

THE GREAT ISLAMIC MUGHAL EMPIRE DURING JALALUDDIN AKBAR'S ERA: SULH-I-KUL POLICY DETERMINATION

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Abstract

This research aims to reveal the main factors underlying the glory of the Mughal Islamic empire by using a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data are collected through literature study of books and ebooks. The results of the research prove that: Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar was the first Muslim ruler who could maintain his position for a long time, not merely to fulfill his personal ambitions but to take advantage of his position as a king to unite all Mughal society under his rule. To realize the vision, Akbar must legitimize his government and build a strong military superiority among his pluralistic society. The Sulh-i-kul or tolerance for all policy that he implemented became a driving tool for several subsequent policies such as the abolition of the jizyah, the establishment of ibadat-khana, and the application of din-i-llahi to unite the Mughal community in building a superpower empire based on universal tolerance. Without the basic ideology of sulh-i-kul, the Mughal society could not have become a famous empire back then.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor utama yang melandasi kejayaan kerajaan Islam Mughal dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Metode pengumpulan data menggunakan studi pustaka dari buku, ebook dan sejenisnya. Hasil penelitian membuktikan bahwa:

Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar merupakan penguasa muslim pertama yang dapat mempertahankan kerajaan Islam dalam waktu lama. Hal ini tidak semata-mata untuk memenuhi ambisi pribadinya tapi untuk memanfaatkan posisinya sebagai raja dalam menyatukan semua masyarakat Mughal di bawah kekuasaannya. Untuk mewujudkan visi tersebut, Akbar harus melegitimasi pemerintahannya serta membangun superioritas militer yang kuat diantara masyarakatnya yang majemuk. Kebijakan Sulh-i-Kul atau toleransi kepada semua yang diterapkannya mampu menjadi alat penggerak beberapa kebijakan berikutnya seperti penghapusan jizyah, pendirian ibadat-khana, dan penerapan din-i-Ilahi untuk menyatukan masyarakat Mughal dalam membangun kerajaan yang superpower berdasarkan toleransi. Tanpa ideologi dasar sulh-i-kul ini belum tentu masyarakat Mughal kala itu dapat menjadi kerajaan yang masyhur.

Keywords: *Sulh-i-kul; Jalaluddin Akbar; Mughal Empire; Islamic Policy*

Introduction

Lately, a lot of policies have been implemented, but they do not bring much good in a broad scope to be implementable in the long term. Therefore, it will result in continuous and endless changes. Meanwhile, policies within an area are not created without any concern on the reciprocity to obtain. It requires an in-depth needs analysis of what is really needed and what is only a temporary fulfillment. Furthermore, many policies in today's era are not related to the customs and culture that have been ingrained in social life. So, there happens a reluctance in the hearts of policy followers to apply these policies in everyday life. If the policy designed by the leader does not see the social context, it only functions as a written rule with no implications.

Even though Prophet Muhammad has given examples in leading the city of Medina when he migrated and formulated the contents of the Medina Charter agreement which by then became the legal policy for the people living in Medina. Most of the policies corresponded to the prevailing culture there. The figure of a leader did not only rely on his own thoughts upon policy formulation, yet contributions from other trusted parties were also on concern. The leaders after Rasulullah SAW. still applied the same leadership model so that the policies implemented were as effective as those designed by Rasulullah SAW. However, leaders today commonly enforce policies without any consideration over fundamental elements, and the policies are designed by him/her personally. The higher the position of a leader, the more he/she is expected to issue fine policies and to run them well (Husna, 2017).

From the historical perspective, the Mughal Islamic empire was one of the famous kingdoms for the success in leadership and policy management. The Mughal Islamic Kingdom was an Islamic kingdom located on the plains of Hindustan established from 1526 to 1857 (Yadav, 2019). The founder of the kingdom was Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur who came from the Mongol area of Timurid descent. The change in leadership of the Mughal Islamic empire was initiated based on family chain until its peak managed to control an area of 3.2 million square kilometers, spanning most of the subcontinent, and 150 million diverse people. The Islamic empire rose to its peak to become the most powerful country with a super strong military power and the richest almost a quarter of the global Gross Domestic Product.

