

LESSON 3

The Mogul Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What factors help unify an empire?
- How can the creation of a new empire impact the people and culture of a region?

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

- intelligent
- authority
- principle

Content Vocabulary

- zamindars
- suttee

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

Identifying Use a chart like this one to identify Akbar's accomplishments.

	Akbar's Accomplishments
Political	
Military	
Cultural	

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Although they were not natives of India, the Moguls established a new dynasty by uniting the country under a single government with a common culture that blended Persian and Indian influences. The Mogul Empire reached its high point under the reign of Shāh Akbar.

The Mogul Dynasty

GUIDING QUESTION *How were the Moguls able to bring almost all of India under one rule?*

In 1500 the Indian subcontinent was still divided into a number of Hindu and Muslim kingdoms. The Moguls, who were not natives of India, established a new dynasty and brought a new era of unity to the region. They came from the mountainous region north of the Indus River valley. Their founder, Bābur, was descended from both Timur Lenk and Genghis Khan. Bābur had inherited a part of Timur Lenk's empire in an upland river valley of the Syr Dar'ya. As a youth, he led a group of warriors who seized Kabul in 1504. Thirteen years later, Bābur's forces crossed the Khyber Pass into India.

Bābur's forces were far smaller than those of his enemies, but with advanced weapons, including artillery, he captured Delhi. Establishing his power in the plains of North India, Bābur continued his conquests there until his death in 1530 at the age of 47.

Bābur's grandson Akbar was only 14 when he took the throne. **Intelligent** and industrious, by 1605 Akbar had brought Mogul rule to most of India. How was Akbar able to place almost all of India under his rule? By using heavy artillery, Akbar's armies were able to overpower the stone fortresses of their rivals. The Moguls also were successful negotiators. Akbar's conquests created the greatest Indian empire since the Mauryan dynasty. The empire appeared highly centralized but was actually a collection of semi-independent states held together by the power of the emperor.

Akbar was probably the greatest of the conquering Mogul monarchs, but he is best known for the humane character of his rule. Like all Mogul rulers, Akbar was born a Muslim, but he showed a keen interest in other religions and tolerated Hindu practices. Akbar put his policy of religious tolerance into practice by taking a Hindu princess as one of his wives.

Akbar was also tolerant in his administration of the government. The upper ranks of the government bureaucracy were filled with nonnative Muslims, but many of the lower-ranking officials were Hindus. It became common practice to give the lower-ranking officials plots of farmland for their temporary use. These local officials, known as **zamindars**, kept a portion of the taxes paid by the peasants in lieu of a salary. They were then expected to forward the rest of the taxes from the lands under their control to the central government. Zamindars came to exercise considerable power and **authority** in their local districts.

The Akbar era was a time of progress, at least by the standards of the day. Indian peasants were required to pay about one-third of their annual harvest to the state, but the system was applied justly. When bad weather struck in the 1590s, taxes were reduced or suspended. Thanks to a long period of peace and political stability, trade and manufacturing flourished.

The era was an especially prosperous one in the area of foreign trade. Indian goods, notably textiles, tropical food products and spices, and precious stones, were exported in exchange for gold and silver. Muslim traders handled much of the foreign trade because the Indians, like their Mogul rulers, did not care for travel by sea.

Akbar died in 1605 and was succeeded by his son Jahāngīr (juh • HAHN • gihr). During the early years of his reign, he continued to strengthen the central government's control over his vast empire. Eventually, however, his grip began to weaken when he fell under the influence of one of his wives, Persian-born Nūr Jahān. As Jahāngīr slowly lost interest in governing, he gave more authority to Nūr Jahān. The empress used her position to enrich her own family. She arranged the marriage of her niece to her husband's third son and successor, Shāh Jahān.

During his reign from 1628 to 1658, Shāh Jahān maintained the political system established by earlier Mogul rulers. He also expanded the boundaries of the empire through successful campaigns in the Deccan Plateau. Shāh Jahān's rule, however, was marred by his failure to deal with growing domestic problems. He had inherited a nearly empty treasury. His military campaigns and expensive building projects put a heavy strain on the imperial finances and compelled him to raise taxes. The peasants were even more deprived as a result of these taxes. The majority of Jahān's subjects lived in poverty.

Shāh Jahān's troubles worsened with his illness in the mid-1650s. It was widely reported that he had died. Such news led to a struggle for power among his sons. The victorious son, Aurangzeb, had his brother put to death and imprisoned his father. Aurangzeb then had himself crowned emperor in 1658.

Aurangzeb is one of the most controversial rulers in the history of India. During his reign, the empire reached its greatest physical size. He had expanded it along nearly all of its boundaries. Constant warfare and religious intolerance, however, made his subjects resentful.

As a man of high **principle**, Aurangzeb attempted to eliminate many of what he considered to be India's social evils. He forbade the custom of **suttee** (cremating a widow on her husband's funeral pyre), which was practiced by many Hindus, and he put a stop to the levying of illegal taxes. He tried to forbid gambling and drinking as well.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Jahāngīr on Akbar

"In his actions and his movements, Akbar was not as ordinary men. The glory of God was manifest in him. He knew no fear and was always ready to risk his life in battle. With exquisite courtesy, he charmed all those that approached him."

