

## PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUES: JALALUDIN MUHAMMAD AKBAR (D. 1605)'S UNIVERSALISM AND SHEIKH AHMAD SIRHINDI (D. 1624)'S SUFI REFORMATION

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### Abstract

*This article examines the philosophical and religious debate between the idea of universalism of Emperor Jalaludin Muhammad Akbar (d.1605) and the Sufi reformation of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624). Akbar, famed for his Sulh-I-Kul (universal peace) policy, aimed to merge many religious traditions into a harmonious framework while encouraging tolerance and inclusivity. In contrast, Sirhindi, a notable Sufi scholar, was fiercely opposed to Akbar's theological reforms, pushing for the restoration of orthodox Islamic norms and inventing the notion of Wahdat al-Shuhud as a counter to Wahdat al-Wajud. His theories emphasized the difference between the creator and the creature while reaffirming Sharia's primacy in Sufi philosophy. This research emphasizes the intellectual and theological conflicts that molded Mughal-era religious thought by examining their opposing ideologies. Using historical research and comparative techniques, the discussion delves into the broader ramifications of religious syncretism and reform throughout South Asian history.*

**Key Words:** Akbar, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Universalism, Sul-i-Kul, Sufi Reformation, Religious Syncretism, Islamic Orthodoxy, Philosophical Dialogues, Comparative Theology

### 1. Introduction

Abu'l Fath Jalaludin Muhammad Akbar (d. 1605), the third Mughal Emperor, came to power at thirteen, beginning his glorious reign. Akbar was born in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Sind, Western India (Shohibatussholihah & Barizi, 2022, p.130). For around fifty years, he was one of the great leaders of the Mughal Empire (Muhammad, 2020, p.6). Akbar had a unique and lasting role, and he acknowledged India not only as his home but also as a country with various political and artistic personalities. He established the framework for India to become a secular nation-state. After rejecting the Islamic notion of state and separating religion and politics, he proclaimed himself India's national ruler. Akbar urged all people to live in harmony and peace. It implies not solely tolerance but also the decency, respect, and compromise required to maintain a diverse population. He made Hindus, including the Rajputs, part of the administration. Under his rule, racism, regionalism, and religious bigotry had no place in the Mughal Empire, which he expanded using their might (Chhaburao, 2018, p.81).

Akbar's rule serves as a testament to intellectual curiosity and religious tolerance. To explain universal peace, he developed the Sul-i-Kul philosophy, which focuses on interfaith tolerance and treating everyone equally, regardless of their religious beliefs. Some scholars confuse "Sulh-i-Kul" with "Din-i-Ilahi" (Tien, 2018, p. 286). Din-i-Ilahi is a mixture of doctrines of various religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrian, and Judaism (Jamsari et al., 2017, p.776). Akbar viewed the positive aspects of all religions and created a sense of fraternity between them. He ruled successfully by upholding law and order, demonstrating good intentions (Lal, 1980, p. 226).

According to Abul Fazal, there are four levels of faith in His Majesty: a willingness to make sacrifices for the Emperor, property, honor, life, and religion. At any point in time, all four degrees had been attained. Badaoni wrote, with customary hyperbole (Allami, 1873, p.191). Tauhid-i-Ilahi, or Divine Monotheism, is another name for Din-I-Ilahi (Divine Faith). It was a socio-religious organization or brotherhood designed to cement different groups in the country. It was not a religion but based on the principle of universal toleration (Ghodratollahi, 2007, p.16). Its foundation was Islam's belief in the unity of God; its liturgy

was diverse, primarily derived from Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Acknowledging Akbar as Caliph and believing in the unity of God were essential components of a student of the Divine Faith (Jaffar, 1936, p.127).

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) was born in Sirhind in 971 A.H. His brilliance in Hadith caught attention of Akbar and his companions, Abul Fazl and, Faizi. They initially tried to build a positive relationship with him, but after discussing several educational issues during a meeting, their relationship did not last long. (Malik et al., 2016, p.157). With his wealth of knowledge and understanding of Islamic philosophy, Sirhindi significantly impacted India's social and political evolution. Sirhindi taught people the value of following the rigid and unambiguous teachings of the correctly led caliphs of Islam and objected to any religious reform (Bhutto et al., 2019, p.46). He was a great reformer; he vehemently opposed Bid'at in Islam, believing it to be against the Sunnah. He was a member of the Mughal Empire's contemporaneous Sufi school, the Naqshbandia order. Sirhindi attempted to encourage the Mughal Emperors to adopt Sharia law using speeches and correspondence. Shaikh Sirhindi's relationship with the Mughal rulers worsened after Akbar proclaimed Din-I-Ilahi. He was crucial to weakening the influence of the new faith, and fiercely resisted Akbar's endeavor to establish it (Bisati, 2001, pp.191-226).

