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# **AKBAR (1556-1605) AND INDIA UNIFICATION UNDER THE MUGHALS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Akbar the Great (1556-1605) was a well-known Mughal (or Moghul) ruler and regarded as a great ruler due to his achievements in the military, politics, development and administration. In fact, he was regarded as the definitive founder of the Mughal Empire after his victory over an army led by Hemu in the Second Battle of Panipat in 1556. The victory has opened a way for Akbar to become the sole emperor in the Indian sub-continent and continued to wage wars against Hindu rajahs. To unify the vast Indian states under a single Mughal empire, Akbar introduced several administrative*

*policies. The objective of this study is to analyze the Indian unification efforts under the Mughal Empire. This study is a historical study employing a qualitative approach methodology as a means of gathering and analyzing of data. The gathering of data was done through search of documents while the historical review, content analysis and source interpretation were used to analyze the data. This study found that Akbar has implemented several policies to unify the whole of the Indian subcontinent in order to achieve his mission of 'Mughal Union'. However, some of his policies were controversial and drew ire from the Indian Muslims as the policies were deemed unacceptable and deviated from the true teachings of Islam. The opposition to his ideas did not however hinder him from achieving his political missions. This article, therefore, must be read as an exposition of a political figure's efforts in his maneuver to consolidate his position. In addition to that, this article serves as an effort to analyze Akbar's political approach which was deemed as attempts to proliferate Mughal political power through measures which 'subdued' Islam with the aim of creating unity of the people and hence creating 'Mughal Union'.*

**Key words:** Akbar; The Mughals; *Din-I-Ilahi*; Urdu Language; Military History, Islamic Civilization; India

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mughal Empire was a great Muslim power in the Indian subcontinent. The existence and achievements of the Mughal Empire was regarded as a jewel in the Islamic civilization, comparable to Islamic civilization in al-Andalus during the Umayyads era, Baghdad during the era of the 'Abbasids and Turkey during the Ottomans (Hamka 2006). In fact, its establishment in 1526 by Babur was seen as a step to establish an Islamic power in the Asian continent to rival the contemporary powers of that time, which were the Ottomans, led by Salim I and the Safavids led by Shah Isma'il (Kulke & Rothermund 2004).

According to Bakar (2000), the Mughal era can be divided into two, namely the era of consolidation and glory (1526-1707) and the era of decline and downfall (1707-1857). He stated that the Mughals glorious era can be observed during the first half of the empire's history when the Indian region was ruled by Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Awrangzeb. The second half of the Mughal's period witnessed the decline of the Mughals, particularly after the demise of Awrangzeb in 1707 at a time when the Mughal empire was weak and besieged by serious resistance from the Hindus, power struggle among the royals, weakness and incompetence of the rulers and invasion and intervention by foreign powers, particularly from Europe (Bakar 2000; Ishak 1992).

Many historians agreed that Akbar was the greatest Mughal Emperor of all. This is attributed to Mughal achievement during his rule which saw the empire extended to the entire of India (Bosworth 1967). Akbar's ability to mobilize the Mughal army and conquer Hindu kingdoms one by one undefeated was a feat not attained by anybody before him. Because of this achievement, Akbar was recognized as the greatest Mughal ruler and given the accolade 'Akbar The Great' (Hintze 1997). Despite his great achievements, Akbar also suffered failures, particularly when he attempted to promote a new religious idea known as *Din-i-Ilahi*. The conception brought by Akbar to unite all religions in his effort to unite the Indian community

was clearly rejected by the ulema and the Muslim communities who considered Akbar's actions as blasphemous (Bakar 1994). In fact, the Muslim rejection was seen as a failure among his efforts to unify India under the Mughal Empire (Bakar, Jamsari & Ashari 2011).

It cannot be denied that Akbar achieved greatly in ensuring the empire's excellence and dominance in many fields. In ensuring that, he strived to implement strategies to achieve his aims. Akbar's dream of realizing the 'Mughal Union' in India drove him to undertake measures which involved changes in administrative policies and military actions. In the aspect of Indian unification, Akbar was regarded successful in forming the Indian National Coalition, helped by the cooperation extended by the Rajput Hindus. Such cooperation gave strength to Akbar in eliminating his enemies, who came from the both the Muslim and the Hindu sides (Bakar 2000). Thus, this article is aimed at drawing historians to analyze and evaluate Akbar's efforts in the unification of India under the Mughal leadership and the reactions of the communities and grassroot leaders to his efforts.

