



MUGHAL EMPEROR AKBAR AND HIS CAPITAL: THE FATEHPUR SĪKRĪ

Yalçın KAYALI*

Abstract

Akbar was only thirteen when his father Humayum died. In the beginning Bairam Khan, his tutor, helped him to rule. Bairam Khan defeated Hemu at Panipat in 1556. Bairam Khan also conquered Ajmer, Gwalior, Jaunpur and other areas for Akbar. Akbar conquered territories from the north to the Deccan and from the west to the east. In central India he took over Malwa and Gondwana. In Rajasthan he conquered Amber, part of Mewar, Bikaner and Jodhpur. Gujarat, Bengal, Kandhar, Bihari, Sind came under his control. Finally, Ahmadnagar and Khandesh in the Deccan were annexed. Akbar's children had hitherto died; but 1959, shortly after he had made a pilgrimage to a celebrate shrine at Ajmer, and paid a visit to Sheikh Salim Chishti, in the village of Sikari, his favorite sultana gave birth to his son Salim. In the following year another son, whom called Murad, was born. As both births had taken place in the village of Sikari, he regarded it as a particularly propitious spot, and selected it as the site of a city, which at a later period received the name Fatehpur Sikri.

Keywords: Indian History, Mughal India, Akbar, Fatehpur Sikri.

I. Introduction

The rise of the Mughal Empire (1556-1707) registers a pioneer substitute in medieval Indian history. Mughals did more than conquer and dominate; they set up an imperial society that derived its power from many sources and continued to expand its influence long after emperors were unable to compel submission (Reddy, 2011: B205). The mystery of Mughal triumph was that each emperor engaged many armies under his own huge authority. Mughal commanders had to be individually strong, mobile, well equipped and decisive, but they also had to remain loyal for empire to survive. Centralizing power over commanders might keep them loyal for a time, but it would also weaken their ability to respond quickly and decisively to local challenges and opportunities, because transportation and communication were slow and expensive (Reddy, 2011: B205-206; Basham, 2007: 227). The profoundly sophisticated, liberal and plural civilization championed by Akbar, Dara Shikoh (Shah Jahan's son) or the later Mughal emperors has only a limited resonance for the urban middle class in Modern India. Taking the long view of Mughal history, this attitude is comprehensible, however. For all its undoubted artistic achievements, especially in architecture and visual arts the Mughal empire was always a despotic and heavily militarized regime, even under Akbar- and even when compared with some of the militaristic regimes of the Delhi Sultanate (Robinson, 2014, 122).

Akbar is generally as the greatest and most capable of the Mughal rulers. Under him Mughal polity and statecraft reached maturity; and under his guidance the Mughals changed from a petty to a major dynastic state. From his time to the end of the Mughal period, artistic production on both an imperial and sub-imperial level was closely linked notions of state polit, religion and kingship (Asher, 2015, 39)

II. Akbar (1556-1605)

At the time of his father's death Akbar was merely fourteen years old and was under the guardianship of Bairam Khan. Akbar received news of his father's death during his campaign against the Afghans in Punjab (Reddy, 2011, B207; Agnihotri, 2014, B214-215; Beveridge, 1990, 147). A man resembling Humāyūn and dressed up like him made public appearance while the Turkish admiral Sidi Ali Rais, who happened to be at Delhi, left for Lahore and assured the people of Humāyūn's recovery (Roy, 2007, 104). On 1556, Akbar ascended throne at Kalanaur. Within a few months of Akbar's accession, Hemu (Himū), the wazir of Muhammad Adil Shah of Bihar, occupied the country from Bayana to Delhi and also Agra with the title of Vikramaditya. In November 1556 the Mughal army under Bairam Khan moved towards Delhi and defeated Hemu in the battle of Pānīpat After the victory of Pānīpat Akbar made his triumphant entry to Delhi (Agnihotri, 2014, B216; Roy, 2007, 106). For four years (1556-1560) Bairam Khan had bravely piloted the ship of the Mughal State against the Afghan power in different parts of India. Bairam Khan enjoyed the supreme position in the state as the emperor's guardian and prime minister. After appointing a renowned Iranian scholar, Abdul Latif, as Akbar's tutor, Bairam consolidated the administration of the reconquered

