

Consolidation of the Mughal Empire

Age of Akbar

When Humayun was retreating from Bikaner, he was gallantly offered shelter and help by the rana of Amarkot. It was at Amarkot, in 1542, that Akbar, the greatest of the Mughal rulers, was born. When Humayun fled to Iran, young Akbar was captured by his uncle, Kamran. He treated the child well on the whole. Akbar was re-united with his parents after the capture of Qandhar. When Humayun died, Akbar was at Kalanaur in the Punjab, commanding operations against the Afghan rebels there. He was crowned at Kalanaur in 1556 at the young age of thirteen years and four months.

Akbar succeeded to a difficult position. The Afghans were still strong beyond Agra, and were regrouping their forces under the leadership of Hemu for a final showdown. Kabul had been attacked and besieged. Sikandar Sur, the defeated Afghan ruler, was loitering in the Siwalik Hills. However, Bairam Khan, the tutor of the prince and a loyal and favourite officer of Humayun, rose to the occasion. He became the *wakil* of the kingdom, with the title of *Khan-i-Khanan*, and rallied the Mughal forces. The threat from the side of Hemu was considered the most serious. The area from Chunar to the border of Bengal was under the domination of Adil Shah, a nephew of Sher Shah. Hemu, who had started life as a superintendent of the markets under Islam Shah, had rapidly risen under Adil Shah. He had not lost a single one of the twenty-two battles in which he had fought. Adil Shah had appointed him the *wazir* with the title of Vikramajit, and entrusted him with the task of expelling the Mughals. Hemu captured Agra, and with an army of 50,000 cavalry, 500 elephants and a strong artillery, he marched upon Delhi.

In a well-contested battle, Hemu defeated the Mughals near Delhi and occupied the city. However, Bairam Khan took energetic steps to meet the situation. His bold stand put heart into his army, and it

marched on Delhi before Hemu could have time to consolidate his position. The battle between the Mughals and the Afghan forces led by Hemu, took place once again at Panipat (5 November 1556). Although Hemu's artillery had been captured earlier by a Mughal detachment, the tide of battle was in favour of Hemu when an arrow hit him in the eye and he fainted. The leaderless Afghan army was defeated, Hemu was captured and executed. Thus, Akbar had virtually to reconquer his empire.

EARLY PHASE—CONTEST WITH THE NOBILITY (1556–67)

Bairam Khan remained at the helm of affairs of the empire for almost four years. During the period, he kept the nobility fully under control. The danger to Kabul was averted, and the territories of the empire were extended from Kabul up to Jaunpur in the east, and Ajmer in the west. Gwaliyar was captured, and forces were sent to conquer Ranthambhor and Malwa.

Meanwhile, Akbar was approaching the age of maturity. Bairam Khan had offended many powerful persons while he held supreme power. They complained that Bairam Khan was a Shia, and that he was appointing his own supporters and Shias to high offices while neglecting the old nobles. These charges were not very serious in themselves because Bairam was known for his liberal religious views. But Bairam Khan had become arrogant, and failed to realise that Akbar was growing up. There was friction on small points which made Akbar realise that he could not leave the affairs of the state in someone else's hands for any length of time.

Akbar played his cards deftly. He left Agra on the pretext of hunting, and reached Delhi. From Delhi he issued a *farman* dismissing Bairam Khan from his office, and calling upon all the nobles to come and submit to him personally. Once Bairam Khan realised that Akbar wanted to take power in his own hands, he was prepared to submit, but his opponents were keen to ruin him. They heaped humiliation upon him till he was goaded to rebel. The rebellion distracted the empire for almost six months. Finally, Bairam Khan was forced to submit. Akbar received him cordially, and gave him the option of serving at the court or anywhere outside it, or

retiring to Mecca. Bairam Khan chose to go to Mecca. However, on his way, he was assassinated at Patan near Ahmedabad by an Afghan who bore him a personal grudge. Bairam's wife and a young child were brought to Akbar at Agra. Akbar married Bairam Khan's young wife who was his cousin. He brought up Bairam's child as his own son. This child later became famous as Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan and held some of the most important offices and commands in the empire.¹

Akbar's confrontation with Bairam Khan and the kind of treatment accorded to his family subsequently show some typical traits of Akbar's character. He was unrelenting once he had made up his mind about a course of action, but was prepared to go out of his way in being generous to an opponent who had submitted to him.

During Bairam Khan's rebellion, groups and individuals in the nobility had become politically active. They included Akbar's foster-mother, Maham Anaga, and her relations. Though Maham Anaga soon withdrew from politics, her son, Adham Khan was an impetuous young man who assumed independent airs when sent to command an expedition against Malwa. Removed from the command, he laid claim to the post of the *wazir*, and when this was not conceded, he stabbed the acting *wazir* in his office. Akbar was enraged and had him thrown down to his death from the parapet of the fort (1561). However, it was many years before Akbar was to establish his authority fully. The Uzbeks formed a powerful group in the nobility. They held important positions in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Malwa. Although they had served the empire well by subduing the powerful Afghan groups in those areas, they had become arrogant and were defying the young ruler. Between 1561 and 1567 they broke out in rebellion several times, forcing Akbar to take the field against them. Each time Akbar was induced to pardon them. When they again rebelled in 1565, Akbar was so exasperated that he vowed to make Jaunpur his capital till he had rooted them out. Meanwhile, a rebellion by the Mirzas, who were Timurids and were related to Akbar by marriage, threw the areas west of modern Uttar Pradesh into confusion. Encouraged by these rebellions, Akbar's half-brother,

1 He was the son of Jamal Khan Mewati's daughter.

Mirza Hakim, who had seized control of Kabul, advanced into the Punjab, and besieged Lahore. The Uzbek rebel nobles formally proclaimed him their ruler.

This was the most serious crisis Akbar had to face since Hemu's capture of Delhi. However, Akbar's grit and a certain amount of luck enabled him to triumph. From Jaunpur he marched to Lahore, forcing Mirza Hakim to retire. Meanwhile, the rebellion of the Mirzas was crushed, with the Mirzas fleeing to Malwa and thence to Gujarat. Akbar marched back from Lahore to Jaunpur. Crossing the river Yamuna near Allahabad at the height of the rainy season, he surprised the rebels led by the Uzbek nobles and completely routed them (1567). The Uzbek leaders were killed in the battle, thus bringing their protracted rebellion to an end. All the rebellious nobles, including those among them who had been dreaming of independence, were cowed down. Akbar was now free to concentrate on the expansion of the empire.

EARLY EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE (1560-76)

During Bairam Khan's regency, the territories of the Mughal empire had been expanded rapidly. Apart from Ajmer, an important conquest during this period was that of Malwa. Malwa was being ruled, at that time, by a young prince, Baz Bahadur. His accomplishments included a mastery of music and poetry. Stories about the romance of Baz Bahadur and Rupmati, who was famous for her beauty as well as for music and poetry are well known. During his time, Mandu had become a celebrated centre for music. The army, however, had been neglected by Baz Bahadur. The expedition against Malwa was led by Adham Khan, son of Akbar's foster-mother, Maham Anaga. Baz Bahadur was badly defeated (1561) and the Mughals took valuable spoils, including Rupmati. However, she preferred to commit suicide to being dragged to Adham Khan's *haram*. Due to the senseless cruelties of Adham Khan and his successor, there was a reaction against the Mughals which enabled Baz Bahadur to recover Malwa.

After dealing with Bairam Khan's rebellion Akbar sent another expedition to Malwa. Baz Bahadur had to flee, and for some time he took shelter with the rana of Mewar. After wandering about from

one area to another, he finally repaired to Akbar's court and was enrolled as a Mughal *mansabdar*.¹ The extensive country of Malwa thus came under Mughal rule.

At about the same time, Mughal arms overran the kingdom of Garh-Katanga. The kingdom of Garh-Katanga included the Narmada valley and the northern portions of present Madhya Pradesh. It had been welded together by Aman Das who flourished in the second half of the fifteenth century. Aman Das had helped Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in the conquest of Raisen and had received from him the title of Sangram Shah.

