

THE PERIOD OF REVOLTS AND REBELLIONS

In the previous chapter we learned how Akbar established a large empire and ruled for 50 years.

Akbar's son Jahangir succeeded him to the throne and ruled from 1606 to 1627. Jahangir was followed by his son Shah Jahan, who ruled from 1627 to 1658. The Red Fort and Jama Masjid at Delhi and the famous Taj Mahal at Agra were constructed during Shah Jahan's reign.

Emperor Shah Jahan fell ill in 1657 and his four sons Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb, Shah Shuja and Murad Badshah began fighting among themselves to ascend the throne. Aurangzeb emerged triumphant and became emperor in 1658. He arrested and imprisoned his father Shah Jahan, who died eight years later in prison. The Mughal Empire reached its largest territorial extent under Aurangzeb – extending from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu in present-day India. But he also faced many political disturbances during his reign.

Revolt of peasants and zamindars

The condition of the peasants was deplorable during the reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. They had to bear the cost of administering the entire empire, paying for the army and for constructing buildings like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal. As a result, their tax burden kept increasing. During Akbar's reign, apart from the government officials, the *zamindar*, *patwari*, village *mukhiya* (headman) and others also collected taxes.

When the tax burden became too high the peasants would leave the village and migrate to other places. But some of them began to revolt against the government. Several revolts took place during Aurangzeb's rule that shook the Mughal Empire. They included the revolt of the Jat peasants of Mathura, the Mewatis of Alwar, the Sikhs of Punjab, the Bundelas of Bundelkhand and the Raushnias of Afghanistan. The local *zamindars* supported the peasants in their struggles because they wanted to become independent rulers. These revolts of farmers and zamindar shook the mughal empire.

- 1) Who were the people who took a share of the produce of the peasants?
- 2) How were the *jagirdars* affected when peasants left the villages and migrated to other places? Discuss in class.

Shortage of jagirs

The number of administrative officials kept increasing during the Mughal period. But there were not enough *jagirs* to distribute among all of them. This

led to dissatisfaction and disobedience among the *jagirdars*. They faced other problems as well. The only way they could solve their problems was to encourage farming and increase the productivity of their *jagirs*. But they were not interested in improving the land because they faced regular transfers and lived in constant fear of having their *jagirs* confiscated.

- 1) Why was there a shortage of *jagirs* during Aurangzeb's time?
- 2) How did shortage of *jagirs* affect the *amirs*?
- 3) Why were the *jagirdars* not keen on encouraging farming and improving their land?

Aurangzeb tries to expand his empire



Fig.: 7.1 Aurangzeb

There was one way in which Aurangzeb could solve the problem of shortage of *jagirs* - by annexing neighbouring kingdoms and expanding his empire.

He sent his *amir* Mir Jumla to capture the Ahom kingdom of Assam, which lay to the east of the Mughal Empire. But after Mir Jumla's death Assam once again regained its independence.

To the south of the Mughal Empire lay the two important kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda. By 1687, Aurangzeb defeated both kingdoms and annexed them to his empire. However, he found that his victories only worsened his problems. He had to distribute *jagirs* to officials of these defeated kingdoms to win their loyalty and keep them content and happy. But the income he earned from the taxes

he levied on the *jagirs* was barely enough to cover the expenses of these *amirs*. This phase of his life was the last and most difficult one, with his victories not bringing him any benefits.

Why did Aurangzeb want to expand his empire?

Revolt of Jodhpur and Mewar

When Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur died, Aurangzeb did not want his son to ascend the throne. But the Rathore dynasty resisted his move to appoint another successor. They revolted against him, gaining the support of the Rana of Mewar (Udaipur) in their struggle. Aurangzeb's son, unhappy with his father's decisions, also joined the Rajputs in opposing the emperor. Although the Rajputs were eventually defeated, they put up a long and tough fight.

Shivaji and the Maratha kingdom

The Marathas, living in the hilly regions of the Western Ghats in Maharashtra, were good warriors. Maratha *jagirdars* held high positions in the



Fig.: 7.2 Shivaji

southern kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda. Shivaji was the son of one such *jagirdar* Shahji Bhonsle and his wife Jijabai. Shivaji wanted to establish an independent Maratha kingdom.

