

---

## Hindu Festivities in Mughal Durbar

Annapurna Sinha Das<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, Visva-Bharati University.

### Abstract

The enthusiastic participation of the Mughals in Hindu religious festivals reflected the outbreak of the composite culture in Medieval India. Diwali, Dussehra, Holi, Rakshabandhan, Vasant Panchami-all these occasions in Mughal India were framed popular and elite festival as like Muslims festival Eid, Shab-i-Barat, Muharram. On the other side, all these Hindu festivals had their own historical imprints, especially in Mughal age. In this paper, my endeavour is to find the historical background of the festivals in Mughal India and examine how the Mughal Emperors and local communities celebrated it.

**Keywords:** Te'ahir, Rakshabandhan, Hindola, Dussehra, Diwali, Sivaratri, Mughal India.

### Introduction

The Mughal Emperors with being staunch Muslims, but it's worth remembering that they made marital alliances with the families of Hindu rulers-especially the Rajputs. So that many of the Mughal queens and secondary wives of the Emperors were Hindu. They would bring their own religious festivals and traditions into the Mughal's *sura* (women's quarters), and Emperor influenced by this very much. In addition, a large number of people like Emperor's soldiers, servants, and slaves were Hindu. The result was that while festivals such as Eid, Nouroz celebrated with great joy, at the same time Holi, Dussehra, Diwali were not ignore.

### Popular Hindu Celebrations

**Diwali-** Mughals celebrated Diwali with feasts and fireworks (*Jashn-e-Chiraghan* or festival of lights) on the thirteenth day of the month of Kartika (October-November). Actually, it started from Akbar, and AbulFazl who constantly uses the metaphor of divine light, mentions both these festivals (*Shab-i-Barat* and *Diwali*) and their adherence with lights in *Ain-i-Akbari*.<sup>1</sup> In *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, it known as a festival of the Vaishya caste (probably due to their association with Lakshmi puja) and the occasion to meet friends, and pass their time busily in gamblings.<sup>2</sup> During the time of Diwali, a puja durbar was held and two decorated cow with garlands of cowries were brought in the garden by the Brahmans. Here arranged Govardhana puja in Mughal capital Agra, cattle were washed, ornamented, fed and worshipped. Emperor Akbar took part in this celebration and several adorned cows brought

before him.<sup>3</sup> Even Mughal princess and other noblewomen celebrating Diwali in a palace courtyard in the presence of Yogis.<sup>4</sup> According to Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi,

“...during the Dewali...the ignorant ones amongst Muslims, particularly the women, perform the ceremonies...They celebrate it like their own Id and send presents to their daughters and sisters...They color their pots...fill them with red rice and send them as presents. They attach much important and weight to this season.”<sup>5</sup>

**Dussehra-Vijayadashami** or Dussehra introduced by Akbar in the Mughal court on the tenth lunar day of Asoj (September-October). On the morning of Dussehra, Mughal Emperor would hold a durbar at the Red Fort and rewarded the courtiers and citizens. He was weight in gold and silver and distributed amongst the poor.<sup>6</sup> Abul Fazl observed “On this day they pay particular attention to their horses and decorate them and place green sprouts of barley on their heads, and all workmen venerate their tools, and it is held as a great festival and particularly for the Kshatriyas.”<sup>7</sup> The small orthodox section of the Muslim community, the Muslims participated in this festival without any inhibition. It was a practice both among Muslims and Hindus that the children made an earthen statue of *taisurai* ten days before the commencement of the Dussehra festival. Then on the Dussehra, everybody took out his particular *taisurai* with kettle drums and flags along with the dancing Mughal boys and girls.<sup>8</sup> When Mughal capital shifted from Agra to Delhi, Dussehra celebrated on the banks of Yamuna, behind the Red Fort during the reign of Shah Jahan. Ramlila was also an important part of the Dussehra celebration, which is a theatrical enactment of the Ramayana narrating the story of the triumph of good over evil. Another tradition in those days was the distribution of sherbet in earthen cups called *kulhads* to everyone. A big fair held on the banks of the Yamuna.<sup>9</sup>

**Rakshabandhan**-A popular festival of the Hindus called Rakhi or *dasht* was included in the list of holidays of the Mughal Empire by Akbar. Though Humayun also declared Rakhibandhan-Bhai of the family of Rana of Chittaur and described about the festival of Rakshabandhan in India.<sup>10</sup> AbulFazl said Rakhi was the Hindu festival celebrated by the Brahmins. He wrote “ in the month of sarvana (July-August) purnmasa, the 15<sup>th</sup> of the light half of the month, this is the greatest festival with the Brahmans throughout the year upon which they fasten the amulet called Rakshabandhan on the right wrist of the principal people. It is a cord of silk and the like, decorated by some with jewels and pearls.”<sup>11</sup> Then Badaoni described this tradition adopted by Akbar as a court custom.<sup>12</sup> But Jahangir envisaged Rakhi a ritualized Hindu practice rather than a festival. “Thereis for this caste (Brahmin) as appointed day and that is the last day of the month of savan, the second month of rainy season, they consider it an auspicious day, and the worshippers go on that they to the bank of the rivers and tanks and recite enchantments, breath upon cords and coloured threads; on another day they fasten them on the hands of the rajas and great men of the time and look on them as good Omen. They called this thread Rakhi. That is preservation (Nigahdast).”<sup>13</sup> Though in Mughal age the historical evidence of Rakhi told two pictures- Firstly in the court

or durbar celebration, and secondly within the elite people of the society. Most of the common people were detached from these festivals.