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ankara University, Language and History- Geography Faculty, Indology Department, ykayali@ankara.edu.tr



region as Akbar's vakil (regent). His growing predominance alienated the "Athal Khail" consisting of the families of Akbar's relations. Akbar was eighteen years old by 1560 and wished to rule independently. In the same year, Maham Anaga one of his step mothers, managed to have Akbar transferred from Agra to Delhi. From there Akbar wrote to Bairam ordering him to leave on a pilgrimage to Mecca. But court politics goaded Bairam to revolt. When he finally surrendered Akbar ordered him to resume his pilgrimage. In 1561 Bairam was unfortunately assassinated by an Afghan at Patan in Gujarat on his way to Mecca (Basham, 2007, 226; Reddy, 2011, B207). The services of Bairam to the Mughal dynasty were great; his gifts and ability, undisputed. He was the real author of the restoration and without him Akbar could hardly have retained his throne His exist from the stage of Mughal history marks the end of an epoch, the age of military conquest, the age of Bābur. A new are with a new orientation commences in Indo-Islamic history, the age of Akbar (Beveridge, 1990, 149-150; Roy, 2007, 111).

After freeing himself from Bairam Khan's regency, Akbar seriously launched a policy of conquests. From the expedition against Malwa to the fall of Asirgarh, he played the role of a great conqueror in 1561. The choice of commanders was unfortunate and proves the unmistakable influence of Maham Anaga and the harem party. The Mughal army led by Adham Khani and Pir Muhammed Khan invaded Malwa and marched unopposed to Sarangpur where at last the musician king Baz Bahadur gave battle but, deserted by his Afghan officers who were discontented was easily defeated by the superior army of Akbar and put to flight. And Baz Bahadur remained a fugitive at various courts until 1570, when he surrendered to Akbar at Nagapur and joined the service (Roy, 2007, 113; Agnihotri, 2014, B214-216). Early in 1561, Khan Zaman and Bhadur Kahan suppressed a formidable uprising of the Afghans under Sher Khan, who marched from Chunār with a big army but suffered total defeat near Jaunpur. Akbar would not tolerate such a gross infringement of his prerogative and marched from Agra towards Jaunpur. Alarmed at this the brothers paid homage to Akbar at Kara and returned him all the spoils including the elephants. Akbar pardoned them and reinstated them in their position. The emperor then sent Asaf Khan to the important fortress of Chunar which the Afghans surrendered without any resistance (Roy, 2007, 113).

In spite of these brilliant successes, Akbar had no peace of mind as he was still denied the blessing of a son, several children born to him having died in their infancy. He prayed fervently at the shrines of Ajmer and Delhi for an heir to his throne. The year 1562 was a turning point in the emperor's life when on his first pilgrimage to the shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Christi at Ajmer, Raja Bhāri Mal of Amber proposed his eldest daughter's marriage with the emperor. Early in 1569 the princess was found to be with child and she sent to the Shaikh's hermitage at Sikrī where she gave birth to a son who was named Salim in honor of the saint. In course of a few years the royal nursery was enriched by new arrivals in succession: a daughter was born to him; on June, 1570, Prince Murad saw the light (Keay, 2010: 324). Two years after, on September 1572, was born a third son at Ajmer in the house of Shaikh Daniyal whom he named after the saint. Two daughters also were born after Daniyal. These three sons of Akbar all attained mature age (Agnihotri, 2014, B216; Roy, 2007, 124-125).