He first defeated a number of small Maratha *jagirdars* and took control of their forts and territory. He then launched frequent attacks on the Bijapur sultan, eventually killing the sultan's general Afzal Khan in battle. This was a great victory.

Shivaji then turned his attention to the Mughals. He defeated and disgraced the Mughal general and captured Surat, the largest trading centre of the Mughals. Aurangzeb sent Raja Jai Singh to subjugate Shivaji. Jai Singh persuaded Shivaji to

accept the supremacy of the Mughals and visit Aurangzeb's court in Agra. Angered by Shivaji's fearless and independent behaviour, Aurangzeb imprisoned him. But Shivaji managed to escape and returned to Maharashtra.

He continued to fight the Mughals, developing a unique style of battle. Instead of directly confronting the Mughal forces, he would carry out swift raids on them and flee to the safety of the mountains after inflicting heavy damage on them. This style of warfare is known as guerrilla warfare. Shivaji was able to defeat larger armies by using such tactics.

Shivaji proclaimed himself an independent king in 1674, adopting the title of *Chhatrapati*. He expanded his empire up to Tamil Nadu in the south. He died in 1680 but the conflict between Aurangzeb and the Marathas continued even after his death.

Aurangzeb's religious policies

Aurangzeb was an orthodox Muslim who wanted to implement Muslim Shariah laws in his empire. During Akbar's reign, all religions were tolerated. Aurangzeb tried to reverse this policy. He prohibited non-Islamic traditions in his court, disapproving of art, music and the celebration of festivals of other religions. He took other steps that hurt the feelings of people of other faiths, re-introducing the *jaziya* tax on Hindus and ordering the destruction of several temples.

The revolt of peasants and *zamindars* picked up momentum during his reign and Aurangzeb soon faced a shortage of *jagirs* to distribute among his *mansabdars*. It was a time of crisis for the Mughal Empire. Aurangzeb wanted to gain the support of all Muslims by adopting dogmatic policies, but these policies harmed the empire, which had been built with the support of people of all religious faiths.

Aurangzeb was well aware of this fact. That is why he also gave donations to several temples and monasteries. The edicts of such donations can be seen even today in the Mahakal Temple of Ujjain and the Ram temple at Chitrakoot. To cite another example, the Hindu traders of Surat once abandoned the city in protest against a local *qazi*. Business came to a standstill. Aurangzeb wrote a letter to the traders assuring them that their religious independence would be protected.

Despite his dogmatism, some of the highest posts in Aurangzeb's court were held by people like Jai Singh and Jaswant Singh. He appointed many more Hindu *amirs* during his reign. Against 30 Hindu nobles in Akbar's time and 98 in Shah Jahan's, Aurangzeb employed 182. Most were Rajputs and Marathas. This shows that Aurangzeb also adopted policies for the benefit of the empire.

Why did so many Rajput and Maratha *amirs* support Aurangzeb despite the conservative religious policies he adopted?

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, there was a battle of succession to the throne. Many *zamindars* revolted and set up their independent kingdoms. Apart from the Marathas, they included the Jats and Sikhs in Punjab, who all became independent rulers. The *subedars* of Hyderabad, Bengal and Avadh also established independent kingdoms. Although they continued to accept Mughal authority, they practically began ruling independently. The Mughal Empire thus broke up in this manner.

During this period, the Kalchuri kings were ruling at Ratanpur and Raipur in Chattisgarh. You read about these kings in Class VI.

EXERCISES

I. Which of the following statements are true or false:

1. Aurangzeb's descendents were powerful kings.
2. Maratha *amirs* held high positions in the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda.
3. Shah Jahan's sons began fighting among themselves the moment he fell ill.
4. The Mughal Empire was not expanded much during Aurangzeb's rule.
5. The Bundelas living near Mathura revolted against Aurangzeb.

II. Answer the following questions:

1. Describe in your own words the two major problems faced by Aurangzeb.
2. What steps did Aurangzeb take to solve the problem of a shortage of *jagirs*?
3. How was the Maratha army able to defeat the Mughals?
4. Would you hold Aurangzeb responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire? Why?
5. Aurangzeb adopted policies for and against Hindus. Give two-two examples of each.

Things to do

Compare the policies of Akbar and Aurangzeb and write a detailed account in your notebooks.

