

# THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

## 4

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#### ➤ INTRODUCTION

##### (a) The Great Mughals

- (i) Ruling as large a territory as the Indian subcontinent with such a diversity of people and cultures was an extremely difficult task for any ruler to accomplish in the Middle Ages. Quite in contrast to their predecessors, the Mughals created an empire and accomplished what had hitherto seemed possible for only short periods of time.
- (ii) From the latter half of the sixteenth century they expanded their kingdom from Agra and Delhi, until in the seventeenth century they controlled nearly all of the subcontinent.
- (iii) They imposed structures of administration and ideas of governance that outlasted their rule leaving a political legacy that succeeding rulers of the subcontinent could not ignore.
- (iv) Today, the Prime Minister of India addresses the nation on Independence Day from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, the residence of the Mughal emperors.

#### ➤ THE MUGHALS

##### (a) Who Were the Mughals

- (i) The Mughals were descendants of two great lineages of rulers. From their mother's side they were descendants of Genghis Khan (died 1227) ruler of the Mongol tribes of China and Central Asia. From their fathers side they were the successors of Timur (died 1404), the ruler of Iran, Iraq and modern-day Turkey. However, the Mughals did not like to be called Mughals or Mongol. This was because Genghis Khan's memory was associated with the massacre of innumerable people. It was also linked with the Uzbegs, their Mongol competitors.
- (ii) On the other hand, the Mughals were proud of their Timurid ancestry, not least of all because their great ancestor had captured Delhi in 1398.
- (iii) They celebrated their genealogy pictorially, each ruler getting a picture made of Timur and himself.

**(b) Mughal Military Campaigns**

- (i) Babar, the first Mughal emperor (1526-1530), succeeded to the throne of Ferghana in 1494 when he was only 12 years old. He was forced to leave his ancestral throne due to the invasion of another Mongol group, the Uzbeks. After years of wandering he seized Kabul in 1504. In 1526 he defeated the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi, at Panipat and captured Delhi and Agra. Table 1 Charts some of the major campaigns of the Mughals.

**Table – 1**  
**MUGHAL EMPERORS**  
**BABUR 1526-1530**

1526 – defeated Ibrahim Lodi and his Afghan supporters at Panipat

1527-defeated Rana Sanga, Rajput rulers and allies at Khanua.

1528 – defeated the Rajputs at Chanderi, Established control over Agra and Delhi before his death.

**HUMAYUN (1530-1540), (1555-1556)**

- (i) Humayun divided his inheritance according to the will of his father. His brothers were each given a province. The ambitions of his brother Mirza Kamran weakened Humayun's cause against Afghan competitors. Sher Khan defeated Humayun at Chausa (1539) and Kanauj (1540), forcing him to flee to Iran.
- (ii) In Iran Humayun received help from the Safavid Shah. He recaptured Delhi in 1555 but died the next year after an accident in this building.

**AKBAR (1556-1605)**

Akbar was 13 years old when he became emperor. His reign can be divided into three periods.

(i) 1556-1570 – Akbar became independent of the regent Bairam Khan and other members of his domestic staff. Military campaigns were launched against the Suris and other Afghans, against the neighbouring kingdoms of Malwa and Gondwana, and to suppress the revolt of his half-brother Mirza Hakim and the Uzbeks. In 1568 the Sisodiya capital of Chittor was seized and in 1596 Ranthambhor.

(ii) 1570-1585 – military campaigns in Gujarat were followed by campaigns in the east in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. These campaigns were complicated by the 1579-1580 revolt in support of Mirza Hakim.

(iii) 1585-1605 – expansion of Akbar's empire. Campaigns were launched in the north-west. Qandahar was seized from the Safavids, Kashmir was annexed, as also Kabul, after the death of Mirza Hakim. Campaigns in the Deccan started and Berar, Khandesh and parts of Ahmadnagar were annexed. In the last years of his reign, Akbar was distracted by the rebellion of Prince Salim, the future Emperor Jahangir.

**JAHANGIR (1605-1627)**

Military campaigns started by Akbar continued. The Sisodiya ruler of Mewar, Amar Singh, accepted Mughal service. Less successful campaigns against the Sikhs the Ahoms and Ahmadnagar followed. Prince Khurram, the future Emperor Shah Jahan rebelled in the last years of his reign. The efforts of Nur Jahan, Jahangir's wife, to marginalize him were unsuccessful.

