The Mughal Empire in India

**MAIN IDEA**

**POWER AND AUTHORITY** The Mughal Empire brought Turks, Persians, and Indians together in a vast empire.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW**

The legacy of great art and deep social division left by the Mughal Empire still influences southern Asia.

**TERMS & NAMES**

• Mughal
• Babur
• Akbar
• Sikh
• Shah Jahan
• Taj Mahal
• Aurangzeb

**SETTING THE STAGE**

The Gupta Empire, which you read about in Chapter 7, crumbled in the late 400s. First, Huns from Central Asia invaded. Then, beginning in the 700’s, warlike Muslim tribes from Central Asia carved northwestern India into many small kingdoms. The people who invaded descended from Muslim Turks and Afghans. Their leader was a descendant of Timur the Lame and of the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan. They called themselves **Mughals**, which means “Mongols.” The land they invaded had been through a long period of turmoil.

**Early History of the Mughals**

The 8th century began with a long clash between Hindus and Muslims in this land of many kingdoms. For almost 300 years, the Muslims were able to advance only as far as the Indus River valley. Starting around the year 1000, however, well-trained Turkish armies swept into India. Led by Sultan Mahmud (muh•MOOD) of Ghazni, they devastated Indian cities and temples in 17 brutal campaigns. These attacks left the region weakened and vulnerable to other conquerors. Delhi eventually became the capital of a loose empire of Turkish warlords called the Delhi Sultanate. These sultans treated the Hindus as conquered people.

**Delhi Sultanate** Between the 13th and 16th centuries, 33 different sultans ruled this divided territory from their seat in Delhi. In 1398, Timur the Lame destroyed Delhi. The city was so completely devastated that according to one witness, “for months, not a bird moved in the city.” Delhi eventually was rebuilt. But it was not until the 16th century that a leader arose who would unify the empire.

**Babur Founds an Empire** In 1494, an 11-year-old boy named **Babur** inherited a kingdom in the area that is now Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It was only a tiny kingdom, and his elders soon took it away and drove him south. But Babur built up an army. In the years that followed, he swept down into India and laid the foundation for the vast Mughal Empire.

Babur was a brilliant general. In 1526, for example, he led 12,000 troops to victory against an army of 100,000 commanded by a sultan of Delhi. A year later, Babur also defeated a massive rajput army. After Babur’s death, his incompetent son, Humayun, lost most of the territory Babur had gained. Babur’s 13-year-old grandson took over the throne after Humayun’s death.
Akbar’s Golden Age

Babur’s grandson was called Akbar, which means “Great.” Akbar certainly lived up to his name, ruling India with wisdom and tolerance from 1556 to 1605.

A Military Conqueror Akbar recognized military power as the root of his strength. In his opinion, a King must always be aggressive so that his neighbors will not try to conquer him.

Like the Safavids and the Ottomans, Akbar equipped his armies with heavy artillery. Cannons enabled him to break into walled cities and extend his rule into much of the Deccan plateau. In a brilliant move, he appointed some rajputs as officers. In this way he turned potential enemies into allies. This combination of military power and political wisdom enabled Akbar to unify a land of at least 100 million people—more than in all of Europe put together.

A Liberal Ruler Akbar was a genius at cultural blending. A Muslim, he continued the Islamic tradition of religious freedom. He permitted people of other religions to practice their faiths. He proved his tolerance by marrying Hindu princesses without forcing them to convert. He allowed his wives to practice their religious rituals in the palace. He proved his tolerance again by abolishing both the tax on Hindu pilgrims and the hated jizya, or tax on non-Muslims. He even appointed a Spanish Jesuit to tutor his second son.

Akbar governed through a bureaucracy of officials. Natives and foreigners, Hindus and Muslims, could all rise to high office. This approach contributed to the quality of his government. Akbar’s chief finance minister, Todar Mal, a Hindu, created a clever—and effective—taxation policy. He levied a tax similar to the present-day U.S. graduated income tax, calculating it as a percentage of the value of the peasants’ crops. Because this tax was fair and affordable, the number of peasants who paid it increased. This payment brought in much needed money for the empire.

Akbar’s land policies had more mixed results. He gave generous land grants to his bureaucrats. After they died, however, he reclaimed the lands and distributed them as he saw fit. On the positive side, this policy prevented the growth of feudal aristocracies. On the other hand, it did not encourage dedication and hard work by the Mughal officials. Their children would not inherit the land or benefit from their parents’ work. So the officials apparently saw no point in devoting themselves to their property.
**History Makers**

**Akbar**

1542–1605

Akbar was brilliant and curious, especially about religion. He even invented a religion of his own—the “Divine Faith”—after learning about Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Sufism. The religion attracted few followers, however, and offended Muslims so much that they attempted a brief revolt against Akbar in 1581. When he died, so did the “Divine Faith.”

