



Political Ideas of Abul Fazl Allami (1556-1602)

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The sixteenth century occupies a significant period in world history, as it unleashed forces responsible for radical transformations in the existing politics. It was an age of Renaissance in Europe, the Mahdi movement in Islam, Ming revival in China, and of sufi forces and Bhakti cult in India. In this age vibrant dynasties appeared in England: the Tudors, in France: the Bourbons, in Spain and Austria: the Hapsburgs, in Prussia: the Hohenzollerns, in Turkey: the Osmanlis, in Egypt: the Mamluks, in Persia: the safvis, in Transoxiana: the Sahabanids, in China: the Mings, in India: the Timurids—all in the same period. These dynasties were ruled by enlightened despots; Henry VIII and Elizabeth in England, Henry IV in France, Frederick William in Prussia, Sigisumd in Austria, Philip II in Spain, Soliman in Turkey, Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp in Persia. The Sahabani Khan is Transoxiana, Yung Lo in China and Mughals: Babur and Akbar in India: (Usmani 1963: 259).

Abul Fazl, a contemporary of Abdul Qadir Badauni, was an eminent historian and courtier to Akbar. He was Akbar's courtier, councilor, confidential chief secretary, official chronicler, legislator and the master of the Diwani department. Nay he was Akbar's tongue and a key to his wisdom, in short a veritable Aristotle to this Alexander (Usmani 1963: 264).

Abul Fazl was born in 1551 at Agra in a family of not extraordinary means and status. His father, Sheikh Mubarak had incurred the displeasure of the court of Ulama for his support to the Mahdavi movement which aimed at the reform and revival of Muslim religion. It is quite natural that the training and teachings of a great scholar, Sheikh Mubarak, the liberal leadership of Mahdavi movement and his personal interest in philosophy, ethics and religion had provided Abdul Fazl with a broad vision, liberal and unorthodox ideas, a sound judgement, a revolutionary but objective approach to socio-political problems and secular outlook.

Abul Fazl being a liberal, secular thinker and his close affinity to the emperor, incurred jealousy of the nobles, religious leaders and heir apparent Prince Salim. In 1601



when Abul Fazl was busy fighting wars in Deccan, he was recalled in haste because Prince Salim had rebelled against his father. On the way back, he was slain by a Rajput chief with whom the prince had conspired to kill him near Gwalior in 1602.

The reign of Akbar, one of the most remarkable periods in the political history of medieval India, has been chronicled by Abul Fazl in Akbar-Nama and Ain-i-Akbari. The two together constitute a single book. The first part gives an account of 46 years of Akbar's reign in a chronological order. The Ain-i-Akbari, the third part of the book, is a compilation of administration, resources, population, industry and wealth. It also contains an account of the religious, social customs and practices of the Hindus. Thus, the works of Abul Fazl is considered to be the most comprehensive account of Mughal administration and state structure.

Views on Monarchy: The basis of Medieval Islamic state in India was perfect harmony between state and religion and their union represented the highest development of human society. Abul Fazl persuaded Akbar that the subject ought to look upon the king not only as the temporal but also the spiritual guide. The promulgation of this new doctrine is the basis of Abul Fazl's political thought responsible for bringing about a revolutionary change in the Mughal theory of the state.

It is however interesting to note that the Muslim concept of one God, one scripture, one Prophet and one brotherhood, led the Muslim kings during the medieval period at least, unconsciously, to form a commonwealth of Muslim Kingdoms with the Khalifa of Baghdad as its titular head. The Muslim kings all over the world, to justify their claims, had uniformly followed the convention of seeking a formal recognition of their kingship from the Khalifa of Baghdad, a nominal suzerain of the Muslim World.

Abul Fazl is in favour of providing absolute power to the monarch. In this attempt, Fazl vests supernatural authority in him and thus negates any right to revolution. As a consequence to man's inherent evil nature, Abul Fazl argues for a strong king, an exalted ideal *Padshah*, necessary for an organized life. The duties of the king are well defined, such as, he protects life, property, honour and religion of his subjects and in return, he is entitled to unqualified obedience. Force or fear cannot form the basis of any political obligation. Consent of the governed and willing co-operation between the ruler and subject is necessary for the sound health of political organization. Therefore, Abul Fazl provided a philosophical



base for co-operation to Akbar's Kingship. A king is the origin of stability and possession as implied in the word *Padshah*: *Pad* signifies stability and possession and *Shah* means origin or lord.

