitimacy for the Timurids began when in April, 1370, Amir Timur crowned himself in Samarkhand. The long narrative descent passes through four generations to Babur, Humayun, and then to Akbar. Humayun was granted a majestic night vision which assured him that "an illustrious successor whose greatness shone from his forelock" would be bestowed upon him. Akbar would be the receptacle for this hidden illumination that had passed from generation to generation.

DISCIPLES AND MANSABDARS

Drawing upon the newly articulated imperial idiom, Akbar and his advisers devised an esoteric means to bind leading nobles to him. In part this appeal emerged naturally from Akbar's own intense spiritual quest that found its fullest expression at Fatehpur Sikri. In the early 1580s the emperor began openly to worship the sun by a set of rituals of his own invention. Four times a day he faced the east and prostrated himself before a sacred fire. Simultaneously, Akbar engaged in abstinence from excessive meat-eating, sexual intercourse, and alcohol consumption. These were all rites and practices much in evidence in the daily world of Hinduism in north India. Worship of the sun and moon with its images of light was easily compatible with the myths of origin and descent central to the ethos of his Rajput nobles.

Shortly thereafter the emperor began to enlist selected members of the nobility as his disciples in association with the worship of sun and light. At noon on Sundays before the sacred fire the emperor presided over an initiation ceremony. Groups of twelve neophytes entered the body of disciples on these occasions. Each initiate swore to accept four degrees of devotion to Akbar: the unhesitating willingness to sacrifice one's life (*jan*), property (*mal*), religion (*din*), and honor (*namus*) in the service of the Master, i.e. Akbar. Muslim initiates signed a declaration agreeing to repudiate the bonds of orthodox Islam and to worship Allah directly, without intermediaries. Throughout the ceremony the neophyte placed his head on Akbar's feet in an extreme form of prostration known as *sijdah*. At the close of the ceremony

Akbar raised up each supplicant, placed a new turban upon his head, and gave him a symbolic representation of the sun embossed on a medallion. Each new disciple also received a tiny portrait of Akbar to wear upon his turban as well as a set of pearl earrings crafted for the occasion.

The number of disciples grew rapidly – to perhaps a majority of the Mughal amirs. Discipleship was an extremely effective means to assimilate a heterogeneous body of nobles and bind them to the throne. Akbar's own charismatic personality and the solemnities of the oaths taken were designed to create a new identity for Mughal amirs. The master-disciple relationship thus established bridged kinship, ethnic, and religious distinctions among the nobles. Oaths bound the disciples to their fellows and committed them to cast aside their former enmities and factional conflict. Even religious beliefs were to be directed to the service and worship of the emperor.

Akbar drew upon several widely accepted institutions for his notion of discipleship and membership in an order. For centuries military slavery in Islamic India, Central Asia, and the Middle East had developed its own norms of behavior. The slave soldier owed obedient submission and profound loyalty to his military commander as long as the latter met minimal standards of good treatment and sympathy for his men. Military slaves in direct service to a royal master felt these obligations even more keenly.

Another model for imperial discipleship was that of the Sufi master (*pir* or *Shaikh*) with his devotees. The specific terms of this relationship varied from order to order. In general, however, devotees placed the responsibility for their physical and spiritual well-being completely in the hands of their chosen Sufi *Shaikh*. The latter was to lead them along the upward stages of the mystical path (*tariqa*) to true knowledge of God. As a symbol of complete devotion to their master Sufi disciples put their heads on his feet in exactly the same prostration (*sijdah*) adopted by Akbar. This latter form of submission to a fellow human being was seen as blasphemous by pious Muslims. Akbar, without question, was deeply influenced by his earlier devotion to the now-dead *Shaikh* Salim, the famed *Chishti* saint. The emperor had cast himself in the role of an ardent disciple whenever he made the long pilgrimage to the rocky hillock at Fatehpur Sikri where Salim lived.

Finally, ready at hand was the Indo-Persian model of courtly behavior and submission to the monarch by the nobility. Court ritual

with its rigid protocol was designed to evoke feelings of awe, unworthiness, and to emphasize the distance between ruler and even the grandest of his subjects. The discipline of movement, speech, and etiquette demanded in public audiences reinforced obedience to the royal will. Rigid assignment of place – whether closer or further from the throne – graphically demonstrated royal preference. Command appearances before the throne demanded presentation of a suitable gift. These ranged from 100 gold coins to more valuable jeweled objects or even elephants. Court ritual culminated in the symbolic incorporation of the servant in the body of his royal master. Thus the Mughals, following long precedent, used the device of elaborately ornamented robes of honor, brocaded in gold and silver, as a staple reward for valuable service. The ruler first placed the robes on his own body and then personally draped them on the recipient. The person so favored responded with a ritual gift – usually of gold or silver coin. By these devices the notion of one body in service to the state – ruler and nobles – was promulgated.