## 2. Literature review

Sunita Chaudhry's article, "Evolution of Akbar's Religious Policy" (2017) states this. Akbar was a great king in India and worldwide. His grandeur lies not in the growth of his kingdom, but in ending the age-old feud between Hindus and Muslims. He ushered in a new age by reducing the rivalry between these prominent religions. J.L. Mehta also claims that Akbar was the first king to implement religious peace policies and elevate them to the greatest level (Chaudhry, 2017).

According to M. Anusha Angel's article "Akbar's Religious Policy" (2018), Akbar followed the policy of universal tolerance, "Sulh-i-Kul". Akbar, who possessed a unique, sharp mind in politics, realized early on that mere tolerance for Hindus was insufficient. Furthermore, because he was deeply concerned with the well-being of his subjects, his program was equally devoted to removing not just religion but also common societal problems (Angel, 2018).

In their article "The Great Islamic Mughal Empire during Jalaluddin Akbar's Era: Sulh-i-Kul Policy Determination" (2022), Fiana Shohibatussholilah and Ahmad Barizi write that Abu'l Fazl publicly advocated that Akbar prioritize absolute authority and social unity as the primary religious goals of the empire. Akbar had many ways to demonstrate this. The first approach is a political marriage. Although Akbar's wives came from different philosophical and social backgrounds, his marriages first to Shahzadi Ruqaiya Sultan Begum and later to Mariam-uz-Zamani were strategic alliances intended to strengthen royal authority. In his early years, Akbar adopted it once he discovered that his parents could peacefully coexist while belonging to different religious organizations. The introduction of this political union may strengthen territorial expansion even more. The second option was to remove the Jizya, or pilgrimage tax (Shohibatussholilah & Barizi, 2022).

Muhammad Ibrahim and Samina Tufail's article "Intellectual Services of Mujadid Alf Sani: An Overview" (2022) states that Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's most notable intellectual and reformist contribution was his opposition to unconventional Sufi beliefs and mystical theories. He established the Naqshbandi order and devoted himself to the spread of Shariah to revitalize Islamic principles. His important writings include "Isbat-ul-Nabuwwat" and "Risali-Nabuwwat," while "Tauheed-i-Shuhudi" is his most significant contribution to Islamic philosophy. Until his death, he was committed to the revival of Islamic teachings and persistently advocated for adherence to Islam's well-defined and legitimate path. Khawaja

Baqi Billah, who arrived from Kabul and remained in New Delhi during the latter period of Akbar's rule, introduced Naqshbandia Silsilah to India. He was the eighth in line of succession to Khawaja Bahaiddin Naqshband, the founder. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi was appointed Khawaja Baqi Billah's vice-regent (Khalifa), after which he aggressively campaigned to spread the Naqshbandi order by assigning his pupils to major cities across India. His unwavering efforts helped the Naqshbandi order dominate the mystical field for about 200 years and significantly influenced Indian Muslims' religious and spiritual lives (Ibrahim & Tufail, 2022).

In *the Mughal Empire (1526-1803 A.D.)*, Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava (1959) stated that in 1564, Akbar abolished the Jizya tax, which was applied to non-Muslims throughout his empire. This tax severely harmed Hindus and reminded them that they were viewed as inferior. Akbar's decision to erase all invidious divisions between various sectors of his subjects resulted in a significant loss to his treasury. However, he acquired the favor of almost all of the country's residents (Srivastava, 1959).

*The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* by Sri Ram Sharma was published in 1962. Akbar's finest accomplishment in this sector was the eradication of the horrible Jizya. The imposition of this tax laid the groundwork for all other aspects of the Muslim kings of India's religious policy. The repeal of this despised tax marked a watershed moment in India's Muslim history. As long as the Jizya was imposed, the Muslims were the only citizens of the Muslim state. Hindus were granted certain rights in return for paying the Jizya to their conquerors. Akbar abolished it, creating a unified citizenship for all of his subjects, Hindus and Muslims. It should be noted that Jizya was abolished many years before Abu'l Fazl and Faizi met with the emperor (Sharma, 1962).