The kingdom of Garh-Katanga included a number of Gond and Rajput principalities. It was the most powerful kingdom set up by the Gonds. It is said that the ruler commanded 20,000 cavalry, a large infantry and 1000 elephants. We do not know, however, to what extent these figures are dependable. Sangram Shah had further strengthened his position by marrying his son to a princess of the famous Chandel rulers of Mahoba. This princess, who is famous as Durgavati, became a widow soon afterwards. But she installed her minor son on the throne and ruled the country with great vigour and courage. She was a good marksman, both with guns and bow and arrow. She was fond of hunting and, according to a contemporary, 'it was her custom that whenever she heard that a tiger had appeared she did not drink water till she had shot it.' She fought many successful battles against her neighbours, including Baz Bahadur of Malwa. These border conflicts apparently continued even after Malwa had been conquered by the Mughals. Meanwhile, the cupidity of Asaf Khan, the Mughal governor of Allahabad, was roused by the stories of the fabulous wealth and the beauty of the rani. Asaf Khan advanced with 10,000 cavalry from the side of Bundelkhand. Some of the semi-independent rulers of Garha found it a convenient moment to throw off the Gond yoke. The rani was thus left with a small force. Though wounded, she fought on gallantly. Finding that the battle was lost and that she was in danger of being captured, she stabbed herself to death. Asaf Khan then stormed the capital, Chauragarh, near modern Jabalpur.

¹ He rose to the rank of 2000. According to tradition, he was buried near a tank at Ujjain where his favourite consort, Rupmati, was also buried.

'So much plunder in jewels, gold, silver and other things were taken that it is impossible to compute even a fraction of it,' says Abul Fazl. 'Out of all the plunder Asaf Khan sent only two hundred elephants to the court, and retained all the rest for himself.' Kamaladevi, the younger sister of the rani, was sent to the court.

When Akbar had dealt with the rebellion of the Uzbek nobles he forced Asaf Khan to disgorge his illegal gains. He restored the kingdom of Garh-Katanga to Chandra Shah, the younger son of Sangram Shah, after taking ten forts to round off the kingdom of Malwa.

Rajasthan and Gujarat

During the next ten years, Akbar brought the major part of Rajasthan under his control and also conquered Gujarat and Bengal. A major step in his campaign against the Rajput states was the siege of Chittor. This redoubtable fortress, which had faced a number of sieges in its history, was considered a key to central Rajasthan. It commanded the shortest route from Agra to Gujarat. Above all, it was a symbol of the Rajput spirit of resistance. Akbar realised that without conquering Chittor, he could not induce the other Rajput rulers to accept his suzerainty. Chittor fell (1568) after a gallant siege of six months. At the advice of his nobles, Rana Udai Singh had retired to the hills, leaving the famous warriors, Jaimal and Patta, in charge of the fort. Many peasants from the surrounding area had also taken shelter within the fort, and actively aided the defenders. When the Mughals stormed the fort, these peasants and many of the Rajput warriors amounting to 30,000 were massacred—the first and the last time Akbar indulged in such a carnage. The Rajput warriors died after extracting as much vengeance as possible. In honour of the gallant Jaimal and Patta, Akbar ordered that two stone statues of these warriors, seated on elephants, be erected outside the chief gate of the fort at Agra.

The fall of Chittor was followed by the conquest of Ranthambhor reputed to be the most powerful fortress in Rajasthan. Jodhpur had been conquered earlier. As a result of these victories, most of the Rajput rajas, including those of Bikaner and Jaisalmer, submitted to Akbar. Only Mewar continued to resist.

Gujarat had been in a sorry state of affairs since the death of Bahadur Shah. The fertility of its soil, its highly developed crafts, and its importance as the centre of the import-export trade with the outside world had made it a prize worth fighting for. Akbar also laid claim to it because Humayun had ruled over it for some time. An additional reason was that the Mirzas who had failed in their rebellion near Delhi had taken shelter in Gujarat. Akbar was not prepared for such a rich province to become a rival centre of power. In 1572, Akbar advanced on Ahmedabad via Ajmer. Ahmedabad surrendered without a fight. Akbar then turned his attention to the Mirzas who held Broach, Baroda and Surat. At Cambay, Akbar saw the sea for the first time, and rode on it in a boat. A group of Portuguese merchants also came and met him for the first time. The Portuguese dominated the Indian seas by this time, and had ambition of establishing an empire in India. Akbar's conquest of Gujarat frustrated these designs.

While Akbar's armies were besieging Surat, Akbar crossed the river Mahi and assaulted the Mirzas with a small body of 200 men which included Man Singh and Bhagwant Das of Amber. For some time, Akbar's life was in danger. But the impetuosity of his charge routed the Mirzas. Thus, Gujarat came under Mughal control. However, as soon as Akbar had turned his back, rebellions broke out all over Gujarat. Hearing the news, Akbar marched out of Agra and traversed across Rajasthan in nine days by means of camels, horses and carts. On the eleventh day, he reached Ahmedabad. In this journey, which normally took six weeks, only 3000 soldiers were able to keep up with Akbar. With these he defeated an enemy force of 20,000 (1573).

After this, Akbar turned his attention to Bengal. The Afghans had continued to dominate Bengal and Bihar. They had also overrun Orissa and killed its ruler. However, in order not to give offence to the Mughals, the Afghan ruler had not formally declared himself king, but read the *khuba* in Akbar's name. Internal fights among the Afghans, and the declaration of independence by the new ruler, Daud Khan, gave Akbar the excuse he was seeking. Akbar advanced with a strong flotilla of boats accompanying him. The Afghan king was believed to possess a large army consisting of 40,000 well-mounted cavalry, an infantry of about 1,50,000, several thousand guns and elephants, and a strong flotilla of war boats. If Akbar had not been as

careful, and the Afghans had a better leader, the contest between Humayun and Sher Shah might well have been repeated. Akbar first captured Patna, thus securing Mughal communications in Bihar. He then returned to Agra, leaving Khan-i-Khanan Munaim Khan, an experienced officer, in charge of the campaign. The Mughal armies invaded Bengal and, after hard campaigning, Daud was forced to sue for peace. He rose in rebellion soon afterwards. Though the Mughal position in Bengal and Bihar was still weak, the Mughal armies were better organised and led. In a stiff battle in Bihar in 1576, Daud Khan was defeated and executed on the spot.

Thus ended the last Afghan kingdom in northern India. It also brought to an end the first phase of Akbar's expansion of the empire.

ADMINISTRATION

During the decade following the conquest of Gujarat, Akbar found time to look at the administrative problems of the empire. The system of administration elaborated by Sher Shah had fallen into confusion after the death of Islam Shah. Akbar, therefore, had to start afresh.

One of the most important problems facing Akbar was the system of land revenue administration. Sher Shah had instituted a system by which the cultivated area was measured and a crop rate (*ray*) was drawn up, fixing the dues of the peasant crop-wise on the basis of the productivity of land. This schedule was converted every year into a central schedule of prices. Akbar adopted Sher Shah's system. But it was soon found that the fixing of a central schedule of prices often led to considerable delays, and resulted in great hardships to the peasantry since the prices fixed were generally those prevailing at the imperial court, and were higher than those in the countryside. The peasants, therefore, had to part with a larger share of their produce.

At first, Akbar reverted to a system of annual assessment. The *qanungos*, who were hereditary holders of land as well as local officials conversant with local conditions, were ordered to report on the actual produce, state of cultivation, local prices, etc. But in many areas the *qanungos* were dishonest and concealed the real produce. Annual assessments also resulted in great difficulty for the peasants and for

the state. After returning from Gujarat (1573), Akbar paid personal attention to the land revenue system. Officials called *karoris* were appointed all over north India. They were responsible for the collection of a crore of *dams* (Rs 2,50,000), and also checked the facts and figures supplied by the *qanungos*. On the basis of the information provided by them regarding the actual produce, local prices, productivity, etc., in 1580, Akbar instituted a new system called the *dahsala*. Under this system, the average produce of different crops as well as the average prices prevailing over the last ten (*dah*) years were calculated. One-third of the average produce was the state share. The state demand was, however, stated in cash. This was done by converting the state share into money on the basis of a schedule of average prices over the past ten years. Thus, the produce of a *bigha* of land under share was given in *maunds*. But on the basis of average prices, the state demand was fixed in rupees per *bigha*.