Surprisingly, despite his wisdom and his achievements, Akbar could not read. He hired others to read to him from his library of 24,000 books.

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**Blended Cultures**  As Akbar extended the Mughal Empire, he welcomed influences from the many cultures in the empire. This cultural blending affected art, education, politics, and language. Persian was the language of Akbar’s court and of high culture. The common people, however, spoke Hindi, a language derived from Sanskrit. Hindi remains one of the most widely spoken languages in India today. Out of the Mughal armies, where soldiers of many backgrounds rubbed shoulders, came yet another new language. This language was Urdu, which means “from the soldier’s camp.” A blend of Arabic, Persian, and Hindi, Urdu is today the official language of Pakistan.

**The Arts and Literature**  The arts flourished at the Mughal court, especially in the form of book illustrations. These small, highly detailed, and colorful paintings were called miniatures. They were brought to a peak of perfection in the Safavid Empire. (See Section 2.) Babur’s son, Humayun, brought two masters of this art to his court to teach it to the Mughals. Some of the most famous Mughal miniatures adorned the Akbarnamah (“Book of Akbar”), the story of the great emperor’s campaigns and deeds. Indian art drew from traditions developed earlier in Rajput kingdoms. Hindu literature also enjoyed a revival in Akbar’s time. The poet Tulsi Das, for example, was a contemporary of Akbar’s. He retold the epic love story of Rama and Sita from the fourth century B.C. Indian poem the Ramayana (rah•MAH•yuh•nuh) in Hindi. This retelling, the Ramcaritmanas, is now even more popular than the original.

**Architecture**  Akbar devoted himself to architecture too. The style developed under his reign is still known as Akbar period architecture. Its massive but graceful structures are decorated with intricate stonework that portrays Hindu themes. The capital city of Fatehpur Sikri is one of the most important examples of this type of architecture. Akbar had this red-sandstone city built to thank a Sufi saint, Sheik Salim Chisti, who had predicted the birth of his first son.

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**Akbar’s Successors**

With Akbar’s death in 1605, the Mughal court changed to deal with the changing times. The next three emperors each left his mark on the Mughal Empire.

**Jahangir and Nur Jahan**  Akbar’s son called himself Jahangir (juh•hahn•GEER), or “Grasper of the World.” However, for most of his reign, he left the affairs of state to his wife, who ruled with an iron hand.

Jahangir’s wife was the Persian princess Nur Jahan. She was a brilliant politician who perfectly understood the use of power. As the real ruler of India, she installed her father as prime minister in the Mughal court. She saw Jahangir’s son Khusrau as her ticket to future power. But when Khusrau rebelled against his father, Nur Jahan removed him. She then shifted her favor to another son.

This rejection of Khusrau affected more than the political future of the empire. It was also the basis of a long and bitter religious conflict. Jahangir tried to promote Islam in the Mughal state, but was tolerant of other religions. When Khusrau...
rebelled, he turned to the Sikhs. This was a nonviolent religious group whose doctrines contained elements similar to Hinduism and Sufism (Islamic mysticism). However, the Sikhs see themselves as an independent tradition and not an offshoot of another religion. Their leader, Guru Arjun, sheltered Khusrau and defended him. In response, the Mughal rulers had Arjun arrested and tortured to death. The Sikhs became the target of the Mughals’ particular hatred.

Shah Jahan  Jahangir’s son and successor, Shah Jahan, could not tolerate competition and secured his throne by assassinating all his possible rivals. He had a great passion for two things: beautiful buildings and his wife Mumtaz Mahal (moom•TAHZ mah•HAHL). Nur Jahan had arranged this marriage between Jahangir’s son and her niece for political reasons. Shah Jahan, however, fell genuinely in love with his Persian princess.

In 1631, Mumtaz Mahal died at age 39 while giving birth to her 14th child. To enshrine his wife’s memory, he ordered that a tomb be built “as beautiful as she was beautiful.” Fine white marble and fabulous jewels were gathered from many parts of Asia. This memorial, the Taj Mahal, has been called one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. Its towering marble dome and slender minaret towers look like lace and seem to change color as the sun moves across the sky.

The People Suffer  But while Shah Jahan was building gardens, monuments, and forts, his country was suffering. There was famine in the land. Furthermore, farmers needed tools, roads, and ways of irrigating their crops and dealing with India’s harsh environment. What they got instead were taxes and more taxes to support the building of monuments, their rulers’ extravagant living, and war.

Connect to Today

Women Leaders of the Indian Subcontinent

Since World War II, the subcontinent of India has seen the rise of several powerful women. Unlike Nur Jahan, however, they achieved power on their own—not through their husbands.