There are several literatures which discuss Mughal rule during the era of Akbar The Great. For example, Abdullah Ishak described in detail Akbar's political journey, particularly involving social reforms in the society. In his work, Ishak analyzed the role of Akbar in promoting intellectual discourse by providing equal opportunities in education for his people, be they Muslims or not, men or women. In addition, Akbar introduced several policies which were indiscriminative, satisfying and comforting the people who of different race and religion. Among them was the introduction of a new religion *Din-i-Ilahi*, encouraging of arts and literature, abolishment of the jizyah tax and slavery tradition (Ishak 1992). Even though the policies were meant for uniting the people, there was, however, no argument that such policies were meant to unify India under the 'Mughal Union'.

Qureshi described Akbar in detail in his writing (Qureshi 1987). He outlined the background of Akbar's life, his childhood, and the crises and rebellions that he faced as well as the relation he had with the Ottomans of Turkey, the Safavids of Persia and the Uzbek kingdom of Central Asia-Samarkand. Additionally, Qureshi also discussed the politics of the Mughals during Akbar's era, by examining his policies on administrative matters, public services, land management system, economic and social reforms and cultural activities. Even though Qureshi did not clearly state Akbar's efforts in unifying India, the emperor's actions, and the reforms he undertook, however, remain to be decided whether or not they were part of his unification effort.

Bakar (2000) also discussed the political development of the Mughals, focusing on the military campaigns during Akbar's rule. His writing clearly stated that the military campaigns were carried for the mere purpose of realizing Akbar's imperialistic ambition of unifying India under a single rule of the Mughals. Early portrayal of this ambition was the war between the Mughals led by Akbar who was aided by Bayram Khan and the army led by Hemu at Panipat in 1556. Akbar's victory in that battle enticed him to further his military campaigns throughout of India. Akbar launched military missions conquering Hindu provinces one after another as in Mewar (1567) and Deccan (1601). The militaric actions were also directed towards Islamic governments, especially those which were headed by the Mughal royal household. Among them was his military action on Kabul, which was governed by his own step-brother, Mirza Muhammad Hakim. The action was taken as Mirza Muhammad Hakim had threatened the position of Akbar as the utmost ruler of the Mughals, proclaiming himself the emperor. The proclamation was a reaction by Mirza to Akbar's close cooperation with the Hindus. In addition, the concept of *Din-i-Ilahi* was also discussed briefly in the book and was regarded as an effort by Akbar in his quest to find a common understanding among his subjects of diverse faiths (Bakar 2000). Even though the book outlined that the militaric missions and the religious reformation were part of Akbar's strategies for realizing his 'Mughal Union', it is fair to

comment that the work lacks discussions on other important issues such as the appointment of non-Muslims to important administrative posts and the abolishment of *jizyah*.

There are various works in Arabic which also discuss Akbar and the Mughals. Among them is the work of al-Faqi which chronicles Akbar's political journey beginning from his enthronement until his death (al-Faqi 2002). Al-Faqi's work focused on Akbar's militaric missions against the Hindus and rebellious royals. On top of that, al-Faqi also discussed the conception of *Din-i-Ilahi* introduced by Akbar and its failure to become a full-fledge religion and to be acceptable to the people of India. In fact, the new religion was ended as soon as Akbar was buried. Similar to many other works, this writing described the problems faced by Akbar and discussed Akbar's remedies to the problems. Therefore, military actions and religious ideas were deemed, by the author, suitable for overcoming problems faced. However, al-Faqi's work did not attempt to explore other implementations by Akbar in his struggle to unify India under the Mughal leadership.

Thus, this article has an objective of analyzing Akbar's strategies in his effort to unify the entire India under the Mughal Empire. This study was undertaken using historical study employing a qualitative research approach as the method for data accumulation and analysis. Data accumulation was done via documentation while the historical study was done using content analysis and source interpretation to analyze the data. This study found that Akbar had implemented several strategies to unify the entire India in his vision of a 'Mughal Union'. However, some of his strategies were rejected by the Muslims of India because the strategies were controversial apart from deviating from the true teachings of Islam. The Muslim resistance did not however hinder Akbar from achieving his political missions. This article therefore, must be read with a mind that it is an exposition of the political maneuver of Akbar in consolidating his position as the ruler of the empire. In addition, this work is an attempt to analyze Akbar's political approach to expanding the Mughal political power by 'subjugating' Islam with the aim of creating unity among the people thus forming 'Mughal Union'.