Later, a further improvement was made. Not only were local prices taken into account, *parganas* having the same type of productivity were grouped into separate assessment circles. Thus, the peasant was required to pay on the basis of local productivity as well as local prices.

There were a number of advantages of this system. As soon as the area sown by the peasant had been measured by means of the bamboos linked with iron rings, the peasants as well as the state knew what the dues were. The peasant was given remission in the land revenue if crops failed on account of drought, floods, etc. The system of measurement and the assessment based upon it is called the *zabti* system. Akbar introduced this system in the area from Lahore to Allahabad, and in Malwa and Gujarat. The *dahsala* system was a further development of the *zabti* system.

— A number of other systems of assessment were also followed under Akbar. The most common and, perhaps, the oldest was called *batai* or *ghalla-bakhshi*. In this system, the produce was divided between the peasants and the state in fixed proportion. The crop was divided after it had been thrashed, or when it had been cut and tied in stacks, or while it was standing in the field. This system was considered a very fair one, but it needed an army of honest officials to be present at the time of the ripening or the reaping of the crops.

The peasants were allowed to choose between *zabti* and *batai* under certain conditions. Thus, such a choice was given when the crops

had been ruined. Under *batai*, the peasants were given the choice of paying in cash or in kind, though the state preferred cash. In case of crops such as cotton, indigo, oil seeds, sugarcane, etc., the state demand was invariably in cash. Hence, these were called cash crops.

A third system which was widely used in Akbar's time was *nasaq*. It was a rough calculation of the amount payable by the peasant on the basis of what he had been paying in the past. Hence, some modern historians think that it was merely a system of computing the peasant's past dues, not a different system of assessment. Others think that it meant rough appraisal both on the basis of the inspection of the crops and past experience, and thereby fixing the amount to be paid by the village as a whole. It is also called *kankut*, or estimation.

Other local methods of assessment also continued in some areas.

In fixing the land revenue, continuity of cultivation was taken into account. Land which remained under cultivation almost every year was called *polaj*. When it remained uncultivated it was called *parati* (fallow). *Parati* land paid at the full (*polaj*) rate when it was cultivated. Land which had been fallow for two to three years was called *chachar*, and *banjar* if longer than that. These were assessed at concessional rates, the revenue demand gradually rising till the full or *polaj* rate was paid in the fifth or the eighth year. In this way, the state helped in bringing virgin and uncultivated wasteland under cultivation. Land was classified further into good, middling and bad. One-third of the average produce was the state demand, but it varied according to the productivity of the land, the method of assessment, etc.

Akbar was deeply interested in the improvement and extension of cultivation. He asked the *amil* to act like a father to the peasants. He was to advance money by way of loans (*taccavi*) to the peasants for seeds, implements, animals, etc., in times of need, and to recover them in easy instalments. He was to try and induce the peasants to plough as much land as possible and to sow superior quality crops. The zamindars of the area were also enjoined to cooperate in the task. The zamindar had a hereditary right to take a share of the produce. The peasants, too, had a hereditary right to cultivate their land and could not be ejected as long as they paid the land revenue.

The *dahsala* was not a ten-year settlement. Nor was it a permanent one, the state retaining the right to modify it. However, with some

changes, Akbar's settlement remained the basis of the land revenue system of the Mughal empire till the end of the seventeenth century. The *zabti* system is associated with Raja Todar Mal, and is sometimes called Todar Mal's *bandobast*. Todar Mal was a brilliant revenue officer who had first served under Sher Shah. But he was only one of a team of brilliant revenue officials who came to the forefront under Akbar. The *dahsala* system was the result of their combined labours.

MANSABDARI SYSTEM AND THE ARMY

Akbar would not have been able to expand his empire and maintain his hold over it without a strong army. For this purpose, it was necessary for him to organise the nobility as well as his army. Akbar realised both these objectives by means of the *mansabdari* system. Under this system, every officer was assigned a rank (*mansab*). The lowest rank was 10, and the highest was 5000 for the nobles. Princes of the blood received higher *mansabs*. Towards the end of Akbar's reign, the highest rank a noble could attain was raised from 5000 to 7000, and two premier nobles of the empire, Mirza Aziz Koka and Raja Man Singh, were honoured with the rank of 7000 each. This limit was retained basically till the end of Aurangzeb's reign. The *mansab* system under Akbar developed gradually. At first there was only one rank (*mansab*). From the fortieth year (1594-95), the ranks were divided into two—*zat* and *sawar*. The word *zat* means personal. It fixed the personal status of a person, and also the salary due to him. The *sawar* rank indicated the number of cavalymen (*sawars*) a person was required to maintain. A person who was required to maintain as many *sawars* as his *zat* rank was placed in the first category of that rank; if he maintained half or more, then in the second category and if he maintained less than half then in the third category. Thus, there were three categories in every rank (*mansab*).

Great care was taken to ensure that the *sawars* recruited by the nobles were experienced and well-mounted. For this purpose, a descriptive roll (*chehra*) of the soldier was maintained, and his horse was branded with the imperial marks. This was called the *dagh* system. Every noble had to bring his contingent for periodic inspection before persons appointed by the emperor for the purpose.

The horses were carefully inspected and only good quality horses of Arabic and Iraqi breed were employed. Ideally, for every ten cavalrymen, the *mansabdar* had to maintain twenty horses. This was so, because horses had to be rested while on march, and replacements were necessary in time of war. A *sawar* with only one horse was considered to be only half a *sawar*. The Mughal cavalry force remained an efficient one as long as the 10–20 rule was adhered to.

Provision was made that the contingents of the nobles should be mixed ones, that is drawn from all the group—Mughal, Pathan, Hindustani and Rajput. Thus, Akbar tried to weaken the forces of tribalism and parochialism. Only the Mughal and Rajput nobles were allowed to have contingents exclusively of Mughals or Rajputs, but in course of time, mixed contingents became the general rule.

Apart from cavalrymen, bowmen, musketeers (*bandukchi*), sappers and miners were also recruited in the contingents. The salaries varied, the average salary of a *sawar* was Rs 20 per month. Iranis and Turanis received a higher salary than Rajputs and Hindustanis (Indian Muslims). An infantryman received about Rs 3 per month. The salary due to the soldiers was added to the salary of the *mansabdar*, who was paid by assigning to him a *jagir*. Sometimes, the *mansabdars* were paid in cash. It is wrong to think that Akbar did not like the *jagir* system and tried to do away with it, but failed as it was too deeply entrenched. A *jagir* did not confer any hereditary rights on the holder, or disturb any of the existing rights in the area. It only meant that the land revenue due to the state was to be paid to the *jagirdar*.

The *mansabdari* system, as it developed under the Mughals, was a distinctive and unique system which did not have any exact parallel outside India. The origins of the *mansabdari* system can, perhaps, be traced back to Changez Khan who organised his army on a decimal basis, the lowest unit of command being ten, and the highest ten thousand (*toman*) whose commander was called *khan*. The Mongol system influenced, to some extent, the military system of the Delhi Sultanat, for we hear of commanders of hundred (*sadis*) and one thousand (*hazaras*). Under the Surs, we have nobles who were designated commanders of 20,000, or 10,000 or 5,000 *sawars*. But we do not quite know the system which was prevalent under Babur and Humayun.

Persons holding ranks below 500 *zat* were called *mansabdars*, those from 500 to below 2500 were called *amirs*, and those holding ranks of 2500 and above were called *amir-i-umda* or *umda-i-azam*. However, the word *mansabdar* is sometimes used for all the three categories. Apart from status, this classification had a significance: an *amir* or an *amir-i-umda* could have another *amir* or *mansabdar* serve under him, but a *mansabdar* could not do so. Thus, a person with a rank of 5000 could have under him a *mansabdar* up to a rank of 500 *zat*, and one with a rank of 4000 could have a *mansabdar* up to a rank of 400 *zat*, and so on.

