

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

1526-1857

ONE OF THE TREATS OF INDIA

Oskar's Trip to India, January 2014

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THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

THE EARLY DAYS

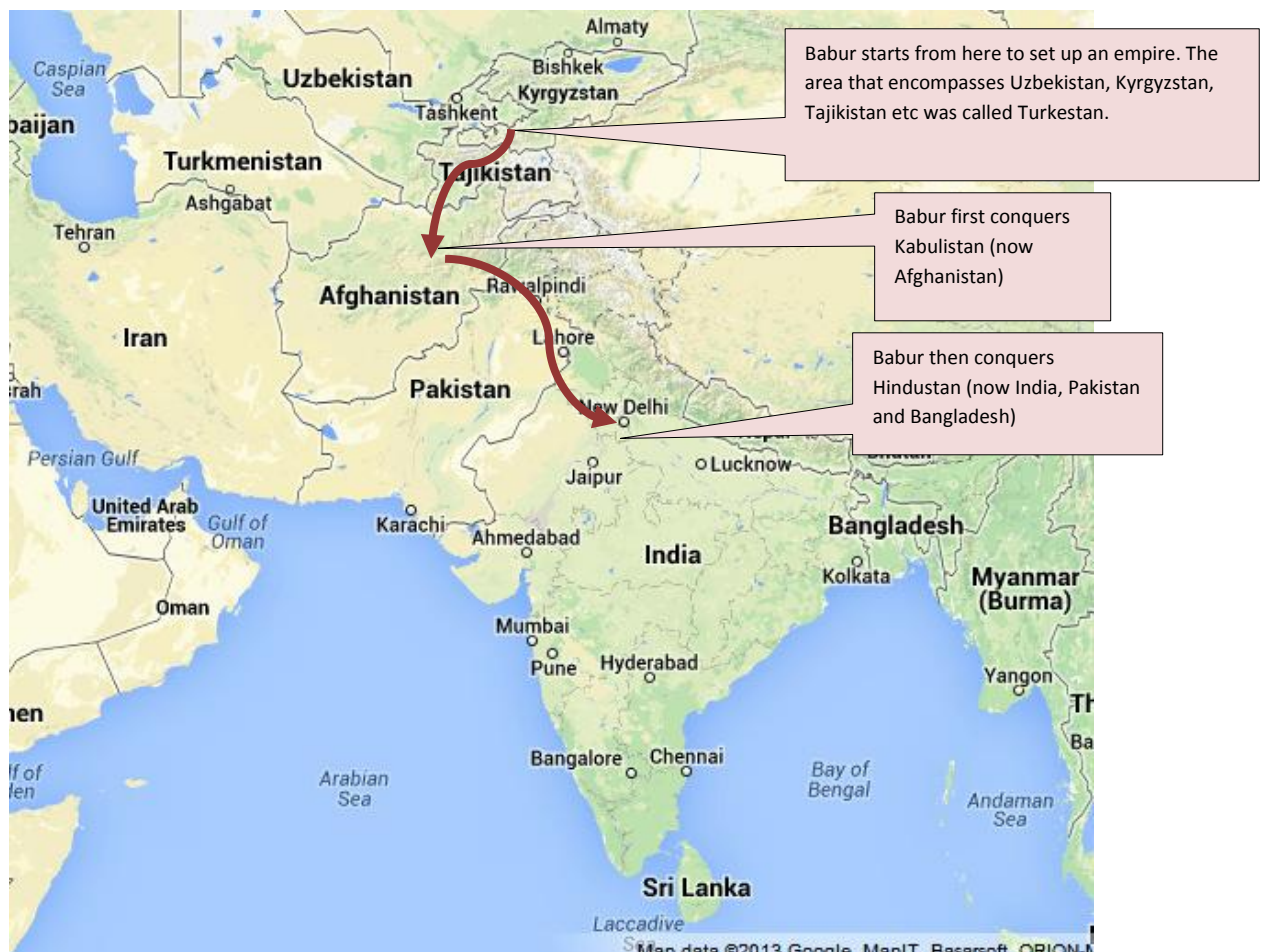
Before present day nations were formed with more or less settled borders, the areas included in the map below (and areas beyond that) were controlled by tribal chieftains, rulers who had established small fiefdoms or, in some cases, more substantial empires, such as the Safavid Empire in Persia (present day Iran).