Saifullah Bhutto, Abdur Rehman Kaloi, and Hameedullah Bhutto produced a paper titled "Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's Role of Refuting the Bid'at: The Case of Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi" (2019). Sheikh Ahmad go against the policy of Akbar of abolishing the Jizya tax. Sheikh Ahmad oversaw the work of purifying Muslim society. His purpose was to eradicate Hindu pantheistic influences from Islamic teachings. He rejected Wahdat-ul-Wujud's philosophy in favor of Wahdat ush-Shuhud's theory (Bhutto et al., 2019).

Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava (1959) writes in his book *The Mughal Empire (1526-1803 A.D.)* that Akbar articulated the Dini-Ilahi concept. Akbar established human reason as the sole basis of religion and granted complete religious tolerance to all creeds across the empire. He was saddened to witness narrow-minded religious extremists preaching hatred against one another. To end religious strife in the empire, he endeavored to integrate all the religions he knew, dubbing it Tawahid-i-ilahi, or Divine Monotheism. It was not a religion, instead, it was a socio-religious organization or brotherhood intended to unite the land's varied communities. It was founded on the Sulah-i-Kul idea of universal toleration and included the positive aspects of every religion the emperor himself had studied. It believed in God's unity and included significant Hindu, Jain, and Parsee ideas (Srivastava, 1959).

Muhammad Ibrahim and Samina Taufail published a paper titled "Intellectual Services of Mujadid Alif Sani: An Overview" (2022), in which they stated that Sheikh Ahmad was not just a religious teacher and spiritual guardian, but also a reforming leader. He emphasized and explored Islamic ideas in his letters, particularly Ittiba-Sunnah. Sheikh Ahmad was a vocal opponent of atheism and a critic of un-Islamic practices. He placed a heavy emphasis on Tauheed. He discovered an inaccuracy in Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi and came out to challenge its wicked beliefs. Mujadid Alf Sani stated that Satanism without a rule of law was confusing, and he criticized religious experts who questioned Shariah's legitimacy. He tried valiantly to bridge the rift between academicians and mystics. Sheikh Ahmad was

most successful in instilling in Muslims throughout Jahangir's reign a deep knowledge that people should not respect any king's orders that contradicted Deen-e-Islam.

He urged Muslims to embrace humble and modest practices through the teachings of Islam and the Sunnah. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's revival movement actively resisted the various social, political, and religious evils that plagued Indian society during Akbar's reign. Mujadid's approach was productive in restoring Shariat and Islamic ideals, which are recognized means of reconciliation. Jahangir's reign saw the success of Imam Rabbani's reformist endeavor. Sheikh Ahmad refused the king's command to perform Sajida prostration before the emperor and was imprisoned for two years at Gwalior Fort until the Emperor realised his mistake. Along with releasing Sheikh Ahmad, Jahangir also invited him to Agra. Following that, Jahangir revoked all of Akbar's un-Islamic measures. Sheikh Ahmad's significant achievement was his strong opposition to unorthodox Sufism and deviant mystical teachings. Sheikh Ahmad preached Islam till his death. He pushed them to take the predetermined, well-defined course (Ibrahim & Tufail, 2022).

### **3. Research methodology**

A qualitative method of research was adopted in this study, based on historical analysis and literary interpretation. Primary sources, such as Akbar's court records, Sirhindi's letters (Maktubat), and contemporary historical accounts, are examined to understand their philosophies. Secondary sources, such as scholarly publications and journal articles, provide contextual information and critical perspectives. A comparative perspective emphasizes the ideological differences between Akbar's universalism and Sirhind's Sufi reformation. This process guarantees a fair and well-researched discussion of their intellectual contributions.

### **4. Sulh-i-Kul: Akbar's Vision of Universalism and Religious Tolerance**

Akbar ruled with relative, rather than absolute, social and religious tolerance (Kuli & Jain, 2014, p. 92). Finding a common ground for all religions and fostering harmony between the different faiths of all his people became Akbar's policy of sulh-i-kul, which is sometimes translated as "universal peace" or "tolerance for all" (Fisher, 2016, p.130). Jalaluddin Akbar Padishah, the empire's builder, ruled with absolute authority for 52 lunar years (Rajpurohit, 2022, p. 933). By inventing the notion of sulh-i-kul, he created a system to help eliminate religious, cultural, and social disparities throughout his empire. He was inspired by growing devotion to God and saw spiritual guidance as a ruler's primary role. Akbar was also greatly influenced by Ibn al-Arabi's notion of the Perfect Man, which holds that the 'Perfect Man' possesses extraordinary spiritual authority and wisdom and is analogous to a deep, quiet ocean. For Abu'l Fazl, a sovereign like Akbar, being a wonderful personality exemplifies the Perfect Man (insan al-Kamil), the Philosopher King. He persistently advocated for Sulh-i-kul (Umar, 2024, p.31).