## **SHAH JAHAN (1627-1658)**

Mughal campaigns continued in the deccan under Shah Jahan. The Afghan noble Khan Jahan Lodi rebelled and was defeated. Campaigns were launched against Ahmadnagar, the Bundelas were defeated and Orchha seized. In the north-west, the campaign to seize Balkh from the Uzbeks was unsuccessful and Qanadhar was finally annexed and the Bijapur forces sued for peace. In 1657-1658, there was conflict over succession amongst Shah Jahan's sons. Aurangzeb was victorious and his three brothers, including Dara Shukoh, were killed. Shah Jahan was imprisoned for the rest of his life in Agra.

## **AURANGZEB (1658-1707)**

(i) In the northeast the Ahoms were defeated in 1663, but rebelled again in the 1680s. Campaigns in the north-west against the Yusufzais and the Sikhs were temporarily successful. Mughal intervention in the succession and internal politics of the Rathor Rajputs of Marwar led to their rebellion. Campaigns against the Maratha chieftain Shivaji were initially successful. But Aurangzeb insulted Shivaji who escaped from Agra, declared himself an independent king and resumed his campaigns against the Mughals. Prince Akbar rebelled against Aurangzeb and received support from the Marathas and the Deccan Sultanate. He finally fled to Safavid Iran.

(ii) After Akbar's rebellion Aurangzeb sent armies against the Deccan Sultanates. Bijapur was annexed in 1685 and Golconda in 1687. From 1687 to 1698, Aurangzeb personally managed campaigns in the Deccan against the Marathas who started guerrilla warfare. Aurangzeb also had to face the rebellion in north India of the Sikhs. Jats and Satnamis, in the north-east of the Ahoms and in the Deccan of the Marathas. His death was followed by a succession conflict amongst his sons.

### **(c) Mughal Traditions of Succession**

The Mughals did not believe in the rule of primogeniture where the eldest son inherited his father's estate. Instead they followed the Mughal and Timurid custom of coparcenary inheritance, or a division of the inheritance amongst all the sons.

### **(d) Mughal Relations with Other Rulers**

(i) The Mughal rulers campaigned constantly against rulers who refused to accept their authority. But as the Mughals became powerful many other rulers also joined them voluntarily. The Rajputs are a good example of this. Many of them married their daughters into Mughal families and received high positions. But many resisted as well.

(ii) The Sisodiya Rajputs refused to accept Mughal authority for a long time. Once defeated, however they were honorably treated by the Mughals, given their lands (watan) back as assignments (watan jagir). The careful balance between defeating but not humiliating their opponents enabled the Mughals to extend their influence over many kings and chieftains. But it was difficult to keep this balance all the time.

(iii) For example Aurangzeb insulted Shivaji when he came to accept Mughal authority.

## ➤ THE MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION

### (a) **Mansabdars and Jagirdars**

- (i) As the empire expanded to encompass different regions the Mughals recruited diverse bodies of people. From a small nucleus of Turkish nobles (Turanis) they expanded to include Iranians, Indian, Muslims, Afghans, Rajputs, Marathas and other groups. Those who joined Mughal service were enrolled as mansabdars.
- (ii) The term mansabdar refers to an individual who holds a mansab, meaning a position or rank. It was a grading system used by the Mughals to fix (1) rank, (2) salary and (3) military responsibilities. Rank and salary were determined by a numerical value called zat, the higher the zat, the more prestigious was the noble's position in court and the larger his salary.
- (iii) The mansabdar's military responsibility required him to maintain a specified number of sawar or cavalymen. The mansabdar brought his cavalymen for review, got them registered, their horses branded and then received money to pay them as salary.
- (iv) Mansabdars received their salaries as revenue assignments called jagirs which were somewhat like iqtas. But unlike muqtis, most mansabdars did not actually reside in or administer their jagirs. They only had rights to the revenue of their assignments which was collected for them by their servants while the mansabdars themselves served in some other part of the country.
- (v) Nobles with a zat of 5,000 were ranked higher than those of 1,000 in Akbar's reign there were 29 mansabdars with a rank of 5,000 zat; by Aurangzeb's reign the number of mansabdars had increased to 79.
- (vi) In Akbar's reign these jagirs were carefully assessed so that their revenues were roughly equal to the salary of the mansabdar. By Aurangzeb's reign this was no longer the case and the actual revenue collected was often less than the granted sum.
- (vii) There was also a huge increase in the number of mansabdars, which meant a long wait before they received a jagir. These and other factors created a shortage in the number of jagirs. As a result many jagirdars tried to extract as much revenue as possible while they had a jagir. Aurangzeb was unable to control these developments in the last years of his reign and the peasantry therefore suffered tremendously.

