

## **“Religion and politics in the Mughal empire of India”**

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Conform to widespread belief, the early modern Muslim world was ‘a liberal paradise compared with Europe’ (e.g. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 197 Kindle). Today, we have the new field of Mughal cultural historiography which presents us with a picture of the religious conditions in the Mughal empire of India (1526-1707/1857) that looks positively benign in comparison. It belabors how the Mughal openness to diverse and unorthodox views had a correlate in the flourishing respect during this period for multiple classical religious and intellectual traditions within an empire of unprecedented dynamism, social harmony and absolute civility. Almost invariably, the alleged Mughal approach to handling diversity is favorably contrasted with contemporary European attitudes of the Reformation.

This paper attempts to advance a more complex and nuanced view. It presents evidence to show that religious attitudes in the Mughal empire changed significantly over time. The more dominant the Mughal dynasty became, the more these attitudes became infused with a reformist agenda. The Mughal imperial regime was indeed pluralistic and tolerant to a degree, but it also successfully set the terms for a more uniform Islamic culture that was sharply at odds with such pluralism and respect for diversity. There were, thus, concerted attempts to reform and regulate important aspects of Hindu religion and custom, while theological engagements between Muslims and Hindus led to assertions of the superiority of Islam no less decisively. Accompanying the increasing commitment of the Mughal dynasty to Sunni Islam as the sole religious legitimation of its rule, there was the inevitable turn against Shi`ism. The paper concludes that, in spite of differences, many of the Mughal imperial regulations do remind us of the new attitudes to religious, social, economic, and political organization that emerged in Reformation Europe. The momentum of religious change went in the same direction and was often conflictuous.