### **5. Wahdat al-Wajud and Wahdat al-Shahud: Contrasting Sufi Perspectives and Sirhindi's Reformist Approach**

Sheikh Ahmad's primary contribution was to reform Sufism by removing innovations (Bid'ah) and integrating mystic rituals with Islamic Shariah. Although adhered to Tarekat's ideas, it offered its doctrines a fresh perspective by rejecting the concept of the unity of being. Sheikh Ahmad challenged teachings on wahdat al-wujud by Ibn 'Arabi, providing a different idea of tawhid, known as wahdat al-syuhud. He stressed rigorous commitment to Islamic teachings for prosperity in this life and the next in his letters to academics and dignitaries. While he influenced many noblemen and scholars, his main contribution was to revive Islamic identity and Shariah customs in Muslim culture (Nizami, 1991, p. 177).

The seeker witnesses nothing except the One (Friedmann, 1966, p. 85). On the other hand, Tawhid-I Shuddhi refers to witnessing divine unity, where the seeker sees only God while acknowledging the difference between Creator and creation. In Sirhindi's perspective,



the seeker affirms the existence of the self but contemplates its annihilation (fana) in the presence of the Divine. The universe is perceived as a mirror reflecting divine attributes, even though it may face eventual extinction; the seeker understands all phenomena as manifestations of divine unity. Thus, true knowledge arises from 'Ayn al-Yaqin (the Eye of Certainty), and Tawhid is realized through this direct, experiential form of certainty (Sirhindi, 2012, pp. 146 -147).

"Wajoodi and Shahudi's philosophy" is typically overlooked by researchers as a mere philosophy and school of thinking. When Shaykh's philosophy and school of thought are examined, one thing becomes clear: this is more than just a theory, but also a secret power that influences a man's thinking and deeds. Shaykh was fully aware of the political and social deviations based on "Wajoodi philosophy," which is why he dealt a severe blow to this philosophy (Reena & Sahu, 2021, p. 3106). By introducing the theory of Wahdat al-Shahud, Imam Rabbani attained a distinguished position in the historical perspective of subcontinent and broader landscape of Islamic thought (Chowdury & Goktas, 2021, p. 33).

### **6. Ibadat khana: A tradition of Dialogue or an arena of Intellectual Conflict**

In 1575, Akbar constructed Fatehpur, a highly controversial building known as the 'Ibadat-Khana' (Arabic for 'divine worship hall') (Fisher, 2016, p. 122). It was to be a sacred meeting place dedicated solely to studying God, where the most learned scholars of Hindustan and beyond would be invited to join him in studious reflection on the divine mysteries (Collier, 2016, p. 220). India's inhabitants have a long history of religious and intellectual disagreements. Therefore, Akbar was persuaded of the value of open debate on religious dogmas (Garbe, 1909, p. 189). When his glorious presence lit the capital (Fatehpur Sikri), his Majesty commanded that a temple of worship (Ibadat Khana) be built to reinforce the spiritual realm, complete with four verandas (Aiwns) (Allami, 1939, p.157). The structure was separated into four halls: the Prophet's descendants, or Saiyids, used the western hall; wise men, or those who had studied and learned, used the southern hall; and those renowned for their wisdom and devotion to inspiration used the northern hall. The eastern hall was reserved for nobles and state officers, whose tastes matched those of one or more classes (Malleeson, 1899, p.123).

'Ibadat Khana' was a critical step toward achieving the objective of encouraging interreligious dialogue and understanding. Leaders from many religious backgrounds might meet under one roof to debate their beliefs and practices. The location becomes a focal point for better understanding each other's ideas and promotes an engaging mindset of tolerance and harmony. The eventual result of the foundation of 'Ibadat Khana' is a syncretic faith that combines the essential doctrines and aspects of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism. Din-i-ilahi was a prominent symbol of Akbar's inclusive worldview, which advocated for religious freedom and basic unity among all existing religions (Rahman, 2023, p.6). According to Badauni's Muntakhab-ut-tawarikh, the ruler spent an immense quantity of time in his Ibadat Khana (Sekh, 2023, pp. 3).