Studies relating to the greatness and excellence of Islamic and Arabic studies generally and Islamic history and civilization particularly are also assayed by local scholars, covering various issues such as discussion of the role of the al-Azhar University in the dissemination of Islamic religious knowledge (Mujani, Abdullah & Bakar 2012), the historical development of public institutions of Malaysian higher learning (Mujani, Muttaqin & Khalid 2014), the *takharuj* principle flexibility in solving the inheritance issues (Ahmad et al. 2017), heir pre-investigation mechanism according to shari'ah perspective (Ahmad, Isa & Omar 2014), the management of zakat distribution in the practice of fatwa in Terengganu (Hassan et al. 2017), the approach of knowledge transfer in deriving Shafi'ite *hukum* (Hassan et al. 2015), the economic effects of the Julban riots during the Mamluk period (Mujani 2013), Ibn al-Athir's records on Islamic history in India (Ashari, Nor & Jamsari 2013), al-Salawi's records of the Marinid military from the point of war (Jamsari et al. 2012a), the Marinid kingdom from different perspectives; i.e. naval force (Jamsari & Ashari 2014), administrative system (Jamsari et al. 2012b), Ibn Kathir's records on chain of wars in *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* (Jamsari, Yaacob & Ashari 2013), al-Ghazali's views on family development (Sulaiman, Jamsari & Noh 2014), the basis and meaning of leadership in Islam (Jamsari et al. 2012c; Mujani et al. 2012), Ibn Firnas's contribution to aviation technology (Jamsari et al. 2013), Reinhart Dozy's bio-bibliographical aspect (Jamsari & Talib 2014; Jamsari et al. 2014), strategic leadership of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih (Jamsari, Isa & Ashari 2014), concept of knowledge according to Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi (Sulaiman, Jamsari & Talib 2016), the scholarship of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at in the science of *tarannum* (Abdullah et al. 2014), astrolabe as portal to the universe, inventions across civilizations, multipurpose astrofiqh instrument, functions in solving astrofiqh issues, general similarities of Malaysian observatories, observatories in Islamic history (Safiai et al. 2017;

Safiai et al. 2016; Ibrahim, Safiai & Jamsari 2015; Safiai, Jamsari & Ibrahim 2014; Mujani, Ibrahim & Safiai 2012), as well as the purification of historical facts in selected Malay novels (Kamaruzaman et al. 2017).

## 2. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Akbar also known as Abu al-Fath, Jalal al-Din and Akbar, Akbar's real name was Muhammad. Akbar was the name synonymous to him as he was better known by that name. The name 'Akbar' itself carried the meaning of 'the greatest' (Hamka 2006). Born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1542, he was the son of the second Mughal ruler, Nasir al-Din Humayun whose wife was Hamidah Banu Begum. Akbar's birth brought joy to Humayun as the latter now had a son who will be the heir to his throne. It gave hope to Humayun and was also a remedy to his disappointment, after his army's 1540 defeat to Sher Shah in his attempt to reconquer Delhi (Qureshi 1987).

Even though the Mughal household left Delhi to settle in Lahore, Humayun's desire to retake the city never vanished. In 1545, Humayun led a military campaign recapture Kabul and proceeded to capture Kandahar in 1546. In 1554, Humayun, together with his right hand man, Bayram Khan, marched the army towards India and victoriously defeated Tatar Khan, Sher Shah's army commander in Lahore. After that, Humayun advanced further by defeating an 80,000-strong Suri army led by Sikandar Suri. Well prepared and well equipped with high morals, Humayun's army overcame their enemies advancing towards the cities of Delhi dan Agra. Finally, in 1555, Humayun captured both cities at once returning India back to the hands of the Mughals. Alas, six months after his victory of reconquering India, Humayun died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1556. His son Akbar ascended to the throne of the Mughals at a very tender age of 14 years (Bakar 2000).

As he became an emperor at a very young age, Akbar did not have much time to learn knowledge and skills. When he was five years old, his father Humayun appointed a teacher to teach him to write and read. The teacher was changed, one after another, as Akbar could neither write nor read. He had no interest in mastering the two important skills preferring to have someone recite him poetry or read a book. In sports, however, Akbar was agile and often trained with weapons of war (Qureshi 1987). Apart from the objective of creating a political unity, it was the lack of religious education that led Akbar to unilaterally conceptualize a religion which combined all religions known as *Din-i-Ilahi* to fill the emptiness of in his heart, after listening to advices coming from learned men of various religions (Thohir & Kusdiana 2006).

