

Expansion of Mughal Empire from Akbar to Aurangzeb

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ABSTRACT

The core philosophy of Akbar and his successors up to Aurangzeb was to expand the power of the Mughals over the entire subcontinent and to deepen their administrative control over the rural and urban subjects by a wise and liberal policy of integration. The present study has been carried out to study the territorial expansion from Akbar to Aurangzeb. For this purpose the researcher has followed the secondary sources of information in terms of different books, journals and internet sources. The study concludes that along with conquests, the process of consolidation was also initiated. As a result, the conquered territories were placed under a unified administrative system. The consolidated Empire created by Akbar was maintained with a measure of success by his successors for more than hundred years.

KEYWORDS: Bengal Territory, Akbar's Administrative, Mughal Empire

INTRODUCTION

It is their success in the second battle of Panipat in the year 1556 that provided secure space for the Mughals in India. Since 1556 to 1707, the Mughals, "the professional kings" strictly followed the dictum of the earlier Hindu and Muslim rulers of the past that "a monarch should ever be intent on conquest, otherwise his enemies rise in arms against him".

Babur founded the Mughal Empire in India in AD 1526 after his success in the first battle of Panipat. But after the sudden demise of Babur in 1530 and in between before the accession of Akbar in AD 1556, the Mughals had to struggle hard to retain their hold in India and in their effort they failed against the determined Afghans and the Rajputs. By the time Akbar ascended the throne in 1556 to claim his right; the Mughals were at their lowest ebb of prestige.

The core philosophy of Akbar and his successors up to Aurangzeb was to expand the power of the Mughals over the entire subcontinent and to deepen their administrative control over the rural and urban subjects by a wise and liberal policy of integration. As John Fleet Richards observes, the dynamism of the Mughals was at its core military

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and the Mughal Empire was a war state. What J.F. Richards holds appears to be true.

Yet the Mughals not only expanded their territorial extent by wars and conquests, they also devised administrative measures to consolidate themselves as rulers by winning the loyalty of their subjects. In the following pages, let us treat the twin policies of expansion and consolidation followed by Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb till 1707 along with diplomatic tactics adopted by them.

Statement of the Problem:

After overcoming initial problems and consolidating his hold on the throne, Akbar started a policy of extending Mughal territories. Any policy of expansion meant conflict with various political powers spread in different parts of the country. Akbar through a systematic policy started the task of expanding his Empire. It must be noted that the major expansion of Mughal Empire took place during the reign of Akbar. During the reigns of his successors (Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb), very little was added in terms of territory. The main additions in the later period were made during Aurangzeb's reign in South India and North-East (Assam). Keeping in mind with

this view the researcher has stated the problem as “Expansion of Mughal Empire from Akbar to Aurangzeb”.

Objectives of the Study: The present study has been carried out with the following objectives-

- To study the territorial expansion under the Mughal Ruler Akbar.
- To discuss the expansion of Mughal Empire under Jahangir.
- To study the territorial expansion under the Mughal Ruler Shahjahan.
- To discuss the expansion of Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb.

Akbar's Conquest of India

The first stage of the conquest began in 1561 and the target area was the Bengal territory. The first city to fall to the Mughals was the city of Malwa which was ruled by a Hindu king. The fall of Malwa prompted another Hindu kingnamely Raja Amber to extend a hand of friendship and cooperation, bowing to the rule of the Mughals. It was purposely done to avoid his kingdom from having the same fate as Malwa (Pandey 1963). Akbar then proceeded to wage war against Rani Durgavati, ruler of the Gondwana province in 1564 in the district of Jabalpur. The Mughal army, under the command of the governor of Kara, Asaf Khan, scored another victory killing Rani Durgavati and Raja Bir Narayan. The conquest of Gondwana opened a way for Akbar to extend his conquest to the city of Chittor, the capital of Mewar. Prior to that, Akbar successfully quelled a rebellion led by Mirza Khan in Punjab, Khan Abdullah Uzbek in Malwa and Khan Zaman Uzbek in Juanpur. Fresh from his victory over the rebels, Akbar marched to Chittor to battle the Hindu Rajput armies who were defending their forts. In 1568, Akbar's men conquered Chittor even though it was said that the Hindu army's defence was among the most formidable at that time (De Laet 1974). After that, Akbar furthered his military expedition to Rajashtan in his effort to conquer Ranthambor. In 1569, Akbar captured the city destroying the palace of Raja Chauhan in the battle (Bakar 1994).

