

MUGHAL RULE IN INDIA (1526-1707)

- The Mughals, descended from the Mongol Chengiz Khan and the Turk Timur, founded an empire in India which lasted for more than three centuries. But they are remembered not as rulers of foreign origin, but as an indigenous Indian dynasty.
- Babur was the founder of the Mughal empire which was established in 1526 after Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the battle of Panipat. Thus a new epoch and a new empire in India began, lasting for nearly three centuries beginning from 1526 to 1857.
- Six major rulers of this dynasty, Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, known as the “Great Mughals”, left their mark on Indian history. The empire declined after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. The empire formally ended a century and a half later, when power passed to the British crown after the great revolt of 1857.
- At the height of its power the Mughal empire stretched from Afghanistan to Bengal and from Kashmir down to the Tamil region in the south.

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1526–1530)

Babur founded the Mughal Empire in India through decisive military victories and innovative tactics.

Background

Babur, a Central Asian ruler of Timurid descent, invaded India after losing his kingdom in Samarkand. He arrived with a small but disciplined army equipped with gunpowder artillery and cannons. His ambition shifted to India following repeated setbacks in his homeland.

Key Battles

- First Battle of Panipat (1526) defeated Ibrahim Lodi of the Delhi Sultanate, marking the Mughals' entry into India.
- Battle of Khanwa (1527) crushed Rana Sanga's Rajput confederacy, securing Agra and Delhi.
- Battle of Chanderi (1528) subdued Medini Rai, extending control over Malwa.
- Battle of Ghagra (1529) eliminated remaining Afghan resistance led by Mahmud Lodi.

Administration

Babur established Agra as his base and introduced the Tulguma system for coordinated artillery and cavalry attacks. He imposed a land revenue system based on measurements and appointed loyal nobles to govern conquered territories. His rule emphasized justice and religious tolerance toward Hindus.

Cultural Contributions

Babur authored the Baburnama, a memoir detailing his life, battles, and observations on India's flora, fauna, and people. He laid gardens in the Persian style, such as the Ram Bagh in Agra. His short reign introduced gunpowder technology that transformed Indian warfare.

Death and Legacy

Babur died in 1530 after a brief illness, designating his son Humayun as successor. His four-year rule consolidated Mughal power in northern India despite constant rebellions. He set the foundation for the empire's expansion under later rulers.

HUMAYUN PERIOD (1530-40 & 1555-1556)

Humayun's reign marked a turbulent phase for the nascent Mughal Empire, characterized by internal strife and external invasions.

Background

Humayun succeeded his father Babur in 1530 at age 22, inheriting a fragile empire centered in Delhi and Agra. Born in Kabul in 1508, he faced immediate challenges from ambitious brothers and resurgent Afghan nobles. His indecisive nature and indulgence in pleasures like opium weakened his rule early on.

First Reign (1530-1540)

- Conquered parts of Gujarat, Malwa, and Bengal but failed to consolidate control due to rebellions.
- Defeated by Sher Shah Suri at the Battle of Chausa (1539), losing key territories.

- Suffered final defeat at the Battle of Kannauj (1540), forcing him to flee Delhi and enter 15 years of exile.

Exile Period (1540-1555)

Humayun wandered through Sindh, Rajasthan, and Persia, seeking aid from Shah Tahmasp. He married Hamida Banu Begum during exile, fathering Akbar. Persian support provided military aid and Shia influences on Mughal culture. Internal Afghan conflicts among Sher Shah's successors created an opportunity for return

Second Reign (1555-1556)

- Recaptured Delhi after victory at the Second Battle of Panipat (1556) against Sikandar Suri, though led by Bairam Khan.
- Reorganized administration with Persian-style Din-i-Ilahi influences and built libraries.
- Died in January 1556 from a fall down library stairs, leaving the throne to young Akbar.

Legacy

Humayun's struggles preserved the Mughal lineage despite near collapse. His tomb in Delhi became a prototype for later Mughal architecture like the Taj Mahal. The period bridged Babur's conquests and Akbar's golden age.

SHER SHAH AND SUR DYNASTY

Sher Shah Suri briefly interrupted Mughal rule by establishing the Sur Empire through military victories over Humayun.

