

The Mughal Empire

In India, the Mughal Empire was one of the greatest empires ever. The Mughal Empire ruled hundreds of millions of people. India became united under one rule, and had very prosperous cultural and political years during the Mughal rule. There were many Muslim and Hindu kingdoms split all throughout India until the founders of the Mughal Empire came. There were some men such as Babar, grandson to the Great Asian conqueror Tamerlane and the conqueror Genghis Khan from the northern region of Ganges, river valley, who decided to take over Khyber, and eventually, all of India.

Babar

The great grandson of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, was the first Mughal emperor in India. He confronted and defeated Lodhi in 1526 at the first battle of Panipat, and so came to establish the Mughal Empire in India. Babar ruled until 1530, and was succeeded by his son Humayun.

Humayun

The eldest son of Babar, succeeded his father and became the second emperor of the Mughal Empire. He ruled India for nearly a decade but was ousted by Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan ruler. Humayun wandered for about 15 years after his defeat. Meanwhile, Sher Shah Suri died and Humayun was able to defeat his successor, Sikandar Suri and regain his crown of the Hindustan. However, soon after, he died in 1556 at a young age of 48 years.

Sher Shah Suri

He was an Afghan leader who took over the Mughal Empire after defeating Humayun in 1540. Sher Shah occupied the throne of Delhi for not more than five years, but his reign proved to be a landmark in the Sub-continent. As a king, he has several achievements in his credit. He established an efficient public administration. He set up a revenue collection system based on the measurement of land. Justice was provided to the common man. Numerous civil works were carried out during his short reign; planting of trees, wells and building of Sarai (inns) for travellers was done. Roads were laid; it was under his rule that the Grand Trunk road from Delhi to Kabul was built. The currency was also changed to finely minted silver coins called Dam. However, Sher Shah did not survive long after his accession on the throne and died in 1545 after a short reign of five years.

Akbar

Humayun's heir, Akbar, was born in exile and was only 13 years old when his father died. Akbar's reign holds a certain prominence in history; he was the ruler who actually fortified the foundations of the Mughal Empire. After a series of conquests, he managed to subdue most of India. Areas not under the empire were designated as tributaries. He also adopted a conciliatory policy towards the Rajputs, hence reducing any threat from them. Akbar was not only a great conqueror, but a capable organizer and a great administrator as well. He set up a host of institutions that proved to be the foundation of an administrative system that operated even in British India. Akbar's rule also stands out due to his liberal policies towards the non-Muslims, his religious innovations, the land revenue system and his famous Mansabdari system. Akbar's Mansabdari system became the basis of Mughal military organization and civil administration. Akbar died in 1605, nearly 50 years after his ascension to the throne, and was buried outside of Agra at Sikandra. His son Jahangir then assumed the throne.

Jahangir

Akbar was succeeded by his son, Salim, who took the title of Jahangir, meaning "Conqueror of the World". He married Mehr-un-Nisa whom he gave the title of Nur Jahan (light of the world). He loved her with blind passion and handed over the complete reins of administration to her. He expanded the empire through the addition of Kangra and Kistwar and consolidated the Mughal rule in Bengal. Jahangir lacked the political enterprise of his father Akbar. But he was an honest man and a tolerant ruler. He strived to reform society and was tolerant towards Hindus, Christians and Jews. However, relations with Sikhs were strained, and the fifth of the ten Sikh gurus, Arjun Dev, was executed at Jahangir's orders for giving aid and comfort to Khusrau, Jahangir's rebellious son. Art, literature, and architecture prospered under Jahangir's rule, and the Mughal gardens in Srinagar remain an enduring testimony to his artistic taste. He died in 1627.

Shah Jahan

Jahangir was succeeded by his second son Khurram in 1628. Khurram took the name of Shah Jahan, i.e. the Emperor of the World. He further expanded his Empire to Kandhar in the north and conquered most of Southern India. The Mughal Empire was at its zenith during Shah Jahan's rule. This was due to almost 100 years of unparalleled prosperity and peace. As a result, during this reign, the world witnessed the unique development of arts and culture of the Mughal Empire. Shah Jahan has been called the "architect king". The Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, both in

Delhi, stand out as towering achievements of both civil engineering and art. Yet above all else, Shah Jahan is remembered today for the Taj Mahal, the massive white marble mausoleum constructed for his wife Mumtaz Mahal along the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra.

Aurangzeb

Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 and ruled supreme till 1707. Thus Aurangzeb ruled for 50 years, matching Akbar's reign in longevity. But unfortunately he kept his five sons away from the royal court with the result that none of them was trained in the art of government. This proved to be very damaging for the Mughals later on. During his 50 years of rule, Aurangzeb tried to fulfill his ambition of bringing the entire Sub-continent under one rule. It was under him that the Mughal Empire reached its peak in matter of area. He worked hard for years but his health broke down in the end. He left behind no personal wealth when he died in 1707, at the age of 90 years. With his death, the forces of disintegration set in and the mighty Mughal empire started collapsing.

Contribution in Arts and Architecture

The rule of Mughal Dynasty from the 16th to 18th century extensively displays art forms, architectural styles that developed vigorously around that time, portraying the amalgamation of styles of the Islamic world and India. The pattern and structures is subject of study till date. Some examples of these styles can be found in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Fort Building

Under the patronage of Mughal emperors, the architecture of forts and tombs saw a striking resemblance to Islamic architecture.