—quoted in *A Brief History of India*



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

How do the qualities Jahāngīr attributes to his father explain Akbar's success as a ruler?

intelligent having a high degree of understanding and mental capacity

zamindar a local official in Mogul India who received a plot of farmland for temporary use in return for collecting taxes for the central government

▼ Officials pay homage to Akbar in the *Akbarnama* (*History of Akbar*).



authority power; person in command

principle a fundamental law or idea; when said of people (e.g., someone is highly principled), it means a devotion to high codes or rules of conduct

suttee the Hindu custom of cremating a widow on her husband's funeral pyre

Aurangzeb adopted a number of measures that reversed the Mogul policies of religious tolerance. For instance, he prohibited the building of new Hindu temples and forced Hindus to convert to Islam. Aurangzeb's policies led to Hindu outcries and a number of revolts against imperial authority.

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, there were many contenders for the throne. Their reigns were short-lived, however. India was increasingly divided and vulnerable to attack from abroad. In 1739, Delhi was sacked by the Persians, who left it in ashes.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Contrasting What were some differences between the rules of Shāh Jahān and Aurangzeb?

The Development of Sikhism

GUIDING QUESTION *What is the significance of Gurus to the Sikh religious tradition?*

According to Sikh (pronounced "Sik-kh", with a short "i" sound) tradition, during the rule of Bābur a man named Nanak (1469-1539) had a religious vision at the age of twenty-nine or thirty. Nanak (NA • nahk) lived in the Punjab (puhn – JAB), a region of South Asia that was ruled by the Moguls. The Punjab was an especially diverse environment with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains living in the region. Guru Nanak had a vision in which God revealed that everyone is a child of God and all faiths are different paths towards the same Creator.

Nanak then travelled widely, preaching a monotheistic message that emphasized devotion to a formless, infinite One (or single God) that can be found in everyone and in all of nature. Guru Nanak taught that God is formless, all-powerful, all-loving, and without fear or hate towards anyone. One can achieve unity with God through service to humanity, meditation, and honest labor. Nanak prohibited discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion, or gender. His direct teaching style and focus on equality drew many followers who became known as Sikhs, from a Punjabi word meaning "disciple."

Nanak is regarded as the first Guru (gur • oo), or spiritual leader in the Sikh tradition. His teachings and those of his successors were compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan (1563-1606), into a holy book called the Adi Granth. Guru Arjan also built Darbar Sahib (later known as the Golden Temple), an important Sikh house of worship, in the city of Amritsar, Punjab.

Nine Gurus followed Nanak until the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), appointed the Sikh holy text and the community as his successors. Along with passing his authority to the holy book, now known as the Guru Granth Sahib, Singh also established the Khalsa, a community of initiated Sikhs. All initiated Sikhs display the signs of the Khalsa (KAL • suh), popularly called the "five Ks." These are: 1) Kesh, uncut hair covered by a special turban; 2) Kanga, comb for the hair; 3) Kirpan, a short ceremonial sword; 4) Kara, a metal bracelet; and 5) Kachera, traditional underwear.

Sikhs initially experienced hostility and persecution from Mogul officials. Slowly, however, Sikhs built a strong religious and economic community and, in the middle of the eighteenth century, created an independent kingdom in the Punjab.

Today, Sikhism is the world's fifth-largest religion with more than 20 million followers in India and Pakistan. Worldwide, there are an additional 2 million Sikhs, including more than 200,000 estimated to be living the United States.

Sikhism favors moral living, careful study and intellectual achievement, hard work, charity, and equality of all humans regardless of class or beliefs.

✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing How did the Sikh religion spread?

Life in Mogul India

GUIDING QUESTION *What was life like in Mogul society?*

The Moguls were foreigners in India. In addition, they were Muslims ruling a largely Hindu population. The resulting blend of influences on the lives of ordinary Indians could be complicated. The treatment of women serves as a good example.

Women had long played an active role in Mogul tribal society. Mogul rulers often relied on female relatives for political advice. To a degree, these Mogul attitudes toward women affected Indian society. Women from aristocratic families frequently received salaries and were allowed to own land.

At the same time, the Moguls placed certain restrictions on women under their interpretations of Islamic law. These practices generally were adopted by Hindus. The practice of isolating women, for example, was followed by many upper-class Hindus.

In other ways, however, Hindu practices remained unchanged by Mogul rule. The custom of suttee continued in spite of efforts by the Moguls to abolish it. Child marriage also remained common.

The Mogul era saw the emergence of a wealthy nobility and a prosperous merchant class. During the late eighteenth century, this prosperity was shaken by the decline of the Moguls and the arrival of the British. However, many prominent Indians had trading ties with foreigners.