LAHORE

In 1585 Akbar transferred his capital to Lahore in the Punjab at the death of his half-brother, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, at Kabul. The Uzbek ruler, Abdullah Khan, who had annexed Badakhshan in 1584, was a possible threat to Kabul. The Uzbeks were subsidizing the Afghan tribes in their continuing defiance of the Mughal regime at Kabul. Akbar immediately sent an army under Raja Man Singh to occupy Kabul and then brought the city and its surrounding districts under direct imperial administration. This task completed, Akbar stayed on in Lahore for thirteen years in a successful effort to clamp imperial Mughal power over the entire northwest.

At Lahore the emperor kept a border watch on Abdullah Khan Uzbek. In 1586 Akbar and the Uzbek Khan negotiated a pact in which Akbar agreed to remain neutral during the Uzbek invasion of Safavid-held Khurasan. In return, Abdullah Khan agreed to refrain from supporting, subsidizing, or offering refuge to the Afghan tribes. Thus freed, Akbar began a series of pacification campaigns directed against the Yusufzais and other tribal rebels. He was also free to round out the empire by annexing Kashmir and Sind, the two remaining kingdoms not fully incorporated into the empire.

An important consideration in this period was the busy overland caravan trade. The overland route from Kabul through the Khyber Pass and Peshawar fed the markets of Lahore with horses from Central Asia, fruits, silks and porcelain (from China), precious metals, and many other valuable commodities. Indian spices, textiles, and other goods travelled outward in a lucrative commerce that sent Indian merchants into the markets of Central Asia and Iran. The Punjab was a major industrial center in which thousands of weavers produced specialized cotton cloth for various markets in Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. The scale of this traffic may be judged by the effect of a single accidental fire in Peshawar fort in 1586. The disaster destroyed one thousand camel loads of merchandise belonging to the merchants who had sheltered there when the route was temporarily obstructed.²⁸

The caravan trade was vulnerable to banditry or even complete blockage by the Afghan tribes. Keeping trade flowing was a perennial concern for rulers on both sides of the passes. In recent years the powerful Yusufzai tribal group had seized control of Swat and Bajaur and threatened to move further south. The Yusufzai had gained control of the Khyber routes and frequently blocked the roads and plundered caravans.

In late 1585 Akbar marched from Lahore to Attock fort (built by him in 1581). From Attock he sent an army under Zain Khan Koka to subdue the Yusufzai tribal confederation in the valleys of Swat and Bajaur. The emperor pitted Mughal centralized state power against the Yusufzai, the most aggressive and powerful tribal confederation in northern Afghanistan. The Mughals estimated that the confederation numbered 100,000 households in which every male member was armed and battle-ready. Their tribal chiefs had not offered formal submission to the Mughals since Babur received a Yusufzai daughter into his harem in 1519.

The Mughal army forced the submission of many Yusufzai chiefs in Swat and Bajaur. But a relief force on its way to Swat through the difficult mountain terrain met disaster. Split command between a royal favorite, Raja Bir Bar, the court wit, and Zain Khan Koka, an ordinary field general, weakened the usually careful deployment of Akbar's armies. A reckless attack on the Yusufzais exposed the royal army to ambush in the mountain passes. About 8,000 imperial soldiers, includ-

²⁸ Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari* (Eng. trans.), II, 602.

ing Raja Bir Bar, were killed in the greatest disaster to Mughal arms in Akbar's reign.

Akbar immediately fielded two new armies to reinstate the Yusufzai lands. Over the next six years, the Mughals contained the Yusufzai in their mountain valleys. The imperialists built and occupied a dozen forts to secure the country and protect the caravan trade. Tribal levies could not withstand Mughal cavalry in the open field; they could not protect their crops or their villages from destruction; nor could the Afghans hold their forts against determined imperial assaults. Akbar's demonstrated ability to clamp firm military control over the turbulent Afghan tribes is an impressive testimonial to the reach of his empire.