Bayram Khan, who was his father's assistant and good companion, guided Akbar in politics and administration. Bayram Khan was a minister during the Humayun era. He was a supporter of Humayun's quest to reconquer Delhi. After Akbar took over the Mughal leadership, Bayram Khan used his influence to in deciding government affairs because the emperor was still young. However, Akbar sacked Bayram Khan and exiled him to the Holy Land in Makkah. There were several reasons as to why Bayram Khan was sacked, among them was that he was a Shi'ite and used that fact to appoint Shi'ites into administrative offices to the point of creating a polemic the majority Sunni community. Another reason was that Akbar was urged by his mother, Hamidah Banu Begum, and his aide, Mahan Anaga, who disliked Bayram Khan for certain reasons (Bakar 2000; Qureshi 1987). On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1556, Akbar was proclaimed the Mughal Emperor in Lahore. Bayram Khan invited him to Agra to lead the Mughals. Due to his young age, Bayram Khan ruled on his behalf in all matters of administration. In the beginning, Bayram Khan had powers to decide all matters, using the name of the emperor. This was evident in the event of the Mughals battling an army led by Hemu. Hemu was the prime minister during the era of Sher Shah's rule and called himself Vikramaditya, in memory of a Hindu emperor. It was probable that the title was used to increase

the morale and spirits of the Hindu army after their victory over the Mughals led by Tardi Beg (Kulke & Rothermund 2004; Bakar 2000). After Hemu's men defeated the Mughals in Delhi in the first battle, both sides clashed again in Panipat in November 1556. The Mughals were then led by Bayram Khan to face Hemu's 1500-elephant-strong army.

Hemu's huge army did not terrify the Mughal army. In fact, Hemu was injured in the battle when an archer managed to inflict injury to Hemu's eye. Due to the injury, Hemu fell off his horse, causing panic and chaos among his men. In that chaotic situation, the Mughals managed to capture Hemu and brought him before Akbar for sentencing (Bakar 2000). It was Bayram Khan himself who sentenced Hemu to death without consulting Akbar as the rightful ruler (De Laet 1974). That was a testament of Bayram Khan's strong power and influence during the early stage of Akbar's rule.

After Bayram Khan was fired, due to several reasons, Akbar himself planned actions to unify India under the Mughal kingdom. He mobilized his army to annihilate the remaining Afghan rebels, conquer several Hindu provinces and even fight rebellion from the Mughal household. The unification effort was strengthened by social reformation which was characterized by a policy of equal treatment to all races and religions. The conception of *Din-i-Ilahi* introduced by Akbar himself was the pinnacle of the efforts to unify the Indian communities under what is called the 'Mughal Union'. However, a political crisis in the Mughal palace took its toll on Akbar's health. A power struggle between his sons, Man Singh and Salim, added further to the crisis. During his illness, Salim showed his good side by taking and showing a great care towards his health and condition. On that, Akbar decided to relinquish his throne to Salim a day before his death on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1605 (Bakar 2000).

### 3. AKBAR'S STRUGGLE IN UNIFYING INDIA

To ensure the success of his mission in unifying India under the Mughal Empire, Akbar implemented several strategies involving military movements, changes in administrative policies and formation of cultural and religious reformation. These were carried out to ensure all subjects of the Mughal rule enjoy great comfort and harmony without discrimination and at once consolidating the Mughals' position in ruling India (Kulke & Rothermund 2004). Hence, this article attempts to look into four strategies by Akbar in his pursuit of 'Mughal Union', which are the conquest of India, equality policy in administration, emergence of the teachings of *Din-i-Ilahi* and the use of the Urdu language.

#### 3.1. The Conquest of India

The conquest of India policy was among the efforts by Akbar to unify India under the Mughals. After his victory over Hemu in the Second Battle of Panipat in 1556, Akbar's troops advanced farther reaching as far as Deccan. The conquest took place stage by stage with the first stage (1561-1576) directed at the central region of India, while the second stage (1583-1595) was focused on northern India and finally the third stage (1597-1601) was extended towards the Deccan region (Bakar 2000).

The first stage of the conquest began in 1561 and the target area was the Bengal territory. The first city to fall to the Mughals was the city of Malwa which was ruled by a Hindu king. The fall of Malwa prompted another Hindu king namely Raja Amber to extend a hand of friendship and cooperation, bowing to the rule of the Mughals. It was supposedly done to avoid his kingdom from having the same fate as Malwa (Pandey 1963). Akbar then proceeded to wage war against Rani Durgavati, ruler of the Gondwana province in 1564 in the district of Jabalpur. The Mughal army, under the command of the governor of Kara, Asaf Khan, scored another victory killing Rani Durgavati and Raja Bir Narayan. The conquest of Gondwana opened a way for Akbar to extend his conquest to the city of Chittor, the capital of Mewar. Prior to that, Akbar

successfully quelled a rebellion led by Mirza Khan in Punjab, Khan Abdullah Uzbeg in Malwa and Khan Zaman Uzbeg in Juanpur. Fresh from his victory over the rebels, Akbar marched to Chittor to battle the Hindu Rajput armies who were defending their forts. In 1568, Akbar's men conquered Chittor even though it was said that the Hindu army's defence was among the most formidable at that time (De Laet 1974). After that, Akbar furthered his military expedition to Rajashtan in his effort to conquer Ranthambor. In 1569, Akbar captured the city destroying the palace of Raja Chauhan in the battle (Bakar 1994).