Background

Sher Shah, originally Farid Khan, rose from humble origins in Bihar as a jagirdar under the Lodi dynasty. He gained prominence by capturing Chunar fort and expanding control over Bihar and Bengal amid weakening Delhi Sultanate. His military genius and administrative foresight enabled him to challenge the Mughals effectively

Rise to Power

- Defeated Humayun at Battle of Chausa (1539), earning the title Sher Shah.
- Crushed Mughals decisively at Battle of Kannauj (1540), forcing Humayun into exile and seizing Delhi.
- Consolidated empire by conquering Punjab, Malwa, Bundelkhand, and Multan, though avoiding deep incursions into independent tribal areas.

Administration and Reforms

Sher Shah created a highly efficient centralized system later adopted by Mughals.

- Divided empire into 47 sarkars and 533 parganas with officials like shiqdar (military) and amil (revenue).
- Introduced zabt land revenue based on crop measurement (patwari records), charging one-third in cash or kind.
- Standardized silver rupiya coinage, alongside gold mohur and copper dam, boosting trade.

Infrastructure

- Built Grand Trunk Road from Bengal to Punjab, with sarais (rest houses) every two miles for travelers and horses.
- Constructed strategic Rohtas Fort in Punjab to control Gakhars and block Mughal return.
- Developed canals for irrigation and promoted market controls against hoarding.

Death and Successors

Sher Shah died in 1545 from injuries in a Kalinjar siege explosion. Sons Islam Shah and later weak successors like Firuz Shah faced rebellions. Sur Empire collapsed by 1555, enabling Humayun's return and Mughal restoration.

AKBAR (1556-1605)

Akbar's reign transformed the Mughal Empire into a vast, stable power through conquests, reforms, and cultural synthesis.

Background

Akbar ascended the throne in 1556 at age 13 after Humayun's death, initially under regent Bairam Khan. The Second Battle of Panipat (1556) against Hemu secured Delhi and Agra. He dismissed Bairam Khan in 1560 and assumed full control, ruling until 1605.

Military Conquests

- Expanded northwest to Kabul, Kandahar, Kashmir (1586), and Sindh.
- Conquered Gujarat (1573) for trade ports, Bengal (1576), Bihar, and Odisha.
- Subdued Rajputana through alliances and battles like Haldighati (1576) against Rana Pratap; annexed Mewar later.

- Extended into Deccan, capturing Khandesh, Berar, and parts of Ahmednagar by 1601.

Administrative Reforms

Akbar centralized governance with the mansabdari system ranking nobles by zat (personal status) and sawar (cavalry maintained). He divided the empire into subas (provinces) led by subahdars, with revenue via zabt assessment on measured land. The Dahsala system fixed revenue at one-third of average yield over ten years.

Religious Policy

Abolished jizya tax on non-Muslims in 1564 and pilgrimage tax; promoted Sulh-i-kul (universal tolerance). Founded Din-i-Ilahi (1582), a syncretic faith blending Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism for elites. Held Ibadat Khana debates with scholars of all faiths.

Cultural and Architectural Legacy

Built Fatehpur Sikri (1571-85) as capital with Buland Darwaza and Panch Mahal. Patronized Persian arts, translation of Mahabharata (Razmnama), and miniature painting. Married Rajput princesses like Jodha Bai, integrating Hindus into nobility

JAHANGIR (1605-1627)

Jahangir's reign continued Mughal consolidation but saw growing internal intrigue and external diplomacy.

Background

Jahangir, born Prince Salim in 1569, succeeded Akbar in 1605 after a brief rebellion attempt by his son Khusrau. His rule until 1627 emphasized justice through chain of bells at Agra Fort for public grievances. Addiction to alcohol and opium increasingly affected governance.

Key Conflicts

- Suppressed Prince Khusrau's revolt (1606), executing Sikh Guru Arjan for alleged support.
- Achieved peace with Mewar (1615) when Rana Amar Singh submitted; Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) led the campaign.
- Faced rebellions by son Shah Jahan (1622-1626) and setbacks against Deccan states like Ahmednagar.
- Ordered Portuguese Jesuits expelled briefly after conflicts in Bengal.

Administration and Economy

Maintained Akbar's mansabdari system but delegated power to wife Nur Jahan and her family (Junta). Promoted trade by granting farmans to British East India Company (1615) via Sir Thomas Roe's embassy. Revenue policies supported agriculture; constructed canals for irrigation.

Cultural Patronage

Greatly advanced Mughal painting with naturalistic portraits and animal studies by artists like Bishan Das. Authored Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri memoirs detailing court life and nature observations. Built Shalimar Gardens in Kashmir and Shah Begum's tomb

Death and Legacy

Died en route from Kashmir in 1627; Shah Jahan seized the throne after imprisoning rivals. His era marked peak artistic refinement but declining central authority, setting stage for Shah Jahan's building legacy

SHAH JAHAN (1627-1658)

Shah Jahan's reign represented the architectural zenith of the Mughal Empire amid territorial expansion and eventual decline.