This marriage was the first step to win the political and military support of the valiant Rajputs whom the Sultans of Delhi had failed either to subdue or convert into allies. Thus, the foundation was laid by Amber of the Mughal Rajput alliance; other Rajput principalities, with the sole exception of Mewar, followed suit. Rana Udai Singh of Mewar refused to accept the Mughal-Rajput alliance and further offended Akbar by giving shelter to Baz Bahadur of Malwa. Mewar lay on the route to the rich province of Gujarat which could not be conquered without securing the submission of at least the fort of Chittor. In 1567 Akbar himself conducted the siege of the fort of Chittor which fell in 1568 after a desperate resistance. But the Mughal-Mewar struggle did not end with the fall of Chittor. After Rana Udai Singh's death in 1572, his son Rana Pratap Singh continued it further, culminating in the famous battle of Haldighat on 1576. The Mughal army which was led by Raja Man Singh of Amber won this battle, but Mewar was not subjugated. Rana Pratap, till his death in 1597, continued the struggle and except Chittor and Mandalgarh he was virtually the master of the whole Mewar (Agnihotri, 2014, B216-217). So, it is known that Chittor is the only place in Mewar where Akbar and other Mughal successors could not have conquered. But actually, his fight was not against Turks or Mughals. It was a war of independence which he waged in the defense of his country (Kaya, 2013, 373).

After the conquest of Malwa and Mewar the way to Gujarat lay open. It was a rich province commanding a large share of India's trade with Western Asia and Europe through its world-renowned port of Cambay. From the Gujarat ports to Haj pilgrims proceeded to Mecca and other holy places in Arabia. It also intervened between the Portuguese territories and the Mughal dominions; and its political and military weaknesses could tempt the aggressive foreigners to advance from the coast to the hearth of the country. In



1572, Akbar himself led an expedition to Gujarat and completed it by the siege of Surat in 1573. And he built the famous Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri (Fathpur Sikri) in commemoration of this victory. Then, in 1574-1575 Bihar and Bengal were conquered from the Afghan Chief Daud (Agnihotri, 2014, B217; Reddy, 2011, B207).

The year 1581 is regarded as the most critical year in the reign of Akbar, when his brother Hakim, the ruler of Kabul, advanced to Lahore. Thereupon Akbar proceeded to Kabul and forced his brother to submit, but reinstated him. After the death of Hakim in 1586 Kabul annexed to the Mughal empire. This necessitated the establishment of effective control over the tribal areas lying between the Punjab and Afghanistan. In 1586, Kashmir too was annexed to the empire, and in 1593, as a prelude to the conquest of Kandahar, the whole of Sindh was annexed. In 1594 Kandahar was conquered from Persia (Agnihotri, 2014, B217; Beveridge, 1990, 164-165).

Akbar had his eye on the Deccan long before he sent regular expedition of the Mughal empire to the South. He had always reckoned the Portuguese as a power, controlling important parts of India's seaboard and growing as a menace to the Mughal empire and he considered it essential to counteract their influence at the cabinet of the Deccan sultanates. Chronic jealousy and frequent ground for the fulfilment of his imperial ambition. Of the five offshoots of the Bahmani empire, Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda concerned Akbar. Besides, there was the kingdom of Khandesh which was the outpost of Mughal invasion into the South (Roy, 2007, 161).

III. Fatehpur Sikri

III. I. Imperial Palace

By the time Akbar became emperor in 1556, the Mughal empire had settled down. By the late 1550s; Akbar had survived rebellions and attempted coups and had begun to win control over increasing areas in north India. Convinced about the importance of architecture in empire building Akbar, embarked in a sustained and systematic programme of construction Beginning in the 1560's, he constructed forts in Agra and Lahore, and smaller ones at Attock, Allahabad, Jaunpur and Ajmer. In 1571, Akbar decided to build himself a capital city. For it, he chose Sikri, a village on the road between the Mughal's imperial center Agra and their spiritual top at Ajmer (Keay, 2010: 323-324). Unlike Agra was a thriving center of trade, Sikri was just a little village which had first come to Mughal notice when Babur, triumphant after defeating Rana Sanga at Khanuwa in 1527, according to a popular belief, named the village Shukri, meaning thanksgiving.

Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's imperial capital, was planned as the cultural, commercial and administrative center of the empire. Strategically situated, it afforded the emperor and his court the security of Agra Forth a day's march. Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's imperial capital, commercial and administrative centre of the empire. Fatehpur Sikri, following the general pattern of medieval Indian towns, was provided with walls, some six kilometers long, which enclosed the city from north to south-west; while the western side was protected by al lake, now largely dry. The walls were loop-holed and there was a path some 2.5 meters wide inside to allow soldiers to pass to and fro (Rivzi, 2002, 13; Asher, 2015, 51). Abul Fazl, Akbar's court chronicler, describes the emperor's architects and designers as lofty-minded mathematicians and says the emperor's style of architecture was understandable only to the scientifically oriented. According to contemporary historians, Akbar took a great interest in the building of Fatehpur Sikri and probably also dictated its architectural style. Though elements within the Imperial Palace complex can be related to various traditions, it does not as a whole adhere to any single style or pattern. Hence, in many respects it represents a unique and mysterious masterpiece. The Imperial Palace complex, consisting of the Treasury, the offices, the Daulat Khana, the Haram Sara or ladies' palace, now appears irregular; but in Akbar's time it was part of a well-connected and highly-planned complex. The complex, with Hathi Pol for its main entrance, was divided into three parts: The mardana or men's section, the zanana or women's area and the official area. The main units of Haram Sara were earlier connected to the Daulat Khana by screened corridors and were closed entirely from the treasuries and the offices. Another viaduct connected the Daulat Khana to Hathi Pol and beyond to the Hiran Minar. Seeking to revive the splendors of Persian court ceremonial made famous by his ancestor Timur, Akbar planned the complex on Persian principles. But the influence of his adopted land came through in the typically Indian embellishments. The easy availability sandstone in the neighboring areas of Fatehpur Sikri, also meant that all the buildings here were made of this red stone. The Imperial Palace complex consists of a number of independent pavilions arranged in formal geometry on a piece of level ground, a pattern derived from Arab and Central Asian tent encampments. In its entirety, the monuments of Fatehpur Sikri thus reflect the genius of Akbar in assimilating diverse regional architectural influence within a holistic style that was uniquely his own (Rivzi, 2002, 19-21; Robinson 2014, 128).



The colonnaded courtyard of the Diwan-i Am or the public enclosure runs one hundred twelve meters from north to south and fifty-five meters from the east to west. The colonnade of one hundred eleven bays runs around the court, broken at the west by the emperor's pavilion, from where Akbar would dispense justice to one and all. The pavilion is a projecting structure with a pitched stone roof and five equal openings to the front. The emperor sat in the central bay upon cushions and carpets and on either side were stone screens carved in fine geometrical patterns. Daulat Khana, literally the Abode of Fortune, comprises the pillared structure known as Diwan-i Khass, the two roomed Diwan Khana-i Khass, the Khwabgah, the Anup Talao, The Turkish Sultana's Pavillion and some other minor structures. Diwan-i Khass is one of the most fantastically conceived yet enigmatic buildings in Fatehpur Sikri and continues to be its most widely photographed monument. It has been variously identified as the Jewel House and even the elusive Ibadat Khana. Its interior is dominated by a massive, richly carved pillar which supports one of the most elaborate capitals ever conceived: as circular arrangements of brackets that supports a circular platform, linked by four diagonal bridges connecting the hanging galleries to each corner of building. According to Rivzi "It was possible a storehouse for the imperial hoard and gems and jewels." Tillotson, on the other hand, recalls the pattern of mandalas, in which the column stands for the axis of the world in Hindu cosmology. And P. Brown says that the emperor sat enthroned on the central platform while listening to arguments from the different religions, the whole arrangement signifying what he has termed as "Akbar's dominion over the Four Quarters". In the south-west corner of the Treasury stands a kiosk traditionally called the Astrologer's Seat. Rivzi suggests that the emperor would sit here and watch the distribution of the copper coins which contemporary European travelers say were usually heaped in the courtyard to pay subordinate officers or else the needy poor (Asher, 2015, 54-55; Rivzi, 2002, 22-29). Diwan Khana-i-Khass is a two chambered pavilion to the far left of the imperial complex, is where the emperor met with his closest advisers. The eastern room was once richly painted and the faintest outline of floral designs still remain. The lower walls of the rooms were hollow, with sliding stone slabs closing the openings historians' conjecture that the spaces were used for storing books that Akbar was fond of having read out to him. A large room behind this chamber twelve by eight meters, contained a platform against the southern wall, with a window above it. The beautiful chamber on the first floor of the Diwan Khana-i Khass was the emperor's private room popularly known as Khwabgah or sleeping chamber. Anup Talao or the Peerless Pool incidentally referred to as Kapur Talao by Monserrate and Jahangir is a twenty-nine meters' square tank, now dry most of the year, north-east of the Diwan Khana-i-Khass steps led down to the water which was supplied from the northern waterworks. It is now less than one and a half meter deep, having been given a new floor in the 1840s. Anup Talao has a central island linked by four bridges to its sides. North-east of Anup Talao is a small and beautiful structure which has been described as a "superb jewel casket". In fact, the carvings on its bracket friezes, pillars and pilasters are so intricate that they appear to be the work of wood carvers rather than that of stonemasons. Commonly known as Turkish Sultana's Pavilion, it is unlikely that the building was a zanana residence, since it is located so close to the mardana section of the imperial palace. It was probably a pavilion for repose attached to the pool. Badauni says that one night in 1575, a very important religious discussion took place in the Hujra-i-Anup Talao. The Abdar Khana or the Water and Fruit Store has been wrongly called Girls' school. These two storied structures were probably where Akbar's drinking water was kept in the care of a trusted nobleman. The imperial store for fruits such as melons, mangoes and grapes were also probably here (Rivzi, 2002, 29-33).