The categories were not rigid. Persons were generally appointed at a low *mansab* and gradually promoted, depending upon their merits and the favour of the emperor. A person could also be demoted as a mark of punishment. Thus, there was only one service including both armymen and civilians. People who entered service at the lower rung of the ladder, could hope to rise to the position of an *amir* or even *amir-i-umda*. To that extent, careers were thrown open to talent.

In addition of meeting his personal expenses, the *mansabdar* had to maintain out of his salary a stipulated quota of horses, elephants, beasts of burden (camels and mules) and carts. Thus a *mansabdar* holding a *zat* rank of 5000 had to maintain 340 horses, 100 elephants, 400 camels, 100 mules and 160 carts. Later, these were maintained centrally, but the *mansabdar* had to pay for them out of his salary. The horses were classified into six categories, and the elephants into five according to quality, the number and quality of horses and elephants being carefully prescribed. This was so because horses and elephants of high breed were greatly prized and were considered indispensable for an efficient military machine. Cavalry and elephants, in fact, formed the main basis of the army in those days, though the artillery was rapidly becoming more important. The transport corps was vital for making the army more mobile.

For meeting these expenses, the Mughal *mansabdars* were paid handsomely. A *mansabdar* with a rank of 5000 could get a salary of Rs 30,000 per month, a *mansabdar* of 3000, Rs 17,000 and of 1000, Rs 8,200 per month. Even a humble *sadi* holding a rank of 100, could get Rs 7000 per year. Roughly, a quarter of these salaries were spent on meeting the cost of the transport corps. Even then, the Mughal *mansabdars* formed the highest paid service in the world.

Akbar kept a large body of cavalrymen as his bodyguards. He kept a big stable of horses. He also maintained a body of gentleman troopers (*ahadis*). These were persons of noble lineage who did not have the means of raising a contingent or were persons who had impressed the emperor. They were allowed to keep eight to ten horses, and received a high salary of about Rs 800 a month. They were answerable only to the emperor, and had a separate muster-master. These people could be compared to the knights of medieval Europe.

Akbar was very fond of horses and elephants. He also maintained a strong park of artillery. Akbar was specially interested in guns. He devised detachable guns which could be carried on an elephant or a camel. There were also heavy siege guns for breaching forts; some of these were so heavy that 100 or 200 oxen and several elephants were needed to pull them. A strong park of light artillery accompanied the emperor whenever he moved out of the capital.

We do not know whether Akbar ever had any plans of building a navy. The lack of a strong navy remained a key weakness of the Mughal empire. If Akbar had the time, he might have paid attention to it. He did build an efficient flotilla of war boats which he used in his eastern campaigns. Some of the boats were over 30 metres long and displaced over 350 tons.

ORGANIZATION OF GOVERNMENT

Hardly any changes were made by Akbar in the organisation of local government. The *pargana* and the *sarkar* continued as before. The chief officers of the *sarkar* were the *faujdar* and the *amalguzar*, the former being in charge of law and order, and the latter responsible for the assessment and collection of the land revenue. The territories of the empire were divided into *jagir*, *khalisa* and *inam*. Income from *khalisa* villages went directly to the royal exchequer. The *inam* lands were those which were allotted to learned and religious men. *Jagirs* were allotted to nobles and members of the royal family including the queens. The *amalguzar* was required to exercise a general supervision over all types of holdings so that the imperial rules and regulations for the assessment and collection of land revenue were followed uniformly. Only autonomous rajas were left free to continue

their traditional land revenue system in their territories. Even there, Akbar encouraged them to follow the imperial system.

Akbar paid great attention to the organisation of the central and provincial governments. His system of central government was based on the structure of government which had evolved under the Delhi Sultanat, but the functions of the various departments were carefully reorganised, and meticulous rules and regulations were laid down for the conduct of affairs. Thus, he gave a new shape to the system and breathed new life into it.

The Central Asian and Timurid tradition was of having an all-powerful *wazir* under whom various heads of departments functioned. He was the principal link between the ruler and the administration. In course of time, a separate department, the military department, had come into being. The judiciary had always been separate. Thus, in practice, the concept of an all-powerful *wazir* had been given up. However, in his capacity as *wakil*, Bairam Khan had exercised the powers of an all-powerful *wazir*.

Akbar reorganised the central machinery of administration on the basis of the division of power between various departments, and of checks and balances. While the post of *wakil* was not abolished, it was stripped of all power and became largely decorative. The post was given to important nobles from time to time, but they played little part in administration. The head of the revenue department continued to be the *wazir*. Under Akbar, generally the *wazir* did not hold a high *mansab*. Many nobles held *mansabs* which were higher than his. Thus, he was no longer the principal adviser to the ruler, but one who was an expert in revenue affairs. To emphasize this point, Akbar generally used the title of *diwan* or *diwan-i-ala* in preference to the word *wazir*. Sometimes, several persons were asked to discharge the duties of *diwan* jointly. The *diwan* was responsible for all income and expenditure, and held control over *khalisa*, *jagir* and *inam* lands.

The head of the military department was called the *mir bakhshi*. It was the *mir bakhshi* and not the *diwan* who was considered the head of the nobility. Therefore, only the leading grandees were appointed to this post. Recommendations for appointment to *mansabs* or for promotions etc., were made to the emperor through the *mir bakhshi*. Once the emperor had accepted a recommendation, it was

sent to the *diwan* for confirmation and for assigning a *jagir* to the appointee. The same procedure was followed in case of promotions.

The *mir bakhshi* was also the head of the intelligence and information agencies of the empire. Intelligence officers (*barids*) and news reporters (*waqia-navis*) were posted to all parts of the empire. Their reports were presented to the emperor at the court through the *mir bakhshi*.

It will thus be seen that the *diwan* and the *mir bakhshi* were almost on par, and supported and checked each other.

The third important officer was the *mir saman*. He was in charge of the imperial household, including the supply of all the provisions and articles for the use of the inmates of the *haram* or the female apartments. Many of these articles were manufactured under supervision in royal workshops called *karkhanas*. Only nobles who enjoyed the complete confidence of the emperor were appointed to this office. The maintenance of etiquette at the court, the control of the royal bodyguard, etc., were all under the overall supervision of this officer.

The fourth important department was the judicial department headed by the chief *qazi*. This post was sometimes combined with that of the chief *sadr* who was responsible for all charitable and religious endowments. Thus, it was a post which carried considerable power and patronage. It fell into bad odour due to the corruption and venality of Akbar's chief *qazi*, Abdun Nabi.

After instituting a careful scrutiny of the grants held by various persons, Akbar separated the *inam* lands from the *jagir* and *khalisa* lands, and divided the empire into six circles for purposes of grant of *inam* lands and their administration. Two features of the *inam* grants are noteworthy. First, Akbar made it a deliberate part of his policy to grant *inam* lands to all persons, irrespective of their religious faith and beliefs. *Sanads* of grant to various Hindu *maths* made by Akbar are still preserved. Second, Akbar made it a rule that half of the *inam* land should consist of cultivable wasteland. Thus, the *inam* holders were encouraged to extend cultivation.

In order to make himself accessible to the people as well as to the ministers, Akbar carefully divided his time. The day started with the emperor's appearance at the *jharoka* of the palace. Large number of

people assembled daily to have a glimpse of the ruler, and to present petitions to him, if necessary. These petitions were attended to immediately, or in the open darbar (*diwan-i-am*) which followed, and lasted till midday. The emperor then retired to his apartments for meals and rest.

Separate time was allotted to the ministers. For confidential consultations, the ministers were generally called to a chamber which was situated near Akbar's bathing apartment (*ghusal khana*). In course of time, this private consultation chamber came to be called *ghusal khana*.

Akbar divided the empire into twelve subas in 1580. These were Bengal, Bihar, Allahabad, Awadh, Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Kabul, Ajmer, Malwa and Gujarat. A governor (*subedar*), a *diwan*, a *bakhshi*, a *sadr*, a *qazi*, and a *waqia-navis* were appointed to each of the provinces. Thus, orderly government based on the principle of checks and balances was extended to the provinces.