So far, researches on the Mughal empire concern to petitions and local politics (Kaicker, 2019), the beauty and grandeur of its architecture (Dadlani, 2018), and the elements of authority and spirituality (Mahmoodi, 2022). However, what still needs to analyze more comprehensively is the history of government and policies implemented in the Mughal empire because the progress and glory of the kingdom did not only happen after it was founded, but through a lot of persistence and hard work and through a change in leadership. The glory of the Mughal Islamic empire could reach its peak during the reign of Jalaluddin Akbar (the third king of the Mughal Islamic Empire) from 1556 to 1605 AD. Overcoming family conflicts and the dominance of a series of royal ministers, Akbar came up as a very powerful ruler. Reflecting on the past life of his father, Humayun, who was betrayed by his brothers until he migrated to Afghanistan, as well as Humayun's persistent efforts to reclaim the throne of the Mughal Islamic empire, spurred Akbar to perfect his leadership from many sides (Zubaidah, 2016).

As a concrete step to realize his wishes, Akbar's regime created the social, cultural and political institutions of the Mughal empire that spread and grounded the empire in India. In particular, he created new relationships with local Hindu and Muslim rulers in strategic northern India, through one of which political marriages, which let his subordinate allies, new officers, and the existing officers complement what he inherited (Gommans, 2002).

Departing from Akbar's desire to form a new leadership structure, several leadership policies designed by Akbar were enforced. This article will expose about the fundamental issues coming up in Akbar's kingdom and the implemented policies to solve them by which he could successfully lead Mughal Empire to be a powerful kingdom.

Method

This study is a library research, a research whose data sources derive from books, ebooks, journal articles, and the like. The data obtained will be processed by using a descriptive analytical method with a qualitative approach. To verify the originality of the data, it applies external and internal criticism. This step is adopted to avoid any fallacies.

Results And Discussion

Biography of Jalaluddin Akbar

Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (Abu'l-Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar) who was the third king of the Mughal Islamic empire began his glory when he ascended the throne at the age of 13 years. Akbar was the biological son of Humayun (the second king of the Mughal Islamic empire) and Hamida Banu Begum. Specifically, Akbar was born in Sind (west India) on October 25, 1542. Throughout his life, the longest period as a royal prisoner in Kabul was during his childhood because his father king Humayun fled to Afghanistan first. In 1571, after Akbar had asserted his imperial authority and succeeded in defeating northern India as his main opponent, Akbar moved his royal capital from Agra to Fathpur Sikri, 24 miles to the west (Blake, 2013).

After Akbar's succession was finally secured and Akbar emerged from the district, Akbar and his close adviser Abu'l Fazl made the main policy. Akbar expanded his household, courts, administration and army through extensive recruiting, most notably through the many political marriage alliances and cultural policies that attracted a wide range of Indian Muslims and non-Muslims. He and his courtiers reorganized the Empire by developing a more centralized fiscal and administrative system (Fisher, 2016). During each phase of his imperial career, based in a different capital city, he commanded an expanding Mughal army that was almost constantly engaged in defensive and offensive wars against his ambitious relatives, rebellious imperial officials, elite and popular uprisings, and neighboring rulers. Most of his life, Akbar personally entered the battlefield and directly led military campaigns until his death. Thus, Akbar and his supporters founded and expanded the Mughal empire as a complex synthesis of the diverse processes, cultures, and peoples of Central Asia, Islam, and India (Shrivant & Ganpatrao, 2013).

Policy Background of *Sulh-i Kul*

In patrimonial states, the political marriages of the ruler can provide a significant way of defining and expanding his household, allies, and body of officials. In contrast, the ruler's new relatives by marriage link themselves to his regime and were able to gain access to his power and prestige. What often affects the outcome of political marriages is the relationship between the ruler and his bride, including their personal affection. In his first marriage when he was nine years old, Akbar and Shahzadi Ruqaiya Sultan Begum, a daughter of Hindal, his future wife did not have much choice because they had been betrothed by the two of them. The marriage did not produce children for both of them and queen Ruqaiya decided to take care of Khurram, the son of another wife of Akbar (Fisher, 2016).

In his late teens, Akbar decided for his own marriage and married Salima Sultan Begum who was still his cousin and a cousin of his first wife. Even in this second marriage, Akbar was still not blessed with children. So, Akbar decided to marry the descendants of the Hindu Rajput rulers who eventually some of them would embrace Islam. When Akbar emerged from the district and was on a pilgrimage to the Sufi shrine of Khwaja Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti in Ajmer, King Bihari Mal of Amber again approached Akbar. King Bihari Mal proposed a more personal and lasting alliance by offering as a bride his eldest daughter, Harkha Bai also known as Hira Kunwari, 'The Diamond Princess,' and Mariam-uz-Zamani, 'Maria Zaman'.

