

# Lesson 4

## Student Handout 4.1—Comparison of Beliefs and Practices of Hindus and Muslims

Islam	Hinduism
Monotheistic: Only one God (Allah in Arabic)	Polytheistic: many gods and goddesses; divinity may be conceived with form or without
Building from Judeo-Christian heritage but with specific starting date of 622 (the year the Prophet Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina)	Amalgamation of a variety of religious traditions in the Indian sub-continent; an on-going process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosque = Place of prostration</li> <li>• Built around an open courtyard</li> <li>• No representation of natural forms; much use of calligraphy</li> <li>• Arches, vaults, and domes</li> <li>• Dome represents heaven; square base represents earth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temple = home of the gods</li> <li>• Inner sanctum is secluded, dark, moist, the womb of the world.</li> <li>• Much representation of living forms: animals, plants, humans, and divine forms</li> <li>• Pillars, post, and lintel</li> </ul>
Bury the dead and build tombs	Dead are cremated, so no tombs; cremation site is sometimes marked
Revealed religion from God	No single revelation. Multiple texts, both “remembered” and told
Obligation to spread the faith	Cannot convert to Hinduism, rather one must be born a Hindu
<i>Jihad</i> : a holy war in which all must participate. Struggle against evil in oneself as well as evil in the world, especially that which threatens Islam	Only one caste ( <i>varna</i> ) has military responsibility. This is the <i>kshatriya</i> caste. Other castes try to practice non-injury to life ( <i>Ahimsa</i> )
One law for all: <i>Shari'a</i> based chiefly on the Qur'an and the <i>hadith</i> (traditions of the Prophet)	Dharma governs all actions. Each caste, gender, and age group has its appropriate dharma
Equality of all believers	Hierarchy: Society is divided into communities called <i>varna</i> , castes, or <i>jati</i> , ranked by purity and pollution
Mecca and Ka'ba as main pilgrimage site.	Multiple pilgrimage sites all over India. Any spot may become sacred
Worship is often communal, with set times for prayer	Worship is personal, involving care of images of the deity, meditation, and prayer
Men are circumcised	No circumcision
Individual goes to Heaven or Hell based on actions in this world	Reincarnation of the individual based on karma

### QUESTIONS:

What problems might these differences present to a (Muslim) Mughal ruler who is ruling over a land that is predominantly Hindu?	How might such a ruler handle these differences? What approach(es) or strateg(ies) might the ruler take?
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## Lesson 4

### *Student Handout 4.2*

#### **Akbar's Attitudes toward Religion**

Akbar was the third ruler of the Mughal Empire in India. He ruled from 1558 to 1603. Akbar and the other Mughal emperors were Muslims. The vast majority of the Indian subjects in the empire were Hindus.

In facing the challenge of ruling a multi-religious state, Akbar appears to have been strongly influenced by Sufism. He regularly visited the tomb in Ajmir of a renowned Sufi saint, who had established the Chishti order in India at the end of the thirteenth century. In 1569, Akbar, who was childless, visited Sheikh Salim Chishti, a Sufi saint from the same order who was living in a hermitage in Sikri. He wanted to get the saint's blessing, and he was gratified that the saint promised him three sons. Akbar's wife, who was a Hindu, soon became pregnant. When she was about to give birth a year later, the emperor sent her to the saint's hermitage. When the child was born, Akbar named the baby Salim, after the saint. He then ordered a new capital built at the small village of Sikri where Salim lived. He used Fatehpur Sikri as his capital from 1571 to 1584.

In 1578, at the age of 36, Akbar was reportedly sickened by the slaughter of animals during a hunt. Calling off the hunt, he appeared to have had a religious experience very much like the Sufi sense of achieving oneness with God. That same year he began to invite learned Hindu, Parsi (followers of Zoroaster), Jain, and Christian scholars to debate religious issues with one another. He was so open and tolerant during these debates that the Jesuit missionaries who attended dared hope they might be able to convert the emperor.

Akbar also instituted a number of reforms intended to placate his Hindu subjects and make them more loyal to him. He showed his tolerance by allowing Salim's mother to worship a sacred tulsi tree she had placed in the center of her courtyard at Fatehpur Sikri. She also placed images of various Hindu deities in her courtyard walls. Many of Akbar's wives were Hindu, and while most of these marriages had been arranged for political purposes, their influence on him must have been considerable.

In 1562, Akbar abolished the practice of enslaving prisoners of war and their families and no longer made them convert to Islam. In 1563, he repealed the tax on pilgrims. The next year he did away with the humiliating tax on non-Muslims, making Hindus and Muslims equal.