Abul Fazl considered kingship to be an agency to fulfil the will of God and a prominent cause of good of the people and the source of efficiency of any course of action. No dignity is higher in the eyes of God than royalty, and those who are wise drink from its auspicious fountain... for royalty is an emblem of the power of God, and a light shedding ray from the sun of the Absolute. (Usmani 1963: 275) A true king according to Abul Fazl is he whose object is to remove the oppression and provide for everything which is good for the people. Abul Fazl believed in the right of Kingship only to a man of God's choice or in other words supernatural descent as essential element for Kingship. He subjects everything to the Divine will which manifests itself in the institution of the king who understands its best and can interpret accordingly. Abul Fazl puts his *Padshah* to the highest position, he is the controlling authority and safeguard's the political powers of the King though religious sanctions. Having the *Padshah* adorned with such absolute powers based on divine gift, there can be no question of individual freedom or right of revolution. According to Abul Fazl, sovereignty was a divine light, therefore the Emperor was portrayed as an agent instead of the traditional reference as shadow of God.

Society: The Muslim writers before Abul Fazl compared the human body with body politic or in other words tried to draw a comparison between elements of society with parts of human body. For eg. in Unani system of medicine the human body is regarded to be composed of four elements: the water, the fire, the air, and, the earth. On similar lines Abul Fazl's fourfold division of classes in society are as follows:

- a) Warriors who in the political body have the nature of fire.
- b) Artificers and merchants: who occupy the place of air.
- c) The learned such as philosophers, the physician, astronomer, mathematician who resemble water.
- d) Husbandmen and labourers who may be compared to earth.



For the society to flourish, it is essential for the king to pay due respect to each and keep them in their place. (Usmani 1963: 279).

Abul Fazl goes a step further and divides the entire population broadly into three groups:

- a) Noblest are those with unquestioned loyalty to the Emperor.
- b) Placed below them are ones whose display of loyalty is on par with tangible gain.
- c) The worst are those who defy loyalty, refuse to surrender to the king and believe in rebellion.

The Mughals, however, did not interfere with the Indian caste system and did not try to change the basic framework of Indian society. The Panchayats and caste courts continued to exist to settle the matters of the Hindus. Although, Abul Fazl believed in hierarchy but for the talented, he advised the king not to pay any heed to their social background. This is the reason that during Akbar's reign, persons at the lowest wing of the army got an opportunity to rise to the dignity of grandee. (Chandra 2001: 133).

Administration: The Mughal state had a vast centralized administration with a huge military power. An important contribution of Akbar was the development of a provincial administration, patterned on a central system of Government. Akbar divided his empire into *subas*, *sarkars* and *mahalīs*. Each *sarkar* was divided into a number of *parganas*. *Mansabdari* system of Persia was in practice, which had two parts comprising *zat* and *sawar*. Each *mansabdar* had some rights (*zat*) and a force of horses to command (*sawar*). Abul Fazl gave three classification for the *mansabdars*: first those who had 500 and above *mansabs*, second those who had 400 to 200 *mansabs*, and the third those who had 150 to 10 *mansabs*. For general administration there was a *Shiqdar* and *Amil* for assessment and collection of land revenue. There were many other posts as well like a treasurer, a *qanungo* and so on. *dahsal* was the basis of Akbar's revenue policy. The *dahasala* did not mean a ten years settlement but was an average of the production and prices of the last ten years.

Akbar, maintained a huge army for the smooth functioning of administration. Abul Fazl further argued for functional specialization in the field of government and administration:



- a) The nobles of the state, the courtiers who resemble fire. At the head of this class is the *vakil*.
- b) The collectors and those entrusted with income and expenditure, who in the administration resemble wind, the head of this division is the *vizir*, also called *diwan*.
- c) The companions of the king, who are the ornaments of the court. They are compared to water, head of this class stands philosopher, poet, astronomer.
- d) The servants who perform the duties of the king, they resemble the earth.

Success of the administration and body politic depend upon the proper formation of the four divisions.

