

The Zenith of the Mughal Empire During the Reign of Akbar the Great

Posted on March 26, 2018

Jalal-Ud-din Muhammad Akbar was the third Mughal ruler of the sub-continent. The advent of the Mughal rule in the sub-continent started when Zahir-UD-din Muhammad Babar won the decisive battle of Panipat on 21st April 1526, and he expanded his kingdom to the sub-continent. However, the Mughal rule was firmly entrenched in the sub-continent by Babar's grandson, Akbar. However, as fate would have it, Babar died only four years after establishing his vast empire in the sub-continent. According to some legendary versions, when Babar returned to Agra in 1530, he saw that his son Humayun was critically sick. He was advised by one of the court theologians that if Babar prayed to God to take his life, then God would spare Humayun's life (Ballhatchet).

Babur's legacy was passed to Humayun, who was less strategically and militarily genius than his father. Thus, most of Babur's empire was captured by Sher Shah Suri, an Afghan, in battle at Kanauj in 1540. Humayun had to run from Afghans and his brothers, and Akbar was born in Umarkot in 1542 when he was still on the run ("Akbar the Great"). Humayun failed to recover his father's empire from the Afghans, but Akbar achieved this task. Thus, he was given the title of Akbar the Great.

Akbar was looked after by Askari Mirza, Humayun's brother when Humayun was on the run. However, Askari Mirza considered Akbar a valuable hostage to threaten Humayun. In 1551, Akbar was reunited with his father, who appointed him governor of Kabul. Akbar became king of his father's domain at thirteen due to his sudden death. According to Ballhatchet, Akbar was born an intellectual despite being illiterate. Bahram Khan, a capable general in Humayun's army, [played a significant role in Akbar's military](#) and strategic leader training. Bahram Khan proclaimed Akbar the king after Humayun's death and marched with him to Delhi to reclaim their throne from a Hindu general named Hemu. Akbar could return to Kabul, the capital of his Central Asian Kingdom, or get the capital of the sub-continent empire back from Hemu. Akbar called a meeting of his loyal generals and decided to choose Delhi, which set the foundation of the Mughal Empire. Akbar reclaimed his empire in the sub-continent from Hemi at the Battle of Panipat in 1556, the same place where his grandfather had won first in the sub-continent thirty years ago.

Akbar was fourteen years old when he recovered the Mughal Empire from Hemu, though he stayed under the influence of his military teachers for another five years. Akbar faced opposition from three power centers in the Sub-continent, including Marathas in the southwest, Rajputs in the North, and Vijayanagar in the South. The most potent threat to Akbar's empire was from Rajputs, which he tackled by marrying a Rajput princess and making Rajputs his allies through this diplomatic marriage. The upper caste Hindus considered this marriage as a derogatory act as it was against the traditions and norms of their [caste system](#). Still, Akbar allowed his Hindu wife to practice her religion at his

palace freely and placed many Rajputs in government positions.

Akbar's permission to his Rajput wife to practice her religion manifests the secular outlook of his empire. Akbar was aware of the fact that most of his subjects were non-Muslims, so he organized a pluralistic system wherein he appointed Hindus along with Turks, Afghans, and Persians to prominent positions in his empire (Bose and Jalal 32). Raja Mansingh was one of Akbar's top military officers, and Raja Todar Mal was his revenue minister.

Metcalf and R. Metcalf wrote about Akbar's glorious expansion of the Mughal Empire, according to them "Akbar's half-century of rule established the [dynasty as an empire](#), brought about by conquests that moved the frontiers of Mughal control north of Kabul and Kashmir, east to Bengal and coastal Orissa, south to Gujarat and part of the Deccan and, most important of all, south-west from Delhi to Rajasthan" (15). Akbar's state policies were diverse and inclusive. His chief historian described Akbar as very curious and intellectual. He was very fond of Arts as well. Akbar tried to create harmony between different religions in the sub-continent by propagating din-e-Elahi, a new religion comprising practices of different faiths. To appease his Hindu subjects, he abolished the Jizya tax, which previous Muslim rulers imposed on non-Muslims in the sub-continent as an exemption from participation in the military. Akbar tried to understand the teachings of different religions. He invited preachers of various religions like Jains, Zoroastrians, and Jesuits, to his court for discussion and tried to learn from them. Some Muslim scholars considered him an apostate due to these reasons. However, Akbar was firm in conviction to learn from different sources.

Akbar is also praised for his administrative policies, which helped consolidate his power and strengthened the Mughal Empire. He awarded different ranks, called *mansabs*, to his nobles for efficient administration. Even the British Empire followed Akbar's administrative policies for effective management in the sub-continent. Hence, there is no wonder that Akbar earned the title of "Akbar the Great." The Mughal Empire was at its zenith during the rule of Akbar. Hindus remember him as the most generous and kind Muslim ruler due to his tolerance toward their religion. Mughal rule prevailed in sub-continent until the advent of the East India Company, which supplanted Mughal rule with British rule. The Mughal kings had become complacent with their vast empire and became indolent. On the other hand, the British were progressing due to their scientific and industrial revolutions. British acquired modern weapons which gave them an advantage over Mughal kings and they exiled the last Mughal king, Bahadur Shah Zafar to Burma when they formally proclaimed their rule in the sub-continent.

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