Sometimes, powerful leaders emerged and, through alliances or military conquests, created extensive kingdoms or empires. In ancient times, Alexander the Great was one such leader. His empire even extended into India. Much later, Genghis Khan emerged as another such leader. He first unified warring Mongol tribes; and then conquered large parts of Asia, the Middle East and into Europe.

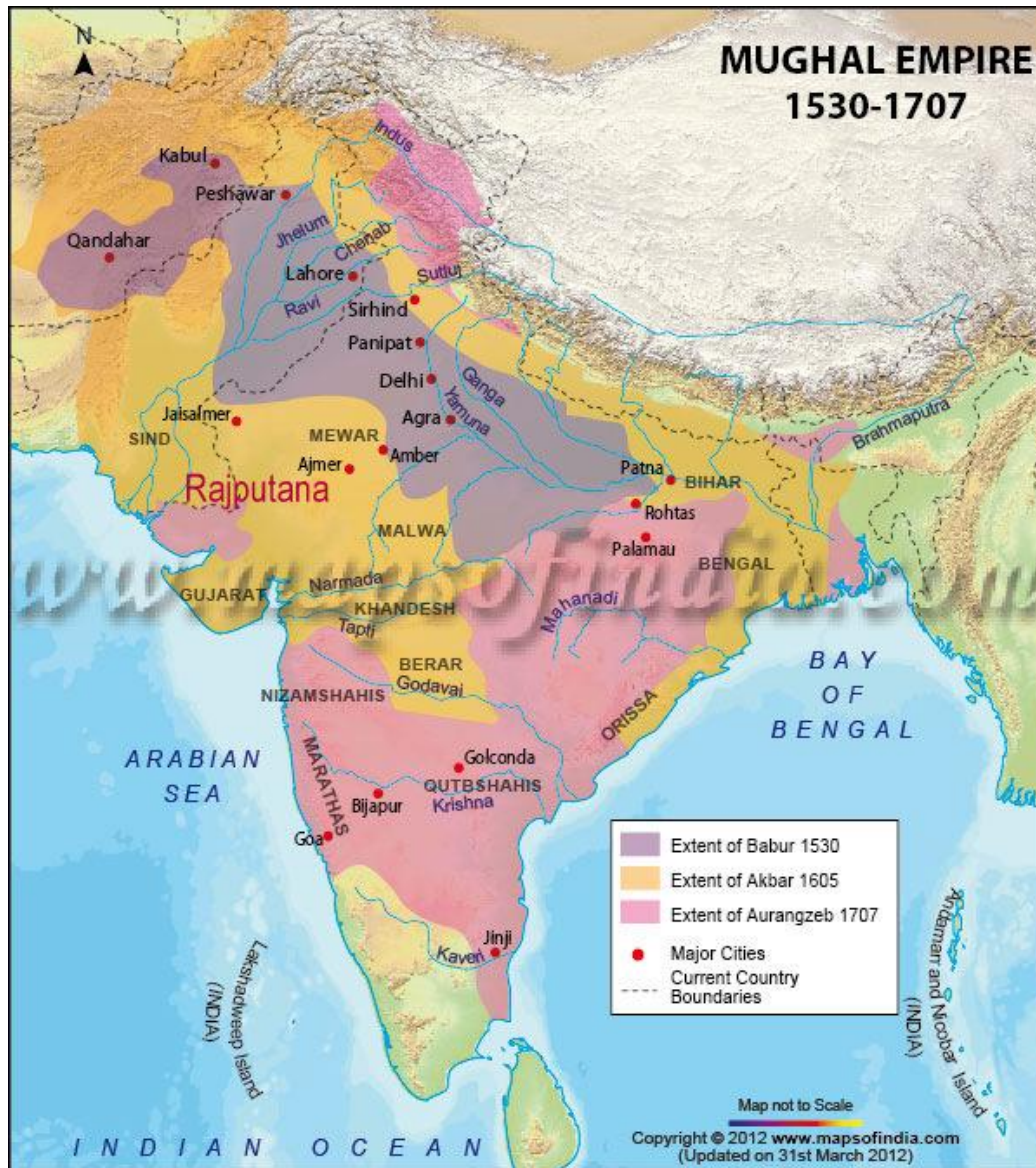
A hundred years later, another leader of mixed Mongol and Turkic origin arose in Timur (also known as Tamerlane). He came from Central Asia (the top one third of the map) and set about to re-establish the empire of Genghis Khan. In doing so, he conquered most of the territory in the top part of the map before losing it.