### **6.1 Influence of Ibadat Khana Debates on Akbar's Religious Philosophy and Beliefs**

When it came to religion, Akbar was significantly different from his predecessors. His administrators held a mix of liberal and orthodox religious views. Despite having extensive relations with numerous other Indian religions and sects of Islam, he was surrounded by ardent Sunni Moulana Abdul Nabi liberals, Sheikh Mubarak, and Abul Fazal and Faizi; Akbar remained committed to Sunni Islam. He exclusively invited Sunni intellectuals to participate in the arguments at Ibadat Khana. Akbar regularly attended these debates, but soon the debaters began to attack each other personally (Akhtar et al., 2023, p. 432).

According to Badaoni, the mullahs fought among themselves and used the sword of the tongue on the battleground of mutual conflict and opposition. The sects' animosity grew to the point where they would refer to each other as fools and heretics (Badaoni, 1884, p. 262). They called their opponents names and even imputed motives to each other. Akbar's sleep was disrupted one night when the two opposing theological factions pulled out swords to resolve the disputed religious matters (Prasad, 2021, p. 38).

Akbar later began to lose faith in Muslim theologians (Moosvi, 1994, p.60). Akbar was astounded to see the irresponsible behavior of those self-conceited, selfish, and intolerant mullahs; they had lost his respect, especially because they had failed to satisfy his yearnings for spiritual enlightenment. In contempt, he threw open the Ibadat Khana's gates. As a result, he invited Shia intellectuals to a debate in Ibadat Khana. Priests and intellectuals of several faiths, including Christianity, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism, continued seeking the truth from Ibadat Khana in 1578 (Prasad, 2021, p. 38).

## **7. Din-I-Ilahi: Akbar's Quest for Religious Unity**

Akbar's reign is seen as a beacon of religious tolerance and intellectual inquiry. His idea of Sulh-i-Kul aimed to promote harmony among different faiths by crossing religious boundaries. Akbar's court evolved into a melting pot of religious intellectuals, encouraging interfaith conversations to bridge the gap between beliefs. This inclusive environment prepared the foundation for the development of the Din-i-Ilahi (V.M., 2019, p.3). Din-i-Ilahi combines the concepts of different religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. This new religion has sparked widespread debate since it lacks core religious traits such as a belief system, rituals, and a sacred text. The primary goal of this religion was to ensure sovereignty by sacrificing property, life, honor, and religion. It is vital to note that Akbar never coerced anyone to practice his new religion (Muhammad, 2020, pp. 8-9). He was exposed to vibrant religion and culture at a young age, which resulted in an intense interest in spirituality and a respectful attitude toward all religious leaders.

Surprisingly, several Sufis functioned as counselors at Akbar's court, which is unusual in previous royal courts. Finally, Akbar dared to be the world's sole king who promoted a divine faith, the Din-i-Ilahi (Rahman, 2023, p. 6). There is no denying that Akbar was a great statesman, unparalleled in Indian history. He emerged as a symbol of Indian unity and a messenger of peace. While he utilized religion as a formal tool to establish and strengthen his empire, it was more symbolic than doctrinal (Jaffar, 1936, p.131).

### **7.1 Tenets of Din-I-Ilahi**

Although the basic concepts of Din-i-Ilahi were ambiguous, some writers recognize following as Din-i-Ilahi principles. These are Sulh-i-kul, tolerance, remembering the day of resurrection, abstaining from worldly pleasures, brotherhood, love for God and his creations, and so on (Akhtar et al., 2023, p.434).

