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TOLERANCE AND CO-EXISTENCE IN MUSLIM INDIA: THE RELIGIOUS POLICY OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

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Abstract:

The Indian peninsula is known for its multi-religious and multicultural identity. India, the birthplace of Hinduism and Indian culture, has accepted many local and foreign religions throughout History. India's meeting with Islam began with Arab merchants at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and was completed with the military expeditions of Persian and Turkish rulers. The most important Muslim Empire in Indian history is the Mughal Empire, founded by Babur, the grandson of Timur. It ruled over many territories in the Indian sub-continent for three centuries. Recognizing Islam as a state religion, this empire has treated indigenous Hindus and the adherents of other religions that constitute the majority of the Indian population with extraordinary tolerance. Generally, these Muslim rulers allowed their citizens to live according to the religions they wanted, even though they destroyed some Hindu temples as a symbol of the authority change. These Muslim rulers even employed them in the governing body of the state. The most prominent example of this can be seen in the period of Akbar Shah of the Mughal Empire.

This study examined how the Mughal Empire, which ruled for centuries in the Indian Peninsula, treated the non-Muslim subjects, especially the Hindus and how did they introduce the culture of co-existence, giving more importance for the period of Akbar, the great ruler of the Mughal Empire. Similarly, I will try to compare the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire with those of Mughal's religious policy using the comparative method.

Key Words:

Cultural Co-existence, The Mughal Empire, Religious Policy, Islam in India.

1. Introduction

The Indian subcontinent, from the very beginning, is the cradle of human civilization with its diverse cultures and religions. It is the birthplace of great religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. Along with these indigenous religions, India hosted all Semitic religions, Bahaim, and Zoroastrianism. According to the 2011 census report, Hinduism constitutes the majority by 80%, while Islam, the second largest religion accounts for just 14%, Christianity for 2% and other religions for 4% of the total population. (Wikipedia , 2018)

Hinduism and Islam, with their all sects and divisions, are the two major religions in India. These two religions have both bitter and nice experiences and both cohesion and conflict throughout history. The Mughal period (1526-1850) that longs over three centuries was the golden age of peaceful religions and cultural cohesion of Hinduism and Islam. Excepting mostly politically motivated some minor strifes and intolerances, India witnessed for the cultural pollination and peaceful co-existence in this period. This unity and peaceful coexistence are the prerequisites for the long endurance of an empire, where dozens of different religions and cultures prevalent. Most of the Mughal rulers were cautious about this fact and they tried to design a new religious policy to keep their sovereignty intact.

In this study, I tried to examine the religious policies of the Mughal Empire and their role in the forming of a wonderful state with all cultural and religious diversity. I analyzed several authentic historical works for this study using historical and analytical methods. These kinds of studies are very important because the histories are being manipulated by some historians with vested interests. They are trying to portray the Islamic rulers, especially Mughal rulers as cruel and the destroyers of the Hindu temples, with the aim of the consolidation of Hindu vote banks and the prosecution of Indian Muslims.

2. Islam in India

There are many different factors that led to the advent and spread of Islam in India like organized raids of Muslim rulers, massive proselytizing efforts of Sufi Scholars and migration of Muslims into the Indian sub-continent. (Islam Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 18/85) Islam arrived in the Indian subcontinent in different regions in different stages. At first, Muslims arrived in the coastal areas of the southern part of India, as traders and missionaries. These trade relations of Arabs with Indian coastal areas can be traced back even before the advent of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). Secondly, in AD 712, Muhammed Kasim, the Arab conqueror

of the Umayyad dynasty, started the wave of military expansions into the Indian regions. Finally, the organized raids and conquests of later Afghan, Turk, and Persian Muslim rulers paved the way for Islam in the entire Indian sub-continent. (AHMED, 1995, p. 600)

Another important factor that led to the Islamisation of India was the proselytizing efforts of Islamic scholars and Sufi saints with the support of Muslim rulers of different times and regions. The presence of Sufi saints and scholars can be seen even before the military operations of Muslim rulers. (SAHA, 2007, p. 30) The important figure in this regard was Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, whose relentless efforts caused to spread Islam into common people. The *tablig* activities of Sufi saints had a great effort in the heart of the common people, who were fed up with the discrimination and subjugation they faced under the cast system. Similarly, Sufi saints always tried to disseminate the ideas of love and tolerance. They emphasized more on the mercy and love of God rather than his wrath and punishment. The doors of their *dargah* have been always open for all, irrespective of colour, religion, race, and caste. Other factors like the humility of Sufi saints towards their disciples and their apathetic attitudes towards the material world, played an important role in the effective proselytizing of Islam in India. Although the military expansion of Muslim rulers played a major role in the Islamisation of the sub-continent, we can hardly find the forced conversion attempts by these rulers. (Singh, 2016)

