

## **Volume 2: Chapter 2**

### **Source 2.2**

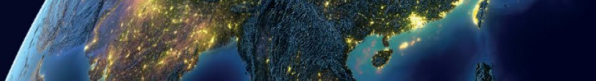
#### **Emperor Jahangir's Views on Hinduism and Memory of Akbar the Great**

*In the late sixteenth century, the emperor Akbar, known as Akbar the Great, transformed the Mughal state into a powerful Islamic empire. He proclaimed himself to be the “king of kings” and issued an official proclamation of religious tolerance. He established a royal courtly culture that promoted Persian influence, and he was a patron of the arts, literature, and sciences. After his death in 1605, his son Jahangir became emperor and composed a memoir, titled Memoirs of the Emperor Jahangueir.*

The citadel or castle of Agrah, as already intimated, was rebuilt by my father from the foundation altogether of red hewn stone, with four principal entrances and two sally ports. It was, in fact, a monument of his power, so perfect in execution that one might almost venture to say it was a fabric shaped by the architect of eternal destiny from a single rock. . . .

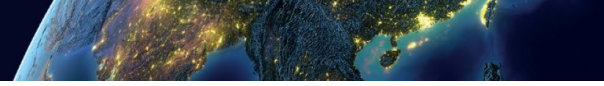
At the same time, emulating the example of their sovereign, every member of the court and subject of the empire, each according to his station, hastened to construct and lay out on the city and its environs mansions of the most sumptuous description, and the most beautiful gardens, so as to render the place altogether the object of universal delight and admiration. In very truth it is a wonderful city; and hence it is not surprising that in the esteem of mankind it has been placed on the same rank with Gualiar and Muttra, the latter the birth-place of Krishna, whom the Indian nations, in their ignorance, adore as the supreme being, and who, when they would speak in language of highest praise, refer to these three places as surpassing all other cities in the known world.

I am here led to relate that at the city of Banaras a temple had been erected by Rajah Maun Sing, . . . The principal idol in this temple had on its head a tiara or cap, enriched with



jewels . . . He had placed in this temple moreover, as the associates and ministering servants of the principal idol, four other images of solid gold, each crowned with a tiara, in the like manner enriched with precious stones. It was the belief of these Jehennemites that a dead Hindu, provided when alive he had been a worshipper, when laid before this idol would be restored to life. As I could not possibly give credit to such a pretence [sic], I employed a confidential person to ascertain the truth; and, as I justly supposed, the whole was detected to be an impudent imposture. Of this discovery I availed myself, and I made it my plea for throwing down the temple which was the scene of this imposture and on the spot, with the very same materials, I erected the great mosque, because the very name of Islam was proscribed at Banaras, and with God's blessing it is my design, if I live, to fill it full with true believers.

On this subject I must however acknowledge, that having on one occasion asked my father the reason why he had forbidden any one to prevent or interfere with the building of these haunts of idolatry, his reply was in the following terms: "My dear child," said he, "I find myself a puissant monarch, the shadow of God upon earth. I have seen that he bestows the blessings of his gracious providence upon all his creatures without distinction. Ill should I discharge the duties of my exalted station, were I to withhold my compassion and indulgence from any of those entrusted to my charge. With all of the human race, with all of God's creatures, I am at peace: why then should I permit myself, under any consideration, to be the cause of molestation or aggression to anyone? Besides, are not five parts in six of mankind either Hindus or aliens to the faith; and were I to be governed by motives suggested in your inquiry, what alternative can I have but to put them all to death! I have thought it therefore my wisest plan to let these men alone. Neither it is to be forgotten, that the class of whom we are speaking, in common with other inhabitants of Agrah, are usefully engaged, either in the pursuits of science or the arts, or of improvements for the benefit of mankind, and have in



numerous instances arrived at the highest distinctions in the state, there being, indeed, to be found in this city men of every description, and of every religion on the face of the earth.”

Source: Jahanguier, *Memoirs of the Emperor Jahangueir, Written by Himself; and Translated from a Persian Manuscript*, translated by David Price (London: The Oriental Translation Committee, 1829): 14-16.

- How do you interpret Jahanghir’s view of the Hindu religion?
- How does Jahanghir describe his father’s justification of policies of religious toleration?
- What do you think Jahanghir meant when he described Hindu traditions as “impudent imposture”?
- How would you compare Jahanghir’s religious views to those of his father?