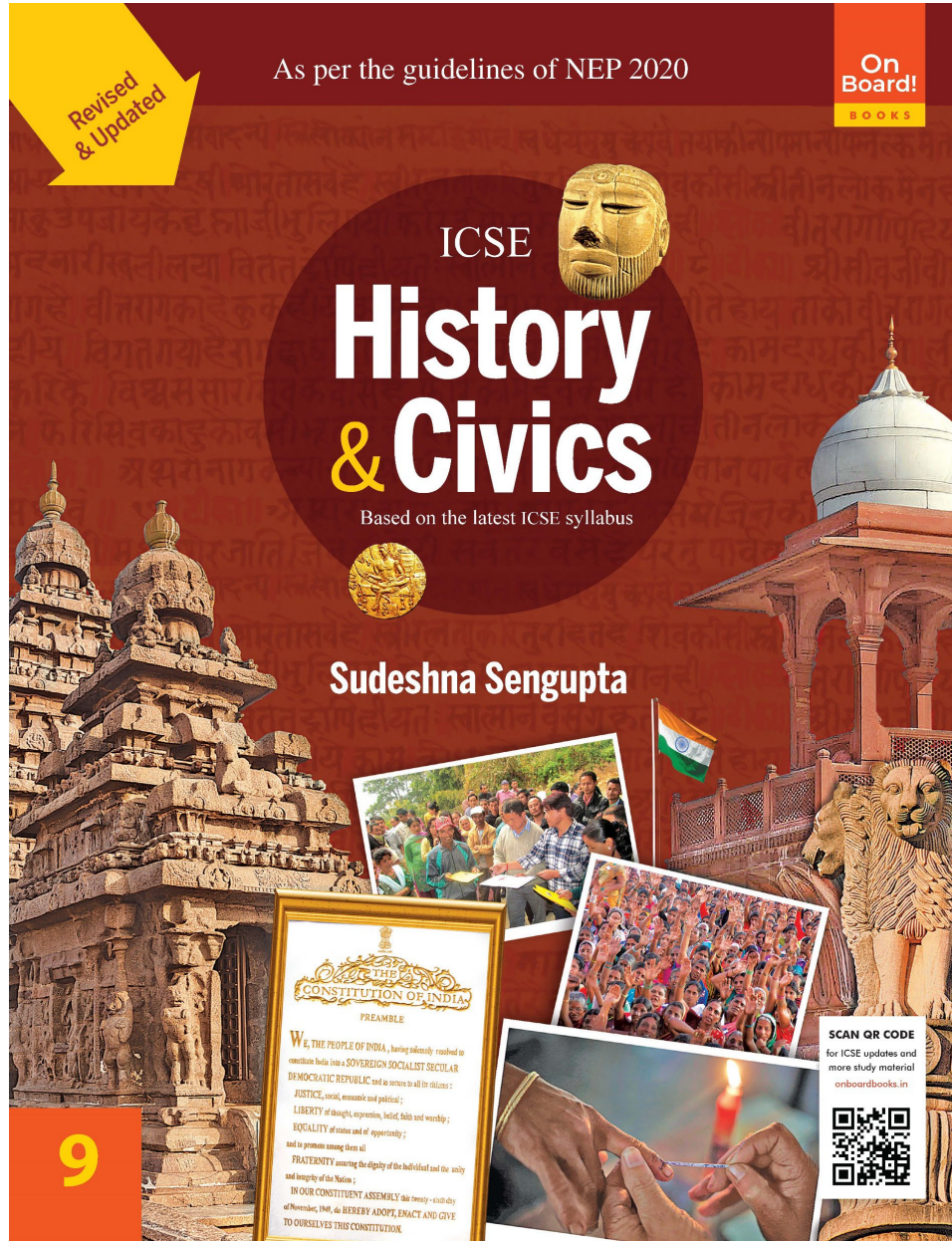


On Board!

B O O K S

History and Civics 9



History 9

Chapter 9: The Age of the Mughals

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Chapter 9: The Age of the Mughals

The Mughals, under Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur laid the foundation of the Mughal Dynasty in India.

Sources

Some of the sources that tell us about Mughal India include literary sources like Baburnama, Abul Fazl's Akbarnama and Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri. Archaeological sources include coins issued by the Mughal Emperors as well as buildings at Fatehpur Sikri, the Agra Fort, Taj Mahal, Jama Masjid and the Red Fort.