The marriage to the Rajputs placed the Mughal royal clan in the same social and divine order with similar martial dharma i.e. bhakti with Sufism. Over time, relations between Hindu Rajputs and non-Rajputs correlated with Akbar's religious and political policies from the beginning of his reign. Akbar vowed to break free and break away from the artificial traditions and religions that arose after doubts. At the end of 1582, there were two consequences faced by Akbar. First, all religions had an element of truth and all religions led to the highest reality. The second is the narrow view and bigotry and arrogance shown by the ulama (Ferne, 2021).

Akbar was also heavily influenced by the theory of transmigration, a cornerstone of traditional Hindu doctrine. Akbar is also said to have appreciated the value of Hindu gods and goddesses and had performed several rites which were customary among Hindus. So, from this consequence, the concept of *Sulh-i-kul* ideology was born which played a significant role in creating a new

liberal and mutually tolerant state. In language, *sulh-i-kul* means universal peace or tolerance for all (Jonnalagadda, 2020).

This ideology not only implies tolerance for others but also considers the balance, courtesy, respect, and compromise needed to maintain harmony among diverse populations (Fard, 2016). Thus, Akbar emphasized to respect all groups that submitted to him as 'perfect humans' and 'universal rulers' even though his troops continuously suppressed dissidents and conquered neighboring kingdoms in order to expand the territory of the Mughal Islamic empire. Akbar justified his many invasions by arguing that enemy rulers were immoral rebels against their sovereignty or perpetrators of violence against their people, who deserved the truly impartial justice that only Akbar could provide.

The king was an agent of a universal God so that his sovereignty was not tied to any one belief. In other words, a king was forbidden to discriminate between different religions, and once he made a discrimination, the king did not represent a good conduct as an agent of God. From Abu'l Fazl's point of view, Akbar's religious views are considered a rational decision to maintain harmony among the variety of religions in the Mughal Islamic empire (Ali, 1996).

Akbar's thoughts and policies were influenced by the beliefs about the position of kings from his Mongol lineage. From his ancestor Ghengiz Khan (r. 1206-1227), Akbar accepted the royal theory in which the king had a divine mandate to rule and was not accountable to other superiors. This means that the Mongol rulers had to rule by concentrating power rather than distributing it. The Mongol indifference to the religion of its people is also reflected in Akbar's actions. Akbar could be perceived as the one who preserve the ruling method that recognized all religions in his kingdom. Subordination of subjects to non-dictation of social policy, such as religion, was the main goal of the Mongol rulers. With the Turkic pluralistic culture, Timur Gurgan of Samarkand, came the addition of Islam to the Mongol theory of empire, but did not come to dictate how Akbar should rule. Akbar managed to explain the supreme status of the sultan within Islamic boundaries by stating "because God is one and has no partner, therefore, the deputy regent (sultan) of God's land must be one" (Padamsee, 2018). Akbar believed that religious law is legal, and the kingdom came directly from God and thus the king was accountable only to God. The Eastern concept of the kingdom that the right to rule came

from God, so all actions, either in the name of Islam or not, were justified by the divine decree of the sultan.

The influence of other religions caused Akbar to finally believe in mysticism and, Sufism. Akbar was very interested in the Chishtiyah order in India, including Shaykh Salim Chishti, who assisted Akbar in conceiving his first son Salim (later Jahangir) and Shaykh Mubarak Nagawri. An important change in the development of Akbar's worldview occurred when he came under the influence of Sufi doctrine beginning around 1571. His very different view of Islam turned away from orthopraxy and towards overcoming worldly desires and impulses while maintaining fundamental doctrines (Holland, 2005). One of the influential aspects of the Sufi Akbar doctrine was the belief in the transcendent unity of religions while understanding the unique differences of each religion. His mystical religious beliefs blended well with his belief in equality with his fellow human beings.

Abu'l Fazl officially emphasized Akbar to focus on the perspective of universal sovereignty with the establishment of social harmony as the missionary goal of the Mughal empire (Mukhia, 2014). Personally, Akbar himself had stepped his policy towards *sulh-i-kul* or universal peace since he just ascended the throne as a king. India's socio-political order was fully familiar to him, and he had fully understood the centrifugal tendencies India created to eliminate there by separating religion from politics. It could be seen from several methods used by Akbar.