Indira Gandhi headed the Congress Party and dominated Indian politics for almost 30 years. She was elected prime minister in 1966 and again in 1980. Gandhi was assassinated in 1984 by Sikh separatists.

Benazir Bhutto took charge of the Pakistan People’s Party after her father was assassinated. She became prime minister in 1988, the first woman to run a modern Muslim state. Reelected in 1993, she was dismissed from office in 1996 and went into exile.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga is the president of Sri Lanka. She was elected in 1994. She survived an assassination attempt in 1999 and was reelected.

Khaleda Zia became Bangladesh’s first woman prime minister in 1991. She was reelected several times, the last time in 2001. She made progress in empowering women and girls in her nation.

Pratibha Patil, elected in 2007, is India’s first female president.
All was not well in the royal court either. When Shah Jahan became ill in 1657, his four sons scrambled for the throne. The third son, Aurangzeb (AWR•uhng•zehb), moved first and most decisively. In a bitter civil war, he executed his older brother, who was his most serious rival. Then he arrested his father and put him in prison, where he died several years later. After Shah Jahan’s death, a mirror was found in his room, angled so that he could look out at the reflection of the Taj Mahal.

Aurangzeb’s Reign A master at military strategy and an aggressive empire builder, Aurangzeb ruled from 1658 to 1707. He expanded the Mughal holdings to their greatest size. However, the power of the empire weakened during his reign. This loss of power was due largely to Aurangzeb’s oppression of the people. He rigidly enforced Islamic laws, outlawing drinking, gambling, and other activities viewed as vices. He appointed censors to police his subjects’ morals and make sure they prayed at the appointed times. He also tried to erase all the gains Hindus had made under Akbar. For example, he brought back the hated tax on non-Muslims and dismissed Hindus from high positions in his government. He banned the construction of new temples and had Hindu monuments destroyed. Not surprisingly, these actions outraged the Hindus.
The Hindu rajputs, whom Akbar had converted from potential enemies to allies, rebelled. Aurangzeb defeated them repeatedly, but never completely. In the southwest, a Hindu warrior community called Marathas founded their own state. Aurangzeb captured their leader but could never conquer them. Meanwhile, the Sikhs transformed themselves into a brotherhood of warriors. They began building a state in the Punjab, an area in northwest India.

Aurangzeb levied oppressive taxes to pay for the wars against the increasing numbers of enemies. He had done away with all taxes not authorized by Islamic law, so he doubled the taxes on Hindu merchants. This increased tax burden deepened the Hindus’ bitterness and led to further rebellion. As a result, Aurangzeb needed to raise more money to increase his army. The more territory he conquered, the more desperate his situation became.

The Empire’s Decline and Decay

By the end of Aurangzeb’s reign, he had drained the empire of its resources. Over 2 million people died in a famine while Aurangzeb was away waging war. Most of his subjects felt little or no loyalty to him.

As the power of the central state weakened, the power of local lords grew. After Aurangzeb’s death, his sons fought a war of succession. In fact, three emperors reigned in the first 12 years after Aurangzeb died. By the end of this period, the Mughal emperor was nothing but a wealthy figurehead. He ruled not a united empire but a patchwork of independent states.

As the Mughal Empire rose and fell, Western traders slowly built their own power in the region. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach India. In fact, they arrived just before Babur did. Next came the Dutch, who in turn gave way to the French and the English. However, the great Mughal emperors did not feel threatened by the European traders. In 1661, Aurangzeb casually handed them the port of Bombay. Aurangzeb had no idea that he had given India’s next conquerors their first foothold in a future empire.
Cultural Blending in Mughal India

As you have read, Mughal India enjoyed a golden age under Akbar. Part of Akbar’s success—and indeed, the success of the Mughals—came from his religious tolerance. India’s population was largely Hindu, and the incoming Mughal rulers were Muslim. The Mughal emperors encouraged the blending of cultures to create a united India.

This cultural integration can be seen in the art of Mughal India. Muslim artists focused heavily on art with ornate patterns of flowers and leaves, called arabesque or geometric patterns. Hindu artists created naturalistic and often ornate artworks. These two artistic traditions came together and created a style unique to Mughal India. As you can see, the artistic collaboration covered a wide range of art forms.

**Decorative Arts**

Decorative work on items from dagger handles to pottery exhibits the same cultural blending as other Mughal art forms. This dagger handle shows some of the floral and geometric elements common in Muslim art, but the realistic depiction of the horse comes out of the Hindu tradition.