BABUR (AD 1526–1530)

Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur was the founder of the Mughal Empire in India. He was a descendant of Timur and Chenghiz Khan. He ruled over a small kingdom in Central Asia. He expanded his kingdom by attacking Afghanistan and capturing Kabul in AD 1504. At this time, Ibrahim Lodi was ruling over the Delhi Sultanate. He was an unpopular king. Daulat Khan Lodi, the governor of Punjab, and Rana Sanga, the ruler of Mewar, wanted to end the rule of the Lodis. They invited Babur to India, thinking that after defeating Ibrahim Lodi, he would return to Kabul, leaving the Sultanate in their hands. With an army of only twelve thousand men, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat in AD 1526. At the Battle of Ghaghara in AD 1529, Babur forced the combined armies of the Afghans to retreat.

These three battles secured Babur's position in northern India. Babur was not just a conqueror. He was also an accomplished poet and writer. Babur died in AD 1530. Since his rule was very short, he could not consolidate the empire that he had established. The task of consolidation fell on his son, Humayun.

HUMAYUN (AD 1530–1540 AND AD 1555–1556)

Babur was succeeded by his son, Nasir-ud-din Muhammad Humayun in AD 1530. He inherited one of the largest empires in the world, and between AD 1530 and AD 1540, he lost all of it to rebellions, from Afghanistan to India. Sher Khan, the Afghan king in the east, took advantage of this situation and strengthened his position in eastern India. He defeated Humayun at Chausa in AD 1539 and then at Kanauj in AD 1540. Thereafter, Sher Khan captured Delhi and Agra. He assumed the title of 'Sher Shah'. The Afghans replaced the Mughals in India.

SHER SHAH SURI (AD 1540–1545)

Sher Shah was an able administrator. He re-organized the civil and military administration. He is often regarded as the forerunner of Akbar.

Administrative reforms

Sher Shah divided his empire into administrative units called sarkars, each of which was again sub-divided into several smaller units called parganas. Sher Shah also devised the system of transferring government officers after every two to three years in order to prevent them from getting powerful in a region. He also appointed spies to report the king of the developments in his empire.

Military reforms

Sher Shah maintained a large standing army. He introduced many reforms to increase the efficiency of the army. He started paying regular salaries in cash to his soldiers and Officers. He personally supervised all recruitments in the army and enforced strict discipline among his soldiers.

Revenue reforms

Sher Shah introduced numerous reforms in land revenue administration. All cultivable land was measured and classified into good, average and bad, according to its fertility. The king's share was fixed at one-third of the total produce. The administrative officials were lenient at the time of revenue assessment but strict at the time of tax collection.

Achievements

Sher Shah encouraged trade. To make travelling easier and to promote trade and commerce, Sher Shah built an excellent network of roads in his empire. To encourage foreign trade, Sher Shah reduced the custom duties. He also introduced a silver coin. Sher Shah was a secular ruler. He followed a policy of religious tolerance. He respected all religions and looked after the welfare of all his subjects. Sher Shah was succeeded by Islam Shah. He could not build upon the work of his predecessor. Humayun defeated Islam Shah in AD 1555 and ended the Sur Empire. After Humayun's death in AD 1556, the task of consolidation fell on his son and successor Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar.

AKBAR (AD 1556–1605)

Akbar was one of the greatest rulers of India. He expanded and consolidated the Mughal Empire. Akbar became the 'Padshah' or 'ruler of the empire'. The Mughal Empire at this time had just been re-established and was not very strong. The Rajputs and the Afghans were waiting for a suitable opportunity to expel the Mughals from India. Under the guidance of Bairam Khan, Akbar defeated Hemu, the general of the Afghan forces in AD 1556 in the Second Battle of Panipat. Thus Akbar was able to crush the Afghan power. The victory over Hemu gave Akbar a lot of confidence. He dismissed Bairam Khan and assumed all powers. Akbar next conquered Chittor, Ranthambhore, Gujarat, Bengal, Kashmir, Sind, Kabul and Kandahar. In the Deccan, Akbar brought Berar, Khandesh and some parts of the kingdom of Ahmadnagar under his control. Akbar was now the ruler of a large part of India.

Relations with Rajputs and other Hindu rulers

Akbar's administrative foresight is best visible in his relation with the Rajputs. He realized that if he had their support, he could consolidate his empire. So he offered them his friendship.

- He married into Rajput families.
- He gave high posts to Rajput chiefs in the Mughal administration. Some of his faithful officers, such as Raja Man Singh and Raja Birbal, were Rajputs.
- He respected the political independence of the Rajputs and did not interfere in their internal matters.