The first method is doing a political marriage. The marriage aimed to strengthen the royal regime even though they had different religious and cultural backgrounds, from his first marriage to Shahzadi Ruqaiya Sultan Begum to the last marriage to Mariam-uz-Zamani. In 1579, he reorganized the aristocratic echelons by ensuring that no social group was at a higher level. This method is a pragmatic step towards the realization of absolute peace in the distribution of political resources (Fisher, 2016). It was adopted by Akbar from his childhood who saw that his parents came from different religious sects but could survive until the end of age. By carrying out this political marriage, it could further strengthen the expansion of the territory (Brahma, 2020).

The second method is abolishing the *jizya* or capitation tax in 1563 which was paid by non-Muslims as protected persons of the Mughal state. *Jizya* is a symbol of inferiority because it has become a formal law that establishes Muslims as rulers and Hindus as second-class subjects through taxation. This step was implemented as one of the steps to harmonize Hindus and Muslims.

The policy was motivated by Akbar's household life with the Rajputs so that justice was needed in living with different beliefs. With the abolition of the tax, the lives of non-Muslims in Mughals were more prosperous so that they were not burdened with the obligation to pay taxes and still received facilities like Muslims did. Mughal government revenue department lost steam for a while. In taking this drastic step, Akbar was opposed by his Muslim ministers and harshly criticized by the orthodox for violating long-standing traditions of Islamic rule. Akbar then proceeded with the move to end the ban on the construction of new Hindu, Jain, Parsi and other non-Muslim temples. Akbar made *inams* (endowments of land income) to Hindu temples (including in Vrindavan) and to non-Muslim saints.

Akbar saw that the people in his kingdom controlled many religions, so that as a king, he had the responsibility not to discriminate between the treatment of Muslims and people of different religions. Later as another method, he gave the authority to build the *Khana Ibadat* or house of worship in 1575 as a place for discussion of several religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. In the end, he drew the conclusion that all religions basically came from the same conclusion, which was only wrapped in different regulations. However, the *Khana Ibadat* was not used for long because it ended in a prolonged debate by scholars of every religion.

The next method is formulating the *Din-i-Ilahi*, which is previously known as *Tawhid-i-Ilahi*. *Din-i-Ilahi* is the most substantial syncretic religious movement from the mutual interaction and relationship between Hinduism and Islam (Kutlutürk, 2016). The concept uses three approaches, namely a theological approach (Sunni theology), a political approach (part of the constitutional system), and a psychological approach (personal self with various religious knowledge) and a socio-cultural approach (inseparable from the socio-cultural conditions of society) (Anwarsyah, 2014). The purpose of *Din-i-Ilahi* is to bridge the two religions by believing in the oneness of God. Because Jalaluddin Akbar was the God's representative, to get a direct guidance from God, all religious leaders must have given up to Jalaluddin Akbar, must not eaten meat, respected the sun and fire as symbols of life, declared Sunday as the official day for worship, prohibited marrying old women and underaged girls, replaced *Assalaamualaikum* with *Allahu Akbar* and *Alaikum salam* with *jalla jalalah*, and expected to sacrifice property, life, religion and honor to serve the sultan. It was adopted by Jalaluddin Akbar considering that the ulama had different

opinions on religious issues, religious bigotry, and the support from people around the king to encourage Jalaluddin Akbar to think radically.

Another method is issuing the order of the *mahzar* or “Maximum Provision”. It drew a lot of criticism from the orthodox mullahs in court because Akbar declared himself an interpreter of the law and no longer wanted the mullahs to interpret and draft laws. Through his conflict with the mullahs, Akbar freed himself from the constraints of traditional Muslim rule dictated by Sharia. The freedom from the control of the mullahs means that everyone in the kingdom, from the king to his subjects, had social freedoms that were unprecedented under Muslim rule in Hindustan. Literally, *Mahzar* designated Akbar as the one who could reason individual laws, just rulers, rulers of Islam, amirul believers, and the shadow of Allah over the two worlds.