THE MUGHALS

The Mughal Empire starts with Babur, the first emperor. At the age of 12, he becomes the ruler of a tribe in Central Asia (now Uzbekistan). He is also of Mongol/Turkic origin, a great-grandson of Timur and an indirect descendent of Genghis Khan. At an early stage, he decides he wants to conquer the nearby rich city of Samarkand. He later invades present day Afghanistan and after that present day Pakistan and India to establish the Mughal Empire.



Over the years after Babur defeated the ruler of Northern India in 1526 (at the first Battle of Panipat), he and his descendents expanded the Mughal Empire through pretty much all of present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as you can see in the map below.



The grey area is the extent of the Mughal Empire by the time of Babur's death. He retained his initial conquests in Afghanistan and gained large tracts of present day Pakistan and northern India.

Babur

At the time of Babur's arrival, Northern India was ruled by the Delhi Sultanate¹. The Delhi Sultanate dated back to 1206 and was established by invaders from Pashtun in present day Afghanistan. The Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims.

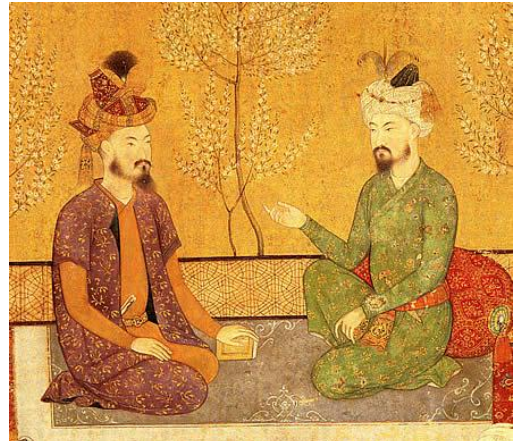
¹ In Arabic lands, a ruler who claimed sovereignty over territory was called a 'sultan'. The territory controlled by a sultan was called a sultanate. These terms are commonly used in Islamic cultures.



Over the 300 years of the Delhi Sultanate, there were 5 dynasties². When Babur invaded Northern India, The ruler of the Delhi Sultanate was Ibrahim Lodi, the ruler of the Lodi Dynasty, the 5th dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate. The Delhi Sultanate ended with Babur's victory over Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat.

Hindustan was no different to the surrounding areas shown on the first map in as much as the lands were controlled by various chieftains, princes, warlords, and other rulers, each with his fortified bases, armies, friends and enemies.

Once Babur had overthrown the Delhi Sultanate and occupied Delhi and Agra, he moved fast to establish his control over surrounding areas. Already very powerful rulers of dynasties to the west – the Rajputs; and to the southwest – the Marathas, were getting their armies together to keep or regain their independence. Babur had little choice but to invade Rajputana (mostly present day Rajasthan); and after a long, vicious battle defeated the uprising.



Babur and Humayun

Babur had secured his fledging empire but soon after he fell ill and died in 1531. So he got to be the first Mughal Emperor for fewer than 5 years.

Humayun

Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun as the second Mughal Emperor.



No sooner had he started his reign than two powerful rivals – Sher Shah Suri to the east and Sultan Bahadur to the southwest – made moves to attack him. While he enjoyed victories over them at first, he failed to lock in the victories; and preferred his comfortable life at court.

Humayun had another problem. He had three brothers who were all treacherous rivals for power. At various times, they abandoned him in military campaigns or betrayed him or tried to usurp power for themselves.

After about five years, his weaknesses and indecision, the treachery of his brothers and the ambitions of Sher Shah Suri caught up with him; and he lost his empire to Sher Shah Suri. Humayun had to flee to Kabul and later to Persia, where the Shah of the Safavid Dynasty gave him refuge.