### (b) **Zabt and Zamindars**

- (i) The main source of income available to Mughal rulers was tax on the produce of the peasantry. In most places, peasants paid taxes through the rural elites, that is, the headman or the local chieftain. The Mughals used one term-zamindars – to describe all intermediaries, whether they were local headmen of villages or powerful chieftains.
- (ii) Akbar's revenue minister, Todar Mal, carried out a careful survey of crop yields, prices and areas cultivated for a 10-year period, 1570-1580. On the basis of this data, tax was fixed on each crop in cash. Each province was divided into revenue circles with its own schedule of revenue rates for individual crops. This revenue

system was known as *zabt*. It was prevalent in those areas where Mughal administrators could survey the land and keep very careful accounts. This was not possible in provinces such as Gujarat and Bengal.

- (iii) In some areas the zamindars exercised a great deal of power. The exploitation by Mughal administrators could drive them to rebellion. Sometimes zamindars and peasants of the same cast allied in rebelling against Mughal authority. These peasant revolts challenged the stability of the Mughal Empire from the end of the seventeenth century.
- (iv) Akbar ordered one of his close friends and courtiers, Abul Fazl, to write a history of his reign. Abul Fazl wrote a three-volume history of Akbar's reign, titled *Akbar Nama*. The first volume dealt with Akbar's ancestors and the second volume recorded the events of Akbar's reign. The third volume is the *Ain-i Akbari*. It deals with Akbar's administration, household, army, the revenues and the geography of his empire. It also provides rich details about the traditions and culture of the people living in India. The most interesting aspect about the *Ain-i-Akbari* is its rich statistical details about things as diverse as crops, yields, prices, wages and revenues.

### ➤ A CLOSER LOOK

#### (a) Akbars Policies

- (i) The broad features of administration were laid down by Akbar and were elaborately discussed by Abul Fazl in his book, the *Akbar Nama*, in particular in its last volume, the *Ain-i-Akbari*.
- (ii) Abul Fazi explained that the empire was divided into provinces called *subas*, governed by a *subadar* who carried out both political and military functions. Each province also had a financial officer or *diwan*. For the maintenance of peace and order in his province the subadar was supported by other officers such as the military paymaster (*bakhshi*), the minister in charge of religious and charitable patronage (*sadr*), military commanders (*faujdars*) and town police commander (*Kotwal*).
- (iii) Akbar's nobles commanded large armies and had access to large amounts of revenue. While they were loyal the empire functioned efficiently but by the end of the seventeenth century many nobles had built independent networks of their own. Their loyalties to the empire were weakened by their own self-interest.
- (iv) While Akbar was at Fatehpur Sikri during the 1570s he started discussions on religion with the Ulama, Brahmanas, Jesuit priests who were Roman Catholics, and Zoroastrians. These discussions took place in the Ibadat Khana. He was interested in the religion and social customs of different people.
- (v) Akbar's interaction with people of different faiths made him realize that religious scholars who emphasized ritual and dogma were often bigots. Their teachings created divisions and disharmony amongst his subjects. This eventually led Akbar to the idea of *sulh-i kul* or "universal peace". This idea of tolerance did not

discriminate between people of different religions in his realm. Instead it focused on a system of ethics – honesty, justice, peace – that was universally applicable.

(vi) Abul Fazl helped Akbar in framing a vision of governances around the idea of sulh-i-kul. This principle of governance was followed by Jahangir and Shah Jahan as well.

(vii) Akbar is known for his patronage of art, literature and buildings. His court was adorned by the nine gems called **navratnas** who were highly qualified and distinguished in various fields.

**Art and Culture :** Faizi was a poet who translated Ramayana and Mahabharata into Persian language. Abddur Rahim khan-I Khan wrote lots of poems and dohas in Hindi. Todarmal was the revenue minister. Man singh was a general. Birbal was known for his wit while Tansen was a classical Hindustani singer. His darbari rag was in honour of the king. There were two famous painters in his court by name Basawan and Daswant.

Akbar also constructed a new capital at Fatehpur Sikri which was the birth place of Salim Chisti. Akbar had a secular outlook. He invited scholars from all religions for discussions in the Ibadat Khana (house of worship). He abolished **Jaziya**, a pilgrim tax. In 1582 he started a new religion called **Din-i-illahi** or divine faith which consisted all the good points of other religions.