

Imperial Zenith and Fragmentation : A study of the Mughal Empire

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Abstract:

The Mughal empire stands as one of the most influential imperial formations in south Asian history. It was also indeed considered one of the most significant and enduring empires in the history of the Indian subcontinent, including present day Pakistan, Bangladesh and even Nepal during its pinnacle ; this paper accentuates and examines the rise to its imperial zenith — and analyse the structural, political, and economic causes that led to its fragmentation after the reign of its last significant ruler Muhi - ud - din Aurangzeb.

Keywords: Mughal, dynasty, Sovereign, empire.

Introduction

The Mughals were among the richest and most dazzling dynasty of their time and their vivid, colourful histories were carried back by travellers across the world. The Mughal kings were not just conquerors, but they were the also the patrons of the arts. For the first two centuries, they were among the epitome of grandeur and power, with the first six kings ; Zahir - ud - din Babur, Nasir - ud - din Humayun, Jalal - ud - din Muhammad Akbar , Nur - ud - din Jahangir, Shihab - ud - din Muhammad Shah Jahan, Muhi - ud - din Aurangzeb.

A dynasty is not called great only because of its longevity, its greatness lies in how they influence and transform the life of the people. Established by Babur after the first battle of Panipat (1526 CE), the empire evolved into a Centralized and culturally dynamic polity under successive rulers. This paper analyses the political expansion, imperialism during the era, administrative innovations, socio - economic systems, and cultural achievements of the Mughal dynasty, this paper also clearly accentuates the zenith as well the fall of the dynasty after the death of the eminent ruler Aurangzeb till its last ruler Bahadur shah Zafar (1857 CE)

The Mughal empire was a Turks - mongol dynasty that ruled a vast portion of the Indian subcontinent from the early 16th century to mid - 19th century. The legacy of the Mughal empire was indeed started by Babur who was descendent of Timur and Genghis khan, the empire marked a new phase of political consolidation in India.

Babur : Imperial conquest and the origins of Mughal sovereignty

He was named Babur, meaning tiger and he built a kingdom with two ferocity of one. With the arrival of Zahir - ud - din - Babur began the the tumultuous reign of the Mughals that became a legend across the world. Babur had the lineage of two great conquerors, even though. He was the king of the tiny Uzbekistan. Battling other claimants, he won and lost it and, in the attempt, ended up losing Ferghana. For years, he

wandered with his army as a nomad, robbing villages to survive. Finally 1504 CE, he captured Kabul. And later 1526, the empire was officially established after defeating Ibrahim Lodi at the Battle of Panipat 1526 CE. His introduction of gun powder deliberately played its role in helping winning the battle even due to the extensive margin in between the number of people and equipment's in the army.

Babur indeed played an exceptional role in establishing a major dynasty without any genuine backup and played an exceptional role in forming of the dynasty. Now it was the year 1527 CE and another major war came in the scene at Khanwa, against Rana sanga. Babur had the advantage of had the advantage of gunmen and by sunset he had won a great victory. Rana sanga retreated from Khanwa and died within a few months. Khanwa was where Babur really won his Indian kingdom. However, he did not live long enough to consolidate Hos victories and died four years later in 1530 CE, and was eventually succeeded by his son Nasir - ud - din Humayun.

Humayun : A Story of loss and return

Nasir - ud - din Humayun succeeded Babur in December 1530 at a young age of twenty three. He had grapple with a a number of problem left behind by Babur. The administration had not yet been consolidated, and the finances were precarious. Apart from these, Humayun had to deal with the rapid growth of power of the Afghans in the east, and the growing of power and sweep of Bahadur Shah, the ruler of Gujarat. At the outset, Humayun was inclined to consider the Afghan danger the more serious of the two. During the later years, Humayun spent his time building a new city at Delhi, which he named Dinpanah. He organised many grand feasts and festivities during the period. And it was the battle of Chausa 1539 CE and the battle of Kanauj 1540 CE, both battles Humayun out against Sher Shah Suri. Sher Shah Suri was a great king by unfortunately died and his successor Islam Shah could not control the kingdom. Meanwhile, Humayun who was wondering Shah Tahmasp of Persia after he had presented him with the Kohinoor diamond. He first captured Kabul from his brother Kamran and then defeated Islam Shah and recovered Delhi in 1555 CE. Humayun's death is often described as sudden and somewhat tragic. On **27 January 1556**, he was descending the steps of his library at Purana Qila in Delhi when he reportedly heard the call to prayer (azan). As was his custom, he paused to kneel in respect, but while rising again, he lost his balance, slipped on the steep stairs, and fell. The fall caused severe head injuries, and despite efforts to treat him, he died shortly afterward. His death came only months after he had successfully regained control of his empire, making it a major turning point in Mughal history. After his passing, his young son Akbar ascended the throne, with the guidance of his regent Bairam Khan. Humayun was later laid to rest in the grand Humayun's Tomb, which became one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture.