III. II. Harem of Emperor

The imperial Harem or Haram Sara was an enclosure where women of the royal household lived in protected environs. It included the Panch Mahal, Jodh Bai's Palace, and what are as Maryam's House and Birbal's House. Each was connected with the other by covered passages, and screened off to the east from the Daulat Khana or the imperial court and treasuries. Akbar's mother Hamida Banu Begum (1527-1604) was the principal lady of his court. Akbar married several times, often due to political exigencies and it is believed that apart from Muslim and Hindu wives he also had a Christian wife. He was also the first Muslim ruler in India to permit his wives to continue following their faith within the precincts of the harem (Rivzi, 2002: 39-40). Jodh Bai's or Principal Haram Sara was the residence of a number of the emperor's principal wives, and not Jodh Bai's personal palace as often claimed. It is the largest and most important of the buildings in the Haram Sae'a having a single entrance, facing east across a wide paved courtyard. From the entrance of the palace a screened viaduct ran across the road behind Maryam's House; and joined the top of the cloister facing the Daftar Khana. Through it, Akbar had easy and private access from his Khwabgah to every palace in the Haram Sara (Rivzi, 2002, 40-41; Asher, 2015, 62). Against the northern exterior wall of Jodh Bai's Palace is the Hawa Mahal or Wind Palace. The first storey, supported on square columns in



double rows, is open; the second is closed with beautiful stone screens. Here the emperor was wont to recline in fresh air with a few chosen ladies, secluded from public eye.

Panch Mahal is an extraordinary structure, entirely columnar, consisting of four stores of decreasing size, disposed asymmetrically upon a ground floor that contains eighty-four columns, a number regarded as highly auspicious by Hindus. To the south-east of Panch Mahal stands a severe looking building known as Sunahra Makan, so called because of the beautiful murals and gold colored painting that once adorned it. It is now generally referred to as Maryam's House. Rivzi believes that the popular ascription of this house to a Portuguese queen of Akbar called Marie is totally imaginary. There were two Maryams in Akbar's court: Maryam Makani was Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu Begum and Maryam Zamani was his first Rajput queen and mother of his first-born son, Emperor Jahangir. Since it is fairly certain that Maryam Zamani lived in the main palace of the Haram Sara, it may be safely presumed that Akbar's mother, Maryam Makani lived here (Asher, 2015, 65; Rivzi, 2002, 45-46).

Though Birbal was a colorful and influential figure in Akbar's court, scarcely could he have occupied a house in the middle of the zanana. This building was definitely an integral part of the Haram Sara, its most probable occupants being Akbar's two senior queens, Ruqayya Begum and Salima Sultan Begum. The building represents, at least stylistically, a conjoining of the two main architectural traditions in India. At the rear of the principal Haram Sara is a large colonnaded enclosure. It has been variously called the imperial stables for camel, elephants or the emperor's choicest horses. And Hathi Pol gets its name from the two headless elephants that flank the gateway. The majestic elephants stand headless today because of the holy zeal of Aurangzeb who decapitated them. Sangin Burj was also located here. It was the principal Naqqar Khana of Fatehpur.