**Shivaratri**-The festival of Shivaratri fell on the night of the fourteenth day of phalguna, and both Akbar and Jahangir used to meet and eat with the principal *jogis* on the night.<sup>14</sup> A Mughal painting depicting two women offering puja (with flower, fruit and water) at eight nights.<sup>15</sup> Both Hindu and Muslims celebrated with fire-works and various kinds of amusement, and the more religious-minded people observed with night vigil and constant prayers.

**Holi**-“Holi is an ancient Hindustani festival which is played by every man and woman irrespective of religion and caste. After coming to India, the Muslims also played Holi with gusto, be it the Badshah or the Faqeer.” It was known as Id-e-Gulabi, Aab-e-Pashi (shower of colourful flowers), Mehfil-e-Holi in Mughal India.<sup>16</sup> In Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, Jahangir wrote “...their day is Holi, which in their belief is the last day of the year. This day falls in the month of Isfandarmudh, when the sun is in Pisces. On the eve of this day, they light fires in all the lanes and streets. When it is daylight, they spray powder on each other’s heads and faces for one watch and create an amazing uproar. After that, they wash themselves, put their clothes on, and go to gardens and fields. Since it is an established custom of among the Hindus to burn their dead, the lighting of fires on the last night of the year is a metaphor for burning the old year as though it were a corpse.”<sup>17</sup> This Hindu festival fell on the last day of the month of Phalguna and Mughal citizen celebrated continued generally for two or three days. PietraDalle Valla described, “They celebrated very solemnly at the entrance of the spring, with dancing through the street, and casting orange water and red colours in just one upon another, with other festivities of songs and mummeries.”<sup>18</sup> According to AbulFazl it was the great festival among the Sudras.<sup>19</sup>

**Vasant Panchami**-Vasant Panchami festival occurred in the month of Magha, Mughal Emperors celebrate it with singing melodious songs, little folk-dances and throwing of coloured powders.

**Folk Hindu Celebration:** The entry of the Hindu women in Mughal harem led to the celebration of Janmashtami (festival of the birth of Krishna) with great fervor and enthusiasm.<sup>20</sup> Before the advent of the Mughal, low castes mostly follower of Krishna cult celebrated Janmashtami. Then from Akbar, it enters in the Mughal *darbar* to achieve oneness with God.<sup>21</sup> Some hold this festival on the eighth of Sravana, and then they celebrate Ganesha-Chaturthialso (birthday of Ganesha).<sup>22</sup> Even under the Brahmanished influence, Devi Mahatyam (Durga, Chandika, Chamudi, Kali, Vaishnavi, Narayani, Maheswari, Shakti, Gouri, Mahamaya) worshiped and celebrated under the Mughal dominance.<sup>23</sup> Even under the Mughal supervision, the Hindus in all over India, worshiped local deities and followed eclectic culture based on their traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Later on these culture influenced Mughal culture and the liberal minded Mughal Emperors celebrated it as *te ‘ahir*.

During the month of Chaitra (March-April), eight occur- Srishtyadi, Nava-ratra (dedicated to the worship of Durga), Sri-Panchami, Asokashtami, Rama-navami, Chaturdasa, Purna-masa, Pariva. Next during Vaisakha (April-May) mostly celebrated *te 'ahir* was Tij (the birthday of Parasurama), in the month of Sravana was Naga-panchami, during Kartika was Pariva or Balirajya (principality of Bali). On this day they deck themselves and cattle and buffaloes.<sup>24</sup> A record said "...the wholesome principle of 'give and take' in the cultural life in India continued undisturbed, and Muslims had less prejudice to import silently colourful Hindu customs in birth and to partake of the mirth and joy of gay Holi and Hindola (swinging of the rainy season).<sup>25</sup>

## References

1. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1894, p. 320.
2. Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol-I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1989, p. 245.
3. Mohamed, Malik, *The Foundations of the Composite Culture in India*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2007, p.303.
4. Sharma, Ruchika, *Discovering Jashn-i-Chiraghan: the Mughal Festival of Lights*, m.thewire.in, accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2018.
5. Blake, Stephen P, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calender, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2013, p. 89.
6. Safvi, Rana, *Dussehra Festivities in Mughal Shahjahanabad*, Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 48, issue. 41, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2013.
7. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, pp. 319-20.
8. Mohamed, Malik, *The Foundations of the Composite Culture in India*, p. 393.
9. Safvi, Rana, *Dussehra Festivities in Mughal Shahjahanabad*, Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 48, issue. 41, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2013.
10. Singh, Amit Kumar, *The Festival of Rakshabandhan in Mughal India*, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, vol-6, issue-11, accessed on December, 2016.
11. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, p. 319.
12. Al-bdul-QadirIbn-I-Muluk Shah or Al-Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, vol-II, tr George S. A. Ranking, Atlantic Publication, New Delhi, 1990, p. 269.
13. Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol-I, p. 246.
14. Mohamed, Malik, *The Foundations of the Composite Culture in India*, p. 303.
15. Ibid, p. 394.
16. *The Colourful History of Holi and Islam*, sabrangindia.in, accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2019.
17. Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol-I, p. 245.
18. Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2016.
19. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, p. 321.

20. Rawat, Sugandha, *The Women of Mughal Harem*, Evincepub Publishing, 2019, p. 109.
21. Ahmed, SaharifUddin, *Dacca: A Study in Urban History and Development*, Rautiedge Library Editing: Urban History, p.13. Also see, Aggarwal, K. K, *From Rakshabandhan to Janmashtami: A Spiritual Yajna*, accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019.
22. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, p. 319.
23. Chaterjee, Kumkum, *Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal*, Modern Asian Studies, p. 6, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2013.
24. AbulFazl-I-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, vol-III, pp. 317-20.
25. Yasin Mohammad, *A Social History of the Islamic India (1605-1748)*, MunshiramManoharlal, 1974, p. 102.