Akbar's siege of Chittor and Ranthambor were a strong blow to the Rajput armies. Raja Ramchandra who ruled Kalinjar voluntarily surrendered his city to Akbar in 1569. In 1572, Akbar continued his militaric mission to Gujerat which was renowned for its ports. Among the important ports in Gujerat were Broach, Cambay and Surat. Gujerat was also a fertile land and rich in agricultural produce. Akbar's assault on Gujerat was unopposed as the ruler of Gujerat, Muzaffar Shah, has fled prior to the attack. The fall of Gujerat contributed greatly to the economy of the

Mughal Empire to an extent that Akbar had to establish a special tax collection department specific for the administration of revenues of the Gujerat territory (Bakar 1994).

In 1574, Akbar headed for Bengal using a naval route. Akbar's tactics was absolutely unexpected by ruler of Bengal, Daud Khan who assumed that the emperor was not keen on maritime activities. Akbar's charge was however a reaction to Daud Khan's severing of ties with the Mughals and his self-proclamation of sultan. Moreover, Daud Khan tried to conquer several territories controlled by the Rajputs. Once again, Akbar's assault on Bengal was unopposed as Daud Khan fled earlier on. Akbar then appointed Mun'im Khan as the Governor of Bengal and he returned to Fatehpur Sikri (Bakar 2000).

Akbar then marched his army towards Northern India. In July 1585, Akbar tamed Kabul and now was plotting his plans to subdue other regions such as Sind, Kandahar and Kashmir. His operation to the north was a success after conquering wealthy regions such as Swat, Bajaur and Buner. Kashmir fell to the hands of Akbar in 1586 followed by Sind in 1590. In 1595, the Mughals captured Baluchistan and Kandahar. The Mughals' successful operation of conquering northern India elevated Akbar's position as a great ruler feared by his contemporaries (Bakar 2000)

Mughal expansion under Jahangir

- The main achievement of Jahangir was the settlement of the outstanding dispute with Mewar. In c. 1615 CE, Amar Singh of Mewar (son of Maharana Pratap) submitted before Jahangir. Rana's son, Karan Singh was made mansabdar with the rank of 5000, which had earlier been accorded to the rulers of Jodhpur, Bikaner and Amber. Thus, Jahangir completed the task begun by Akbar, and further strengthened the alliance with the Rajputs.
- With the help of Maratha sardars, Khan-i-Khanan inflicted a crushing defeat on the combined forces of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda in c. 1616 CE. This defeat shook the Deccani alliance against the Mughals.
- Jahangir was the first Muslim ruler to annex Kangra (in c. 1620 CE).
- In c. 1622 CE, Mughals lost Qandahar and was captured by Shah Abbas of Persia.
- Jahangir tried to follow an expansionist policy in the Deccan, however, he achieved little success. This was mainly due to Malik Ambar, who led the Deccani struggle against the Mughals. Malik

Ambar with the help of the Marathas and Ibrahim Adil Shah, ruler of Bijapur, made it difficult for the Mughals to consolidate their position in Berar, Ahmednagar and Balaghat.

- During Jahangir's reign, conflict arose in the east. In c. 1608 CE, Jahangir sent Islam Khan, the grandson of Sheikh Salim Chisti (famous Sufi saint) to Bengal. Islam Khan handled the revolt with great energy and foresight. He defeated the Afghan rebels and thus Mughal power was firmly established in East Bengal.

Shah Jahan

As a ruler, Shah Jahan's first concern was to recover the territories in the Deccan which had been lost to the Nizam Shahi ruler. He deputed Khan-i-Jahan Lodhi for this purpose but he failed and he was recalled to the court. Soon, Khan-i-Jahan Lodhi joined the Nizam Shahi ruler. This infuriated Shah Jahan and he decided to follow an aggressive policy to recover lost territories of the Deccan. His Deccan policy was more successful than Akbar and Jahangir. After ascertaining the facts, he came to the conclusion that there could be no peace for the Mughals in the Deccan as long as Ahmednagar continued as an independent state. He successfully isolated Ahmednagar by winning over Bijapur and the Marathas. Fath Khan, the son of Malik Ambar, also joined the Mughals and Shah Jahan appointed Mahbat Khan as Mughal viceroy of Deccan. But the conflict with the Deccan states continued and finally, in c. 1636 CE, ahdnama (treaties) were signed with Bijapur and Golconda.