Religion: In a multi-religion and caste ridden society like India, Abul Fazl tried to remove the religious barriers to fulfill his ambition of unified, integrated and well-ordered society. He was sharp to realize the mistake of the Turkish Sultans who failed because of their policy of intolerance towards the non-believers of Islam. He was instrumental in persuading the emperor to adopt a policy of tolerance and adaptability which were characteristic of Indian civilization. As a result, Akbar dropped all tribal, racial or communal considerations and dissociated himself from particular class or groups, brought the Persian and Hindus to join with the Mughals and Indian Muslims in supporting the throne of Agra. Abul Fazl did not conform with the traditional Muslim Philosophy, that Shariat alone as laid down in the *Quran* and *Hadis* should be the guiding principle of human activities and the society. Abul Fazl's *Padshah* aims at the good of all subjects without any distinction of religion or otherwise. He protects life, property, honour and religions of his subjects and in return is entitled to unqualified obedience. As a protector of religion, Abul Fazl's *Padshah* is not a defender of any particular faith. Abul Fazl is clear in his secular outlook.

A great contribution of Abul Fazl to Indian political philosophy was his doctrine of peace with all or universal tolerance (*Sulh-i-Kuhl*). The idea was not absolutely new for the Indian soil, it was practiced to a great extent by Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sufi saints and the saints of Bhakti tradition. Abul Fazl seems to be convinced that social harmony, political stability and national solidarity was not possible without emotional integration of all the social, religious, linguistic, and racial groups of the Indian society. *Padshah* is like a father for his subjects and so will not discriminate but will look after the welfare of all. It is



not only the *Padshah* who will follow the path of justice but the subjects too will be guided by the Principle of *Sulh-i-Kuhl* (peace with all).

Abul Fazl's attempt to establish a synthetic code of religious conduct resulted in Akbar's introduction of *Din-i-Illahi*, a synthesis of all religions prevailing in India at the time. *Din-i-Illahi* was an experiment to please all religious groups and adopt the merits of all religions. The new theory was deemed to gain from the advantage of not losing what is good in any one religion while including whatever is better in another.

His religious thoughts were based on secularism which considered all religions equal and believed in religious fraternity and *Sulh-i-Kul* (peace everywhere)(M Athar Ali, pp. 162-164).

Critical Appreciation

In close quarters of twelfth century prior to Muslim invasion of North India, the entire country was divided into a number of principalities. Kingship was based upon divine right, high caste and super-natural descent. The Indian polity was a monopoly of the privileged few, dominated exclusively by the higher castes. The lack of a strong central government allowed the infighting among the rulers of the principalities for dominance to continue.

Furthermore, the rulers i.e. Turkish Sultans failed to realize that in a multi-religious, caste-ridden, multi-lingual society, bulk of the population will not subscribe to such views based purely on Islamic traditions. This fact was responsible for creating a gulf between the ruler and the ruled. The sanction behind the Government of the Turkish sultans was not the willing obedience of the people but the superior military force and support of the nobles.

Akbar realizing the mistake of his predecessors, took a giant leap forward: during his reign (1556-1605) the socio-political conditions of India witnessed a reorientation, the theory of government and philosophy of state underwent a reassessment and the system of administration was reorganized. The brain behind gigantic tasks was Abul Fazl, the great statesman of the time. The policies and plans designed for the state were very often the product of his fertile brain, but were executed by the emperor.

Abul Fazl was conscious of the divided house that is entire society divided between Muslims and Non-Muslims to the extent that the government depended upon the support of



the one, sometimes at the cost of the other. Therefore, to curb opposition from any quarter he introduced *Din-I-Illahi*. The merits of this new religion were that it aimed at a secular socio-political organization, maximum freedom of thought and belief, social equality and non-violence.

The new religious order, however, created more foes than friends. It is criticized for being more political rather than religious. It failed mainly because a political design was desired to be achieved through the channel of religion. However, whatever charges of apostacy may be levelled against Abul Fazl, but it was due to his political insight that the foundation of a tolerant and a secular state was laid in India.

The ownership of land, during Akbar's reign and later, belonged to the peasant families, the Zamindar and the king. This communal ownership prepared a ground for the development of canals, common grazing ground and so on. It also helped in developing trade and commerce in village and society (Mehta 1996: 152-153).

Abul Fazl's several discussions of Kingship is the composition of a paternal love towards his subjects, the priceless jewels of justice and fair play, and observance of absolute peace, *Sulh-i-Kuhl*, without discrimination, other conditions vary with the context, at times out of step with one another. There is a grander vision to Abul Fazl's conception of sovereignty than enumerating a king's qualities. The true king must understand the spirit of the age. (Mukhia 2005: 51-54).



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