Background

Shah Jahan, born Khurram in 1592, succeeded Jahangir in 1628 after eliminating rivals. He married Mumtaz Mahal in 1612, who bore 14 children before dying in 1631 during childbirth. His 30-year rule shifted the capital to Delhi (Shahjahanabad) in 1648.

Military Campaigns

- Annexed Ahmednagar (1636) and forced tribute from Bijapur and Golconda, establishing Deccan provinces under Aurangzeb.
- Captured Kandahar briefly (1638) from Safavids but lost it permanently in 1649 despite repeated sieges.
- Defeated Shahji Bhonsle (Shivaji's father) and expanded northwest to Ghazna, though facing Maratha and Portuguese resistance.

Administration and Economy

Centralized Akbar's mansabdari system, increasing ranks and military demands fourfold. Promoted trade with European powers; revenue

from land assessments supported lavish court. Introduced Marwari horses and mass-produced cannons at Jaigarh Fort.

Architectural Legacy

Commissioned Taj Mahal (1632-1653) as Mumtaz's mausoleum, using white marble and Persian gardens. Built Red Fort, Jama Masjid in Delhi; Moti Masjid and Agra Fort expansions; Shalimar Bagh in Lahore.

Decline and Death

Illness in 1657 sparked succession war among sons; Aurangzeb defeated Dara Shikoh, imprisoned Shah Jahan in Agra Fort (1658). He watched Taj Mahal from captivity until death in 1666.

AURENGZEB (1658-1707)

Aurangzeb's long reign expanded the Mughal Empire to its territorial peak but sowed seeds of decline through religious orthodoxy and endless wars.

Background

Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 after defeating brothers Dara Shikoh, Shuja, and Murad in a brutal succession war, imprisoning father Shah Jahan in Agra Fort. Born in 1618, he ruled for nearly 49 years until 1707 as Alamgir I, shifting focus from opulence to strict

Islamic governance. He personally led armies, copying Quran verses during campaigns

Military Conquests

- Northern phase (1658-1681) subdued Jats, Satnamis, and Ahoms in Assam; recaptured Kashmir and northwest frontiers.
- Deccan campaigns (1681-1707) annexed Bijapur (1686) and Golconda (1687), but prolonged Maratha guerrilla warfare drained resources.
- Executed Shivaji's son Sambhaji (1689) after capturing Raigad; empire reached from Hindukush to southern India.

Administration and Religious Policies

Centralized Akbar's mansabdari but increased ranks excessively, straining nobility. Reimposed jizya tax on Hindus (1679), destroyed some temples, and enforced Sharia laws like banning music and gambling. Banned sati in some regions; promoted Islamic scholarship while facing revolts from Rajputs, Sikhs (executed Guru Tegh Bahadur, 1675), and Jats.

Economic and Cultural Impact

Heavy military spending depleted treasury; Deccan wars ruined agriculture and trade. Patronized Islamic arts modestly but reversed Akbar's syncretism, alienating Hindus and fostering rebellions. Built Bibi Ka Maqbara in Aurangabad as a modest Taj imitation.

Death and Legacy

Died in 1707 near Ahmednagar after prolonged illness, mourned by few amid revolts. Empire fragmented post-death due to weak

successors, Maratha resurgence, and European incursions; marked transition from Mughal golden age to decline.

SOCIETY DURING MUGHAL ERA

Indian society under Mughal rule blended indigenous traditions with Persianate influences, forming a hierarchical yet syncretic structure.

Social Hierarchy

Society divided into nobility (umara), zamindars, merchants, artisans, peasants, and slaves. Emperor and royal family topped the pyramid, with nobles holding mansabs based on merit and loyalty. Upper classes enjoyed luxury; lower strata like peasants and laborers faced heavy taxation and exploitation.

Caste and Varna System

Hindu varna (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras) and jati persisted, dictating occupations and marriages. Muslims formed ashraf (noble), ajlaf (converts), and arzals, mirroring castes. Rural villages remained self-contained caste units, though urban mobility allowed some rise through service.

Status of Women

Patriarchal norms prevailed; upper-class women practiced purdah, child marriage, and faced sati restrictions. Elite Muslim women had mehr rights and inheritance, though unequal to men; some like Nur Jahan wielded political power. Rural women contributed to agriculture but held limited rights.