Akbar's siege of Chittor and Ranthambor were a strong blow to the Rajput armies. Raja Ramchandra who ruled Kalinjar voluntarily surrendered his city to Akbar in 1569. In 1572, Akbar continued his military mission to Gujarat which was renowned for its ports. Among the important ports in Gujarat were Broach, Cambay and Surat. Gujarat was also a fertile land and rich in agricultural produce. Akbar's assault on Gujarat was unopposed as the ruler of Gujarat, Muzaffar Shah, has fled prior to the attack. The fall of Gujarat contributed greatly to the economy of the Mughal Empire to an extent that Akbar had to establish a special tax collection department specific for the administration of revenues of the Gujarat territory (Bakar 1994).

In 1574, Akbar headed for Bengal using a naval route. Akbar's tactics was absolutely unexpected by ruler of Bengal, Daud Khan who assumed that the emperor was not keen on maritime activities. Akbar's charge was however a reaction to Daud Khan's severing of ties with the Mughals and his self-proclamation of sultan. Moreover, Daud Khan tried to conquer several territories controlled by the Rajputs. Once again, Akbar's assault on Bengal was unopposed as Daud Khan fled earlier on. Akbar then appointed Mun'im Khan as the Governor of Bengal and he returned to Fatehpur Sikri (Bakar 2000).

In 1581, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, who was Akbar's younger step-brother and the ruler of Kabul, rebelled and proclaimed himself The Emperor of Mughal. It was Mirza's reaction to Akbar's policy of good political cooperation with Rajput rulers. Backed by a senior Mughal government official, Khwaja Mansur, Mirza Hakim captured Punjab and plotted to conquer the entire India. Akbar himself led an army of 50,000 horsemen and 500 war elephants chasing Mirza Hakim up to Kabul. He, however, pardoned Mirza Muhammad Hakim and even returned Kabul to Mirza Muhammad Hakim's rule (Bakar 2000). Historians agreed that Akbar's pardon for Mirza and allowing Mirza Muhammad Hakim to maintain his control over Kabul were surprising as his step-brother's crime was unforgiven and punishable by death. Akbar's action to let Mirza in charge of Kabul was however a political ploy as Mirza in return promised not to challenge Akbar's position as emperor (Pandey 1963). It was also wise of Akbar to let his step-brother maintain his power as that would guarantee no more rebellion from him and that would mean Akbar could concentrate his missions on conquering other northern India provinces.

Akbar then marched his army towards Northern India. In July 1585, Akbar tamed Kabul and now was plotting his plans to subdue other regions such as Sind, Kandahar and Kashmir. His operation to the north was a success after conquering wealthy regions such as Swat, Bajaur and Buner. Kashmir fell to the hands of Akbar in 1586 followed by Sind in 1590. In 1595, the Mughals captured Baluchistan and Kandahar. The Mughals' successful operation of conquering northern India elevated Akbar's position as a great ruler feared by his contemporaries (Bakar 2000).

After his triumph over northern India, Akbar diverted his attention to the Deccan territories which housed many Muslim kingdoms which were small and localized (Pandey 1963). The operation to conquer the region commenced near the end the year of 1590 and lasted until 1601 (De Laet 1974). During that period, Akbar defeated several small kingdoms under the control of Nizam Shahi; among them were Khandesh, Berar, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golkonda and Bedar. In 1591, Akbar took the initiative of sending emissaries to the leaders of Deccan territories to discuss the unification of India which he suggested. His suggestion was however



rejected with most of the rulers ignoring his call. Because of that, in 1595, Akbar sent his troops to Ahmadnagar and the military operation was successful as its ruler, Chand Bibi agreed annexation to the Mughal Empire. The action of Chand Bibi drew anger from his people causing riots. In the end, in 1600, Akbar resented his troops and occupied Ahmadnagar and Berar.

