



AKBAR-NĀMA

AKBAR-NĀMA, the official history of the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (964-1015/1556-1605), including a statistical gazetteer of sixteenth century North India, compiled by [Abu'l-Faẓl 'Allāmī](#). One of the fundamental source materials for the history of Mughal India, the *Akbar-nāma* is divided into three books. The first book presents Akbar's horoscope and the Indian and Greek astrological theories upon which it is based, followed by a list of eminent personalities of world history beginning with Adam and proceeding through the Timurid line to Akbar himself. After a detailed history of Akbar's father Homāyūn, the *Akbar-nāma* gives a year-by-year chronicle of Akbar's reign from his accession in 964/1556 to the 17th year of his reign, 981/1572. The second book continues the chronicle from 981/1572 to the 46th regnal year, 1010/1602.

The third book of the *Akbar-nāma*, called the *Ā'īn-e Akbarī*, is virtually a separate work, as it departs from the narrative style of the earlier books and presents a detailed description of Akbar's India. The *Ā'īn-e Akbarī* is, in turn, divided into five sections: the first treats the divine source of the Emperor's royalty, the management of the imperial household, the treasury, and minting procedures; the second gives regulations for the Empire's military (*manṣabdārī*) system; the third sets forth guidelines for the Empire's civil administration, especially the local, provincial, and central revenue systems, and the revenue settlements according to various crops and regions of North India; the fourth gives a geographic and ethnographic description of Mughal India, including a discussion of Hindu philosophy and social organization; and



the fifth book contains various sayings of Akbar as collected by the compiler. The style of the *Akbar-nāma*, self-consciously ornate and often bombastic, was considered the acme of historical prose writing in Abu'l-Faẓl's own day, and was imitated for generations after him.

Commissioned to write the *Akbar-nāma* in 998/1590 and continuing to work on it till his death in 1011/1602, Abu'l-Faẓl utilized a broad variety of sources. By far the most important of these was the vast archival data of the imperial records that were placed at his disposal. Information from such records provides the *Akbar-nāma* with a measure of detail, especially in matters pertaining to the revenue system, that is lacking in works by other Indo-Persian historians who did not enjoy the same degree of archival access. The *Akbar-nāma* also pioneered the use of Rajput chronicles and oral traditions collected from resident Hindus.

Abu'l-Faẓl had at least three major aims in writing the *Akbar-nāma*. On one level, he sought to provide a thorough and objective description of Akbar's reign, not only in the traditional diachronic sense of recording politically significant events across time (as done in books one and two), but also in the more novel sense of giving a synchronic picture of all aspects of Akbar's Empire—geographic, social, administrative and cultural—without reference to chronology (as done in book three, the *Āʿīn-e Akbarī*). As such the concluding section of the work, the *Āʿīn-e Akbarī*, contains a mine of statistical information on the sixteenth century that is without parallel in the historiography of India before Abu'l-Faẓl's time, or even after Abu'l-Faẓl's time until the appearance of gazetteers in the nineteenth century.

The second—and perhaps the most deliberate—aim of the *Akbar-nāma* was to present Akbar, Abu'l-Faẓl's master and patron, as the pivot on whom the Empire's peace, stability and splendor depended. To this end Abu'l-Faẓl made use of a number of ideological buttresses. One was the traditional Iranian political theory postulating a semi-divine, absolute monarch resplendent in glory and possessing supreme sovereignty over his people. To this political theory Abu'l-Faẓl added potent mystical and moral support in the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man (*ensān-e kāmel*). Formulated by the 13th-century Hispano-Arab mystic Moḥyī-al-dīn b. 'Arabī and systematized by his followers such as Ṣadr-al-dīn Qūnavī and 'Abd-al-Karīm Jīlī, the doctrine of *ensān-e kāmel* postulated that certain privileged individuals can embody all the attributes of God. By identifying Akbar as the Perfect Man and thus endowing him with the force of this mystical doctrine, Abu'l-Faẓl effectively countered the claims of



the *'olamā'* to ultimate authority in Mughal India.

The third—and probably the most significant—aim of the *Akbar-nāma* was to define Mughal ideology in imperial rather than in communal terms. Whereas most Indo-Persian chronicles of the early Mughal period had interpreted Indian history in terms of the fate of the Muslim community against a static background of Hindu society and culture, the *Akbar-nāma* stressed the imperial interests of a multi-racial and multi-communal state and saw Mughal history in the context of the court's political destiny. The primary theme of the *Akbar-nāma*, therefore, was not the conflict of Muslims versus non-Muslims, but rather that of the imperial state versus tenacious pockets of anti-Mughal power, viz., the hereditary local gentry or *zamīndārs*.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries the imperial aspect of its ideology remained the *Akbar-nāma's* most influential legacy, for the British, seeing themselves in many respects as successors to Mughal rule, tended to stress this aspect of Mughal ideology. In modern, independent India, however, it is the seemingly secular aspect of the *Akbar-nāma* which has received more attention. In his preface to a 1965 Delhi reprint of the *Ā'īn-e Akbarī*, for example, S. L. Gooner refers to “Akbar's cult of secularism” and describes it as “well worth emulation in the present context of communal predilections and fissiparous tendencies.” Whether or not this secular ideology is properly identifiable with the Emperor Akbar or with his spokesman and chief ideologue Abu'l-Faẓl, it is through the *Akbar-nāma* that the precursor to such an ideology achieved forceful expression and lasting influence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See *Ā'īn-e Akbarī* and *Akbar-nāma* in the list of short references.

See also Marshal, *Mughals in India*, pp. 17, 32-34.

Storey, I/2, pp. 541-51.

Mošār, *Fehrest*, cols. 77-78.



Āʿīn-e Akbarī I, ed. S. L. Goomer, Delhi, 1965.