In 1585 Akbar dispatched an army north to invade Kashmir when Ali Shah, the current ruler of the Chak dynasty, refused to send his son to the Mughal court. The Kashmiri ruler surrendered immediately, but his son, Yaqub, crowned himself and led a dogged resistance to the imperial armies. Finally, in June, 1589, Akbar himself travelled from Lahore to Srinagar to receive the surrender of Yaqub and his rebel forces. The emperor's visit began the Timurid interest in the beauties of Kashmir and the construction of the numerous royal gardens laid out in that mountain kingdom.

In 1586 Akbar turned his attention to the lower Indus valley. The imperial governor of Multan had failed to secure the capitulation of Jani Bek, the ruler of Thatta (Sind). Akbar responded by sending another large Mughal field army to besiege Sehwan, the river capital on the Indus. Jani Bek mustered a large army and numerous armed river boats to resist. The outnumbered Mughal general defeated the Sind forces in a hard-fought battle on the river. After suffering further defeats, the Sind ruler surrendered and, in 1593, paid homage to Akbar at court in Lahore in person. Jani Bek became a Mughal mansabdar, accepted discipleship under Akbar and was appointed to the governorship of Multan. His former kingdom became the Mughal province of Thatta, divided into three districts under an imperial governor.

The conquest of Sind strengthened Akbar's resolve to retake Qandahar fort and town which had long been in Safavid hands. In 1595 the Persian commandant of Qandahar, having fallen into disgrace with Shah Abbas, defected to the Mughals and surrendered the fortress to a Mughal force. But Shah Abbas chose not to go to war over this provocation.

When the death of Abdullah Khan Uzбек in 1598 eased the threat of

invasion from that quarter, Akbar moved his capital once again to Agra – not to Fatehpur Sikri. From Agra he could devote his energies to that most intractable and difficult frontier: the Deccan.

Why did the emperor not return to the delights of Fatehpur Sikri rather than Agra? One reason lay in the increasingly difficult problem posed by his son Salim's rebelliousness. Residence in Agra's more defensible citadel might well have been preferable to the insecurity of Fatehpur Sikri. Relative to the annual income of the empire, the cost of building Fatehpur Sikri, estimated recently at 3.5 million silver rupees, was not consequential. Akbar's desert city was in fact a disposable capital in view of his immense wealth.²⁹

These are partial answers, but for a fuller explanation we must look to ideology. Abruptly in 1585 the pilgrimages to Ajmer and veneration of the Chishti saints ended. The emperor did not engage in any public worship at other Sufi tombs. The royal weighing ceremonies were detached from pilgrimage. The silence of the chronicles suggests that Akbar ceased regular worship in the congregational mosque at either Lahore or Agra. He was no longer anxious to display his Islamic piety in public. At Fatehpur Sikri royal heirs, royal victory, and Timurid authority flowed from devotion to Chishti saints properly enclosed within the framework of orthodox Islamic institutions. After 1585, Agra, rather than Fatehpur Sikri was the proper urban setting for the new imperial court.³⁰

RETURN TO AGRA

The remaining external frontier lay in the Deccan, the domain of centuries of epic Muslim wars against the infidel. The Deccan landscape, although less hospitable to large-scale military operations than the Indo-Gangetic plain, was certainly less daunting than the mountains of the northwest or the riverine jungles of Assam. Moreover, the existence of large Muslim-ruled kingdoms encouraged the thought of conquest. What the Sultans of Delhi had accomplished surely their heirs, the Timurids, could surpass. Here were five Muslim Sultanates to be ground down and either conquered and annexed or brought under Mughal hegemony: Khandesh, under the Farruqi dynasty; Ahmadnagar, under the Nizam Shahs; Berar under the Imad Shah

²⁹ Habib, "Economic and Social Setting," p. 74, in Brand and Lowry, eds., *Fatehpur Sikri*.
³⁰ Richards, "The Imperial Capital," p. 72.

dynasty; Bijapur, under the Adil Shah rulers, and Golconda, under the Qutb Shahs. (See map 1). Apart from the Sultan of Khandesh, who intermittently paid tribute, none had submitted to the Mughals.

The social landscape, however, was less propitious to Mughal aggression than it might seem. Over the two centuries since the break-up of the Delhi Sultanate, a distinctive Deccan Muslim political culture had evolved in this region. The Muslim elites in each state were predominantly either Shia Persian nobles or Sunni Afghans along with less powerful Indian Muslim converts. Neither of these groups was especially fond of the Timurids – the Afghans least of all.