- Persian and Indian styles were intelligently fused to create the works of quality and precision.
- Placed in the walled garden enclosure the forts had distinct domes, sleek towers at corners with the magnificent halls in the center supported by pillars and broad entrances.
- Delicate ornamentation with arches, decorative sections with fine geometrical designs and inscriptions were major highlights.
- The forts had arrangements for soldier barracks, private and public halls for meetings, horse and elephant stables, and gardens at the entrance. An example of which is the Red Fort by Shah Jahan.
- Use of decorated colored tiles, painted designs on walls and ceiling, profusely carved doorways show the beautiful detailing and taste of the Emperors.
- Extensive use of red sandstone and white marbles is seen in all the buildings of that time.

Monuments

Some of the most famous buildings created during Mughal era are given below.

1. Taj Mahal – It was built by Shah Jahan between 1632 and 1653, in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recognized Taj Mahal as a World Heritage Site in 1983. It is located in Agra.
2. Red Fort – UNESCO designated it as the World Heritage Site in 2007. It was built by Shah Jahan, when he decided to move the capital from Agra to Delhi. It was the residence of Mughal rulers.
3. Shalimar Gardens – It is a 40 acre garden built by Shah Jahan in 1642. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1981.
4. Jama Masjid – Built by Shah Jahan. The construction was completed in 1656.
5. Badshahi Mosque – At the time of completion in 1673, it was the largest mosque in the world. It was built during the reign of Aurangzeb.
6. Humayun's Tomb – It was built in 1570 in memory of Emperor Humayun, it was declared as the world heritage site in 1993.
7. Buland Darwaza was built by Mughal Emperor Akbar, to commemorate his victory over Gujarat. It can be translated as Door to Victory. It was built in 1601 A.D and acts as entrance to the Jama Masjid at Fatehpur Sikri.

Building of Mausoleums

Mughal culture has seen several Mausoleums in the era like the Humayun tomb, Taj Mahal and others. The blend of artistic capacities with consciously envisioned structures highlights the features and details of these architectural masterpieces.

- The structure saw the Mughal influence with its pillars, beams and lintels and the blend of Indian architecture of Rajasthan with the decorative brackets, balconies, decorations and chatari or kiosk type structures.
- The entrance chamber dome is of a great height with detailing work with symmetrical designs on its inside.
- The arches at the upper center form balconies or viewing areas
- The entrance of the Mausoleums like the palaces, have an extensive green garden with walking passages and water courses.
- Arched lobbies connect the octagonal chambers inside the Mausoleums.
- Calligraphy on the walls, delicate plant motifs on the stone and the stones or marbles cut into delicate lattice give the monuments the most distinctive feature.
- Burial chambers employ the *Pietra Dura* or the technique of using cut polished stones to create images and twin Cenotaphs. Burials were placed in a manner that the head would face towards Mecca.

Development of Mughal Paintings

Patronizing their Persian painters, the Mughals took keen interest in paintings that reflected a collaboration of Indo-Persian synthesis. Originating from the time of Turkish-Afghan Delhi Sultanate, paintings prospered under the rule, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the Mughal Rulers. The art of Mughal painting flourished with the time and developed into realistic portraiture.

- Paintings of the Mughal Era depict a theme from fables of Persian literature and Hindu Mythology, which gradually changed to realistic subjects like portraits of the royalty, events and details of the court life, wild life and hunting scenes, and battle illustrations.
- Abundant use of bright colors highlight glory of the era and fine drawing with calligraphic text descriptions on the border enhance the appeal of the artwork.
- Humayun's exposure to Persian miniature painting compelled him to get along accomplished Persian artists, *Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad. Khamsa of Nizami*, his own commission has 36 illuminated pages, with different styles of various artists.
- Akbar inherited Humayun's library and court painters; he expanded the art by paying close personal attention to its output. Among the major art pieces of the time were *the Tutinama ("Tales of a Parrot")*, *The Gulistan*, *The Khamsa of Nizami*, *Darab Nama*, and *Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata*. Akbar hired many painters to develop and spread the Mughal style painting in the years 1570 AD to 1585 AD.
- Jahangir's artistic inclination developed the Mughal Paintings further and the oil paints began being used. He encouraged the single point perspective of European artists and paintings became focused on real life events. *The Jahangirnama*, his autobiography had several paintings.
- In Shah Jahan's reign the Mughal paintings developed but they were rigid with themes of lovers in intimate positions, musical parties etc

Development of Literature

Literature received a boon during the Mughal Period. From the important source books, this period also witnessed the growth in different languages like Persian, Hindi and also contributed to Bengali and Punjabi literature.

- From the 'Tuzak-i-Baburi' (Memories of Babur) in Turki and 'Humayunnama' the biography of Humayun written by Gulabadan Begum, the period witnessed extensive literature growth in Akbar's reign because of his tolerant attitude. 'Navratans' (Nine Jewels) the great literary figures of his court contributed a lot.
- Abul Fazal (historian, philosopher and scholar of the period) wrote the 'Akbarnama' and 'Ain-i-Akbari'. Badauni, wrote the 'Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh'. Nizam- ud-Din (noted historian) contributed with his work 'Tabaqat-i-Akbari' and the Hindu epics the Arthava Veda, the Ramayana, the Mahabharat were translated into Persian.
- Hindu poetry during the Mughal period was also significantly expanding as Akbar wholeheartedly patronized the Hindu poetry too. Sursagar by Sur Das, Ramcharitamanas by Tulsidas and the Persian-Sanskrit dictionary 'Parsi Prakash' were documented during this time.
- Jahangir's self written autobiography 'Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri' and other important literary works like 'Iqbalanam-i-Jahangir' and 'Masir-i-Jahangir' were written during the Era.
- Aurangzeb's reign saw the important work 'Fatwa-i-Alamgiri'—a summary of Muslim law. 'Muntakhab-ul '-a famous history by Khafi Khan and 'Nuskho-i- Dilkusha' by Bhimsen were other important works.

Conclusion: The Mughal Era has extensively contributed to a rich and admirable architectural, literary and cultural history to India.