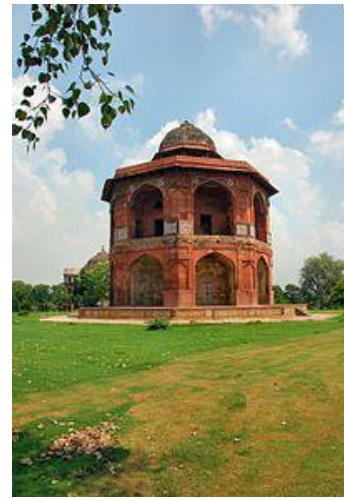
With the help of the Shah, in 1545, fourteen years after losing his Mughal Throne, Humayun returned from exile to take back his throne accompanied by thousands of Persian soldiers and nobles.

² A dynasty is a sequence of rulers from the same family or tribe.

During the first five years of his reign, before he had to flee to Kabul, Humayun's Delhi was centred on what is now called the Old Fort or *Purana Qila*. It is located on the banks of the Yamuna River and has evidence of occupation going back two thousand years.

It's uncertain how much of the Purana Qila Humayun built before his defeat by Sher Shah Suri, how much Sher Shah Suri built (probably a lot) and how much Humayun built or renovated after his return to Delhi. The fort holds a lot of secrets.

Sadly for Humayun, he was to enjoy the Purana Qila for only a year after his return from exile as the second Mughal Emperor. He liked spending time in a small free-standing building in the grounds of the Purana Qila which he used as an observatory and library. It's called the Sher Mandal. One evening, as he rushed to prayers in the mosque, he tripped and fell down the stairs, never regaining consciousness. He died three days later.



Sher Mandal within Purana Qila

He was first buried in the fort but his body was shifted when the fort was in danger of being captured by a Hindu king. Some nine years after his death, at the instigation and cost of his first wife, a permanent tomb was commenced. It was designed by a Persian architect and was the first tomb in India to include a Persian-style garden as part of it. The tomb complex includes tombs of many others, including Humayun's wife and subsequent emperors as well as several nobles.

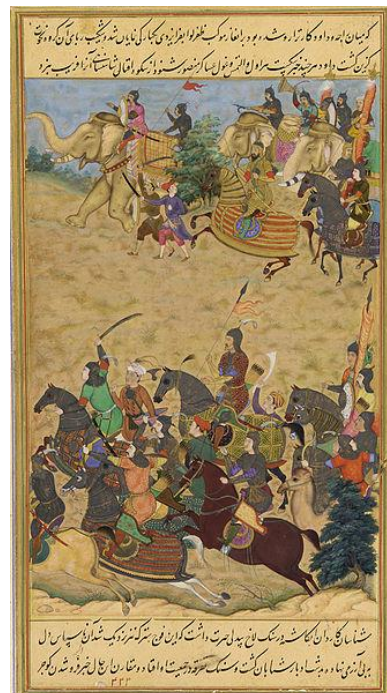
Akbar

Humayun's son was Akbar. He became the 3rd Mughal Emperor; and became known as Akbar the Great.

He was 14 when enthroned as emperor. He was proclaimed *Shahanshah* (Persian for "King of Kings"). Bairam Khan, his guardian and regent, ruled on his behalf until he came of age.

Akbar was the greatest of all the Mughal emperors. He expanded the empire to three times the size it was when he became emperor (see the yellow section of the map on page 4). His power and influence extended even further because of his military and political power.

He built up a huge army and was himself an inspiring military leader. He first moved against enemies to the north to secure his empire from any future incursions from Afghanistan. He then moved against the powerful rulers in Rajputana (Rajasthan) who had largely remained independent under previous emperors.



Akbar leading Mughal Troops



region, in order to demonstrate his authority.

The Rajput kings (called maharajas or simply rajas) had large armies and huge forts. Some of the rajas were won over by diplomacy but some held out.

One fort was particularly vital because of its strategic location. This was the Chittorgarh Fort in Mewar. Akbar laid siege to it for four months before it fell. Akbar had the surviving defenders massacred and their heads displayed upon towers erected throughout the

Akbar went on to conquer new territories in every direction, as indicated in the map on page 4.