A further complication lay in the composition of the regional landed aristocracies. Below Khandesh, Rajput domination over the land came to a halt. Instead, in the western Deccan, Marathi-speaking members of the Maratha caste were the heirs of the Yadavas and earlier Hindu kingdoms defeated by the Muslims. In the east, Telugu warriors controlled rural society. The latter could look back to centuries of successful resistance to the Muslims by their forbears in Vijayanagar and its successor states. Gradually, these aristocrats had assimilated to the imposed political order of the Deccan Sultanates. In each case, whether Maratha or Telugu, it is reasonably certain that the thinly populated, largely urban, Muslim elites depended heavily upon an alliance with these rural aristocracies to rule effectively.

The Deccan Sultans imposed few restrictions on the expression of local religious and cultural life. Rarely, if ever, had they demanded conversion to Islam as a condition of high rank in the state. Indeed, Ibrahim Qutb Shah (1550–1580) of Golconda and Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580–1626) of Bijapur, both engaged in broad-ranging attempts to reduce barriers between Hinduism and Islam within their states in much the same fashion as Akbar in the Mughal dominions. Akbar's new policies and ideological stance might well appeal to the landed aristocracies of both halves of the Deccan, but this linkage was something that would have to be created and sustained by careful statesmanship and administration. The Mughals did not easily or readily obtain the allegiance of either Maratha or Telugu chiefs.

In 1591 Akbar sent embassies to each of the Deccan Sultans to demand submission to Mughal overlordship. On this occasion the ruler of Khandesh sent his daughter to be married to Prince Salim and the Sultans of Bijapur and Golconda sent gifts, but rejected the emperor's demand for formal submission. Burhan Nizam Shah II,

the ruler of Ahmadnagar, treated the Mughal envoys with studied brusqueness.

In 1595, while still at Lahore, Akbar ordered an invasion of Ahmadnagar Sultanate – then undergoing a succession crisis after the death of Burhan Nizam Shah II. A large imperial force jointly commanded by Prince Murad (Akbar's second son) and the Khan Khanan, son of Bairam Khan, besieged Ahmadnagar, the royal capital. The Mughals coerced reluctant participation in the imperial army by Raja Ali Khan the ruler of Khandesh. The defending ruler was Chand Sultan, sister of the deceased Sultan and guardian of the infant heir to the throne. The princess held the fortress until a relief army sent by the Sultans of Bijapur and Golconda threatened the imperial armies. A negotiated truce resulted in Mughal withdrawal from Ahmadnagar in return for cession of the province of Berar (the former kingdom annexed earlier by Ahmadnagar) to the Mughal emperor. In 1586 Berar became the first of the Deccan provinces to be brought under direct imperial administration.

Continuing tension and intermittent battles between the Mughals and the defiant Deccan Sultanates marked the next several years. Even the Sultan of Khandesh withdrew to his massive hill fortress at Burhanpur and refused to assist the Mughals. In 1599, Prince Murad, in command of the Mughal Deccan armies, died prematurely from alcoholism. Akbar turned over command in the Deccan to his third son, Daniyal. But in September, 1599, the emperor left Agra at the head of an 80,000 man army for the Deccan to direct operations in person.

Under the emperor's energetic command, Mughal forces stormed the fortress of Ahmadnagar in August, 1600. The Nizam Shahi princess Chand Sultan died at the hands of a dissident mob before the fort fell. Akbar himself led a Mughal army marching into Khandesh. Bahadur, the Sultan of Khandesh, had repudiated his allegiance to the Mughals and had taken refuge in the massive hill fortress of Asirgarh near Burhanpur, capital city of the kingdom. In the last major military command of his life, Akbar directed the siege from his camp at Burhanpur. Relentless Mughal pressure drove Bahadur into face-to-face negotiations with Akbar from which he was not allowed to return to the fortress. Finally, the fort defenders, faced with Mughal capture of two of Asirgarh's outlying citadels, surrendered in early January, 1601.

Khandesh and a large portion of Ahmadnagar joined Berar as new

imperial provinces in the Deccan. Akbar assigned the three provinces to Prince Daniyal to administer as the viceroy of the Deccan. On April 11, 1601, the emperor left Burhanpur on the return journey to Agra.