Similarly, the places where Muslim powers ruled for centuries, especially capital cities like Delhi and Agra had a very nominal Muslim presence that constitutes only 10-15% of the total population. As famous historian Thomas Arnold said Islam succeeded the great and everlasting *tablig* victories in the periods and places where the political power of Muslims was so feeble. (SAHA, 2007, p. 39)

Apart from being a military commander, Muhammad bin Kasim was also a devout and pious Muslim. His benevolent conducts and humanitarian activities towards the people of the conquered land, granting them the religious freedom, and considering them as *dhimmi*s in return to the minor Jizya, resulted in the flocking of common people into Islam willingly. (Idris El HAREIR, 2011, p. 607)

The decline of the great Abbasid Caliphate resulted in many important historical events like Mongolian invasions, arising of many independent dynasties in Persia, Afghanistan, and Turkistan. (Encyclopedia Britannica , 1965, p. 12/140) Mahmood Gaznevi of Ghaznavid dynasty was another important ruler who started the massive conquest of Indian sub-continent as he raided around 17 times. (Islam Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 18/85) He reached the new milestones as he conquered territories up to Somanath at the south and up to Bundelkhand at

east. (Islam Ansiklopedisi , 2001, p. 5/521) The conquest of Mahmood Gaznevi was followed by Muhammad of Ghor and later the rulers of Delhi sultanates. Around 33 sultans from 5 dynasties; 1) Slave dynasty (1206-90); The Khaljis (1290-1320); 3) Tughlaqs (1320-1413); Sayyid dynasty (1414-51) and Lodis (1451-1526) ruled Delhi until the establishment of Mughal empire in 1526. (Encyclopedia Britannica , 1965, p. 12/140)

3. Mughal Empire and Religious Policy

Generally, like many other Muslim empires like Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman, Mughal Empire, founded by Babur, the descendant of Timur, also accepted Islam as the official religion. They constructed many mosques and religious schools throughout the country and appointed the religious teachers, they encouraged the migration of the Islamic scholars from the Islamic world and they were rewarded with plenty of prizes, lands and other benefits. They showed great respect and reverence for the Sufis of the different indigenous and foreign Sufi schools like Chishtiyya and Naqshabandiyya. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 99)

The Judicial system was also based on the Hanafi school of thought of Sunni Islam. This was the basis of the criminal law for all and both criminal and civil law for Muslims. But, when the non-Muslims involved in the cases they were provided, legal advisors. Also, some internal cases like cases related to the caste system were settled at their own *Panchayath* (a council that has been set up in the villages). Mughal emperors acted very sensitively on internal issues. They allowed *sati*¹ practice of Hindus only if a woman appeared herself and expressed her own choice rather forced. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 99)

The Mughal emperors granted the freedom of religion and worship for all in their territories. Even there are so many references in the Mughal history, on the grants and financial aids made by Mughal rulers for temple constructions. (CHANDRA, 2005, pp. 177,250) Despite the pressure from the orthodox Islamic scholars, Mughal rulers didn't wish to alienate the non-Muslims from their governance. They tried to reconcile between different religions and to find out the commonalities through mutual dialogues. The destruction of the temple by some the Mughal emperors was mostly politically motivated than religious sentiments. Number of Non-Muslims served in the imperial courts, even as the chief army commander like Raja Todar Mal in the reign of Akbar. Also, most of the Mughal emperors had non-Muslims wives as they married them without converting them to Islam. Now we can give

¹A Hindu practice, that a widow is doing self-immolation in funeral pyre of her dead husband. for more details see (ELIADE, 1987, p. 14/128)

brief details about the religious policies of major Mughal emperors. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 291)