The last method is time reorientation. Akbar devised a new sun-based calendar, *Tarikh-i Ilahi* (‘Divine Era’), which began with his own accession. The calendar also had practical administrative advantages since the harvest was annual and thus the income cycle varied in the lunar Islamic Hijri calendar. Akbar also added ‘*Allah-o-Akbar*’ to imperial documents and coins. From the policy, farmers were no longer confused about the time to deposit agricultural taxes and land taxes. In addition, the Divine Date made it easier for farmers to start planting diverse plants according to the duration of the harvest.

Impact of *Sulh-i-Kul* Policy

The implementation of the entire *sulh-i-kul* could minimize social discrimination among Indian society. However, on the other hand, *sulh-i-kul* was misused by Hindus to trigger a dispute between the king of the state order and the king of the religious order. It also sparked a another dispute between Jalaluddin Akbar and Prince Salim who wanted to immediately occupy the throne of the Mughal Islamic empire (Agustina, 2020).

The cancellation impact of the *jizyah*, which was a tax given by the government to non-Muslims living in Islamic countries, made non-Muslims even more prosperous. After paying the tax, non-Muslims would be given the freedom to carry out their worship activities. It was very important because it eliminated a hierarchical society based on religious divisions and created an equal class of subjects.

Other changes made to the existing laws helped to break up social inequalities, such as the abolition of the Hajj tax, which only applied to Hindus because it was a part of their belief to go on pilgrimage in their

lifetime. Akbar also allowed all forms of public prayer to take place, allowed non-Muslim temples and churches to be built or repaired, banned the slave trade, and allowed open conversion to or from Islam, although he forbade the forced conversion of slaves to Islam. Akbar forbade the slaughter of animals on certain days which helped in his quest for approval from the Hindu majority (Holland, 2005).

It was from Akbar's new policies that the wealth and territorial gains by some of the ruling Rajput clans through imperial service gave them status, resources and political power unavailable to their forefathers on a local basis, especially as the homeland of Rajasthan which was not agriculturally rich (Fisher, 2016). Furthermore, the concept of 'Rajput' changed through their interaction with the Islamic Mughal empire, evident in clan genealogies and history highlighting sacred ancestors; prepared vocabulary and literary, artistic and administrative skills; clothing imitated the style of the imperial court; and the primacy of the royal clan head over his subordinate relatives. In addition, Rajput imperial officials moved further and further away from their homeland, often getting marriages and other alliances with the Rajputs they met there. They used revenues and awards from imperial service to fund the expansion of their homeland and to protect Hindu temples and other places of worship. Thus, they gained financial and political advantages, especially compared to rival Rajputs who underestimated participation in the Mughal Empire and spent their limited resources fighting for it.

Silver coins were created of uniform purity and weight, standardized throughout the kingdom. This silver inflation lowered interest rates and rose prices for producers, stimulated the kingdom's economy, promoted dynamic innovation by Akbar's government. Thus, the impact of implementing *sulh-i-kul* on the political and economic side of the Mughal Islamic empire really helped the Mughals to become a great empire.

From adapting Persian cultural, administrative and political institutions to reorganizing military and civilian institutions as well as provincial government, Akbar also created a political and religious ideology, derived from a range of Islamic and Indian traditions, which bound him not only to core officials but also to many Indians in the world. Gradually, many tributary lords and landowners became royal functionaries, paying systematically assessed revenues and receiving fixed incomes. More and more people were accepting the sovereignty of the Mughal empire. All of them increased the empire's

power to rule and extract resources from India's economy, which was largely agriculture-based.

Conclusion

Before setting a policy under his authority, Akbar initially saw the situation of the diverse Indian society so that the policies to be implemented worked in line with the characteristics of the people. He intended to avoid similar mistakes to those made during the two reigns of the kings before him.

With a background of different religious sects from his parents (Sunni and Shia), Akbar studied the values of tolerance with people who had different beliefs with him. Under the direction of Abu'l Fazl, Akbar managed a policy of universal tolerance well known as *Sulh-i-kul*. Unofficially, the policy had been implemented by Akbar since he ascended the throne, but officially launched after several other religious policies to strengthen other religious policies (*ibadat khana* and *din-i-ilahi*) to spread the value of tolerance to all humans without any discrimination.

The final result was a lot of progress, especially in the social, political and economic fields that the Mughal empire had under Akbar's leadership, from a policy of mutual tolerance between religions in the lives of the people. Without tolerance, to realize the ideals of nation advancement will be a lot difficult no matter how smart the leader is.

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