The Moguls brought together Persian and Indian influences in a new and beautiful architectural style. This style is best symbolized by the Taj Mahal, which Shāh Jahān built in Agra in the mid-seventeenth century. The project lasted more than twenty years. To finance it, the government raised land taxes, driving many Indian peasants into complete poverty.

The Taj Mahal is widely considered to be the most beautiful building in India, if not in the entire world. The building is monumental in size and boasts nearly blinding brilliance yet delicate lightness.

Another major artistic achievement of the Mogul period was in painting. Like architecture, painting in Mogul India resulted from the blending of two cultures: Persian and Indian. Akbar established a state workshop for artists, mostly Hindus, who worked under the guidance of Persian masters to create the Mogul school of painting. The “Akbar style” combined Persian with Indian motifs. It included the portrayal of humans in action, a characteristic not usually seen in Persian art.

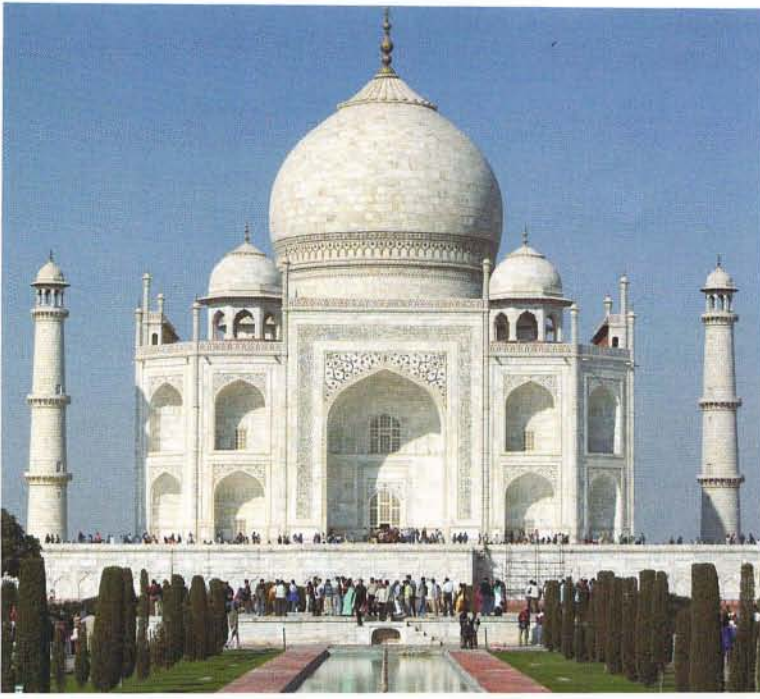
✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What rights were enjoyed and what restrictions were imposed on upper-class women during the Mogul Empire?

Europeans Come to India

GUIDING QUESTION *What led to the decline of the Mogul Empire?*

The arrival of the British hastened the decline of the Mogul Empire. By 1650, British trading forts had been established at Surat, Fort William (which was renamed Calcutta and is now the city of Kolkata), and Madras (Chennai). British ships carried Indian-made cotton goods to the East Indies, where they were traded for spices.



▲ The Taj Mahal in Agra is a classic example of Mogul architecture.

British success in India attracted rivals, especially the French. The French established their own forts, many of them along the coast. For a brief period, the French went on the offensive, even capturing the British fort at Madras.

The British were saved by the military genius of Sir Robert Clive, an aggressive British empire builder. Clive served as the chief representative in India of the East India Company, a private company that acted on behalf of the British Crown. Clive's forces ultimately restricted the French to a few small territories.

While fighting the French, Clive was also consolidating British control in Bengal. The Indian ruler of Bengal had attacked Fort William in 1756. He had imprisoned the British garrison in the "Black Hole of Calcutta," an underground prison. Due to the intense heat in the crowded space, only 23 people (out of 146) survived.

In 1757 Clive led a small British force of about 3,000 to victory over a Mogul-led army more than 10 times its size in the Battle of Plassey in Bengal. As part of the spoils of victory, the failing Mogul court gave the East India Company the power to collect taxes from lands in the area around Calcutta.

Britain's rise to power in India, however, was not a story of constant success. The arrogance and incompetence of many East India Company officials offended their Indian allies. Such behavior also alienated the local population, who were taxed heavily to meet the East India Company's growing expenses.

In the late eighteenth century, the East India Company moved inland from the bustling coastal cities. British expansion brought great riches to individual British merchants. British officials also became wealthy as they found they could obtain money from local rulers by selling trade privileges. The British were in India to stay.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Summarizing How did Sir Robert Clive increase the power of the British in India?

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LESSON 3 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Explaining** Describe the duties and rewards of a zamindar in the Mogul system of governing.

Using Your Notes

2. **Summarizing** Describe the rule of Akbar using the information compiled in your graphic organizer.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Identifying** How were the Moguls able to bring almost all of India under one rule?

4. **Analyzing** What was life like in Mogul society?

5. **Identifying Cause and Effect** What led to the decline of the Mogul Empire?

Writing Activity

6. **Informative/Explanatory** Using descriptive terms, write a paragraph on the reasons for the decline of the Mogul Empire beginning with Shāh Jahān.