Akbar also established a translation department and ordered scholars to translate the Hindu epics into Persian so that non-Hindus could come to understand and appreciate them. He encouraged the use of Hindi as well as Urdu and Persian at the court. He adopted a semi-vegetarian diet, meat only during a few months of the year. He forbade the consumption of beef and other red meat. If a Hindu had been converted to Islam in childhood, he was given the option of becoming Hindu again if he wished. He discouraged child marriage but encouraged voluntary marriages between Hindus and Muslims. He awarded jobs in his government on the basis of merit and service to him, and he also appointed Hindus to prominent positions. Out of 137 high officials (mansabdars), 14 were Hindu. He also allowed Christians to try to convert people in India.

In 1581, Akbar proclaimed himself the head of a new faith, which he called Din-i-Ilahi (Divine Faith). He proclaimed that it would include the

best elements of Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. The next year he held a council whose purpose was to take the best ideas from all these faiths and create that true religion, “not losing what is good in any one religion while gaining whatever is better in another.” He meant to have the scholars determine those “good things.”

Borrowing ideas from Zoroastrianism in creating his new faith, he tried to make the sun the center of worship, arguing that worshipping the sun was a means to worship Allah. When his subjects came into his presence, they cried out “Allah Akbar” which means “God is great,” but which can also be interpreted as “Akbar is God.” Picturing Akbar sitting at dawn in the Public Audience hall at Fatehpur Sikri as the rising sun fell on his face, we can almost hear him proclaim: “The very sight of kings has been held to be a part of divine worship. They have been styled conventionally the shadow of God, and indeed to behold them is a means of calling to mind the Creator, and suggests the protection of the Almighty.”

Din-i-Ilahi never materialized as an organized religion. Many of the leaders in his court may have feared that Akbar’s main motivation was neither tolerance nor religion, but an attempt to strengthen his own position as the unquestioned ruler of India. In addition, the *ulama*, that is, the Muslim religious leaders who were the guardians of Islamic law, objected to what appeared to them Akbar’s attempt to take over their authority. In addition, other groups that had come into the subcontinent had eventually been absorbed into Hindu society. The *ulama* feared that Akbar’s policies of religious tolerance might result in Islam meeting the same fate.

### **ANALYSIS**

*Based on your reading of this article, how did Akbar do as a leader? Did he handle religious difference and ideological conflict effectively?*

*List a few examples from the reading to back up your evaluation:*

## Lesson 4

### **Student Handout 4.3—Emperor Aurangzeb’s Attitudes toward Non-Muslims**

When Aurangzeb became ruler of the Mughal Empire in 1658, Mughal India was still very much a multicultural society. Emperor Aurangzeb, like Akbar, had to decide what policy he would employ with the various groups of different faiths under his rule. Personally, Aurangzeb was a strict Muslim. He avoided pleasures of the senses, ate no animal food, and drank only water. Since the prophet Muhammad had said everyone should have a trade, Aurangzeb made skullcaps. He knew the Qur’an by heart and copied it twice. Although he could not make the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), he provided facilities for pilgrims.

The Indian Rajputs were the pick of the warrior class of India. It was up to Aurangzeb to decide whether he would invite them to serve him as loyal servants or treat them as his most foe. Aurangzeb felt he had to curb any possibility that Rajput power would increase, as well as strive to keep the provincial governors from giving their prestige to their sons and trying to found competing dynasties. He may also have felt he should try to breathe new life into the Mughal army, whom many felt had become pale copies of the Muslim warriors who had originally invaded India in the early sixteenth century.

To Aurangzeb, Hinduism and the other sects, the religions of the majority of his subjects, were mischievous and idol-worshipping and should be persecuted, even stamped out. He employed a variety of methods, some of which are listed below:

- He suppressed music and dancing at court.
- He ordered the destruction of Hindu temples (1659).
- He banned the celebration of Hindu festivals.
- He ordered all provincial governors “to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teaching” (1669).
- He reimposed the *jizya*, a tax that all non-Muslims had to pay personally, but not if one converted (1679).
- He gave converts to Islam special recognition and, sometimes, influential government jobs.
- He removed hundreds of Hindus from their government positions when they refused to convert.
- When there was a quarrel over land between a Muslim and non-Muslim, he decreed that the Muslim should get the non-Muslim’s property.
- He reimposed the pilgrim tax.
- He proclaimed that Hindus should not dress like Muslims, nor ride a horse or elephant or be transported in a palanquin

#### **ANALYSIS**

*Based on your reading of this article, how did Akbar do as a leader? Did he handle religious difference and ideological conflict effectively?*

*What evidence from the reading backs up your evaluation?*