Akbar brought more unity to the empire than ever before through his clever administration and by placating conquered rulers through marriages and diplomacy.

He was tolerant of all religions and even devised a cult that combined them all. He appointed Hindus as senior officials. All this won him respect and support from the local Hindustan people, who previously had been treated badly.

He was also a great patron of the arts and culture. He brought holy men of many faiths, poets, artists architects and craftsmen to his court from all over the world for study and discussion.

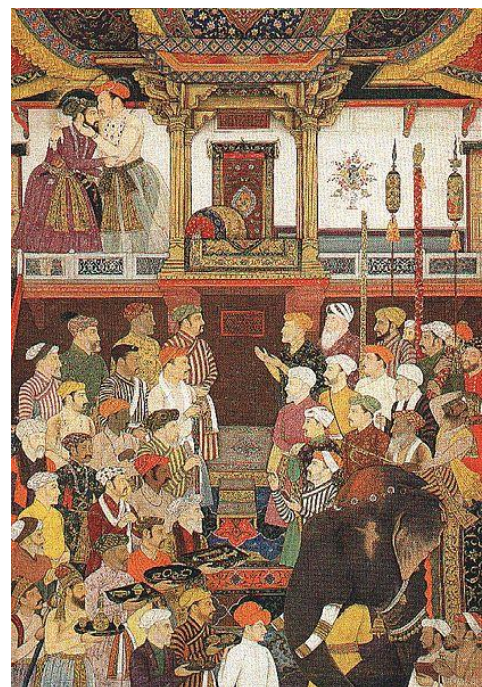
While his capital started as Agra, at one stage, he built a new capital at Fatehpur Sikri before abandoning it 14 years later in favour of Lahore. His tomb is just north of Agra at Sikandra.

Jahangir

Jahangir was the eldest surviving son of Akbar. He had been nominated as Akbar's successor long before Akbar's death. Perhaps this had made him impatient for power because he rebelled against his father in order to seize the throne, but was defeated by Akbar. It was six years after that before he succeeded to the throne on Akbar's death.

Within a year of becoming emperor, his own eldest son, Khusrau, led a rebellion against him, which didn't succeed. Khusrau was brought before his father in chains. After subduing and executing nearly 2000 members of the rebellion, Jahangir blinded his renegade son.

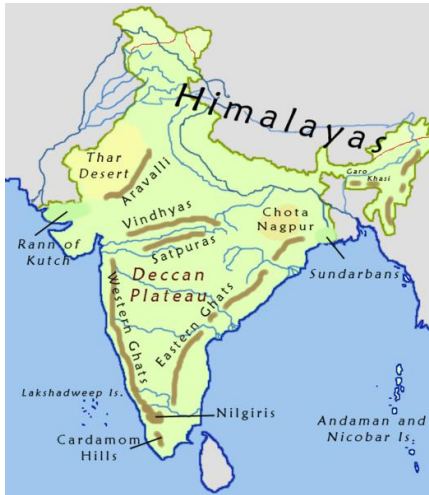
That was pretty much a common occurrence in Mughal times: lots of plotting by brother against brother; and son against father; not to mention uncles and other relatives and



Jahangir receives Prince Khurram on his return from the Deccan 10 Oct 1671

influential nobles, all of whom harboured ambitions for power.

Jahangir was a very good administrator and dispenser of justice, so he kept the empire working smoothly. He was also committed to expanding the empire's boundaries, which he did by putting down several rebellions and conquering new lands.



Jahangir was a great supporter of the arts and science. The unique practice of Mughal miniature paintings developed significantly under him; and his scientists carried out many experiments. He also expanded Mughal architecture.

By almost twenty years into his reign, however, he was succumbing to opium, alcohol and his harem. His third son, Prince Khurram, feared he was being pushed aside and led a rebellion against his father. Jahangir's forces chased Khurram's forces from the capital into the Deccan.³ It was four years before Khurram surrendered.

The rebellion and the following court intrigue took their toll on Jahangir's health; and he died soon after in 1627. Prince Khurram succeeded him and took the throne as Emperor Shah Jahan.

Shah Jahan

Shah Jahan was the imperial name of the fifth Mughal Emperor who reigned from 1628 until 1658. He was previously known as Prince Khurram.