### **7.2 Controversies Surrounding Din-i-ilahi**

The propagation of the Divine Faith was followed by a succession of anti-Islamic ordinances purportedly issued by Akbar with the sole goal of eliminating Islam. But Badaoni's views cannot be relied on (Nur, 2017, p.88). These accounts were included by Badaoni in his work and cited numerous times. The content below meets our requirements: 1) Around 991, fresh directives were introduced, including a ban on animal slaughter on specific days, most notably Sundays, due to day's sanctity in honor of the sun (Allami, 1873, p. 200). 2) Sajdah was permitted on the Emperor. 3) Fire and sun worship were forbidden; 4) Arabic studies were discouraged. 5) Public prayers and the Azan were discontinued. 6) The pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting during Ramadan were discontinued (Smith, 1917, p. 220). 7) Islamic names like Muhammad, Ahmad, and Mustafa were altered, as they were deemed

objectionable by the Emperor (Badaoni, 1884, p. 324). Despite these reforms, Din-i-Ilahi never gained widespread acceptance. The number of adherents of the order was insignificant. This was partly due to Akbar's missionary work. So, it eventually died with Akbar (Ghodratollahi, 2007, p. 17). Some historians say Badaoni's ideas are untrustworthy because he was a strict Muslim. He was opposed to Akbar. He termed Birbal a Bastard, and Shi'as were labeled as "heretics, fools, worshippers of the devils, fit only to be cast out" (Sharma, 1962, p. 64).

Van Noer said, "Badayuni consistently seizes every opportunity to revive the idea of Akbar's deification to launch further attacks on the great emperor." However, he never had a close relationship with the Din-i-Ilahi; instead, he perpetuates the false beliefs prevalent in society, tainted and distorted by popular perceptions (Jaffar, 1936, p.133). Din-I-Ilahi, according to S. R. Sharma, does not meet the definition of a religion. According to him, giving Din-i-Ilahi is an exaggeration. It was not a religion in the traditional sense; there were no sacred texts, no clergy, no rituals, and above all, no doctrinal beliefs. It functioned more like an order or a fraternity, resembling freemasonry than any conventional religious group.

As per A.L. Srivastava, "Din-i-Ilahi was created for political reasons. Akbar wanted to unite Muslims and Hindus to strengthen his cultural and political rule. His Sul-i-Kul strategy and nationalist policies led to the formation of a new religion." According to Wellesley Haig, "Akbar, prompted by his counselors, issued a new religion. He felt that all people in the subcontinent should obey his will, something neither Christianity nor Islam permits" (Akhtar et al., 2023, p.435).

### **7.3 Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's Refutation of Din-I-Ilahi**

Formation of Din-I-Ilahi, a syncretic religion meant to combine Hindu and Islamic ideas, was one of the theological innovations of Emperor Akbar that Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi vehemently opposed. He categorically condemned these religious reforms, claiming that they violated Islamic precepts. Several high-ranking officials- including Khan Khanan Khan-i-Azam, Khan Jahan, Mirza Dara Khan, Quli Khan, Khwaja Jahan, Lala Baig, and Syed Farid Bukhari- wrote letters to the Governor of Lahore, urging the revival of Islamic rites, the preservation of religious practices, and the abolition of doctrinal misconceptions. Many of these letters were addressed to Syed Farid Bukhari. This highlights the efforts of intellectuals and officials to restore ancient Islamic ideals (Sirhindi, 2012, p. 5).

Sheikh Sirhindi extensively discussed the concepts of Shariah, Tariqat (spiritual path), and Haqiqat (ultimate reality) in his *Maktubat Qudsiyyah*. He opposed various Sufi rituals that deviated from the framework of Islamic law, emphasizing the importance of matching spiritual pursuits with Shariah. Prominent academics at the time expressed worry about the damaging influence of unregulated religious innovation on Islamic teachings. Due to King Akbar's and his atheist nobles' blasphemous beliefs, Ulama and Sufis were drawn to the relief of the religious difficulties. They were exhorted to revive the Sunnah by avoiding and rejecting heresy that has been planted among Muslims as a result of Hindu intermingling. Sirhindi was particularly critical of Shaykh Mubarak's sons, Abul Fazl and Faizi, whose theological views he regarded as unorthodox and atheistic. He also refuted the beliefs of the Kharijites and Tafziliya sects, citing their doctrinal deviations and the importance of reverence for the Ahl al-Bayt, Companions (Sahaba), and righteous predecessors, advocating for their rightful place in Islamic thought while strictly adhering to Sunni beliefs.

His work focused on the superiority of Shariah over Tariqat, claiming that any spiritual path that contradicted Islamic law was a type of heresy (Zandaqah) (Sirhindi, 2012, p. 25). Sirhindi was especially critical of worldly scholars (ulama-i-su), whom he believed compromised religious integrity for personal gain. Instead, he asked the ulama to aid monarchs in sustaining Islamic governance and moral norms. His advocacy for Islamic

revival had a considerable impact on Mughal policy (Friedmann, 1966, pp. 121-122), and several of Akbar's problematic rituals, such as the Zaminbosi (prostration before the emperor), were eliminated under Emperor Jahangir. Cow slaughter was also prohibited under Jahangir, and various other religious reforms were enacted.

