

Aurangzeb's Religious Policy:

The general view of historians is that Aurangzeb entirely reversed the policy of religious toleration followed by Akbar and it resulted in serious revolts among the Hindus.

In the words of Lane-Poole, "For the first time in their history, the Mughals beheld a rigid Muslim in their emperor—a Muslim as sternly repressible of himself as of his people around him, a king who was prepared to stake his throne for sake of his faith. He must have been fully conscious of the dangerous path he was pursuing, and well aware ... against every Hindu sentiment. Yet he chose this course, and adhered to this with unbending resolve through close on fifty years of unchallenged sovereignty."

Dr. S.R. Sharma, writing about the acts of religious intolerance of Aurangzeb has observed, "These were not the acts of a righteous ruler of constructive statesman, but the outbursts of blind fanaticism, unworthy of the great genius that Aurangzeb undoubtedly possessed in all other aspects."

Aims of Aurangzeb's religious policy:

It is generally accepted that Aurangzeb was a fanatic Sunni Musalman. His chief aim was to convert Dar-ul-harb (India: the country of Kafirs or infidels) to Dar-ul-Islam (country of Islam). He was intolerant towards other faiths, especially Hindus. He was also against Shia Muslims.

Aurangzeb's religious policy had two aspects i.e:

- (i) To promote the tenets of Islam and to ensure that the people led their lives accordingly.
- (ii) To adopt anti-Hindu measures.

Following were the anti-Hindu measures adopted by Aurangzeb:

1. Demolishing temples and breaking idols:

Even as a governor of Deccan he had pulled down several temples including the important Chintamani temple of Ahmedabad which he replaced with a mosque. He followed this practice vigorously after becoming emperor of India. In the first year of his reign, he issued orders to the governor of Orissa to demolish all temples in the province.

In the twelfth year of his rule, he ordered the demolition of all important and famous temples within his empire. Mosques were built at the sites of different temples. In Mewar alone, he is said to have demolished 240 temples. The most famous of the temples destroyed were those of

Keshva (Krishan Janmabhoomi) in Mathura, Vishwanath in Varanasi and Somnath in Kathiawar.

2. Imposition of Jizya:

Akbar had abolished this tax on the Hindus but Aurangzeb again levied this tax. According to Elliot, the object of reimposing the Jizya or poll tax "was to curb the infidels and to distinguish the land of the faithful from an infidel land." Manucci however, holds that the object of the tax was two-fold; first to fill up his treasury which had begun to shrink on account of expenditure on his various military campaigns; secondly to force the Hindus to embrace Islam.

Aurangzeb issued very strict instructions to the officers regarding the collection of Jizya:

"You are free to grant remissions of revenue of all other kinds; but if you remit any man's Jaziya which I succeeded with great difficulty in laying on the infidels it will be an impious charge and will cause the whole system of collecting the poll tax to fall into disorder." It is alleged that when thousands of Hindus gathered to protest against this measure, the Emperor directed his elephants against the people so that many people fell trodden to death, under the feet of the elephants.

General nature of anti-Hindu policy:

Haig draws the picture of the religious policy of Aurangzeb in the following words: "Aurangzeb was a bigot to whom the religion of the great majority of his subjects was anathema, mischief, idolatry, which it was his duty before heaven to persecute and if possible to stamp out. His methods were iconoclasm, sacrilege, economic repression, bribery, forced conversion and restriction of worship."

3. Discriminatory toll tax:

The Hindu traders were required to pay a toll tax of 5 per cent as against half of it paid by the Muslim traders. Later on Muslim traders were totally exempted from the payment of this tax.

4. Removal of the Hindus from Government jobs:

Aurangzeb's predecessors, especially Akbar had appointed a large number of Hindus in the various departments, but Aurangzeb followed the policy of removal of the Hindus from these jobs. The Hindus were not allowed to occupy high administrative or executive posts. A general order prohibiting the employment of the Hindus in the revenue department was passed in 1670.

But as it resulted in the complete breakdown of the efficiency, the order was slightly modified and Hindus were allowed to work on certain limited posts in the revenue department.