Akbar : The indomitable emperor

Akbar, one of the most formidable sovereigns of the Mughal dynasty, ascended the throne in the mid-16th century and proceeded to sculpt an empire distinguished by territorial grandeur, administrative sophistication, and ideological inclusivity. His reign is often regarded as a seminal epoch in Indian history, marked by political consolidation, cultural synthesis, and an unprecedented vision of governance that transcended the orthodox boundaries of his time.

The man, whose memory even to-day is revered by the Hindus, was a descendant of Babur, Abul Fath Jelâleddin Muhammed, known by the surname Akbar "the Great," which was conferred upon the child even when he was named, and completely supplanted the name that properly belonged to him. A

Mohammedan, a Mongol, a descendant of the monster Timur, the son of a weak incapable father, born in exile, called when but a lad to the government of a disintegrated and almost annihilated realm in the India of the sixteenth century,—which means in an age of perfidy, treachery, avarice, and self-seeking,—Akbar appears before us as a noble man, susceptible to all grand and beautiful impressions, conscientious, unprejudiced, and energetic, who knew how to bring peace and order out of the confusion of the times, who throughout his reign desired the furtherance of his subjects' and not of his own interest, who while increasing the privileges of the Mohammedans, not only also declared equality of rights for the Hindus but even actualized that equality, who in every conceivable way sought to conciliate his subjects so widely at variance with each other in race, customs, and religion, and who finally when the narrow dogmas of his religion no longer satisfied him, attained to a purified faith in God, which was independent of all formulated religions.¹

Not only a great ruler Akbar is also considered as the architect of the Mughal Golden Age, he is widely regarded as the greatest Mughal emperor due to his political vision and inclusive policies. His policies helped create a stable combining Hindus and Muslims. Greater administrations like Administrative reforms - introduced mansabdari system, strong religious policies, political establishments that helped him build a centralised and powerful empire, cultural achievements, and the territorial expansion that consolidated and expanded the empire across north India. Akbar was a humane and tolerant king who presided over a dazzling court of highly talented men. Legends say that he had nine jewels, or the navratna, in his court. One of the few wise things Humayun had done was to make his trusted general Bairam Khan the guardian of his son that helped the 13 year old Akbar dominate the 1556CE battle of Panipat. Akbar was the first Muslim king to realise that to establish a long lasting empire in India he had to gain the support of the majority of the population, - Hindus. When Jalal - ud - din Muhammad Akbar was twenty he married a Rajput princess, the daughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber (present - day Jaipur) namely by her Mughal title was called 'Mariam - uz - Zamani', who became the mother of Akbar's his apparent successor prince Salim who later became king as Jahangir.

Warrior and lover of books, a liberal man who respected all religions, a patron of the arts, a tough ruler, yet loved by his subjects. Akbar was humane king who built an empire that would become famous across the world. The Mughal historian Haider said at his birth, he was 'the child of a Sunni father and a Shia mother, born in Hindustan in the land of Sufism, at the house of a Hindu.' Jalaluddin Akbar, the, was a true Indian king.

Nur - ud - din Jahangir : a true patron of Art and justice

(Reign : 1605 - 1627)

Akbar had made sure that his descendants had an easy time and there was peace during the reign of Jahangir. He was no warrior and hardly made any effort to extend the empire, he was however a highly culture man and he cared for his subjects. Jahangir was a liberal king like his father and he continued Akbar's policy of religious tolerance. Jahangir too made good relations with the Rajputs as he himself was the son of a Rajput princess. He diligently known for his justice and had a golden 'chain of justice' with bells installed outside the palace. People seeking his help could pull the chain and appeal directly to the king.

¹ Akbar, Emperor of India by Richard von Garbe

Arrival of the Europeans

In 1615 CE, Sir Thomas Roe landed at Surat as the first official ambassador to India from the court of King James I of England and spent three years in the Mughal court. He came in with the eminent request of establishing the first ever east India company. To Jahangir, it was a matter of little consequence ; yet within 150 years, the east India company would rise to prominence and supplant Mughal rule across much of India.

Jahangir's detailed observation, recorded in his memoirs namely Tuzuk - i - Jahangiri; played an eminent role in accentuating the personal traits of what truly the emperor was like. It was the year 1611 CE when Mehr - un - Nissa (the birth name) was in her thirties, was a widow of one of Akbar's officials and also a lady-in waiting of Akbar's widow Ruqaiya Begum in the royal harem. Who was already a king, (Jahangir) fell in love with her and gave her the name of Nur Mahal and then later Nur Jahan. A very intelligent woman who later saved the Mughal empire with her brilliant tactics.