3.1. Babur

Babur, the descendant of Timur was the founder of the great Mughal Empire that ruled the major part of the Indian subcontinent over three centuries. He founded this empire defeating Ibrahim Lodi, the ruler of the Lodi dynasty of Delhi at Panipat in 1526. (Islam Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 77) When he died in 1530, the great part of north India, starting from Kandahar to Bengal was under his control. (Encyclopedia Britannica , 1965, p. 141) He bore the legacy of Timur, who was converted to Islam, in the religious matters also, as he admired the scholars and Sufi saints. He sought guidance and prayer from the Sufi saints, especially from Naqshbandi Sufi order, which was more popular in that region. The late Naqshbandi *pir* Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar (d.1490) came to Babur promising the battlefield victory and rescue from the life threat. Babur donated land and other livestock for these Sufi saints in return for their guidance and advice and married with royal family members. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 19)

In certain wars like the war against Rana Sing of Rajput, he gave the colour of religion to raise the morale of soldiers and declared this war as *jihad*. He assumed the title of *ghazi* soon after the war. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 34) However, his religious policy towards Non-Muslim was based on tolerance. There are no references to Babur proving the destruction of Hindu temples. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 45) Also, there is no historical proof on the controversial Babri mosque, which was destroyed by RSS and Sang Parivar (Fanatic Hindu Political movements), allegedly claiming it was constructed in the birthplace of Rama, one of the Hindu lords, destroying the temple. (PUNIYANI, 2009, p. 18)

His advice in his will to his son Humayun is a significant example of tolerance.

He says “My son, take note of the following: do not harbour religious prejudice in your heart. You should dispense justice while taking note of the people’s religious sensitivities, and rites. Avoid slaughtering cows in order that you could gain a place in the heart of the natives. This will take you nearer to the people. Do not demolish or damage places of worship of any faith and dispense full justice to all to ensure peace in the country. Islam can better be preached by the sword of love and affection, rather than the sword of tyranny and persecution. Avoid the

differences between the Shias and Sunnis. Look at the various characteristics of your people just as characteristics of various seasons”²

He was succeeded by his son Humayun. He ascended the throne amidst instability and turmoil. He was engaged in the war between Afgan rebels as well as his own brothers. Although he was defeated by an Afghan rebel Shershah and forced to leave the country at the beginning, he could recapture the lost territories in 1555. He followed his father and considered his will in the religious policy. The only difference between his father was that he was associated with the Shiite sect of Islam and took the asylum in the court of Shah Tahmasp. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 167)

3.2. Akbar Shah

Soon after the death of Humayun his 14-year-old son Akbar was enthroned. He was one of the great rulers of the Mughal empire, who ruled almost two-thirds of the entire Indian subcontinent for around for five decades. (E.STREUSAND, 2011, p. 213) He could manage to control the whole empire through the centralized administrative system. He was also known for his religious tolerance and reconciliation. His religious policy was designed inspiring from the various factors like the Turko-Mughal tradition of his ancestors and Hindu-Muslim rapprochement efforts of Bhakti and Sufi movements. His religious policy was multi-dimensional and can be divided into three phases. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 168)

3.2.1. The Early Phase (1556-73)

During this period Akbar was an orthodox practicing Muslim, as he scrupulously performed the daily prayers, he sent the delegation to Hajj and distributed the money for the poor. He was devoted to the orthodox Muslim scholars like Abdulla Sultanpuri and Shaikh Abdunnabi and used to listen to the lectures of these scholars. However, he followed the liberal religious policy of his ancestors. In 1563, he remitted the pilgrim tax of Hindus to their holy places. Also, he banned the enslavement of the wives and children of the Non-Muslims and married to a number of Rajput princesses without converting to Islam, and allowing them to practice their religion within the palace. (Garbe, 1909, p. 19)

Similarly, he granted permission to worship idols for Birbal, the Hindu minister of Akber. Along with the strong influence of orthodox *ulamas*, he tried to win over the hearts of the Hindus and other Non-Muslims. The significant step in this regard was the abolition of

² This was taken from the document preserved in state library of Bhopal. Quoted from (HASAN, 2013, p. 81)

*Jizya*³in 1564.⁴It was the fundamental component of any Muslim empire, ruled according to Sharia and it determined the Muslims as the ruling class. The abolition of *Jizya* by Akbar facilitated the equality between the citizens. Abul Fazal the grand vizier of Mughal and author of Akbarnama, justifies it that the *Jizya* is unnecessary because people from all religions and cultures joined in the service of Akbar and were equally loyal to them. Thus, it changed the nature of the Empire fundamentally. (E.STREUSAND, 2011, p. 247)

