

## The Mughal Empire

### The Origins of the Mughal

Turkic invaders led by Babur, invaded India in 1526 after being driven from Afghanistan. They sought riches not conquest. Babur's forces were using military tactics and technology similar to the Ottomans. They crushed the Muslim Lodi dynasty in 1526 and within two years, Babur controlled much of the Indus and Ganges plains. The first Mughal ruler was a talented warrior who also possessed a taste for art and music, but he was a poor administrator. His sudden death in 1530 brought invasions from surrounding enemies. Babur's successor was able to maintain control until his death.

Akbar succeeded to the throne and immediately had to face pressure from Mughal enemies. Akbar and his advisors defeated them all, and the young monarch became a ruler with outstanding military and administrative talent. His armies consolidated Mughal conquests in north and central India. Akbar advanced a policy of reconciliation with his Hindu subjects; he encouraged intermarriage; abolished head taxes, and respected Hindu customs. Hindus rose to high ranks in his administration. Akbar invented a new faith incorporating Hindu and Muslim beliefs to unify his subjects. The Hindu and Muslim warrior aristocracy were granted land and labor for their loyalty.

1. How were the Mughal similar to the Ottomans?
2. What were some of Akbar's achievements?

### Social Reform and Change

Akbar attempted to introduce social changes that would benefit his subjects. Among them were reforms to improve the status of women. Akbar encouraged widow remarriage and discouraged child marriages. He did prohibit one Hindu ritual, the Sati and attempted to break women from seclusion by creating special market days for women.

Even though most of his reforms, including the new religion, were not successful, Akbar left a powerful empire at his death in 1605. Not much new territory was added by his successors, but the regime reached the peak of its splendor. Most of the population, however, lived in poverty. Because of the severe poverty in India, they fell behind Europe in science, art and technology. Still, by the late seventeenth century, the Mughal ruled over a major commercial and manufacturing empire. Indian cotton textiles were world famous and gained a large market in Europe.

1. What social reforms did Akbar institute in the Mughal Empire?
2. Describe Mughal society under Akbar.

### Artistic Achievements and Politics

The seventeenth century rulers Jahangir and Shah Jahan continued the policy of tolerance toward Hindus along with most other of Akbar's policies. They were important patrons of the arts; they expanded painting workshops for miniatures and built great architectural works; including Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal. They often blended Persian and Hindu traditions.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan left the details of daily administration to subordinates. While the life of court women improved, the position of women elsewhere in society declined. Child marriage grew more popular, widow remarriage died out, and seclusion for both Hindu and Muslim women increased. Sati too became popular; it spread among the upper classes. The lack of opportunity for a productive role and the burden of a dowry meant that the birth of a girl became a discouraging event.

1. What were the achievements of other Mughal rulers?
2. What was the role of Mughal women?

### Decline of the Mughal

Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan's successor, inherited a declining empire. He pushed two disastrous ambitions: to control all of India and to rid Islam of Hindu rituals. By 1707, Aurangzeb had conquered most of India, but the warfare had drained the treasury and weakened the bureaucracy and military. The time spent on warfare diverted the ruler's energies from other vital tasks. Internal revolt and the growing autonomy of local leaders were not dealt with. Aurangzeb's religious policies increased internal weaknesses. The head tax on Hindus was restored. By the end of Aurangzeb's reign, his large empire was plagued by internal disruption. Outside forces were threatening the Mughal and strained imperial resources. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, state revenues and power passed to regional lords, a return to a pattern previously predominant in South Asia.

The early modern Muslim empires had sufficient internal reasons for destruction, but their demise was made more certain by ignoring the rising European threat. Little effort was made to incorporate European technological advances. The failure to meet the European challenge weakened the economic base of their empires as revenues and profits were drained off by foreigners. Importation of European bullion brought damaging inflation. Muslim leaders and scholars ignored these trends and caused serious difficulties for the world of Islam in the future.

1. What were some of the weaknesses under Aurangzeb?
2. How did the Europeans affect the Mughal Empire?
3. List reasons for the Mughal Decline.

### The Characteristics of Akbar the Great

Akbar, as seen in middle life, was a man of moderate stature, perhaps five foot seven inches in height. His black eyebrows were thin, and the Mongolian strain of blood in his veins was indicated by the narrow eyes characteristic of the Tartar, Chinese, and Japanese races. The eyes sparkled brightly and were "vibrant like the sea in sunshine." His complexion, sometime, described by the Indian term was dark rather than fair. His face was clean shaven, except for a small, closely trimmed moustache worn in the fashion adopted by young Turks on the verge of manhood. His hair was allowed to grow, not being dipped close in the ancestral manner. His very loud voice was credited with "a peculiar richness." . . .

He took special delight in the practice of mechanical arts with his own hands. We are told that "there is nothing that he does not know how to do, whether matters of war, or of administration, or of any mechanical art. Wherefore he takes particular pleasure in making guns and in founding and modeling cannon." Workshops were maintained on a large scale within the palace enclosure, and were frequently visited by him. He was credited with many inventions and improvements. That side of his character suggests a comparison with Peter the Great. . . .

"A monarch," he said, "should be ever intent on conquest, otherwise his neighbors rise in arms against him. The army should be exercised in warfare, lest from want of training they become self-indulgent." Accordingly he continued to be intent on conquest all his life and to keep his army in constant training. He never attained more than a part of the objective of his ambition, which included the conquest of every part of India besides Central Asia. . . .

In 1582 he resolved to attempt the impossible task of providing all sects in his empire with one universal eclectic religion to which he gave the name of Divine Monotheism. He persuaded himself that he was the vice-regent of the Almighty, empowered to rule the spiritual as well as the temporal concerns of his subjects. It was a failure, but Akbar never formally admitted the fact, and to the end of his life he persisted in maintaining the farce of the new religion.

His attitude towards religion expressed the surprising mixture in his mind of mysticism, rationalism, superstition, and a profound belief in his own God-given powers. His actions at times gave substantial grounds for the reproach that he was not unwilling to be regarded as a God on earth.

From V. A. Smith: *Akbar, the Great Mogul (1542-1605)*, Clarendon Press, 1919.

1. Describe Akbar's features?
2. How did Akbar feel about war?
3. How did Akbar feel about religion?
4. What makes Akbar different than other leaders of "gunpowder empires?"