RELATIONS WITH THE RAJPUTS

Akbar's relations with the Rajputs have to be seen against the wider background of Mughal policy towards the powerful rajas and zamindars of the country. When Humayun came back to India, he embarked upon a deliberate policy of trying to win over these elements. Abul Fazl says that in order 'to soothe the minds of the zamindars, he entered into matrimonial relations with them.' Thus when Jamal Khan Mewati, who was the cousin of Hasan Khan Mewati, 'one of the great zamindars of India', submitted to Humayun, he married one of his beautiful daughters himself and married the younger sister to Bairam Khan. In course of time, Akbar expanded and elaborated this policy.

Bhara Mal, the ruler of Amber, had come to Akbar's court at Agra immediately after his accession. He had made a favourable impression on the young king, for when people were running helter-skelter from a maddened elephant, the Rajputs under Bhara Mal had stood firm. In 1562, when Akbar was going to Ajmer, he learnt that Bhara Mal was being harassed by the local Mughal governor. Bhara Mal paid

personal homage to Akbar, and cemented the alliance by marrying his younger daughter, Harkha Bai, to Akbar.

Marriages between Muslim rulers and the daughters of Hindu potentates were not unusual. Many cases of such alliances in various parts of the country during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have been cited earlier. Maldeo, the powerful ruler of Jodhpur, had married his daughter, Bai Kanaka, to Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat and another, Lal Bai, to the Sur ruler, probably Islam Shah Sur. Bhara Mal himself had married his elder daughter to Haji Khan Pathan who had been the virtual ruler of Alwar after the death of Islam Shah Sur. Most of these marriages had not led to the establishment of any stable personal relations between the concerned families. The girls were generally lost to their families and never came back after marriage. Akbar followed a different policy. He gave complete religious freedom to his Hindu wives, and gave an honoured place to their parents and relations in the nobility. Bhara Mal was made a high grandee. His son, Bhagwant Das, rose to the rank of 5000 and his grandson, Man Singh, to the rank of 7000. This rank was accorded by Akbar to only one other noble, Aziz Khan Koka, his foster-brother. Akbar emphasised his special relationship with the Kachhawaha ruler in other ways as well. The infant prince, Danyal, was sent to Amber to be brought up by Bhara Mal's wives. In 1572, when Akbar dashed to Gujarat, Bhara Mal was placed in charge of Agra where all the royal ladies were residing, a signal honour, given only to nobles who were either relations or close confidants of the emperor.

But Akbar did not insist upon matrimonial relations as a precondition. No matrimonial relations were entered into with the Hadas of Ranthambhor, yet they remained high in Akbar's favour. Rao Surjan Hada was placed in charge of Garh-Katanga, and rose to the rank of 2000. Similarly no matrimonial relations were entered into with the rulers of Sirohi and Banswara when they submitted to Akbar later on.

Akbar's Rajput policy was combined with a policy of broad religious toleration. In 1564, he abolished the *jizyah* which was sometimes used by the *ulama* to humiliate non-Muslims and was often considered a symbol of Muslim domination and superiority. He had earlier abolished the pilgrim tax, and the practice of forcible conversion of prisoners of war.

Following the conquest of Chittor, most of the leading Rajput rulers had accepted Akbar's suzerainty and paid personal homage to him. The rulers of Jaisalmer and Bikaner had also entered into matrimonial relations with Akbar. The only state which had steadfastly refused to accept Mughal suzerainty was Mewar.

Although Chittor and the plain area around it had come under Mughal domination, Udaipur and the hilly area which formed the larger part of Mewar had remained under the control of the rana. In 1572, Rana Pratap succeeded Rana Udai Singh to the *gaddi*. A series of embassies were sent by Akbar to Rana Pratap to persuade him to accept Mughal suzerainty and to do personal homage. These embassies, including the one led by Man Singh, were courteously received by the rana. The story that he insulted Man Singh is not a historical fact, and is uncharacteristic of the rana who always behaved in a chivalrous and courteous manner, even towards his opponents. Man Singh's embassy was followed by one under Bhagwant Das, and another under Raja Todar Mal. At one time, it seems that the rana was prepared for a compromise. He put on the imperial robe sent by Akbar, and sent his son, Amar Singh, to the court with Bhagwant Das to pay homage to Akbar and accept his service. But no final agreement could be reached as the proud rana was not prepared to accept Akbar's demand for tendering personal homage. Also, it seems that the Mughals wanted to keep hold of Chittor which was not acceptable to the rana.

Early in 1576, Akbar moved to Ajmer, and deputed Raja Man Singh with a force of 5000 to lead a campaign against the rana. In anticipation of this move, the Rana had devastated the entire territory up to Chittor so that the Mughal forces might get no food or fodder. He had also fortified all the passes in the hills. A furious battle between the two sides was waged at Haldighati below a narrow defile leading to Kumbhalgarh, which was then the rana's capital. Apart from select Rajput forces, the rana's van consisted of the Afghan contingent led by Hakim Khan Sur. Thus the battle of Haldighati was not a struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims, or between the Indians and the foreigners. A small force of the Bhils whom the rana had befriended was also present. The rana's forces are put at 3000. The onslaught by the Rajputs and the Afghans threw the Mughal forces

into disarray. But the rumours that Akbar had arrived in person rallied them. With fresh Mughal reinforcements, the tide of battle began to turn against the Rajputs. Seeing this, the rana escaped. The Mughal forces were too tired to pursue him but, after some time, they advanced through the pass and occupied Gogunda, a strong point which had been evacuated by the rana earlier.

This was the last time the rana engaged in a pitched battle with the Mughals. Henceforth he resorted to methods of guerilla warfare. The defeat at Haldighati did not weaken Rana Pratap's resolve to fight on for independence. However, the cause for which he stood had already been lost; most of the Rajput states had accepted Mughal suzerainty. By his policy of inducing the Rajput rajas into Mughal service and treating them on par with the Mughal grandees, according broad religious toleration to his subjects, and his courteous behaviour to his former opponents, Akbar succeeded in cementing his alliance with the Rajput rulers. Therefore, Rana Pratap's refusal to bow before the Mughals had little effect on most of the other Rajput states which realised that in the existing situation, it was impossible for small states to stand out for long in favour of complete independence. Moreover, by allowing a large measure of autonomy to the Rajput rajas, Akbar established an empire which those Rajput rajas did not consider harmful to their best interests.

Rana Pratap's defiance of the mighty Mughal empire, almost alone and unaided by the other Rajput states, constitutes a glorious saga of Rajput valour and the spirit of sacrifice for cherished principles. Rana Pratap's method of sporadic warfare was later elaborated further by Malik Ambar, the Deccani general, and by Shivaji.

It is not necessary to discuss in detail the struggle between Akbar and Rana Pratap. For some time, Akbar exerted relentless pressure on the raja. The Mughals overran the states of Dungarpur, Banswara, Sirohi, etc., which were dependent allies of Mewar and had supported Rana Pratap. Akbar concluded separate treaties with these states, thus further isolating Mewar. The rana was hunted from forest to forest and from valley to valley. Both Kumbhalgarh and Udaipur were occupied by the Mughals. The raja underwent great hardships, but thanks to the support of the Bhil chiefs, he continued his defiance. The Mughal pressure relaxed after 1579 due to a serious revolt in

Bihar and Bengal, in protest against some reforms effected by Akbar. Akbar's half-brother, Mirza Hakim, made an incursion into the Punjab in order to fish in troubled waters. Thus, Akbar had to face a most serious internal crisis. In 1585, Akbar moved to Lahore to watch the situation in the north-west which had become dangerous. He remained there for the next 12 years. No Mughal expedition was sent against Rana Pratap after 1585.

Taking advantage of the situation, Rana Pratap recovered many of his territories, including Kumbhalgarh and the areas near Chittor. But he could not recover Chittor itself. During this period, he built a new capital, Chavand, near modern Dungarpur. He died in 1597 at the young age of 51, due to an internal injury incurred by him while trying to draw a stiff bow.