3.2.2. The second phase (1573-80)

This was the period of introspection in the religious policy of Akbar. He got leisure time to engage in discusses with scholars, philosophers, and Sufis in various matters and made him think that he was assisted by God almighty and chosen to unify the Indian-subcontinent under his command after his successive and remarkable victories against his counterparts. (AQUIL, 2009, p. 79)

In this context, *ibadat Khana*, or hall of prayers has been constructed in Fatehpur Sikri in 1575.it was the large rectangular building, built near the palace, with spacious galleries on each side. At first, it was opened for Muslims only and selected *Shaikhs*, *Ulamas*, pious men, and attendants were invited. The Emperor used to sit with them and engaged in scholarly discussions. (AQUIL, 2009, p. 80)

The emperor was so upset when he noticed the difference and contradicting opinions of *ulamas* and competition and agony between them to establish superiority over the others. His only aim from these debates was to ascertain the truth and discover the reality. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 171) Especially the contradicting opinions of *ulama* over the question of emperor about the number of wives allowed for a man. (AQUIL, 2009, p. 84) Eventually, Akbar opened the door of *ibadatkhana* for all like Hindus, Jains Christians, and Zoroastrians. It resulted in further confusion as the very fundamental and undisputed matters were also questioned. Each delegate tried to prove their superiority over the other and to convert the emperor to their faith. Finally, he closed the *ibadathkhana* in 1582, realizing the futility of these debates and continued these discussions privately in the cot near to his bedroom. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 172)

³Jizya is a percapita yearly tax historically levied by Islamic states on certain Non-Muslim subjects-dhimmi-permanently residing in Muslim lands under Islamic law. (Wikipedia , 2018)

⁴According to Badayuni, the court historian and orthodox *ulama* in the reign of Akbar, places it in 1579. He mentioned in his Book "*Munthakhab-ut-Tawarikh* that Akbar ordered to Abdunnabi and MakhdumulMulk to determine the amount of *Jizya* in 1575-76 And they issued the *farman*, but this order disappeared quickly as reflection on water (AQUIL, 2009, p. 85)

During this period Akbar began to abstain from the Islamic observances like daily prayer and started doing certain practices of different religions, though he didn't give up on Islam completely. (AQUIL, 2009, pp. 87-96) Even though the *ibadathkhana* is closed in a very short duration it brought two important consequences that led to the radical change in the religious policy of Akbar. Firstly, Akbar was convinced by these debates that there are certain elements of truth in all religions. This idea resulted in the development of his concept of Sulh-i-Kull or peace between all religions. Secondly, the narrowness of views in the *ibadathkhana* debates and arrogance of court *ulamas*, the growing influence of Abul Fazal and Birbal led to the breach between *ulamas* and Akbar. (CHANDRA, 2005, pp. 172-173)

Another important turning point in the reign of Akbar is the issuing of the *Mahzar* (manifesto), an attested document signed by leading court *ulamas* including Shaikh Abdunnabi and Abdulla Sultanpuri. It was the outcome of the suggestion of Sheikh Mubarak, the father of Abul Fazal, that the emperor was the *imam* of the age and *mujtahid*. Akbar was convinced quickly that he was mostly frustrated in certain fatwas given by the court *ulamas*. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 174) *Mahzar* is the document that gives certain religious authority to Emperor Akbar, placing him as the *imam adil* comparable to caliph and giving the status higher than the *mujtahid*, as he can issue the religious decrees that are not in contrary to the *nass* (explicit decree) of Qur'an and Hadith. Modern historian Raziuddin Aquil says:

“Five major issues emerge in the above document. First, Akbar is accorded the status of *imam-i-adil* and *sultan-i-adil*, which are positions comparable to that of the caliph. Second, this position is placed above that of *mujtahids*, or interpreters of the Shariat. Third, in case there is a difference of opinion amongst the *mujtahids*, Akbar's recommendation resolving the issue would be binding on all. Fourth, Akbar could issue orders in conformity to the Qur'an. Finally, it was aimed at establishing the glory of God (*hasat-ullah*) and the propagation of Islam (*izharul ajra haquq ul Islam*).” (AQUIL, 2009, p. 102)

This document had an international implication as he wished to compete with the present Islamic rulers of the Ottoman and Safavid rulers. It also strengthened the breach between Akbar and *ulamas* and he was criticized by most of the orthodox *ulamas*.