Akbar's most successful administrative coup, however, was allowing Hindu kings to retain a large degree of autonomy. In all other Muslim kingdoms, non-Muslims came under the same law, the Shariat, as all Muslims. Akbar, however, allowed the Hindus to remain under their own law, the Dharmashastra, and to retain their own courts. This loose style of government, in which territories were under the control of the Emperor but still largely independent, became the model that the British would emulate as they slowly built the colonial model of government in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Administrative reforms

In order to govern the Mughal Empire, Akbar introduced various reforms. The most important feature of his reign was the mansabdari system. The term 'mansab' means a rank or position. The 'mansabdar' was the official who held this rank. The mansabdars were paid through jagirs. The jagirs were allotted based on the rank of the mansabdar. Akbar also made several changes in the revenue administration. Land revenue was fixed according to the fertility of the land. However, the tax was assessed equally on every member of the empire—a radical innovation considering that every other state in the sixteenth century rarely taxed the nobility.

Religious policy

Akbar did not discriminate on the basis of religion.

- He employed many competent Hindus in his administration.
- He abolished the jaziya and the pilgrimage tax.
- He allowed his Hindu subjects to build temples and worship as they liked.
- He even participated in many Hindu festivals.

Din-i-Ilahi

After interacting with people of different religions, Akbar concluded that all religions preach a common message of love for humanity. He felt that if the best points of all religions could be combined, the people of his empire would greatly benefit from it. Therefore, he suggested a religious path called the 'Din-i-Ilahi' or Divine Monotheism—religion of one God. It was based on the fundamental ideas of all religions.

Din-i-Ilahi, sought to synthesize the world's religions into a single religion. Akbar also elevated the notion of 'unity of the real,'—the world, as a creation of God, is a single and unified place that reflects the singularity and unity of its creator—to a central religious idea in his new religion.

Akbar also popularized the principle of 'Sulh-i-Kul' or 'peace with all'. This was primarily aimed at achieving peace, tolerance and unity in a country of diverse religions. Din-i-Ilahi was not a new religion, but a code of moral conduct. Akbar had put in place an efficient administration and a set of political relationships between the Mughal court and local Hindu kingdoms that ensured a peaceful empire for the rest of his life.

JAHANGIR (AD 1605–1627)

Akbar was succeeded by his son, Nur-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, who ruled the empire from AD 1605 to AD 1627. Jahangir tried to consolidate the empire further. He first crushed the rebellion of his son, Prince Khusrau. Next, he strengthened Mughal control over Avadh and Bengal. In AD 1613, he defeated Rana Amar Singh of Mewar. Jahangir allowed the Rana to rule over his territories on the condition that he would remain loyal to the Mughals.

Jahangir tried to expand the Mughal influence in the Deccan. The Mughal armies captured the fort of Ahmadnagar. However, Malik Ambar, the military commander of Ahmadnagar, put up a stiff resistance and did not allow the Mughals to conquer territories in the Deccan. Jahangir patronized art, architecture, literature and painting. Jahangir's reign is considered the richest period of Mughal culture. However, it was during this period that the European presence in India became dominant.

SHAH JAHAN (AD 1628–1657)

After Jahangir's death, his sons fought for the throne. After months of fighting, Prince Khurram defeated his brothers and ascended the throne. He took the title of 'Shah Jahan'. Shihab-ud-din Muhammad Shah Jahan had to face many revolts. He put down a rebellion in Ahmadnagar, repulsed the Portuguese in the Bengal, and conquered parts of the Deccan. One of Shah Jahan's major innovations was shifting the capital from Agra to Delhi, the traditional seat of Muslim power. Delhi was one of the largest cities in India and its status as the capital increased its prestige and power. Shah Jahan began a series of grand monumental architectural projects in Delhi. The city itself was surrounded by walls. In the middle of the city was the Red Fort. He also built the Taj Mahal at Agra.

AURANGZEB (AD 1658–1707)

In AD 1657, Shah Jahan fell ill. A war of succession broke out among his four sons—Dara Shukoh, Shah Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad Baksh. Aurangzeb defeated his main rival, Dara, and imprisoned Shah Jahan at Agra Fort. Thereafter, he crowned himself the emperor. Muhi-ud-din Muhammad Aurangzeb ruled for almost 50 years. His reign witnessed numerous revolts in different parts of the empire. In matters of administration, Aurangzeb repealed all taxes that were not authorized as per the Islamic law or tradition. This move depleted the Mughal Empire of the much-needed revenue. So Aurangzeb reimposed the jaziya and pilgrimage tax. It led to unrest among the Hindu subjects.

CAUSES FOR THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHALS

The Mughal Empire owes its decline and ultimate downfall to a combination of factors.