Prior to that, in 1599, Akbar occupied Khandesh unresisted as its ruler, Miran Bahadur Shah, after personally being guaranteed by Akbar of his safety, agreed to sign an agreement to join the Mughal union. Akbar soon had to return to Agra because his own son, Salim attempted a coup. Akbar however managed to rearrange the administration of the Deccan territory into three main provinces which were the states of Nizam Shahi, Gujarat and Malwa. These provinces were put under Prince Danial's control as an envoy of the Maharaja or Emperor (Bakar 2000).

In evaluating Akbar's success, many historians acknowledge him as a great Mughal ruler whose actions changed the political situations of India. Akbar successfully unified the entire India which was once provincially ruled or led by certain race or ethnics. During his rule of 50 years (1556-1605), the Mughal Empire enjoyed a period of glory in various fields. Politically, the Mughals were recognized by foreign powers, namely the Safavids in Persia and the Ottomans of Turkey. Such recognition was important and meaningful to Akbar allowing his empire to forge diplomatic and trade ties with those governments. Moreover, the recognitions were morally a bonus to Akbar who was facing enemies from the Hindu kingdoms. At the time of his death, the Mughal Empire comprised of more than 15 territories, including Subah, Agra, Ajmer, Allahabad, Ahmadabad (Gujarat), Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Kabul, Kashmir, Lahore, Malwa, Multan, Sind, Qudh, Berar, Ahmadnagar and Khandesh (Ishak 1992).

Due to the strength and greatness of the Mughal Empire, there were a number of Hindu kings who befriended Akbar. For example, the King of Amber voluntarily became a protectorate of the Mughals and that brokered a number of other Hindu kingdoms to follow suit (Gascoigne 1976). Akbar also tied a good relation with the Hindu Rajputs, even marrying their princesses. Even though his marriage to Hindu women looked good in the eyes of many, his weakness in dealing with his wives did go down well with the Muslims of India. Among his actions which were deemed his weakness were letting his wives to retain their faith, allowing them to bring in all kinds of idols into the palace and openly granting his blessing for idol worshipping in the palace. Apart from that, Akbar practiced some Hindu customs such as wearing a *rakhi* and taking part in *Diwali* festival which was contradictory to the Islamic creed inviting discontent and discomfort from among his Muslim subjects.

### 3.2. Equality Policy in the Administration

In administrative matters, Akbar regards his subjects equal in their rights and position regardless of race and religion. Akbar put many Hindu nobles into important policy-making offices. For example, Akbar appointed Bhagwan Das, a Hindu prince in Amber as his army commander. Akbar even honoured him with the title of *Amir al-Umara* for his service in winning several battles for the Mughal army (Ishak 1992). Akbar also appointed Hindus to the posts of tax collectors and financial officers of his government (Richards 1981). In addition, Akbar made a scholar of the Shi'ite faith, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, an interpreter at the Mughal palace. The appointments resulted in a polemic due to the rejection by the majority Sunni Muslims but Akbar stood firm with his decisions for he believed that the appointments would raise the standing of the Mughal rule. Moreover, the controversial appointments were a veiled message to the people of his willingness to cooperate with anyone of the right qualification and competence.

In his reformation of the education system, Akbar opened equal opportunities for education for all, allowing Hindu children be schooled at schools established by the Muslims. Schools,

madrasahs and educational institutions were established throughout the provinces, while the workforce was selected from among the qualified and competent, regardless of race and religion. Aids like scholarships were offered and free education was made available to those less fortunate. On top of that, women education was also given special attention as it was reported that Akbar set up a foundation specific for the women of his palace (Ishak 1992). Such measures were taken to ensure that his subjects were given their rights and opportunity for education and to form a populace obedient to the Mughal rulers.

In economy, Akbar carried out reforms particularly in taxation which was regarded a burden to the people. Certain taxes imposed on farmers and the poor were abolished such as land sales tax, livestock sales tax, sales tax, market tax, clothes tax and house purchase tax. He also abolished fees which were customarily paid to certain officials for their service (Ishak 1992). To ensure equal treatment for all his subjects, Akbar put an end to taxes imposed specifically on the Hindus. Among them were the *jizyah* tax and a tax on Hindu devotee making a pilgrimage to their holy place in Mathura (Gascoigne 1976). The abolishment of such taxes brought joy to the Hindus who considered him a savior who rescued them from all kinds of discrimination. The Muslims, however, particularly the ulema, objected to his actions citing reasons such as that the taxes were allowed in syaria and that the abolishment of such tax would lessen the imperial treasury. Akbar, nevertheless, stood firm in his decisions so as to ensure that his subjects were treated fairly in order for him to unite them under the Mughal Empire.