**Architecture**

Mughal emperors brought to India a strong Muslim architectural tradition. Indian artisans were extremely talented with local building materials—specifically, marble and sandstone. Together, they created some of the most striking and enduring architecture in the world, like Humayun’s Tomb shown here.
Painting
Mughal painting was largely a product of the royal court. Persian artists brought to court by Mughal emperors had a strong influence, but Mughal artists quickly developed their own characteristics. The Mughal style kept aspects of the Persian influence—particularly the flat aerial perspective. But, as seen in this colorful painting, the Indian artists incorporated more naturalism and detail from the world around them.

Fabrics
Mughal fabrics included geometric patterns found in Persian designs, but Mughal weavers, like other Mughal artisans, also produced original designs. Themes that were common in Mughal fabrics were landscapes, animal chases, floral latticeworks, and central flowering plants like the one on this tent hanging.

Connect to Today
1. Clarifying What does the art suggest about the culture of Mughal India?  

2. Forming and Supporting Opinions 
What are some modern examples of cultural blending in art? What elements of each culture are represented in the artwork? Consider other art forms, such as music and literature, as well.
Akbar
by Father Monserrate

Akbar, who ruled the Mughal Empire for nearly 50 years, was remarkable for his attempts to promote religious tolerance. By demonstrating acceptance of many religions, he hoped to establish peace between his Muslim and Hindu subjects. Father Antonio Monserrate, a Catholic missionary from Portugal, visited Akbar’s court for a few years. Think about Father Monserrate’s impressions of Akbar as you read his first-hand account.

This Prince [Akbar] is of a stature and of a type of countenance well-fitted to his royal dignity, so that one could easily recognise, even at the first glance, that he is the King. He has broad shoulders, somewhat bandy legs well-suited for horsemanship, and a light-brown complexion. He carries his head bent towards the right shoulder. His forehead is broad and open, his eyes so bright and flashing that they seem like a sea shimmering in the sunlight. This contrary to the custom of his race he does not cut his hair; nor does he wear a hat, but a turban, into which he gathers up his hair. He does this, they say, as a concession to Indian usages, and to please his Indian subjects. He limps in his left leg, though indeed he has never received any injury there. His body is exceedingly well-built and is neither too thin nor too stout. He is sturdy, hearty and robust. When he laughs, his face becomes almost distorted. His expression is tranquil, serene and open, full also of dignity, and when he is angry, of awful majesty. It is hard to exaggerate how accessible he makes himself to all who wish audience of him. For he creates an opportunity almost every day for any of the common people or of the nobles to see him and converse with him; and he endeavours to show himself pleasant-spoken and affable rather than severe toward all who come to speak with him. It is very remarkable how great an effect this courtesy and affability has in attaching to him the minds of his subjects. For in spite of his very heterodox [against accepted beliefs of a particular religion] attitude towards the religion of Muhammad, and in spite also of the fact that Musalmans [muslims] regard such an attitude as an unforgivable offence, . . . Akbar . . . has not yet been assassinated. He has an acute insight, and shows much wise foresight both in avoiding dangers and in seizing favourable opportunities for carrying out his designs. Yet all these fine qualities both of body and mind lose the greater part of their splendour because the lustre of the True Faith is lacking . . .

He is a great patron of learning, and always keeps around him erudite men, who are directed to discuss before him philosophy, theology, and religion, and to recount to him the history of great kings and glorious deeds of the past. He has an excellent judgment and a good memory, and has attained to a considerable knowledge of many subjects by means of constant and patient listening to such discussions. Thus he . . . makes up for his ignorance of letters (for he is entirely unable either to read or write). . . . He can give his opinion on any question so shrewdly and keenly, that no one who did not know that he is illiterate would suppose him to be anything but very learned and erudite . . .

countenance (n) - appearance
bandy (adj.) - bow-legged
serene (adj.) - peaceful
affable (adj.) - friendly
affability (n) - friendliness
acute (adj.) - keen; insightful
design (n) - plan; program
lustre (n) - shine; glow
erudite (adj.) - learned or scholarly
HOMEWORK TO ACCOMPANY MUGHAL READING FROM TEXTBOOK

NAME:___________________________________________________________   PER. _______

1. Which Mughal emperors had a positive effect on the empire? Which had a negative effect. Explain your answer.

2. How did Akbar demonstrate tolerance in his empire?

3. What pattern can you see in the ways individuals came to power in the Mughal Empire?

4. Was Akbar “Great”? Explain your answer.

5. Why were Akbar’s tax policies so successful?

6. Why was Nur Jahan able to hold so much power in Jahangir’s court?

7. Why were the policies of Aurangzeb so destructive to the Mughal Empire?
1. Why does Akbar dress like a Hindu?

2. How does Akbar act when meeting with his subjects?

3. Why has Akbar offended some Muslims, according to Father Monserrate?

4. What does the author mean when states that “the lustre of the True Faith is lacking” in Akbar?

5. Why does Akbar surround himself with men of learning and religious knowledge?