- Historians have primarily held Aurangzeb responsible for the decline of the Mughal Empire. Aurangzeb's prolonged Deccan campaign not only depleted the treasury but also rendered administration of the empire impossible.
- Aurangzeb also reversed Akbar's policy of friendship with the Rajputs. As a result, Aurangzeb could not seek their help against the Marathas.
- The Mughals did not follow any law of primogeniture, therefore a lot of time and resources were wasted on wars of succession.
- The rulers who followed Aurangzeb lacked the administrative acumen and the military prowess of the early Mughals.
- The degeneration of the rulers had also led to the moral degeneration of the nobility. Under the Great Mughals, the nobles distinguished themselves both in war and peace.

- The mansabdari system, under which a mansabdar had to maintain a fixed quota of troops, faced a crisis in the second half of the seventeenth century AD. The number of mansabdars increased rapidly. It became difficult to control them.
- The mansabdari crisis weakened the military. The problem was made acute by the fact that the Mughals did not adopt new technology. The weapons used in the army were outdated. The artillery wing of the army was neglected. Nor did the rulers try to develop a navy. Due to all these factors, the empire failed to defend itself against foreign invasions.
- The Mughal Emperors paid their officers through jagirs. By the end of the seventeenth century AD, there were not enough jagirs left to be assigned. Thus, there was a rivalry for the few jagirs that were left. To tide over the crisis, a lot of crown land was converted into jagir land. This reduced the revenue share of the king and his power declined further.
- Further, factors like wars of succession, rebellions and luxurious lifestyle of the rulers and nobles had depleted the treasury leading to financial bankruptcy.
- The raids by Nadir Shah, and repeated invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali, resulted in further weakening of the empire. The already weakened empire faced further threat by the advent of the British and the French, which proved to be the last nail in the coffin.

To Remember

The Mughal Dynasty—Mughals were the descendants of the Mongols, it is the Persian word for Mongol.

Sources—Literary sources like *Baburnama*, *Akbarnama* and archaeological sources like coins and monuments tell us about the Mughal India.

Babur—Founder of the Mughal Dynasty, the First Battle of Panipat, the Battle of Khanua and the Battle of Ghaghara consolidated Babur's position in northern India, wrote *Baburnama*, died in AD 1530.

Humayun—He inherited, lost and managed to regain one of the largest empires, was defeated by Sher Khan in the battles of Chausa and Kanauj, Sher Khan then occupied Delhi and Agra, Humayun fled and took shelter in the court of Shah Tahmasp of Persia.

Sher Shah—Sher Khan adopted the title of Sher Shah, regarded as the forerunner of Akbar, Administrative reforms: He divided the empire into sarkars and parganas, appointed spies, Military reforms: He maintained a large standing army, paid regular salaries in cash to his soldiers, maintained a descriptive roll of the soldiers, Revenue reforms: All cultivable land was assessed according to its fertility, gave loans to peasants on easy terms, Achievements: Sher Shah encouraged trade, built an excellent network of roads, the Grand Trunk Road, introduced silver coin called rupia, built the Purana Qila at Delhi, his successors were weak, Humayun reconquered the lost territories and ended the Sur Empire.

Akbar—Humayun was succeeded by Akbar in AD 1556, defeated Hemu in the Second Battle of Panipat, thereafter conquered a large part of India, Relations with Rajputs and other Hindu rulers: Akbar established friendly relations with the Rajputs, concluded matrimonial alliance, gave high administrative posts, Hindu rulers were free to rule as per the Dharmashastra, Administrative reforms: Akbar introduced the mansabdari system, mansabdars were paid through jagirs, Religious policy: Akbar adopted a very liberal policy, abolished the jaziya and the pilgrimage tax, celebrated Hindu festivals like the Holi, Din-i-Ilahi: Akbar introduced Divine Monotheism, it underlined the essential unity of all religions, was accepted by very few.

Jahangir—He succeeded Akbar, lost Kandahar, patronized art, painting, architecture, European presence became dominant.

Shah Jahan—His accession to throne was not a smooth affair, quelled revolts, defeated the Portuguese, shifted the capital from Agra to Delhi, built the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal.

Aurangzeb—He ruled for a very long time, his reign witnessed numerous revolts, Maratha and Sikhs became powerful, reimposed the jaziya, it made Aurangzeb unpopular.

Causes for the Decline of the Mughals—Aurangzeb's responsibility, no law of primogeniture, weak successors, corrupt nobility, mansabdari crisis, inefficient army, jagirdari crisis, luxurious lifestyle of rulers and nobles depleted the treasury, invasions by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali.

Thank You