From the social perspective, Akbar made laws prohibiting polygamy as he rendered the practice a nuisance to health and personal peace. He was even of the opinion that polygamy was the source of marital breakdown thus creating problem in the society. Akbar encouraged inter-faith marriages in the name of racial integration and harmony. He himself created an example by marrying a Hindu Rajput princess, daughter to the King of Amber in 1562 (Gascoigne 1976). The marriage brought the relations between the Mughals and several Hindu kingdoms in Rajputana closer. His son Salim also married a Hindu princess who was the daughter of Baghwan Das (Ishak 1992). Following that, several rules of the palace were influenced by Hindu traditions such as the prohibition of animal slaughter and the eating of beef or cows which were symbolically gods to Hindus. Akbar himself did not eat meat as a mark of respect to the Hindu devotees (Bakar 1994). Additionally, Hindu customs were allowed in the palace, such as celebration of the *Diwali*, traditional wearing of *rakhi* idol worshipping of Hindu gods (Gascoigne 1976).

The tradition of making war prisoners, especially children and women, slaves was abolished. Such measure was taken as Akbar believed that all people of India, regardless of race religion, were free and must live free. Akbar also strongly prohibited *sati* rituals practiced by Hindus deeming it a pointless practice. *Sati* was a traditional Hindu ritual whereby a widow is cremated together with her dead husband (Ishak 1992). Due to his policies, the people of Mughal especially Hindus held high respect for him to an extent that some of them regard him their savior. It is therefore not strange that the Hindu communities supported Akbar and considered his policies better than those of some Hindu rajahs. Such support consolidated Akbar's position and eased the realisation of a unified India.

### 3.3. Emergence of *Din-i-Ilahi*

To consolidate his political position and to reach an understanding among his people, Akbar introduced the idea of a new religion known as *Din-i-Ilahi*. It was a conception of a new religion combining Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Akbar assumed that the people would live in harmony by practising a unity of religion and at once avoiding crises in the society caused by the variety of religion. Besides, he was also of the opinion that a comfortable and luxurious life would attract the people's total obedience (Ishak 1992).

The teachings of *Din-i-Ilahi* were propounded by Akbar factor driven by several factors. Among them was the personality factor of Akbar himself, who had a keen interest in philosophy. According to his understanding, differences between religions could only be resolved if all religions in India could be unified (al-Faqi 2002). The other factor was due to the problems arising from differences in opinion of the ulema. Akbar felt that the dissension in religious opinions could not overcome problems and he was of the opinion that there needed to be an authoritative figure who should have the final say in such matters. Akhbar therefore proclaimed himself *al-Imam al-'Adil* to raise himself to a status higher than the ulema. Such action was done for the sole purpose of positioning himself as someone of religious authority and subjugating the ulema (Kulke & Rothermund 2004). Moreover, conflicts due to differences in religion also drove him to formulate *Din-i-Ilahi*. In his assumption, the union of religions could resolve the conflicts because his people profess one religion only (Ishak 1992). The other factor was that Akbar himself was not well versed in the teachings of Islam and because of that he was easily influenced by the Sufism teachings promoted by his advisors such as Shaykh Mubarak, Abu Fadl dan Mir Abdul Latif (Thohir & Kusdiana 2000).

To strengthen the teachings of *Din-i-Ilahi*, Akbar built a place in Fatehpur Sikri where debates between religions were held, called *Ibadat-Khanna* in 1575. He often invited intellectuals of different religion to the place to have a discourse on religion. Once, the Portuguese colony of Goa sent three priests to *Ibadat-Khanna* on Akbar's invitation (Gascoigne 1976). The following are among the essential fundamentals of the the teachings of *Din-i-Ilahi* (Ishak 1992):

- All followers of the religion must believe in the oneness of God.
- All followers must prostrate before Akbar.
- Akbar is a viceroy of God who always receives guidance of truth and strength.
- Fire and sun worship is encouraged.
- Sunday is the official day of worship.
- The Islamic greeting of *al-Salam* 'alaykum is replaced by *Allahu Akbar* while *Wa' alaykum al-Salam* is replaced by *Jalla Jalaluhu*.
- Akbar as the head of the religion is prohibited from eating all kind of meat or flesh.
- It is forbidden to have intercourse with pregnant women, old women, the infertile and girls who have not came of age.

All the afore-mentioned elements were implemented to make *Din-i-Ilahi* a success. The teachings however failed to achieve its objectives because the people especially Muslims opposed the new religion which was considered to be deviant and pro-Hindu. The opposition even came from Akbar's own ulema, among them was Mullah Muhammad Yazdi, who supported Akbar's younger step-brother, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, to be the new Mughal ruler, considering Akbar had deviated from the true teachings of Islam. Followers of the teachings of *Din-i-Ilahi* amounted to as many as 19 adherents who were mainly made up of the officials at Akbar's palace. Thus, Akbar's measure to unite the Indian people though reformation of the religion did not only fail but also had the Muslims caught a religious morass (Ishak 1992).

