
Chapter 4

The Mughal Empire

❖ The Mughals

- The Mughals were the descendants of two great lineages of rulers, Genghis Khan and Timur.
- They created a huge empire, expanding their kingdom from Agra and Delhi in the latter half of the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, they had control over nearly the entire subcontinent.
- Their biggest success was creating mechanisms of administration and governance which were adopted by subsequent rulers.

❖ Mughal military campaigns

- Babur was the first Mughal emperor. He established his rule over Delhi by defeating Ibrahim Lodi at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526.
- He later defeated Rajput rulers at Khanua in 1527 and Chanderi in 1528. He managed to control Agra before his death in 1530.
- Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun, whose position was weakened because of rivalry from his brother. Humayun was defeated by Sher Khan at Chausa in 1539 and Kanauj in 1540, forcing him to flee to Iran.
- He recovered his rule of Delhi in 1555 with the help of the Safavid Shah of Iran. However, he died the next year.
- Humayun's son Akbar became the emperor at the age of 13. He directed military campaigns against the Suris, the Afghans and the kingdoms of Malwa and Gondwana.
- He suppressed the revolt of his half-brother and the Uzbeks. He seized the Sisodiya capital of Chittor in 1568 and Ranthambhor in 1569.
- Military expeditions were undertaken in Gujarat, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and the North-west. Qandahar, Kashmir and Kabul were annexed. In the Deccan, Berar, Khandesh and parts of Ahmadnagar also came under Akbar's rule.
- Under Jahangir, the ruler of Mewar accepted the Mughal authority. The campaigns against Sikhs, Ahoms and Ahmadnagar were less successful.
- Shah Jahan continued campaigns in the Deccan. The Afghans and the Bundelas were defeated. Ahmadnagar was also annexed. Qandahar was lost to the Safavids, while setbacks were also faced against Uzbeks.
- Aurangzeb became the emperor after killing his brothers and imprisoning his father in the battle for succession. He achieved temporary success against the Ahoms, the Yusufzai and the Sikhs.

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- The Maratha ruler Shivaji declared himself as an independent king after Aurangzeb's insult. He continued to campaign against the Mughals.
 - After the rebellion of Aurangzeb's son, Akbar was supported by Deccan rulers. He began his campaign against them. He annexed Bijapur and Golconda. However, he had to face guerilla warfare from the Marathas.
 - The Sikhs, Jats and Satnamis also rebelled against Aurangzeb's rule.

❖ **Mughal traditions of succession**

- Primogeniture was the custom where the eldest son was the inheritor of his father's estate.
- The Timurid or Mughal tradition was coparcenary inheritance, which meant equal division of inheritance among all sons.

❖ **Mughal relations with other rulers**

- Many rulers like the Rajputs voluntarily accepted Mughal authority once they became powerful. Many of them received high positions in Mughal courts and alliances were created on the basis of marriage.
- The prominent opponents of the Mughal authority were the Sisodiya Rajputs. After their defeat, they were treated honourably and given their lands back as *watan jagir*.
- The policy of not humiliating the opponents served the Mughals well. Aurangzeb did not follow this policy and had to face consequences in the form of revolts.

❖ **Mansabdars and Jagirdars**

- People from diverse backgrounds joined the Mughal service as the empire expanded. They were known as *mansabdars*.
- *Mansabdari* was a grading system used by the Mughals to fix rank, salary and military responsibilities of those in their service. The numerical value of *zat* determined the rank and salary of *mansabdars*.
- *Mansabdars'* military responsibilities required them to maintain a specified number of cavalrymen.
- *Mansabdars* received their salaries as revenue assignments called *jagirs*, similar to *iqtas*. The rights of the *mansabdars* were limited to the revenues from *jagirs*.
- During Akbar's reign, these *jagirs* were carefully assessed so that their revenues were roughly equal to the salary of the *mansabdar*.
- During Aurangzeb's reign, there was a huge increase in the number of *mansabdars*. This created a shortage in the number of *jagirs*. *Jagirdars* tried to extract maximum revenue due to which the peasantry suffered.

❖ **Zabt and Zamindars**

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- The main source of revenue was tax on the produce of peasants. The intermediaries who collected taxes were called *zamindars*.
 - *Zabt* was the revenue system created on the basis of a survey conducted by Akbar's revenue minister, Todar Mal. Taxes were fixed on crops while provinces were divided into revenue circles with a schedule of revenue rates.

❖ Akbar's policies

- Events of Akbar's reign were recorded by the *Akbar Nama*, a three volume history written by his courtier, Abul Fazl. The third volume, *Ain-i-Akbari*, provided details about the administration, revenues, geography and people of the empire.
- The provinces were divided into *subas*, governed by a *subadar*. Other officers who assisted the *subadar* were the *bakhshi*, *faujdar* and *kotwal*.
- Akbar's nobles commanded large armies and had access to large amounts of revenue. By the end of the seventeenth century, many nobles had built independent networks of their own.
- Akbar was interested in the religious and social customs of different people. He had a tolerant disposition which led him to the concept of *sulh-i kul* or "universal peace". It was a system of ethics based upon honesty, justice and peace rather than religion.

❖ The Mughal Empire in the Seventeenth Century and After

- Efficient civil and military administration during the Mughal period led to economic and commercial prosperity.
- The ruling class spent a large portion of its income on salaries and goods. This enabled the artisans and peasantry to supply them with goods and produce. However, the scale of revenue collection did not leave much for the peasants and artisans.
- The enormous wealth and resources commanded by the Mughal elite made them an extremely powerful group of people in the late seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, several provinces of the empire had consolidated their independent political identities.