Shahib - ud - din Shah Jahan : the poet of marble and memory

The green of Shah represents the Zenith of Mughal grandeur, where the period is often regarded as the golden age of Mughal architecture and cultural refinement. As the son of Jahangir, he inherited a stable and prosperous empire, which he further strengthened through effective administration and patronage of the arts with the accession of Shah, the Mogul Empire entered a phase of extraordinary splendour and magnificence.

As the true patronage of art, culture, and heritage. Shah has majorly contributed in the greater perspectives of the Mogul architecture as he contributed in building the Taj Mahal, one of the world's most famous monuments. He also constructed Delhi Red Fort and expanded cities which is considered as one of his finest urban development. His military campaigns were as important as his architecture ones as he extended influence in the Deccan region as well. His administration contained the true eminence of his, grandfather Jalal Uddin, Mohammad Akbar, as he himself continued, centralised government that was established by Akbar.

Major mishap that impacted the reign :

Shah's illness triggered a war of succession among his sons, leading to Aurangzeb's rise.

But somehow, indeed, his reign symbolises the height of Mogul luxury, wealth, and artistic excellence.

Muhi - ud - din Aurangzeb (1658 CE - 1707 CE)

When he extended the throne, Aurangzeb took the title of 'Alamgir', 'world seizer' — clearly, he planned rule over an empire that was even larger than that of his fathers. In one way, he was unique as a Mogul King. He ruled in Delhi while his father was still alive and languished as a prisoner in the fort of Agra. He was also very different in character from other Mughals, who were all colourful larger than life characters. Aurangzeb was indeed a very zealous, fervent and repressive ruler as he believed in establishing the Muslim rule all over the established empire, a true, orthodox, and completely opposite of what his sibling Dhara Shikoh, who was meant to be there, apparent successor of Shah Jahan.

In Aurangzeb's portraits, he is usually shown clad in white and wearing few jewels. He was an austere who sewed prayer caps and copied Quran to pay for his personal expenses. He used his religious image with great cleverness, and so, even his most cruel acts were always garbed in religious reasons.

Aurangzeb had plotted for years to become king, and along the way, he had fooled his brothers, Suja, and Murad into helping him. He had also not thought twice about putting Dara and Murad to death. The Mogul had no rule of succession, so all the sons began to fight when a king died and every such battle of the throne weakened the empire.

After becoming the king, it was not always glory. Aurangzeb faced many challenges during his entire reign, with revolts, battles in the Deccan, rise of six with the glory of teachings of Guru Nanak and other gurus became very popular in Punjab and the rise of the Great Marathas. During the late 17th century, a new power was rising in the craggy Hills of the Western Ghats. Shivaji Bhosle, Lande owner, and his loyal band of followers, began to build a kingdom. In 1674CE, Shivaji defiantly crown, himself, king, taking the title of Chhatrapati, and established a Hindu Kingdom. After the debacle at Delhi, the Mogul left him alone and he ruled till his death in 16 ACE. Which Shivaji, the Marathi has become an important centre of power in Deccan and would later play a crucial role in the history of India.

Which is territorial expansion empire reached its greatest size, extending deep into South India. Aurangzeb's administration maintains strict discipline and centralised control and not only did. These policies work in his screen. Some controversial policies like introduction of jizya tax on non-Muslims and reduced religious tolerance compared to Akbar made greater changes in Aurangzeb's reign than that of his forefathers. His policies weakened internal unity, contributing to the empire's downfall.

In conclusion, Aurangzeb stands as a formidable yet controversial figure in the Mughal history, still his rigid policies and continuous warfare weakened its internal stability. His reign thus represent both the height of the Mughal power and the beginning of its decline.

Conclusion

Babur's victory at the First Battle of Panipat marked the start of the Mughal Empire, which plays a significant role as it established the expansion and transformation process across India. During the reigns of ruler Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, it gained immense power. They improved the governance, encouraged coexistence among people from diverse backgrounds, and contributed to the development of art and construction techniques.' One of their most renowned works is the Taj Mahal. During the long reign of Aurangzeb, the empire began to weaken due to internal problems, unreliable governors after him, financial setbacks and local powers such as Maratha Empire gaining prominence. The Mughal Empire was greatly diminished by the 18th century and it was officially cut down following a rebellion against the British East India Company.

In summary, the Mughal Empire left a lasting impression on India's government, culture, buildings, and customs as mention in the text above. Although it has declined, its influence still permeates the culture and character of those living in the region.