



JAHANGIR'S RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF HINDUISM

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Abstract

The study of state policy of any ruler, towards different communities, forms an essential aspect of understanding his approach towards governance. It becomes more relevant, where the creed of the ruling class is different from the majority of the subject. The advent of Islam in India added a new ingredient in its composite culture. Rulers under the Delhi sultanate and later the Mughals contributed in the development of syncretic tradition. It has been an established fact that the Mughal rulers were always curious about the native culture and tradition. They took keen interest in native socio-religious moorings in order to have a better understanding of their subjects. In fact, they encouraged their nobility and officers, deputed in a particular region, to acquire knowledge of local traditions and customs in order to have efficient administration. There are numerous instances of efforts made by the Mughal rulers to dwell deep into the logic behind a particular ritual or tradition. In this context, the state policy adopted by Mughal rulers towards different communities has been a favourite topic of scholars, thus producing voluminous literature on the subject. But despite this fact, sufficient scope is there to explore grey areas and add new dimensions to the subject. S. R. Sharma¹ was among the pioneers who studied Mughals policies from this perspective but later a number of scholars added new approach to this study. As far as the study of state policy of Jahangir towards different communities is concerned, a number of scholars have produced standard works which include Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramaniam's work shedding light on Jahangir's views on Christianity, especially the concept of Trinity of God² and Shireen Moosvi's study in understanding Jahangir's views on Reflection of Absolute, his denial of the idea of favour in lieu of change of faith, his disapproval of violence in the name of religion and his queries regarding the Mansukh (cancelled) verses of Quran³. It is evident from above description that perception of Jahangir in context of Hinduism has not been covered in any major study of the topic. Thus, an attempt has been made in this paper to further highlight the religious understanding of Jahangir in the context of Hinduism based on the analysis of Tuzuk⁴ and Majalis-i-Jahangiri⁵.

It is an established fact that Jahangir possessed a curious and rational mind. He tried to apply logical thinking in religious matters as well. Religious scholars had hard time convincing him on contentious issues, as Jahangir possessed deep knowledge on the subject and superfluous explanation would not satisfy him. We can observe his depth of knowledge during the religious debates which he conducted on regular basis. On one occasion, he posed questions to the *pandits* regarding incarnation of god. He contended that incarnation of god in ten different forms by the process of transmigration of soul seems illogical. God is limitless, one can't give him shape and size. If the idea behind the theory of incarnation is the manifestation of the light of god in these bodies, then that is applicable to all created things and not only to the ten incarnations. Jahangir further points out that if the idea behind incarnation is to give someone god's attributes, then also it is needless because in every age there are men with special attributes and miraculous qualities. Definitely he was referring to saints and other such divine personalities. After much argument the *pandits* concurred on the point that, as the formless personality of god is beyond the comprehension of human mind, they don't have any way to know him⁶. Thus, they take the aid of the theory of incarnation in which god is conceived in ten different forms.

Jahangir's observations on Hinduism are quite detailed and accurate. This becomes evident on numerous occasions with his description of institutions and traditions followed by the Hindus. He had given a detailed account of caste system in his memoir. He writes that the Hindus are divided into four groups i.e. *Brahmans*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudras* and each of these groups acts according to the rules and regulations of his group. He gives a detailed description of the duties of all the four groups. For the *Brahmans*, he writes that, they had six kind of duties i.e. to acquire religious knowledge, to give instructions to others, to worship fire, to lead men to the worship of fire, to help the needy and to receive gifts. For the *Kshatriya*, he writes that, their duty is to protect the oppressed from the evil of oppressor. For the *Vaishya*, he says that their duty is to serve the *Brahman* and *Kshatriya*. He describes



Shudras as the lowest in the caste hierarchy of Hindus. He writes that their duty is to serve the other three castes. He further writes that these group had a fixed day in the year, which they consider as auspicious. For *Brahmans* it is the last day of the month of *Sawan* when they go to the banks of rivers and tanks and perform rituals and prepare a special thread (*rakhi*) which they tie on the hands of Rajas and great men on the other day. This is considered a good omen and the thread is meant for preservation (*nigah-dasht*)⁷. At this point it is worth mentioning that Jahangir not only made minute observation of native traditions but gave due regard to it as well. He was a ruler who believed in peaceful co-existence and thus respected other's traditions. This can be established from his account on *Rakshabandhan*. He not only allowed Hindu nobles and the head of castes to tie *rakhi* on his arms but also considered it a laudable religious practice. That he adored the tradition of *rakhi* is also evident from the fact that he declared a day as *Mubarak-shamba* on account of three "pieces of good fortune" i.e. it was the day of his ascension of the throne, it was the *Shab-i-barat*, and it was the day of *rakhi*. He further writes that the auspicious day for the second caste i.e. the *Kshatriya*, is *Bijay Dashmin*⁸. *Kshatriyas* considered it auspicious to go to battle on this day, as they believe that they would be victorious if they do so. The auspicious day of the third caste i.e. *Vaishya* is the day of *Diwali*. They celebrate this day and indulge in gambling. As this class is basically engaged in mercantile activities, they considered it auspicious to open new account and start new business on this day. For the *Shudra*, the day of celebration was *Holi*, which is the last day of the year. Jahangir gives the exact dates and time of these auspicious days⁹. Such detailed account definitely reflects his quality of minute observation. On one occasion, he also mentioned about *Shivratri*, "when many *jogis* collected and the ceremonies of this night duly observed". Jahangir met the learned among these *jogis* in social intercourse¹⁰. He also mentions about the practice of *sati*, which he described as a custom among the Hindus in which after the death of the husbands women burned themselves. He writes that it may be because of her love for husband or to save the honour of their father or to save them from getting ashamed before their son-in-law¹¹.