Sheikh Sirhindi's letters show his continual efforts to strengthen Islamic identity in response to Akbar's ideology of religious fusion. He strongly promoted the idea that Muslims and non-Muslims were distinct communities, directly contradicting Akbar's goal of spiritual unification. He supported the complete revolution of Mustafa's system, which involved eliminating non-Islamic traditions and rejecting religious innovations. His publications significantly impacted Islamic revivalism during the Mughal era, influencing intellectuals and official policy on religious governance (Sirhindi, 2012, pp. 5-6).

### **8. Akbar and Sirhindi: Contrasting Religious Impacts on Mughal India**

Akbar the Great was the first patron to gather renowned religious scholars from various backgrounds, establishing a diverse and inclusive environment at his court. Akbar's religious policies, particularly interfaith dialogue, were shaped by the territorial power network and the socioeconomic hierarchy of the period, which reflected the conditions of the Mughal era in India. Akbar attempted to create a syncretistic form of religious traditions. He assimilated aspects from diverse theological and cultural backgrounds, laying the groundwork for an emerging pluralistic society based on variety, tolerance, inclusion, discourse, and peaceful coexistence.

Akbar used numerous initiatives to improve his relations with neighboring rulers. The most notable initiatives included trade and the discovery of various cultural aspects, which resulted in the development of new literature, art forms, architecture, and a wide range of other artistic elements. This project's overall goal is to make the court of Akbar the Great a priceless example of fostering interfaith discussion and diversity via open communication, cultural exchange, and religious coexistence. This historical insight improved knowledge of the context of interreligious concord and the effects of such policies in the contemporary social landscape to foster social cohesion and, eventually, world peace (Rahman, 2023, p.7).

Sirhindi's influence on the subcontinent was undeniable. The Mujaddid's teachings filled the gap of theological knowledge among the Muslim community in the seventeenth century and were unquestionably successful. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi effectively countered Akbar's policies and significantly influenced the attitudes of his successors toward Orthodox Islam. His ideas also had a big influence on how the Muslim nobility and upper classes generally thought. His ideas were influential in all sectors of Muslim society (Malik et al., 2016, pp. 158-159).

### **9. Conclusion**

Akbar, a great Mughal emperor, held a unique place in Indian history. Akbar accepted himself as the impartial ruler of his subjects from the moment he ascended to the throne. In this framework, he governed all Indians, regardless of caste, creed, religious views, or traditions, in a one society. Akbar attempted to implement human social improvements. He consistently strove to speak the truth and remained impartial toward his subjects. As a result, his religious policy was founded on the concept of universal peace. The conversations at Ibadat Khana had a strong influence on his secular thinking. The debates among Muslim intellectuals became extremely heated. Akbar despised this type of debate, which undermined his Islamic convictions. Furthermore, Akbar did not discover the divine religion in the sense of becoming a proponent of the new faith.

Akbar's philosophy of universal tolerance and religious liberty rendered the populace completely inert in their thinking; they were unaware of the new religion. The monarch did



not recognize any priesthood. Nevertheless, some academics, whether intentionally or inadvertently, disregarded how Islam influenced Akbar's social and religious views toward other people, failing to take into account the novel Islamic discourses on equality, tolerance, and religious freedom that were structured in the primary Islamic texts over nine hundred years before Akbar's birth.

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi was a distinguished scholar, social reformer, and leader. He made great contributions to protecting Muslim society from un-Islamic ideals and Hindu ideology. Many circumstances undermined the Muslims' religious and cultural consciousness. Due to their attachment to earthly gain, the people of the Mughal court perpetrated innumerable sins. The entire society was on the edge of falling into darkness. One of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's biggest accomplishments was the resurgence of Sharia in society. He sent numerous letters to government officials, highlighting the importance of Islamic teachings. He removed the faults of this class of society and firmly urged them to follow the Holy Prophet's instructions through letters. The teachings and spiritual guidance of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi significantly influenced ministers and high-ranking officials, with Emperor Jahangir also experiencing an indirect impact. Furthermore, Sirhindi's teachings influenced successive Mughal kings. As a result, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's efforts resulted in the resurgence of Islamic principles.

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