### 3.4. Use of Urdu Language

The Urdu language was among the Islamic languages in the world apart from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Swahili and the Malay language. This is because Urdu has been used by majority of Muslims and adopted Arabic alphabet system of writing. During the Mughal reign, the language

was made the official language of the government by Akbar as an effort to unite the people of various race and religion creating a Mughal identity among the people. Due to that, the Urdu language was seen as an amalgamation of the three main languages; Arabic, Persian and Turkish with some element of the Hindu Sanskrit (Hamka 2006). Arabic was, then, a religious language, used during rituals and the teaching and learning of the religion. Turkish was used as a spoken language for communication among the Mughal royals and the nobles. The Persian language was the language of knowledge, literature and administration (Alam 1998). The Hindu Sanskrit language, meanwhile, was taken in to recognise the Hindu communities in India so that they would feel comfortable using the Urdu language.

Several hypotheses have been proposed with regards to the origin and development of the Urdu language. Ahmad wrote about the opinions on this. Among them was the opinion of Mahmud Sharani and T. Grahame Bailey who argued that the Urdu language has been in existence long before that and was said to be spoken by the Punjabi Ghaznavid community. The existence of the Urdu language began in 1027 in Lahore. However, only after 750 years had passed was the language recognized as Urdu. Before that, Urdu, or pre-Urdu, was called various names such as Hindi, Dihlawi, Dakani dan Gujarati due to the provincial dialect nature of the language (Ahmad 1969). Another hypothesis such as the one proposed by Siraj al-Din 'Ali Khan Arzu states that Urdu originated from the Sind language or Haryani because the language was used by the people in northern India. Another opinion was that the language originates from and developed in the Deccan territory as proposed by S.K. Chatterji (Ahmad 1969). Whatever the opinion was, the effort of Akbar to make Urdu the official language of the Mughal Empire was seen as an effective measure to unite the people. This is due to the fact that the language incorporated elements and influences of the other languages spoken by the Muslim and Hindu communities and was seen as having a sense of common belonging among the people of the empire. Both Muslims and Hindus were comfortable with the use of the Urdu language as the medium of communication because the language was receptive to elements of the Islamic and Hindu language apart from being seen as creating a true Mughal identity Among the peoples in India.

The use of the Urdu language as the formal language and *lingua franca* started after the marriage of Akbar to Rajput Princess. His wife was neither fluent in Persian nor Turkish, being able to speak only in Hindi. Because of that Akbar decided to introduce Urdu as the new official language for in communication, bringing in influences of the other languages; Persian, Arabic and the Hindu Sanskrit (Alam 1998). That clearly soothed comfort to the Hindus, particularly the rajahs, and at once recognizing Hindu elements in the building of the Mughal civilization. Clearly, the effort by Akbar was characterized a form of appreciation towards the multiracism and multiculturalism existence of the Indian people during the Mughal era. The Urdu language will always be remembered as a legacy of the Mughals to the people, Muslims and Hindus alike, and became a *lingua franca* and then became the official language of Pakistan in the modern era (Jaffar 1972).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Akbar's success in unifying India under a single rule namely the Mughal Empire placed him among the greatest leaders in Mughal history. In fact, his achievement is regarded as a great feat, comparable to Emperor Asoka's achievement during the latter's rule in classical Indian civilization era. The title Akbar The Great by Western historians was a recognition towards his achievement ruling the empire bringing about excellence in various fields. Through military expeditions, changes in administration policies and religious reformation, Akbar realized his dream of seeing India united under Mughal unity. Nevertheless, some of his efforts were resisted and heavily criticized, among them were the idea of *Din-i-Ilahi* and pro-Hindu

administration policies. Even though such policies were implemented in the name of people's unity, his actions were met with resistance by certain quarters of the people, citing deviation from Islam as the reason. Nevertheless, Akbar's great achievement of conquering virtually the entire Indian subcontinent will forever be remembered as pioneer work for Mughal Union even though his idea of *Din-i-Ilahi* tarnished his credibility from the Islamic perspective. To understand the reasons for his achievement, further research can be carried out to look into military actions and/or the development of intellectual activities in India during his rule. Other research may include efforts by other Mughal rulers in maintaining the integrity and strength of the Mughal Empire.

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