

# Jahangir and Non-Violence

- R.N. Mehta\*

In 1610 A.D. (V.S. 1666) the Jaina *Samgha* of 90 representatives with P. Vivek and Udehi met *Pādsāh* Jahāngīr at Āgrā and requested him to pass an order prohibiting slaughter of animals during the *Paryuṣana* festival. *Pādsāh* Jahāngīr complied with the request and a decree for prohibition of slaughter of animals during the *Paryuṣana* festival was promulgated. This information was sent to Vijayasena Sūri in 1610 (V.S. 1667, Second day of Bright half of *Kārtika*) by Sohakasuta of *Tapāgaccha*.

This interesting letter was published by Hīrānand Śāstrī in '*Ancient Vijñapti Patras*' in 1942. In this work Hīrānand Śāstrī has commented on p. 20 that "Jahāngīr was not so tolerant as his father. That Jahāngīr also forbade animal slaughter under similar influence for some days is proved by the present document".

This statement by Hīrānand Śāstrī suggests two lines of thought.

- (1) Jahāngīr was not as tolerant as his father Akbar.
- (2) He forbade animal slaughter under the influence of the Jainas.

These points require an examination. It is significant to raise a few questions to understand the situation. If Hīrānand Śāstrī's view that Jahāngīr was less tolerant be examined then one has to find out whether Jahāngīr had any traumatic experience that led him towards the path of non-violence as is noted by Aśoka Maurya Did P. Vivek and P. Udehi and the Jaina *Samgha* went to preach Jahāngīr? Was Jahangir influenced by this teaching and he declared the decree or Jahāngīr was thoughtful and had an innate desire for spreading non-violence.

An examination of these points would require the study of the life of Jahāngīr. Fortunately Jahāngīr is credited to have maintained autobiographic notes for either twelve or eighteen years after he became the ruler. After that the notes were maintained by Mahammad Hāji and Mutmmadkhān under Jahāngīr's instructions. This Persian account is variously known as '*Tuzuka-e-Jahāngīr*', '*Tarikh-e-Salimsāhī*', '*Tarikh-e-Jahāngīrnāmā*', '*Dwazdasal*', '*Jahāngīri vakīyat*' etc. This work was translated by Major David Price in 1904 in English. It is reprinted under the title "*Memoirs of the emperor Jahangir*" by J.K. Ahuja from Delhi-7. This edition is used in the article, A perusal of this work indicates that Jahāngīr became *Pādsāh* on 10

*Jamādul Akhir* 1014, October 1605 on Tuesday. As soon as he became the ruler he had issued a decree. In it the eleventh item is highly significant as it deals with the ban on slaughter of animals. It is stated in it that --

1. As Jahāngīr was born in Rabi-ul-avval meat-eating was prohibited in the kingdom.
2. He was enthroned on Thursday so slaughter was prohibited on that day.
3. For Sunday no slaughter of animals was permitted. This practice was established by Akbar before eleven years and Jahāngīr continued it.

He had released the prisoners and in them one was in prison at Gwalior for forty years.

It is highly significant that the above decree prohibited animal slaughter in the empire of Jahāngīr for 126 days. It clearly indicates that Jahāngīr had prohibited animal slaughter for at least four months during the year.

Moreover Jahāngīr notes that Hindus should be allowed to follow their religion without any hindrance, but on the point of *Satī* it may be noted that he strictly prohibited this practice.

If one follows his autobiography one finds two interesting examples of his attitudes. During his rule there was trouble on Lahore-Kabul high way. Khwājā Abul Hasan cleared this trouble. In this action 17,000 persons were killed and others were captured. Jahāngīr forgave those captured and gave them the work of bringing fodder for the elephants. He has noted that this blood bath is painful, but so long as other ways are not found there is no option. Moreover, he noted that the ruler has to protect his people from trouble.

His remarks when compared with XIIIth Asokan edict finds a great similarity of experience and emotions. It is a well-known fact that he had hung a bell for Justice. These features in his life are highly significant for proper evaluation.

The letter of Sohakasuta and its time are highly significant. When Jahāngīr came to throne, *Paryuṣana* festival was over, but Rabi-ul-avval and *Paryuṣana* were coinciding so the question of killing of animals was out of question. But it changed afterwards. In this change there was a coincidence of *Jamādul Akhir* in 1610 when Jaina *Samgha* went to the court of Jahāngīr.

Usually during *Paryuṣana* the non-slaughter days, the Thursdays and Sundays would always be coming so two or three non-violent days would

naturally exist during these festivals. Under these conditions the Jaina *Samgha* at Āgrā took advantage of this situation and might have requested for promulgation of the decree of non-violence during *Paryuṣana*, on the coronation day. Jahāṅgīr conceded to this request. This information was sent to Vijayasena Sūri who was residing at Pāṭan (Somnāth or Devkee).

All these historical antecedents do not uphold the views of Hīrānand Śaṣtrī as noted above.

The analysis of Jahāṅgīr's auto-biography also suggests that he was deeply influenced by his father. As a boy Jahāṅgīr had asked his father about stopping the building of temples of the icon worshippers. Akbar's answer of tolerance as a shadow of the Almighty and universal peace had impressed him. He had therefore already imbibed from his childhood the lessons of multi cultural tolerant society and practices with a deep sense for sanctity of life. These ideas were highly favourable for the decree of Non-violence during the *Puryaṣana*. It might have extended the practice of Non-violence and ban on slaughter of animals for a week, but in reality it would be for five or six days more, during the whole year.

Jahāṅgīr had already declared a ban on slaughter of animals for 126 days. The new order would take the days to 131 or 132 depending on Sundays and Thursdays. This was about 5% increase of days from Jahāṅgīr's point of view and a great help by the *Pādśāh* to the Jaina *Samgha* and glory to *Tapāgaccha*.

In conclusion, it may be stated that Jahāṅgīr had inherited from his father the ideas of zilullah (Ruler as shadow of the Almighty) and Sulah Kula (Universal peace), that were effective to sympathise with the Jaina idea of Non-violence. This coincidence was possibly the main reason of Jahāṅgīr's decree. Moreover, Jahāṅgīr's autobiography amply demonstrates his desire for non-violent action, but use of violence in the political activity, maintenance of law and order etc. When other more sophisticated methods were not discovered, was reluctantly taken by him. In this aspect the position taken by him and '*Niśithacūrni*' as well as by Jaina thought to solve the riddle of violence for non-violent world also stand almost on the same platform.

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