

AKBAR AND CONSOLIDATION OF MUGHAL EMPIRE

Jalauddin Muhammad Akbar (1542-1605)



Although Babur introduced Mughal rule in India, he cannot be regarded as the true founder of the Mughal Empire. Babur left for his son an empire without any stronghold, structure less and invertebrate. He was not gifted with that consummate political genius which enabled his grandson to establish an empire remarkable for strength, homogeneity and efflorescence of culture.

Jalauddin Muhammad Akbar was born to Humayun by Hamida Banu on October 15, 1542 in Sind, while Humayun was on exile from the Delhi throne. Humayun recovered shortly before his death in 1556. When he died, Akbar was proclaimed Emperor on 14th February, 1556 by Bairam Khan (his regent

Akbar had an unhappy childhood since his father was a refugee Emperor when he was born. From the time he was young, he was more

interested in martial arts and sports than in studies. His tutors failed to teach him reading and writing and had been written by historians all over that he remain illiterate. When Akbar came to the throne, his father had left for him an infant Mughal empire, fully surrounded by enemies. In fact, only a part of the Punjab was under the actual control of the minor 'Padshah' and his guardian.

Consolidation of Empire

The expansion of Akbar was brought about after he had dealt with some major problems that he faced within his kingdom and inside his court and outside his kingdom. Those problems include:-

- **Hemu and the second Battle of Panipat, 1526**

Hemu was an Afghan general who had taken the name of Vikramaditya and who proclaimed himself as the king of Delhi. He fought the II Battle of Panipat with Akbar on 5th November, 1556. In the field, he fought bravely and at one stage he seemed to be on the point of winning but he was suddenly struck by an arrow in the eye and lost consciousness. His troops fled in panic and he was later captured and beheaded by the Mughal Emperor (Akbar). Hemu's death doomed the Afghan cause and the victors occupied Agra and Delhi.

- **Nobles in the Court**

Akbar faced problems to assert his authority in the court. Most of the nobles were much older than Akbar and they were not willing to accept him. However, later Akbar proclaimed his authority over them and any rebellion was suppressed.

- **Bairam Khan**

Bairam Khan's service and devotion to Humayun earned for him as Akbar's guardian. But as a guardian he later became too powerful. He

was coming to an age where he can assert his own authority. Akbar himself had his grievances for he had no privy purse and his household was not as richly provided as the family and dependants of Bairam Kahn. In 1560, Bairam Khan was advised to go to Mecca to which he complied. On his way, he was killed at Anhilwara Patan in Gujarat by an Afghan to satisfy his private revenge (1561). Akbar was not happy with Gujarat and brought arms against them. Though he was not happy with Bairam becoming too powerful, he regarded him as his guardian. He even adopted Bairam's son as his own son (Abdul Rahim) and gave him the title, Khan-i- Khanan. Thus Bairams' problem was quelled.

- **Harem's Party**

The fall of Bairam Khan did not immediately establish Akbar's personal control over the administration. Maham Anaga (Akbar's nurse) and her party tried to be dominant over Akbar's administration. But later on, they were suppressed and Akbar secured for himself complete freedom from the influence of his relatives.

Beginning of Personal Rule and Expansion

Akbar's personal rule began in 1526. He became master in his own house in his 28th year. Between 1526 and 1564, the new ruler displayed his enlightened spirit through the introduction of three reforms. The first was the abolition of the old practice of reducing the prisoners of war to slavery. The second one was the abolition of 'Pilgrim tax' throughout his dominions. Third was the abolition of *Jizyah* or religious tax.

Policy of conquest: Akbar said "A Monarch should be ever intent on conquests, otherwise his neighbours rise against him". He also wanted to keep his army engaged in conquests. From the expedition against Malwa (1561) to the fall of Asirgarh (1601)-during a period of forty

years-he played the role of conqueror and reaped a rich reward in the establishment of a vast empire. It was only through war and conquest that political unity could be restored in the country.

The initial phase of conquests began during the regency of Bairam Khan and during the period of Harem's party's rule. Gwalior, Ajmer and Jaunpur were occupied during this time.

Later on he moved his conquests over the Rajput states. His first victory in Rajputana was won without bloodshed. Raja Bhar Mal of Amber submitted to him without fighting and offered his daughter's hand to Akbar (mother of Jahangir). His son Man Singh rose in Mughal Service in military and in political affairs.

Merta, Bikaner, Ranthambor, all submitted to Akbar; only Mewar did not submit to Akbar. Rana Udai Singh guarded his strong Chittor fort and remained adamant. At last after a strong siege, Chittor was captured by Akbar in 1568. However, Udai Singh's son Pratap Singh rose against Akbar in 1572-97. Later on, he suffered a crushing defeat in the battle of Haldighat in June 1576 but the Rana did not submit. In fact, Chittor was never crushed properly.

Gujarat, Bihar Bengal and Orissa also came under him.

In the north-west, Kabul was placed under his brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim. This place went for rebellion against Akbar. But this rebellion was quelled. Akbar's survival in the crisis of 1581 gave Akbar an absolutely free hand for the rest of his life and maybe regarded as the climax of his career. The incorporation of Kabul in the empire made it necessary for Akbar to establish effective control over the tribal areas lying between the Punjab and Afghanistan. Birbal, Akbar's Jewel was killed in one of these Afghan's expedition.

Kashmir, Sind, Baluchistan, Kandahar, all came under Akbar. But the far south Indian areas remained out of his touch, presumably because it was far away from the center of his political power.

The most important of all the conquest of Akbar was perhaps the conquest of Rajputs. Instead of trying to crush the Rajputs as the Sultans of Delhi had done, this great and far-sighted ruler converted them into the pillars of his empire. Historian Tod describes Akbar as 'the first successful conqueror of Rajput independence'. The capture of Asirgarh marked the climax of Akbar's career of conquest. One can thus say that by the year 1600, Akbar had brought under his control almost the whole of Indian sub-continent from Kabul in the west to Bengal in the east, from Kashmir in the North to Khandesh in the South.

His last years were clouded by misfortunes. His eldest son, prince Salim (later known as Jahangir), broke into rebellion and set himself up as an independent ruler at Allahabad. Many more confusions followed. But as noted above, Akbar laid the real and great foundation of Mughal Empire. It was through him that the infant Mughal Empire grew into the greatest Empire ever seen in India. The aged Emperor died on 17th October, 1605.