Khurram was the favourite of his legendary grandfather, the third Mughal emperor Akbar the Great; and, from a young age, he was chosen as successor to the Mughal throne after the death of his father, Emperor Jahangir.

He is considered one of the greatest Mughals. His reign has been called the Golden Age of the Mughals and one of the most prosperous ages of Indian civilization. Like Akbar, he was eager to expand his vast empire. He ruled for 30 years; but in 1658, he fell ill and was confined by his son Emperor Aurangzeb in Agra Fort until his death in 1666.



The most significant part of Shah Jahan's life history began in 1607 when he was 15 and was betrothed to Arjumand Banu Begum, the granddaughter of a Persian noble and was just 14 at that time. After they got married in 1612, Arjumand became the unquestioned love of his life. Khurram bestowed her with the title of Mumtaz Mahal, meaning "Jewel of the Palace". She became his inseparable companion, accompanying him even on military ventures, and was a trusted confidante. After she died in 1631 while giving birth to their 14th child, Shah Jahan undertook the work of constructing world's most beautiful monument in her memory. This monument, which entombs Mumtaz Mahal as well as Shah Jahan, came to be known as "Taj Mahal".

³ The Deccan is the Deccan Plateau – a huge expansive plain taking up much of southern India between the two large mountain ranges of the Eastern Ghats and Western Ghats.

In the early years of his reign, Shah Jahan kept his capital in Agra where he undertook many building ventures, including significant additions to the Agra Fort and, of course, the Taj Mahal.

[Shah Jahan's successful capture of the city of Kandahar in the year 1638.](#)



In 1638, he moved his capital to the newly established city of Shahjahanbad – now Old Delhi. The walled city included broad avenues with water channels, souqs (markets), mosques, gardens, houses of the nobility, and the fortified palace known as the Red Fort or Lal Qila. Twice the size of the fort at Agra, the Red Fort was named for the high, red sandstone wall that surrounded the white marble palaces.

From Shah Jahan to the end of the Mughal line, the famous Red Fort was the heart of the empire and the principal residence of the emperors. The Red Fort constituted not only the residence of the emperor and his court but also housed the central administrative machinery of the empire, a military garrison, an arsenal, the imperial treasury, factories for the manufacture of luxury commodities, and much more.

During the latter years of his reign, Shah Jahan became ill and unable to keep control of his ambitions and rivalry amongst his four sons. The emergence of Aurangzeb as the undisputed victor led to the father's imprisonment in the Agra fort.

Tended by Jahanara, his eldest daughter, Shah Jahan was confined to the fort for eight years. According to legend, when Shah Jahan was on his death-bed, he kept his eyes fixed on the Taj Mahal which was clearly visible from his place of confinement. After his death, Shah Jahan was buried there beside his dead queen, Mumtaz Mahal.

Aurangzeb

Aurangzeb (also known by his imperial title Alamgir) was the sixth Mughal Emperor. His reign lasted for 49 years from 1658 until his death in 1707. Aurangzeb was a notable expansionist and during his reign, the Mughal Empire reached its greatest extent.

He was among the wealthiest of the Mughal rulers. He was a pious Muslim, and his policies partly abandoned the legacy of Akbar's tolerance of different religions. This remains a very controversial aspect of his reign.

During his lifetime, victories in the south expanded the Mughal Empire to more than 3.2 million square kilometres and he ruled over a population estimated as being in the range of 100-150 million subjects. He was a strong and effective ruler, but with his death, the great period of the Mughal dynasty came to an end, and central control of the sub-continent declined rapidly.



[Aurangzeb on the Peacock Throne](#)

Later Emperors

When Aurangzeb died close to the age of eighty, there followed several fights amongst claimants to the throne and eventually a civil war. This period led to a decline in the power of the Mughals and the ability of other powers, such as the Marathas, to claim control over parts of the empire. Invaders came from Persia and Afghanistan; and much of the Mughal treasures were looted. This period also allowed the British to obtain trading rights and ultimately political power.

END OF THE EMPIRE

Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the last emperor of the Mughals before the British deposed him in 1858 and the Mughal dynasty officially came to an end.



Humayun's Tomb



Purana Qila