Religious Composition

Hindus formed majority, with Muslims as rulers and elites; tolerance varied—Akbar's Sulh-i-kul promoted syncretism, Aurangzeb imposed orthodoxy like jizya. Bhakti and Sufi movements fostered harmony; Sikhs, Jains, and Christians coexisted, though temple destructions occurred.

Urban and Rural Life

Cities like Agra and Delhi bustled with markets, sarais, and diverse crafts; Europeans noted prosperity. Rural life centered on agriculture,

with joint families and village panchayats resolving disputes. Trade boomed in textiles, spices via ports like Surat

Cultural Syncretism

Persian arts fused with Indian styles in painting, music, and architecture; festivals like Nauroz blended traditions. Literacy grew among elites via madrasas and pathshalas; women poets like Mah Laqa Bai emerged later.

ECONOMIC LIFE

The Mughal economy thrived on agriculture and trade, generating immense wealth through efficient revenue systems and global commerce.

Agriculture

Agriculture formed the backbone, employing most of the population and contributing over 50% of state revenue. Major crops included rice, wheat, millets, cotton, indigo, sugarcane, and opium as cash crops. Advanced techniques like seed drills, canals, and wells boosted productivity, with Akbar's zabt system assessing taxes on measured land yields.

Land Revenue System

Introduced zabt by Todar Mal under Akbar, fixing revenue at one-third of average produce over a decade (dahsala). Zamindars collected taxes, often exploiting peasants; jagirs assigned to mansabdars for salary equivalents. This monetary system encouraged cash crops and state incentives.

Trade and Commerce

Flourishing inland and overseas trade via Grand Trunk Road and ports like Surat, with exports of textiles, spices, indigo, saltpetre to Europe, Persia, and Southeast Asia. Europeans (Portuguese, Dutch, English) established factories; silver influx spurred monetization. Markets regulated to prevent hoarding.

Manufacturing and Crafts

Textile industry dominant, producing cotton, silk, woollens for global markets; other crafts included shipbuilding, metalwork, jewelry, carpets. Urban centers like Agra, Lahore, Dhaka specialized; guilds protected artisans. Mughal patronage elevated quality.

Currency and Banking

Standardized silver rupee (11.5g), gold mohur, copper dam under Sher Shah, later refined. Hundi bills of exchange facilitated long-distance trade; indigenous bankers (shroffs) provided credit. Economy silver-based due to imports from Americas via Europe.

Overall Prosperity and Decline

Peak under Akbar-Shah Jahan saw GDP 25% of world total; Deccan wars under Aurangzeb strained treasury, causing inflation and peasant distress. Post-1707 fragmentation reduced central control, paving way for European dominance.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious life during the Mughal era in India featured a complex interplay of Islamic rule over a Hindu-majority population, marked by periods of tolerance and orthodoxy.

Early Emperors (Babur-Humayun)

Babur showed basic tolerance toward Hindus without formal policy, focusing on conquests. Humayun maintained orthodox Sunni practices but lacked time for major reforms amid exile. Both emphasized Islamic rituals while coexisting with local faiths.

Akbar's Liberal Policies

Akbar pioneered Sulh-i-kul (universal peace), abolishing jizya tax (1564) and pilgrimage cess on Hindus. Built Ibadat Khana for interfaith debates with Muslim, Hindu, Jain, Christian, and Zoroastrian scholars. Founded Din-i-Ilahi (1582), a syncretic cult for elites blending multiple religions; married Rajput princesses to foster alliances.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan

Jahangir continued tolerance unevenly, executing Sikh Guru Arjan but patronizing Sufis and Hindus; allowed festivals. Shah Jahan leaned orthodox, building grand mosques like Jama Masjid while employing Hindu nobles and celebrating Hindu festivals at court

Aurangzeb's Orthodoxy

Reimposed jizya (1679), banned music/dancing, and ordered destruction of select temples (e.g., Kashi Vishwanath, Mathura). Enforced Sharia via Fatawa Alamgiri; executed Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur. Yet employed many Hindus in administration and granted some temple permissions.

Popular Movements

Bhakti saints (Tulsidas, Surdas) and Sufi orders (Chishti, Naqshbandi) promoted devotion transcending castes. Sikhism evolved under Gurus from peaceful to militarized amid conflicts. Jains and Christians received patronage under tolerant rulers.

Overall Impact

Tolerance fostered syncretism in arts and architecture; orthodoxy sparked revolts (Rajputs, Marathas, Sikhs). Policies varied by emperor, balancing Islamic identity with governance needs in diverse society