- According to the agreement with Bijapur, Adil Shah agreed to recognise the Mughal suzerainty, to pay an indemnity of twenty lakh rupees and to not interfere in the affairs of Golconda which was brought under Mughal protection. Any dispute between Bijapur and Golconda was to be referred to the Mughal emperor for arbitration. Adil Shah also agreed to cooperate with the Mughals in reducing Shahji to submission.
- Shah Jahan completed the settlement of the Deccan by entering into a treaty with Golconda as well. The ruler agreed to include the name of Shah Jahan in the khutba and to exclude the name of the Iranian emperor from it. Qutb Shah took an oath of loyalty towards the Mughal emperor. The annual tribute of four lakh huns which Golconda was previously paying to Bijapur was remitted, instead, Golconda was required to pay two lakh huns annually to the Mughal emperor.
- In the decade following the ahdnama of c. 1636 CE, Bijapur and Golconda overran the rich and

fertile land of Karnataka, from the river Krishna to Tanjore and beyond. In a short span of time, the territories of these two states were more than doubled and they reached the climax of their power and prosperity. However, rapid expansion weakened the internal cohesion these states had. Ambitious nobles such as Shahji and his son Shivaji, in Bijapur and Mir Jumla, the legendary noble of Golconda started carving out spheres of influence for themselves and this again led to the conflicting atmosphere in the Deccan. The Mughals demanded a price for their benevolent neutrality during the expansionist policy of these states. In c. 1656 CE following the death of Muhammad Adil Shah, treaties were ignored. Shah Jahan asked his son, Aurangzeb, to conquer and annex the territories of the Deccan kingdom.

- In c. 1632 CE, Shah Jahan defeated the Portuguese near Hugli due to regular abuse of trading privileges by them.
- Shah Jahan captured Qandahar (in c. 1639 CE) and fortified it, but Persia wrestled Qandahar from the Mughals. Shah Jahan launched a prolonged campaign in the northwest frontier to recover Qandahar and other ancestral lands. However, realising the futility of his ambition, he stopped fighting and Qandahar became a permanent loss for the Mughals.

Aurangzeb

Aurangzeb was one of the ablest of the Mughal kings. He assumed the title "Alamgir" (world conqueror). Aurangzeb ruled for almost 50 years and during his long reign, the Mughal Empire reached its territorial climax. It stretched from Kashmir in the north to Jingi in the south and from Hindukush in the west to Chittagong in the east.

- North-East Conquest - In c. 1662 CE, Mir Jumla, the governor of Bengal led the expedition against the Ahoms. He penetrated up to the limit of the Ahom kingdom, and forced the Ahom king to sign a favourable treaty (c. 1663 CE). Mir Jumla died soon after his brilliant victory. In c. 1667 CE, the Ahoms renewed the contest and recovered the areas ceded to the Mughals. Shaista Khan, who succeeded Mir Jumla as the governor of Bengal, captured the island of Sondip and Chittagong. He also chastised Arakanese pirates.
- Conquest of Deccan - When Aurangzeb became Mughal emperor, for the first 25 years he concentrated on the northern regions. At that time, Maratha ruler Shivaji carved out an independent kingdom in the territories of north and south Konkan. To contain the spread of the

Marathas, Aurangzeb decided to invade Bijapur and Golconda. He defeated Sikandar Shah of Bijapur and annexed his kingdom (c. 1686 CE). Then he proceeded against Golconda, eliminated the Qutb Shahi dynasty and annexed it (c. 1687 CE). Along with Bijapur and Golconda, he also seized the territory of Karnataka. Aurangzeb made Khirki, founded by Malik Ambar, the capital of Mughal Deccan and named it Aurangabad.

Conclusion:

Akbar started a policy of conquests and brought large areas in the east, west, north and south under the Empire, though success in the south was confined to the regions of Deccan only. Along with conquests, the process of consolidation was also initiated. As a result, the conquered territories were placed under a unified administrative system. The consolidated Empire created by Akbar was maintained with a measure of success by his successors for more than hundred years. During the reign of Aurangzeb, new territories in the south (Bijapur, Golkonda, etc.) and in the North-East were added. The notable achievement of the Mughal Emperors was in securing the help of the autonomous chieftains for the expansion and consolidation of the Empire.

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