5. Restrictions on Hindu educational institutions:

For destroying the culture of the Hindus, Aurangzeb destroyed their several educational institutions at Varanasi, Multan and Thatta. He placed restrictions on the starting of new pathshalas. The Hindu children were disallowed to study the fundamentals of their faith. They were not allowed to attend Muslim Madrasa and Maktab.

6. Conversion through different means:

For the Hindus the only way to escape from the payment of various taxes like pilgrim tax, trade tax, Jizya, etc. was conversion to Islam. Getting jobs after conversion also became easier. The Hindu prisoners were freed on their conversion to Islam. All sorts of promises were made to the converted.

7. Social restrictions:

Aurangzeb issued orders that except Rajputs, no Hindu could ride an elephant, a horse and a palanquin. Holi and Diwali festivals were allowed to be celebrated with certain restrictions. The Hindiis could no longer put on fine clothes. The Hindus were not allowed to burn their dead on the banks of the river Sabarmati in Ahmedabad. Similar restrictions were placed at Delhi on the river Jamuna.

Results of the religious policy of Aurangzeb:

The religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb overshadowed his virtues. His reversal of Akbar's policy of religious toleration resulted in weakening the entire structure of the Mughal empire. It led to several conflicts and wars in different parts of the country.

These conflicts were:

- (i) Conflict with the Jats
- (ii) Conflict with the Satnamis
- (iii) Conflict with the Sikhs
- (iv) Conflicts with the Rajput's
- (v) Conflict with the Marathas.

All these rebellions destroyed the peace of the empire, disrupted its economy, weakened the administrative structure, diminished its military strength, led to the failure of Aurangzeb to make

any impact. Ultimately all these contributed to the downfall of the Mughal enterprise.

Was Aurangzeb really anti-Hindu?

A few historians have tried to justify Aurangzeb's religious policy. They state that this policy was the outcome of his political and economic considerations. He was an imperialist and he wanted to strengthen his hold on his subjects. Since several sections of the Hindu society which formed the majority of his subjects did not want to be ruled by him, they revolted. His Deccan campaigns against the Shia Sultans were also the outcome of his expansionist policy.

Regarding special taxes imposed upon the Hindus, it is argued that Aurangzeb was in need of money to carry out his policy of expansion. He therefore, imposed different kinds of taxes. Since Hindus were quite rich, they had to bear the burden of various taxes. But no argument is put forward by the protagonists of this view as why he took pains to demolish temples and break idols.

The following three letters written by him to his sons clearly establish the fact that he was a staunch Muslim and he wanted to promote his religion. Those letters also indicate that he himself considered himself a failure as a ruler. About the letters Dr. V. Smith says that "The sternest critic of the character and deeds of Aurangzeb can hardly refuse to recognise the pathos of these lamentations or to feel some sympathy for the old man on his lonely death-bed."

Letter to Prince Muazzam:

"My years have gone by profitless. God has been in my heart yet my darkened eyes have not recognized his light. There is no hope for me in the future. You should accept my last will. It should not happen that Musalmans be killed and the blame for their death rest upon this useless creature. I have greatly sinned and know not what torment awaits me. I commit you and your sons to the care of God and bid you farewell. May peace of God be upon you."

Letter to Prime Azam:

"I know not what punishment be in store for me to suffer. Though my trust be in the mercy of goodness of God, I deplore my sins. When I have lost hope in myself, how can I hope in others? Come what will, I have launched my bark upon the waters! Farewell! Farewell!"

Letter to Kambakhs:

"Soul of my soul. Now I am going alone. I grieve for your helplessness. But what is the use? Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong have done, I carry the consequence with me. Strange that I came with nothing into the world and now go away with

this stupendous caravan of sins! Whatever I look I see only God. You should accept my last will. It should not happen that Musalmans be killed and the reproach should fall on the head of this useless creature. I commit your and your sons to the care of God and bid you farewell. I am sourly troubled; May the peace of God be upon you.”