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Aurangzeb's Religious Policy, CC-410, Unit 4

Aurangzeb ruled for almost 50 years. During his long reign period, the Mughal Empire reached its territorial climax.

- Aurangzeb stretched his territory from Kashmir (in the north) to Jinji (in the south), and from the Hindukush (in the west) to Chittagong (in the east).
- Aurangzeb's letters reflected the close attention that he paid to all affairs of the state and governance. He was a strict disciplinarian who did not spare even his own sons.
- In 1686, Aurangzeb imprisoned prince Muazzam on a charge of intriguing with the ruler of Golconda, and kept him in prison for 12 long years. His other sons also had to face his wrath on various occasions.
- Aurangzeb's personal life was marked by simplicity. He had the reputation of being orthodox, God fearing Muslim. In a course of time, he began to be regarded as a *zinda pir*, or "a living saint."
- Aurangzeb was not interested in philosophical debates or in mysticism; however, he did not prohibit his sons from experimenting in Sufism.
- While taking his stand on the Hanafi school of Muslim law, which had been traditionally followed in India, Aurangzeb did not hesitate in issuing secular decrees, called '*zawabit*.'
- A collection of his decrees had been collected in a work known as ***Zawabit-i-Alamgiri***.
- Apart from being an orthodox Muslim, Aurangzeb was also a ruler. He could hardly forget the political reality that the overwhelming population of India was Hindu, and that they were deeply attached to their faith.

Religious Policy

- At the beginning of his reign, Aurangzeb prohibited the *kalma* being inscribed on coins, as it trampled underfoot or be defiled while passing from one hand to another.
- Aurangzeb banned the festival of *Nauroz*, as it was considered as Zoroastrian practice favored by the *Safavid* rulers of Iran.
- Aurangzeb appointed ***Muhtasibs*** in all the provinces. Their major work was to see that people lived their lives in accordance with the *shara*.
- *Muhtasibs* were responsible for ensuring that the things, which were forbidden (such as intoxicants and gambling dens, etc) by the *shara* and the *zawabits* (secular decrees) were, as far as possible, not disobeyed openly.
- While appointing *Muhtasibs*, though, Aurangzeb emphasized that the state was also responsible for the moral welfare of the citizens. But these officials were instructed not to interfere in the private lives of citizens.
- In 1669, Aurangzeb took a number of measures, which have been called puritanical, but many of them were of an economic and social character, and against superstitious beliefs. Likewise, he prohibited singing in the court and the official musicians were pensioned off. The instrumental music and ***naubat*** (the royal band) were, however, continued.

- Singing also continued to be patronized by the ladies in the harem, and also by individual nobles. It is interesting to note that the largest number of Persian works on classical Indian music were written during Aurangzeb's reign. Aurangzeb himself was proficient in playing the *Veena*.
- Aurangzeb withdrawn the practice of ***jharoka darshan*** or showing himself to the public from the balcony (initiated by Akbar). He considered it a superstitious practice and against Islam.
- Aurangzeb banned the ceremony of weighing the emperor against gold and silver and other articles on his birthdays. However, because of majority of social demand, Aurangzeb had to permit this ceremony for his sons when they recovered from illness.
- Aurangzeb prohibited astrologers from preparing almanacs. But the order was disobeyed by everybody including members of the royal family.
- To promote trade among the Muslims who depended (almost) exclusively on state support, Aurangzeb exempted Muslim traders from the payment of cess. However, Aurangzeb found that the Muslim traders were taking undue advantages of this and cheating the state; therefore, he reinstated it, but kept it at half of what was charged from others.
- Some evidences suggest that Aurangzeb wanted to have the clergy on his side, as the clergy exercised a powerful hold on the minds of men.
- Aurangzeb restated the position of the ***shara*** regarding the temples, synagogues, churches, etc., that "*long standing temple should not be demolished but no new temples allowed to be built.*" He also allowed that the old places of worship could be repaired "since buildings cannot last forever."
- When he was governor of Gujarat, Aurangzeb, ordered a number of temples in Gujarat to be destroyed, which often meant merely breaking the enragés and closing down the temples at the outset of his reign. However, Aurangzeb found that images of these temples had been restored and idol-worship had been resumed.
- In 1665, Aurangzeb again ordered to destroy these temples. The famous temple of ***Somnath***, which he ordered to be destroyed, was earlier in his reign.
- Aurangzeb encountered political opposition from a number of quarters, such as the Marathas, Jats, etc., as they had adopted a new stance. Therefore, while dealing with the conflicts (with the local elements), Aurangzeb considered it legitimate to destroy even long standing Hindu temples as a major punishment and as a warning.
- Aurangzeb looked upon temples as the centers of spreading rebellious ideas, i.e. ideas which were not acceptable to the orthodox elements. Therefore, in 1669, he took strict action especially when he learnt that in some of the temples in Thatta, Multan and especially at Banaras, both Hindus and Muslims used to come from great distances to learn from the Brahmins.
- Aurangzeb issued orders to the governors of all provinces to prohibit such practices and to destroy all those temples where such practices took place.
- As a result of these orders, a number of temples such as the famous temples of ***Vishwanath*** at Banaras and the temple of ***Keshava Rai*** at Mathura built by Bir Singh Deo Bundela during the reign of Jahangir were destroyed and a mosque; erected in their place.
- Mustaid Khan, author of the ***Maasir-i-Alamgiri*** mentioned that with reference to the destruction of the temple of Keshava Rai at Mathura, "*On seeing this instance of the strength of the Emperor's faith and the grandeur of his devotion to God, the proud rajas were subdued,*

and in amazement they stood like images facing the wall." Thereupon, many temples built in Orissa during the last ten to twelve years were also destroyed.

- During 1679-80, when there was a state of hostility with the Rathors of Marwar and the Rana of Udaipur, many temples of old standing were destroyed at Jodhpur and its **parganas**, and at Udaipur.
- After 1679, it seems that Aurangzeb's zeal to destroy temples decreased, as after this, there was no evidence of any large-scale destruction of temples in the south (between 1681 and his death in 1707).
- Aurangzeb again introduced the **jizyah** (or the poll tax) (it was abolished by Akbar). According to the *shara*, in a Muslim state, the payment of *jizyah* was obligatory, for the non-Muslims.
- Aurangzeb, in fact, did not try to change the nature of the state, but reasserted its fundamentally Islamic character. Aurangzeb's religious beliefs cannot be considered as the basis of his political policies.
- Aurangzeb's religious ideas and beliefs on the one hand, and his political or public policies on the other, however, clashed on many occasions and he faced difficult choices. Sometimes this led him to adopt contradictory policies which damaged the empire.