REBELLION OF SALIM

When Akbar departed for the Deccan, he left his eldest son in charge of the capital. In July, 1600, Salim tried unsuccessfully to seize control of Agra fort,³¹ and appointed his own officers in the province. There he remained in defiance of his father's orders sent from the Deccan. When Akbar arrived at Agra, Salim marched on the capital with a force of 30,000 horsemen. Akbar sent a stiff letter to him ordering the prince to halt and return to the east where he offered Salim the governorship of Bengal and Orissa. Salim brushed aside this offer, but did return to Allahabad. In May, 1602, he had his name read in the Friday prayers and had coins struck as emperor in his own name.

Akbar recalled his trusted adviser, Abul Fazl, from the Deccan in order to send him to deal with Salim. Fearing the stern presence of Abul Fazl, Salim commissioned Bir Singh, the Bundela raja of Orchha, to intercept Abul Fazl on his return journey. The Bundela raja overpowered the minister's small escort, killed Abul Fazl, and brought his severed head to Allahabad.

The grief-stricken emperor finally was reconciled to his son by his wife Salima Sultan Begam who, along with several of the other noblewomen, acted as peacemaker between the two. Salim appeared at court, with proper deference, was embraced by Akbar, and designated heir-apparent. Thereafter, he returned to Allahabad against his father's wishes and indulged in a period of excessive intake of opium and wine as well as in public displays of cruelty. After the death from alcoholism of Daniyal, Akbar's third son, in 1604, Salim returned to court. In part he was worried by the maneuvering of the partisans of his own son Prince Khusrav. The powerful Raja Man Singh, among others, urged Akbar to set aside Salim's claims in favor of his grandson. After Salim submitted to the emperor, he was confined briefly in the palace in the final episode of this rebellion.

Just under a year later, Akbar fell ill with dysentery, weakened and lay dying. Salim escaped the plots of his enemies in the nobility and

³¹ Fort garrisons were under the command of independent officers appointed directly by the emperor and would be unlikely to submit to even a royal prince without express orders.

visited his father who placed the imperial turban on the prince's head and gave him Humayun's sword as heir. During the night of October 25, 1605, Akbar died and was taken to be buried in the mausoleum which he had built for himself at Sikandra, near Agra.

CONCLUSION

When the emperor died in 1605, his legacy was a multi-regional empire, which, in the course of his half-century of rule, had become the dominant power on the Indian subcontinent. Beginning in his adolescent years, Akbar directed a continuing series of remarkable military campaigns in which Mughal armies won victory after victory on the field of battle. No single kingdom or coalition of regional kingdoms could stand against the Mughal armies. Each victory added money, men, and weapons to the imperial armies. Each campaign, battle, and siege was a public event, widely reported and discussed throughout the subcontinent. Year after year, as the Timurid armies proved invincible and as revolts and resistance failed, Akbar's reputation soared. He and his immediate confidants became figures of enormous popular interest. Folk tales about him based on well-known incidents in his life began to circulate. The Mughal emperor acquired an aura of near-divinity and mystery which further reinforced popular perceptions of Mughal infallibility.

After conquest followed annexation. Once-proud rulers were deposed and killed or accepted personal service with the Mughal emperor. Once-independent kingdoms became provinces of the expanding empire. Akbar forcibly unified the collection of regional states in North India into a single, centralized political system. Within this system the Mughal emperor was the single source of political legitimacy and authority. No sultan, raja, or other ruler could devolve legitimate authority without reference to the emperor. All became "landholders" (*zamindars*) in the emperor's eyes, who relied upon a patent of office (*sanad*) to secure their hereditary seats. Military power permitted him to impose a stringent degree of administrative control over each new territory as it came into the empire – and to retain this control despite resistance. The Mughals imposed a new level of public order on the tumultuous society of India.

Akbar deployed overwhelming numbers of heavy cavalry, armored men and horses with bow, lance, and sword, war elephants,

musketeers, and artillery. In his many battles and campaigns the Mughal ruler made effective use of the new gunpowder weaponry – more so than his opponents. But gunpowder had become widely available by the mid-sixteenth century. Akbar's string of victories depended upon organizational prowess, not technology. In tracing the sequence of these campaigns, it is important to realize that the Mughal emperor met determined enemies who commanded substantial, well-equipped, well-motivated armies. Most battles were desperate and bloody; the sieges difficult and lengthy. On numerous occasions, Akbar could have been wounded or killed when leading his troopers in battle. Luck and his military skills saved him. The builder of the Mughal empire was undoubtedly a superb military commander in a generally bellicose society.