3.2.3. The Third Phase (1581-1605)

In this final stage, he set up a new religion or cult of *Din-i-Ilahi*, a mixture of doctrines of various religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Zoroastrian. There is a good deal of controversy about this new religion because it has no fundamental characteristics of the religion like the belief system, rituals, and holy book. (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 180) He was so

selective in choosing followers of this new religion and he himself initiated them with certain rituals. The main aim of this religion was to ensure sovereignty by sacrificing the four degrees; property, life, honour, and religion. It is very important to note that he never forced anyone to join his new religion. This can be better understood from the reply of Man Sing, one of his army chief. He said:

“If by discipleship was meant willingness to sacrifice one’s life he had already carried his life in his hands. What need was there for further proof? If, however, the term has another meaning and refers to faith, I certainly am a Hindu. If your order me to do so, I will become a Muslim, but I know not of the existence of any other (religion) than these two.” (CHANDRA, 2005, p. 182)

Thus, the eclecticism, policy of *sulh-i-kull* and treatment of all religion as same was praised by non-Muslims, while he was harshly criticized by Muslim scholars, especially Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

3.3. Jahangir

Jahangir, son of Akbar succeeded him when Akbar died in 1605. The first thing he did soon after his enthronement was the changing of state religion from *Din-i-Ilahi* back to Islam. He was also tolerant towards all religions, excepting the case of Sikhism. The fifth Sikh guru was executed during his reign. He was interested in the orthodox Islamic scholars and Sufis but he never allowed them to interfere in his empire. He imprisoned the famous Naqshbandi pir Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi though he released after a year. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 153) Like his father, he also engaged in religious discussion with Christian missionaries like Portuguese Jesuits. When the Portuguese naval vessels captured the merchant and pilgrim ship of Mughal courtiers, in retaliation, he closed the Catholic churches in Lahore and Agra and stopped the financial aid to the Jesuit missionaries. Also, he allowed the Jain ascetics in court and listened to them and vowed not to hunt for weeks, even though he was so interested in animal hunting. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 156)

3.4. Shah Jahan

Another important Mughal ruler is Shah Jahan (1628-1658), son of Jahangir. He was the ruler who tried to enrich the Mughal architecture as the great Mughal monuments like Taj Mahal of Agra, Red Fort, and Jama Masjid of Delhi were constructed during his reign. Unlike his father and grandfather, he was a devout orthodox Sunni Muslim. He scrupulously observed the daily prayers, fast of Ramadan, abstained Alcohol and restarted the imperial sponsorship

of Haj. He tried to enforce Sharia and favour to *ulamas* and Sufis than all of his predecessors. (H.Fisher, 2016, p. 167) He restricted most of the un-Islamic court cultures that were introduced in the reign of Akbar, as he banned prostration before the ruler. He prevented marriages between Hindus and Muslim women. He temporarily re-imposed the Hindu pilgrim tax, which was abolished by Akbar and he made the apostasy a criminal matter. He brought some restrictions on building new Hindu temples and destroyed some. Actually, these were largely based on his political policy rather than religion. But later in 1637, he reversed most of these changes and returned to the previous Mughal customs. It happened, maybe by the growing influence of his eldest son Dara Shukoh, the scholar and student of Sanskrit and the advocate of religious liberalism. (E.STREUSAND, 2011, p. 251)

Similarly, he respected other faith as his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal was of Shia sect and his mother was from a Hindu Rathor Rajput. He patronized Hindu poets and Muslim scientific works were translated into Sanskrit. His Taj Mahal, the crowning glory of the Mughal Empire was the greatest example of blended Hindu-Muslim architecture. (William J. Duiker, 2016, p. 425)

3.5. Aurangzeb

The last great emperor of the Mughal Empire is Aurangzeb (1658-1707). Although he was engaged in the war of succession and continuous threat of Marathas, the Mughal Empire reached the zenith of power in his reign. (Islam Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 18/77) He was ultimately an Islamic puritan. He was known for his self-discipline and simple lifestyle. He banned all un-Islamic traditions of the court, Hindu astrologers were discouraged, the great festival of Muharram, celebrated by Shiite Muslims, and lamps lit on the tomb of Sufi saints were banned. Alcohol, narcotics, and gambling were prohibited and restrictions were made on the prostitutes, though these measures were less practical. The re-imposition of Jizya was the revolutionary action that caused the hatred of non-Muslims. Destruction of the temple was most allegedly exaggerated by some historians. But these destructions were more politically or strategically motivated. Like Jahangir, he also had a bad relationship with the Sikh community, as the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, who revolted against Mughal, was assassinated by Aurangzeb. That fostered the hostility of the Sikh community towards the Mughal Empire. (AVARI, 2013, p. 115)