Apart from Mewar, Akbar had to face opposition in Marwar as well. Following the death of Maldeo (1562), there was a dispute for succession between his sons. The younger son of Maldeo, Chandrasen, who was the son of the favourite queen of Maldeo, succeeded to the *gaddi*. Due to the pressure of the Mughals, he had to give parts of his country in *patta* to his elder brothers. But Chandrasen did not like this arrangement and after some time, rose in rebellion. Akbar now took Marwar under direct Mughal administration. Possibly, one reason for this was his desire to safeguard the Mughal supply route to Gujarat which passed through Jodhpur. After its conquest, Akbar appointed Rai Singh Bikaneri to look after Jodhpur. Chandrasen resisted valiantly and waged a guerilla warfare. But after some time he had to seek refuge in Mewar. Even there he was hunted from place to place by the Mughals. He died in 1581. A couple of years later, Akbar conferred Jodhpur upon Udai Singh, the elder brother of Chandrasen. To strengthen his position, Udai Singh married his daughter, Jagat Gosain or Jodha Bai as she came to be called, to Akbar's eldest son Salim. Unlike the *dola* form of earlier marriages, the bridegroom's party went to the raja's house in *barat*, and a number of Hindu practices were followed. This happened when Akbar was residing at Lahore.

Akbar also had close personal relations with the rulers of Bikaner and Bundi who served in various campaigns with distinction. In 1593, when the son-in-law of Rai Singh of Bikaner died due to a fall from

his *palki*, Akbar went personally to the raja's house to console him, and dissuaded his daughter from performing *sati*, as her children were young.

The Rajput policy of Akbar proved beneficial to the Mughal state as well as to the Rajputs. The alliance secured to the Mughal empire the services of the bravest warriors in India. The steadfast loyalty of the Rajputs became an important factor in the consolidation and expansion of the empire. The alliance ensured peace in Rajasthan, and enabled the Rajputs to serve in far-flung parts of the empire without worrying about the safety of their homelands. By being enrolled into the imperial service, important positions in the empire were open to the Rajput rajas. Thus, Bhagwant Das of Amber was appointed joint governor of Lahore, while his son, Man Singh was appointed the governor of Bihar and Bengal. Other Rajput rajas were placed in charge of strategic provinces, such as Agra, Ajmer and Gujarat, at various times. As high grandees of the empire, they were granted *jagirs* in addition to their hereditary kingdoms, thus augmenting their resources.

Akbar's Rajput policy was continued by his successors, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Jahangir, whose mother was a Rajput princess, had himself married a Kacchawaha princess as well as a Jodhpur princess. Princesses of the houses of Jaisalmer and Bikaner were also married to him. Jahangir gave positions of honour to the rulers of all these houses.

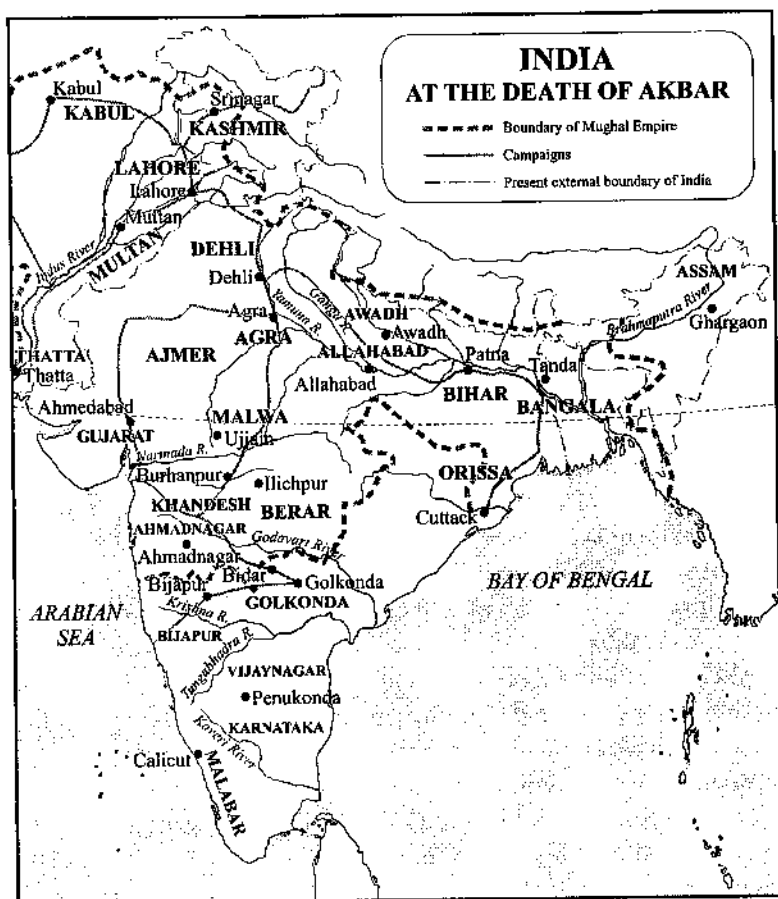
The main achievement of Jahangir, however, was the settlement of the outstanding dispute with Mewar. Rana Pratap had been succeeded by his son, Amar Singh. Akbar had sent a series of expeditions against Amar Singh in order to force him to accept his conditions. Jahangir himself was sent against him twice, but could achieve little. After his accession in 1605, Jahangir took up the matter energetically. Three successive campaigns were launched, but they could not break the rana's will. In 1613, Jahangir himself reached Ajmer to direct the campaign. Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) was deputed with a large army to invade the mountainous parts of Mewar. The heavy pressure of the Mughal army, the depopulation of the country, and ruination of agriculture, at last produced their effect. Some sardars defected to the Mughals, many others pressed the rana for peace. The rana's son, Karan Singh, who was deputed to proceed

to Jahangir's court was graciously received. Jahangir got up from the throne, embraced him in darbar and loaded him with gifts. To save the rana's prestige, Jahangir did not insist upon the rana paying personal homage to him, or entering the royal service. Prince Karan was accorded the rank of 5000, which had been earlier accorded to the rulers of Jodhpur, Bikaner and Amber. He was to serve the Mughal emperor with a contingent of 1500 *sawars*. All the territories of Mewar, including Chittor, were restored. But in view of the strategic importance of Chittor, it was stipulated that its fortifications would not be repaired.

Thus, Jahangir completed the task begun by Akbar, and further strengthened the alliance with the Rajputs.

REBELLIONS AND FURTHER EXPANSION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The new system of administration introduced by Akbar, as described above, implied tightening of the administrative machinery, greater control over the nobles, and more attention to the interests of the people. It was, therefore, not to the liking of many nobles. Sentiments of regional independence were still strong, particularly in areas such as Gujarat, Bengal and Bihar, all of which had a long tradition of forming separate kingdoms. In Rajasthan, Rana Pratap's struggle for freedom was continuing apace. In this situation, Akbar had to deal with a series of rebellions. Gujarat remained in a state of unrest for two years due to a bid for freedom by a representative of the old ruling dynasty. The most serious rebellion during the period was in Bengal and Bihar which extended to Jaunpur. The main cause of the rebellion was the strict enforcement of the *dagh* system or branding of the horses of the jagirdars, and strict accounting of their income. The discontent was fanned by some religious divines who were unhappy at Akbar's liberal views, and at his policy of resuming the large revenue-free grants of land which had been obtained by them, sometimes illegally. Akbar's half-brother, Mirza Hakim, the ruler of Kabul, also abetted the rebellion and held out the hope of invading the Punjab at a suitable time in order to help. A large number of Afghans in the eastern parts were sullen at the loss of the Afghan power and were ever ready to join a rebellion.



The rebellion kept the empire distracted for almost two years (1580–81), and Akbar was faced with a very difficult and delicate situation. Due to the mishandling of the situation by local officials, Bengal and almost the whole of Bihar passed into the hands of the rebels who proclaimed Mirza Hakim as their ruler. They even got a religious divine to issue a *fatwa*, calling on the faithful to take the field against Akbar.