His account is full of such detailed descriptions of Hindu traditions and religious sites. One such description is regarding the *asram* system. He mentions that a brahmana's life is divided into four periods, which is called the four *asram*. The first period is the *Brahmacharya*, which starts at the age of eight. During this time the person abstains from all bodily pleasure and indulge himself in the learning of *Vedas*. He had to stay at the house of his *guru* and leads an austere life. After this period has passed, he is allowed to marry and lead a householder's life. This phase is known as *grihast*, which continues till he had a son. When the son attains the age of sixteen, he disassociates himself from his family and moves to place of solitude, probably a jungle. This period is known as *banprasta* and it is for twelve years. After this period he enters into the phase of *sanyasi* in which he closes his heart for everyone and everything except god¹².

His description of religious places of Hindus are equally detailed. Once he went to the site of Pushkar lake for hunting. He writes in his memoir that it is the established place of worship of the Hindus, surrounded by *Deohara* (temples). He went to see a specific temple built by one of his noble Rana Shankar. He describes the deity, which was cutout from black stone, as half man and half pig. He further mentions that, there is a belief that the tank (Pushkar) has no bottom. He enquired about the fact and found that it's depth was not more than 12 cubits¹³. Likewise, he mentions about river Narmada which he describes as an object of worship among the Hindus¹⁴. On another occasion, he mentions about the city of Ujjain. He writes that Ujjain is one of the old cities and is one among the seven established places of worship of the Hindus. The city is situated on the banks of river Sipra. The Hindus believe that the water of this river turns into milk once an year during an unknown time. However, he doesn't agree with this fact and says that "my intelligence will, in no way, agree to it, the real truth of this affair is known to *Allah*"¹⁵. Such rationality on the part of Jahangir is evident in the night assembly discussions as well. On one such occasion, discussion started on the phenomenon of solar eclipse. Learned men from different religions, including Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, were present in this assembly. According to Hindu tradition, divine bath was necessary on the occasion of solar and lunar eclipse. Hindu scholars argued that this was to maintain the cleanliness and purity of the body. The Islamic scholars rejected this idea as mere propaganda on the part of *Brahmans* to get monetary benefit from such ritualistic bath. At this juncture, the emperor intervened and said that Muslims offer *namaz-o-niyaz* on the occasion of eclipse and cleanliness of the body is a prerequisite for worship or



performing *namaz-o-niyaz*¹⁶. Thus, the basic idea of remaining clean on the occasion of eclipse is common to both the religions.

Jahangir was quite influenced with Vedantic philosophy and one of the reasons for this was his association with a *Sanyasi* named Jadrup¹⁷. After his stay in Ujjain he went to visit this *Sanyasi* and in due course of time Jahangir met him several times. That he revered the *sanyasi* is evident from the fact that the emperor did not send for him but himself went to meet him, and covered the last part of the journey on foot. His memoir gives a vivid description of these meetings. Jadrup was a resident of Ujjain but had retired into the desert and was engaged in the worship of god. Jahangir gives a description of his abode, which was dug into a hill whose entrance was in the shape of a *mihrab*. A detailed measurement of this place is also given in Jahangir's memoir¹⁸. His observations about Jadrup is equally detailed. He mentions that the *sanyasi* had a weak personality and he passed his time in solitude. He just had a piece of rag at the front and back and he never lights a fire. He bathes twice daily in a water body near his place and visits Ujjain on a daily basis, to the house of three brahmin families. He takes five mouthfuls of food from them as alms, which he swallows without chewing in order to avoid the enjoyment of its flavour¹⁹. Jahangir further writes that Jadrup is well versed in the science of *Vedanta*, which is equal to *tasawwuf*²⁰. Jahangir met him thrice in Ujjain, first during his eleventh regnal year (1617) and twice during his thirteenth regnal year (1619)²¹. Jadrup moved to Mathura in 1620, where Jahangir again met him twice in the same year. Jahangir was highly impressed with the knowledge and philosophical ideas of Jadrup, which were mainly based on the divine books (*Vedas*)²². Jahangir writes that he gained much from these meetings with Jadrup and his heart felt heavy at the time of parting²³. Jadrup enjoyed a privileged position in the Mughal circle is an established fact and a possible explanation for this could be found in the fact that he was the first man, who brought the *Vedanta* to the notice of the Mughal court²⁴.

The above discussion is a testimony to the fact that Jahangir understood the diverse nature of Indian society and gave ample importance to different communities. He took note of the minutes details of the native tradition and culture and gave due regard to it. Most of his views and perception about these traditions were based on logical and rational thinking. He had an open mind and he gave space to diverse, and at times conflicting, views at his court. This is evident from the night assembly debates where contentious issues were discussed. Thus, a fertile ground was prepared for the assimilation of different ideas resulting in the development of syncretise culture in the country.

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12. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, pp 176-77.
13. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, p 124.



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15. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, p 175.
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17. For more details about Jadrup's Vedantic philosophy and tasawwuf, see Shireen Moosvi's Mughal Encounters with Vedanta: Recovering the Biography of Jadrup, *Social Scientist*, Vol- 30, no 718 (July-Aug 2002), pp 13-23.
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