Some historians blame the religious policy of Aurangzeb as the cause of the decline of the Mughal Empire. But it is not completely true because the various revolt of Marathas and Rajput and Sikhs were occurred by separate and unrelated causes. As Athar Ali demonstrated

“The ethnic composition of the Mughal ruling class did not change substantially during Aurangzeb’s reign. Without the specific trigger of Jaswant Singh’s death without a living heir, the Rajput rebellion might not have occurred at all.” (AVARI, 2013, p. 252)

He had changed his policies number of times during his long reign. The extension of the territory and the ensuring of the sovereignty were his ultimate aim like any other ruler. The number of non-Muslim officers increased in his time to 33% higher than in the period of Shah Jahan. He funded for the restoration and renovation of the Hindu temples like Balaji temple, the temple of Ujjain and other Jain temples. The re-imposition of the Jizya was also temporary and Brahmins, old men, and Handicapped were exempted from this tax. (PUNIYANI, 2009, p. 70)

After Aurangzeb, the decline of the Mughal Empire has been started. The frequent war of succession, internal and external threats of rebels like the Marathas, Afgan powers and finally the British invasion and colonialism caused the decline of the great Mughal Empire in 1857. Bahadur Shah Zafer was the last ruler of this empire, who died in Rangoon, where he was exiled by the British. (Kanda, 2007, p. 12)

4. Millet System of Ottoman Empire and Mughal Empire

The Ottoman Empire, which ruled most of the Islamic world over centuries, was the powerful counterpart of the Mughal Empire. It has also a wonderful history of blended culture and religious tolerance. The religious policy of the Ottoman Empire towards non-Muslims was mainly based on *millet* system.⁵ They governed the non-Muslim subjects of *their* territory according to the *dhimmi* law of Islam. Thus, they could maintain the unity and togetherness of twenty more ethnic groups and four religions of its vast territory of east and west. We cannot compare the religious policy of the Ottoman Empire to the Mughal Empire, mainly because both have different situations. Ottoman Empire has to deal with the non-Muslim minority while the Mughal Empire has to deal with the non-Muslim majority. However, in case of religious tolerance both share the same culture. While we examine the history of both great

⁵ The *millet* system was a governing system for the citizens under the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire, grouping them based on religion or beliefs. The term ‘*millet*’ is an Arabic word which means community, and it is given different meanings in different periods of history. In the late, 19th century the term ‘*millet*’ is translated to the western term ‘nation’. In the Islamic literature the term ‘*millet*’ is used to denote the religious communities as the Qur’an used it for Islam and other religions. Similarly, According to the terminology of the Ottoman Empire it means the religious community which accepts certain vocal or written commandments like Christians and Jews. (Encyclo Pedia of Islam 2005: p, 64)

Muslim empires, we can find out that their religious policy and concept of cultural co-existence played a major role in their long period of rule.

5. Conclusion

The Indian subcontinent has a rich culture of religious tolerance and cultural coexistence. Its prominent examples can be seen in the period of the Mughal Empire. Mughal Empire like any other Muslim empires accepted Islam as the state religion, although sharia law is not enforced strictly in all periods. Excepting some minor policy changes in a certain periods, from the very beginning, most of the Mughal rulers followed the policy of religious tolerance. When we analyze the history of the Mughal Empire we can clearly understand that the main aim of the Mughal rulers was the extension of empire and keeping their sovereignty unshaken. The Islamisation of India was not their ultimate objective, although they favoured Islamic scholars and Sufi saints. Similarly, when we are analyzing Mughal rulers, we can find Akbar as ultra-secular in religious matters and Aurangzeb as more orthodox and puritan Muslims. Many of the allegedly interpreted intolerant activities of Mughal rulers like temple destructions and killing of religious leaders were ultimately politically motivated rather than religious sentiments. The active inclusiveness of non-Muslim officers in the rule was the key success of the Mughal Empire, as many of the Mughal rulers had the Hindu Army chiefs and commanders while the growing religious revolts and insecurity feelings of non-Muslims were the causes of the decline of the empire.

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