Akbar did not lose his nerve. He despatched a force under Todar Mal against Bihar and Bengal, and another under Raja Man Singh to check the expected attack by Mirza Hakim. Todar Mal proceeded with great vigour and tact, and brought the situation in the east under control before Mirza Hakim's invasion took place. Mirza Hakim advanced on Lahore with 15,000 horses, but could not take the city due to the stout defence by Raja Man Singh and Bhagwant Das. His hopes that large number of nobles in the Punjab would rebel and join him were also belied. Meanwhile, Akbar marched on Lahore with a well-disciplined force of 50,000 horses. Mirza Hakim had no option but to beat a hasty retreat.

Akbar crowned his success by marching to Kabul (1581). Since Mirza Hakim refused to accept Akbar's suzerainty, or to come to pay personal allegiance to him, and the Indian nobles and soldiers were becoming restive, Akbar handed over Kabul to his sister, before returning to India. The handing over of a kingdom to a woman was symbolic of Akbar's broad-mindedness and liberalism.

Akbar's triumph over his opponents was not only a personal success, but also showed that the new system was beginning to strike roots. Akbar was now free to think of the further expansion of his empire. He was drawn to the Deccan in which he had long been interested. But before he could do anything, the situation in the northwest claimed his attention again. Abdullah Khan Uzbek, the hereditary enemy of the Mughals, had been gradually gathering strength in Central Asia. In 1584, he overran Badakhshan which had been ruled by the Timurids. Kabul appeared to be next on the list. Both Mirza Hakim and the Timurid princes ousted from Badakhshan now appealed to Akbar for help. But before he could act, Mirza Hakim died due to excessive drinking, leaving Kabul in a state of disturbance.

Akbar now ordered Man Singh to march to Kabul, and himself moved to Attok on the river Indus. In order to block all roads to the Uzbeks, he sent expeditions against Kashmir (1586), and against Baluchistan. The whole of Kashmir, including Ladakh and Baltistan (called Tibet Khurd and Tibet Buzurg), came under Mughal domination, and a daughter of the chief of Baltistan was married to young Salim. Expeditions were also sent to clear the Khyber Pass which had been blocked by rebellious tribesmen. In an expedition against them, Raja Birbal, the favourite of Akbar, lost his life. But the Afghan tribesmen were gradually forced to submit.

The consolidation of the northwest, and fixing a scientific frontier of the empire were two of the major contributions of Akbar. His conquest of Sindh (1590) also opened the trade down the river Indus for Punjab. Akbar stayed at Lahore till 1598 when the death of Abdullah Uzbek finally removed the threat from the side of the Uzbeks.

After settling the affairs of the northwest, Akbar turned his attention towards the affairs of eastern and western India and the Deccan. Orissa, which was at the time under the domination of Afghan chiefs, was conquered by Raja Man Singh who was the Mughal governor of Bengal. Man Singh also conquered Cooch-Bihar and parts of east Bengal, including Dacca. Mirza Aziz Koka, the foster-brother of Akbar, conquered Kathiawar in the west. Khan-i-Khanan Munim Khan was deputed to the Deccan along with prince Murad. The developments in the Deccan would be dealt with in a separate chapter. Suffice it to say here that by the turn of the century, Mughal control had been extended up to Ahmadnagar, bringing the Mughals into direct contact with the Marathas for the first time.

Thus, the political integration of north India had been achieved by the turn of the century, and the Mughals had started the penetration of the Deccan. But what was even more important, the cultural and emotional integration of the people within this vast empire had developed apace.

TOWARDS INTEGRATION: STATE, RELIGION AND SOCIAL REFORMS

We have seen how, during the fifteenth century, a number of rulers in different parts of the country had tried to promote greater

understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims by having secular and religious literature in Sanskrit translated into Persian, by giving patronage to local languages and literature, by adopting a more liberal policy of religious toleration and, in some cases, by giving important jobs, including service at the court, and in the army, to the Hindus. We have also seen how a remarkable series of popular saints, such as Kabir, Chaitanya and Nanak, in different parts of the country emphasised the essential unity of Islam and Hinduism, and laid stress on a religion based on love and devotion rather than one based on rituals or a literal interpretation of revealed books. They thus created the atmosphere in which liberal sentiments and views could grow and religious narrowness began to be looked down upon. This was the atmosphere in which Akbar was born and reared.

One of the first actions which Akbar took, after he had taken power in his own hands, was to abolish the poll tax or *jizyah* which the non-Muslims were required to pay in a Muslim state. Although it was not a heavy tax, it was disliked because it made a distinction between subject and subject. At the same time, Akbar abolished the pilgrim tax on bathing at holy places such as Prayag, Banaras, etc. He also abolished the practice of forcibly converting prisoners of war to Islam. This laid the essential foundation of an empire based on equal rights to all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

The liberal principles of the empire were strengthened by bringing able Hindus into the nobility. While most of these were Rajput rajas, many of whom entered into matrimonial relations with Akbar, and with whom he had established a personal relationship, *mansabs* were given to others also on the basis of their competence. Among the latter, the ablest and the most well-known were Todar Mal, an expert in revenue affairs, who rose to the post of *diwan*, and Birbal, who was a personal favourite of the emperor. There were others, such as Rai Patr Das, entitled as Rai Bikramajit.

Akbar's attitude towards his Hindu subjects is closely linked with his views of how a sovereign should behave towards his subjects. These views which have been carefully explained by Akbar's biographer, Abul Fazl, were an amalgam of Timurid, Persian and Indian ideas of sovereignty. According to Abul Fazl, the office of a true ruler was a very responsible one which depended on divine

illumination (*farr-i-izadi*). Hence, no one could stand between God and a true ruler. A true ruler was distinguished by a paternal love towards his subjects without distinction of sect or creed, a large heart so that the wishes of great and small are attended to, and prayer and devotion and a daily increasing trust in God who is considered as the real ruler. It was also the duty of the ruler to maintain equilibrium in society by not allowing people of one rank of profession to interfere in the duties and obligations of another. Above all he was not to allow the dust of sectarian strife to rise. All these together constituted what has been called the policy of *sulh-kul* or 'peace to all'.

Akbar was deeply interested in religion and philosophy. At the outset, Akbar was an orthodox Muslim. He paid great deference to the leading *qazi* of the state, Abdun Nabi Khan, who held the post of *sadr-us-sadur*. On one occasion, Akbar even carried his slippers for him. But by the time Akbar reached adulthood, mysticism which was being preached in the length and breadth of the country, began to influence him. We are told that he spent whole nights in thoughts of God, continually pronounced his name, and for a feeling of thankfulness for his success, he would sit many a morning alone, in prayer and contemplation, on a large flat stone of an old building near his palace in Agra. Gradually, he turned away from the path of narrow orthodoxy. He had already abolished the *jizyah* and pilgrim tax, as we have seen. He gathered at the court a band of talented people with liberal ideas. The most noted among these were Abul Fazl and his brother Faizi who, along with their father who was a noted scholar, had been persecuted by the *mullahs* for having sympathy with Mahdawi ideas to which the orthodox elements were strongly opposed. Another was a Brahman, Mahesh Das, who was given the title of Raja Birbal, and was a constant companion of Akbar.

In 1575, Akbar built a hall called Ibadat Khana or the Hall of Prayer at his new capital, Fatehpur Sikri. To this he called selected theologians, mystics and those of his courtiers and nobles who were known for their scholarship and intellectual attainments. Akbar discussed religious and spiritual topics with them. He frequently said, 'My sole object, oh wise *mullahs*, is to ascertain truth, to find out and disclose the principles of genuine religion...' The proceedings, at first, were confined to the Muslims. They were hardly orderly. The

mullahs wrangled, shouted, and abused each other even in the presence of the emperor. The behaviour of the *mullahs*, their pride and conceit in their learning disgusted Akbar, and further alienated him from the *mullahs*.

At this stage, Akbar opened the Ibadat Khana to people of all religions—Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Jains, even atheists. This broadened the discussions, and debates began even on issues on which all Muslims were agreed, such as whether the *Quran* was the last revealed book and Muhammad its prophet, resurrection, nature of God, etc. This horrified the theologians, and all kinds of rumours began to circulate about Akbar's desire to forsake Islam. As a modern historian of repute, R.P. Tripathi says, 'The patience and open-mindedness of Akbar was construed in a variety of way by persons of different faiths. Instead of bringing credit, the Ibadat Khana brought growing discredit.'