III. III. Dargah Complex

Amongst the earliest monuments to have been constructed in Fatehpur Sikrī, the buildings of the dargah complex followed an architectural style that gave expression to the religious ideology Akbar relied upon in the early years of his reign. Dominating the scene and occupying the highest point on the ridge, the Jami Masjid is the principal building of Fatehpur and the vastest, spanning 133.6 meters north to south and 165.2 meters east to west. According to inscriptions on either side of the central archway of the prayer chamber the construction of the mosque was completed in 1571-1572. And given Badauni's evidence that the building work took five years, we have an idea of the date of commissioning of the great mosque. Akbar acknowledged his deep gratitude and respect for Shaikh Salim Christi by ascribing the mosque to him. The Shaikh died on 1572 aged and the great mosque must have been nearly complete before his death. Legend has it that the emperor himself often swept the floor of the mosque and called the azan. In 1579, he read the khutba, the prayer to proclaim his sovereignty, and also issued the mahzar or declaration from the hallowed precincts of Jami Masjid that assigned to him unlimited powers in religious matters (Rivzi, 2002: 58-59; Asher, 2015: 56-57). The tomb of Shaikh Salim Christi is often described in superlative. Percy Brown has called the tomb an architectural cameo. In the last years of his life, Shaikh Saslim Christi abandoned his cell besides the Stone Cutters' Mosque for a new khanqah to the north of Jami Mascid. The tomb, raised where the Shaikh's zawiya or meditation chamber stood, was completed in 1580-1581 (Rivzi, 2002: 63). Buland Darwaza, or literally Lofty Gate one of the monumental structures of Akbar's reign, has often been described as his most arrogant assentation of imperial power. This magnificent gate dominates the southern side of the Jami Masjid and is visible from a great distance. Buland Darwaza is an imposing structure with height of forty meters, added to which the twelve meters of steps leading to it makes the entire composition rise fifty-two meters above the road.

IV. The Place of Fatehpur Sikrī In Akbar's History

Towards the end of 1564, Akbar laid the foundation of a town which he named Nagarchain (the city of repose) on the site of the village of Kakrālī to the south of Agra. It became his favorite resort where he received even ambassadors from abroad, but was deserted some years later when Fatehpur Sikrī became the capital of the empire (Roy, 2007, 116).

Mirza Ghiyas Beg was a native of Teheran. His father had high office, but after the old man's death Ghiyas Beg found it hard to earn a decent living. So he resolved to try his luck in Hindustan, and set out with the caravan of a merchant prince, accompanied by his wife. As he was passing through Kandahar, a daughter was born to him. She was named Mihirunnisa. The father was in such a plight that he could hardly provide for the baby and its mother. But the rich merchant who led the caravan took pity on the family and looked after them. Soon he became friendly with Ghiyas Beg, and on reaching Fatehpur Sikrī he presented him to the Emperor (Bhattacharya, 1976, 94).



In pursuance of a vow, Akbar set out on foot on pilgrimage to Ajmer to offer thanks for the birth of Salim. From Ajmer he returned to Delhi where he inspected the splendid mausoleum of his father which had been recently built, thanks to the affectionate fidelity of a wife, Haji Begum. In September he set out again on pilgrimage to Ajmer where he repaired and enlarged the fortifications and began construction of buildings for himself and his nobles. In 3 November he left for Nagaur and arrived at Pak Pattan in the Punjab to visit the shrine of Shaikh Farid Shakarganj. From there he returned to Ajmer by way of Hissar and on 1571, arrived at Sikri which he now decided to make his capital as the auspicious place where his two sons Salim and Murad had been born (Roy, 2007, 125).

On 1572, Akbar set out from Fatehpur Sikri for Ajmer from where he sent Khan Kalan with 10.000 horse as an advance guard and himself by leisurely marches (Roy, 2007, 126 Beveridge, 1990, 160).

On 1573, Akbar left Fatehpur Sikri with an army of 3.000 and marching by way of Ajmer and Merta with lightning speed, reached the vicinity of Ahmadabad, thus covering a distance of about in eleven days which caravans took two months to complete. The enemy was taken by absolute surprise and Muhammad Husain was reluctant to believe the report of the arrival of Akbar whom his scouts had left at Fatehpur Sikri just two weeks back (Roy, 2007, 128).