At this time, an enquiry was conducted into the affairs of the Chief *Sadr*, Abdun Nabi, who was found to be extremely corrupt and tyrannical in his dealings in the distribution of charitable lands (*madad-i-maash*). He had amassed wealth in other corrupt ways as well. He was a bigot and had inflicted the punishment of death on the Shias, and on a Brahman of Mathura for their beliefs. At first, Abdun Nabi was sheared of his power, and *sadrs* were appointed in every province for distributing charitable lands. Soon he was dismissed and ordered to proceed to Mecca for *haj*. At about the same time, in 1580 a rebellion broke out in the east. A number of *fatwas* were given by the *qazis*, declaring Akbar to be a heretic. Akbar suppressed the rebellion and gave drastic punishment to the *qazis*.

To further strengthen his position in dealing with the *mullahs*, Akbar also issued a declaration or *mahzar* which asserted that if there were conflicting views among those who were considered fit to interpret the *Quran*, that is *mujtaddids*, Akbar, by virtue of being 'a most just and wise king', and his rank being higher in the eyes of God than of the *mujtaddids*, was entitled to choose any one of the interpretations, which would be of 'benefit to the nation and in the interests of good order.' Further, if Akbar issued a new order 'in conformity with the *Quran* and calculated to benefit the nation', all should be bound by it.

The declaration which was signed by the leading *ulamas* had been wrongly called a 'Decree of Infallibility'. Akbar claimed the right to choose only when there was a difference of opinion among those qualified to interpret the *Quran*. At a time when there were bloody conflicts between the Shias, the Sunnis and the Mahdawis in different parts of the country, Akbar wanted the widest toleration. There is little doubt that the *mahzar* had a salutary effect in stabilising the religious situation in the empire.

But Akbar was less successful in his effort to find a meeting ground between the votaries of different religions in the country. The debates in the Ibadat Khana had not led to a better understanding between different religions, but to greater bitterness, as the representatives of each religion denounced the others and tried to prove that their religion was superior to others. Hence, in 1582, Akbar discontinued the debates in the Ibadat Khana. But he did not give up his quest for truth. Even his bitter critic, Badayuni, says: 'Night and day people did nothing but inquire and investigate.' Akbar invited Purushottam and Devi to expound the doctrines of Hinduism, and Maharji Rana to explain the doctrines of Zoroastrianism. He met some Portuguese priests and in order to understand the Christian doctrines better, he sent an embassy to Goa, requesting them to send two learned missionaries to his court. The Portuguese sent Aquaviva and Monserrate who remained at Akbar's court for almost three years and have left a valuable account. But their hope of converting Akbar to Christianity never had any basis. Akbar came into touch with the Jains also and, at his instance, the leading Jain saint of Kathiawar, Hira Vijaya Suri, spent a couple of years at Akbar's court.

Contacts with leaders of various religions, listening to their learned works, meetings with the Sufi saints and yogis gradually convinced Akbar that while there were differences of sect and creed, all religions had a number of good points which were obscured in the heat of controversy. He felt that if the good points of various religions were emphasised, an atmosphere of harmony and amity would prevail which would be for the good of the country. Further, he felt that behind all the multiplicity of names and forms, there was but one God. As Badayuni observed, as a result of all the influences which were brought to bear on His Majesty, 'there grew gradually as the

outline of a stone, the conviction in his heart that there were some sensible men in all religions. If some true knowledge was thus everywhere to be found, why should truth be confined to one religion?

Badayuni asserts that as a result, Akbar gradually turned away from Islam and set up a new religion which was compounded of many existing religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc. However, modern historians are not inclined to accept this view, and think that Badayuni has exaggerated. There is little evidence to prove that Akbar intended or actually promulgated a new religion. The word used by Abul Fazl and Badayuni for the so-called new path was *tauhid-i-Ilahi* which literally means 'Divine Monotheism'. The *tauhid-i-Ilahi* was really an order of the Sufistic type. Those who were willing to join, and whom the emperor approved, were allowed to become members. Sunday was fixed as the day for initiation. The novice placed his head at the feet of the emperor who raised him up, and gave him the formula, called *shast* in the Sufi terminology, which he was to repeat and concentrate upon. This contained Akbar's favourite motto 'Allah-o-Akbar' or God is great. The initiates were to abstain from meat as far as possible, at least in the month of their birth, give a sumptuous feast and alms on their birthday. There were no sacred books or scriptures, no priestly class, no place of worship or rituals and ceremonies, except the initiation.

Tauhid-i-Ilahi should not be confused with Akbar selecting a small group of trusted nobles who were totally devoted to him. According to Badayuni, those selected were to promise sacrifice of property, life, honour and religion. Giving up religion, apparently meant giving up attachment to the narrow concepts and observances which, again, was in keeping with Sufi ideas. However, many leading nobles, including all the great Hindu nobles, except Birbal, declined to join. The number of this group, as far as we know, amounted to about eighteen only, while those who were enrolled as disciples of Akbar amounted to thousands. Akbar did not, use force, nor was money used for enrolling disciples or *murids*.

In enrolling *murids*, Akbar evidently had some political purpose also. He wanted a band of nobles and others who would be personally

loyal to him, and support him in his concept of a state based on *sulh-i-kul*, i.e. equal toleration of and respect to all sections, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Orthodox elements, such as Badayuni, neither sympathized with or supported such a state. Badayuni ascribes this move of Akbar, to enroll disciples, to his head being turned by many unworthy flatterers and panegyrists who suggested to him that he was the *insdan-i-kamil* or the 'Perfect Man' of the age. It was at their instance that Akbar initiated the ceremony of *pabos* or kissing the floor before the sovereign, a ceremony which was previously reserved for God.

There were many precedents of rulers trying to combine temporal and spiritual powers in their person. Abul Fazl says that it was natural for people to turn to their ruler for spiritual guidance and that Akbar was well qualified to lead the people to spiritual bliss and to establish harmony among warring creeds.

The *tauhid-i-Ilahi* virtually died with Akbar though the practice of enrolling *murids* and giving them a *shast* was continued for some time by Jahangir. However, Akbar's attempt of tying the nobles to the emperor by personal bonds succeeded, many nobles continuing to pride themselves as being the *banda* or slaves, or *murids* of the emperor. Also, by and large, the nobles did not support elements propagating religious orthodoxy in social and political matters. However, the belief of looking upon the king as someone having miraculous powers, so that people could be cured by the king's touch, or by his breathing upon a pot of water, continued. Even an orthodox ruler such as Aurangzeb could not shake off this belief.

Akbar tried to emphasise the concept of *sulh-i-kul* or peace and harmony among religions in other ways as well. He set up a big translation department for translating works in Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek, etc., into Persian. Thus, the *Singhasan Battisi*, the *Atharva Veda* and the *Bible* were taken up first for translation. These were followed by the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the *Ramayana*. Many others, including the *Panchatantra* and works of geography, were also translated. The *Quran* was also translated into Persian, perhaps for the first time.

Akbar also introduced a number of social and educational reforms. He stopped *sati*, the burning of a widow, unless she herself, of her

own free will, persistently desired it. Widows of tender age who had not shared the bed with their husbands were not to be burnt at all. Widow remarriage was also legalised. Akbar was against anyone having more than one wife unless the first wife was barren. The age of marriage was raised to 14 for girls and 16 for boys. The sale of wines and spirits was restricted. Not all these steps were, however, successful. As we know, the success of social legislation depends largely on the willing cooperation of the people. Akbar was living in an age of superstition and it seems that his social reforms had only limited success.

Akbar also revised the educational syllabus, laying more emphasis on moral education and mathematics, and on secular subjects such as agriculture, geometry, astronomy, rules of government, logic, history, etc. He also gave patronage to artists, poets, painters and musicians, so much so that his court became famous for the galaxy of renowned people known as the *navaratna*.

Thus, under Akbar, the state became essentially secular, liberal and enlightened in social matters, and a promoter of cultural integration.