Munim Khan hurried to the north to recover Ghoraghat which had been occupied by the Afghans during his absence. In utter indiscipline, born of terror, the Mughal officers and troops evacuated Bengal and retreated to Bhagalpur. Akbar sent Khan Jahan, governor of the Punjab, with Todar Mal as his lieutenant, to deal with the situation. After a stubborn and long waving fight, the Afghans were completely routed and their leaders slain. His head was received by Akbar one stage from Fatehpur Sikri as he was proceeding to Bengal to deal with the situation personally (Beveridge, 1990: 162).

The foundation in 1575 of the 'Ibadat-Khana' (House of Worship) at Fatehpur Sikri where religious discussions were held every Friday evening. In 1578, discussions in the Ibadat-Khana' were revived with renewed vigour and the House of Worship had become a Parliament of religious where the Sufi, the philosopher, the orator, the jurist, the Sunni, the Brahman and the atheist (Charvaka), the Jain, the Buddhist, the Christian and the Jew and others met and debated under the presidency of the Mughal king (Roy, 2007, 134-135).

• Akbar had no proper diplomatic relations with England, though some Englishmen visited his court. England had already begun to take interests in Indian trade and in 1585 a party of three Englishmen, John Newbery; Ralph Fitch; William Leedes arrived at Fatehpur Sikri. Of them Fitch has left a valuable account of his travels and to him Agra and Fatehpur Sikri appeared much larger and more populous than London. Leedes was taken into the royal service at Fatehpur Sikri (Roy, 2007, 160).

• Yet it has to be confessed that Akbar's knowledge, acquired through ears, could neither be methodical nor coordinated. He was a man of original ideas and bold conceptions. His administrative and military reforms reveal his constructive ability and organizational power. Like the Buland Darwaza that he built at Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar towers far above his contemporary sovereign and, with all his vices, he remains not only as one of the grandest monarchs known to history but one of the few royal figures that approach the stature of great men (Roy, 2007, 171).

V. Conclusion

In India as elsewhere, economic indicators for the pre-modern period are hard to come by. By combining different methods of calculating, the population of the Indian subcontinent in the year 1600 has been estimated at about 140 million, of whom about 100 million lived within the great band of territory between the Himalayas and the Deccan sultanates which comprised Akbar's empire (Keay, 2010: 320).

Delhi, the traditional capital of north Indian Islamic rulers, served as Akbar's capital until 1565, when he commenced his massive Agra Fort. This was followed by the construction of other forts in strategically important locations signaling the diminishing importance of Delhi, until its revival in the mid-seventeenth century (Asher, 2015, 41).

Akbar remained heirless until 1569 when his son, the future Jahangir, was born in the village of Sikri, 38 km west of Agra. That year Akbar commenced construction there of the religious compound as a sign of his esteem for the Christi saint, Shaikh Salim, his spiritual adviser who had predicted the birth of his son. After Jahangir's second birthday, probably considered as adequate period to test his stamina since all the emperor's other offspring had died in infancy, Akbar commenced construction at Sikri of a walled city and imperial palace. He shifted his capital from Agra to this city, which came to be called Fatehpur Sikri. Just as Humayun's tomb earlier had been placed close to the Chishti dargah, Nizam al-Din, so Akbar satiated his

palace at a Chishti site. By constructing his capital at the khanqah of his spiritual adviser, Akbar associated himself with this popular Sufi order and so brought further legitimacy to his reign through affiliation with popular yet orthodox Islam (Asher, 2015, 51-52; Beveridge, 1990, 172-173).

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PHOTOGRAPHS¹



Figure I- The view of Imperial Palace Complex, Panch Mahal.

¹ These photographs were taken during the research of the author in India to be used in the relevant study.



Figure II- The Richly carved pillar in Diwan-i Khass



Figure III- The Abdar Khana



Figure IV- The Shaikh Salim Chishti's Tomb



Figure V- Buland Darwaza



Figure VI- The courtyard in the Jami Masjid complex.