

Later Mughals (1707-1857 A.D.):

The Mughal Empire was vast and extensive in the beginning of the eighteenth century. But by the close of the century it had shrunk to a few kilometres around Delhi.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, a war of succession began amongst his three surviving sons, Muazzam – the governor of Kabul, Azam-the governor of Gujarat, and Kam Baksh-the governor of Deccan.

Azam turned to Ahmednagar and proclaimed himself emperor. Kam Baksh too declared himself the sovereign ruler and conquered important places as Gulbarga and Hyderabad. Muazzam defeated both Azam at Jajau in 1707 and Kam Baksh near Hyderabad in 1708. Muazzam emerged victorious and ascended the Mughal throne with the title of Bahadur Shah I. He was also known as Shah Alam I.

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Bahadur Shah:

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Bahadur Shah I (1707-12) was the first and the last of the later Mughal rulers to exercise real authority. He was learned, dignified and tried to reverse some of the narrow-minded policies and measures adopted by Aurangzeb. He followed a conciliatory policy towards the Rajput's and Marathas but a strict policy towards the Sikhs.

Rajput's:

To have better control over Marwar and Amber he forced Ajit Singh of Marwar to submit to the Mughal authority. He made attempts to garrison Amber and replace Jai Singh with his younger brother Vijay Singh. Both Ajit Singh and Jai Singh were later restored but their demand for high mansabs (ranks) and offices of subahdars of important provinces were not accepted.

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Marathas:

Shahu, son of Shambhaji who was in Mughal captivity was released in 1707. He granted them the sardeshmukhi of the Deccan but not the chauth. He also did not recognize Shahu as the rightful Maratha king thus keeping the fight for supremacy going between Tara Bai and Shahu. Marathas thus remained dissatisfied.

Sikhs:

Bahadur Shah made reconciliation with Guru Gobind Singh and granted him high mansab. But after the death of the Guru, the Sikhs once again raised a revolt under the leadership of Banda Bahadur. The Mughal authority defeated Banda Bahadur at Lohgarh, a fort built by Guru Govind Singh. That was however recovered in 1712 by the Sikhs.

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Bahadur Shah made peace with Chhatrasal, the Bundela chief and the Jat chief Churaman who joined him in the campaign against Banda Bahadur. He adopted a more tolerant attitude towards the Hindus. There was however a deterioration in the field of administration in his reign because he lavishly granted jagirs and promotions. Khafi Khan called him Shah-i-Bekhabar (Headless King). He died in 1712. Henceforth a new element entered Mughal politics and the war of succession.

Previously, the contest for power was between the royal princes; the nobles had merely backed and sided with them. Now they became direct aspirants to the throne and began using the princes as pawns to capture authoritarian positions.

Jahandar Shah (1712-1713):

In another war of succession following Bahadur Shah's death, his four sons, Jahandar Shah, Rafi-us-Shan, Azim-us-Shan and Jahan Shah became involved. Jahandar Shah (1712-13) was successful in the war than the others. But Jahandar Shah was a weak ruler and came to the throne chiefly – with the help of Zulfikar Khan, the powerful noble who as a reward was made the wazir (prime minister).

He was a clever man and advocated a friendly policy towards the Rajput's, Marathas and the Hindu chieftains not only to strengthen his own position but to ensure the survival of the empire. He quickly abandoned the policies of Aurangzeb and adopted a liberal attitude towards the Hindus. He abolished the jizyah; gave the title of Mirza Raja Sawai to Jai Singh of Amber and appointed him the governor of Malwa.

Ajit Singh of Marwar was given the title of Maharaja and appointed the governor of Gujarat. He confirmed the agreement reached between his deputy and Shahu in 1711 whereby the Marathas were given the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan on condition that the Mughal officials would make these collections and hand it over to the Maratha

officials. He pacified Churaman Jat and Chhatrasal Bundela but continued a strict policy towards the Sikhs.

Zulfikar Khan tried to improve the finances of the empire by checking the reckless growth of jagirs and offices and forced the mansabdars to maintain their official quota of troops. But he also introduced the evil practice of revenue – farming or Ijarah whereby the government established contact with the revenue farmers and middlemen who paid the government a fixed amount while they were free to collect whatever they could from the peasant.

This oppressed the peasantry to a great extent. However the inglorious reign of Jahandar Shah soon came to an end in 1713 when he was defeated by his nephew Farrukh Siyar at Agra. Zulfikar Khan was soon executed by the orders of the new emperor.

Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719):

Farrukh Siyar came to power with the help of Sayyid brothers, Abdullah Khan and Hussain Ali Khan Barha – the kingmakers. They were given the office of the wazir and mirbakshi respectively. The two brothers soon acquired dominant control over the affairs of the state.

Farrukh was himself incapable of ruling and was easily influenced by the others. The Sayyid brothers were convinced that if the real authority were in their hands the empire would be safeguarded from perishing. It was during the reign of Farrukh that Banda Bahadur the Sikh chief was captured and killed. However the struggle for power between the emperor and the Sayyid brothers increased and the efforts of the emperor to overthrow the brothers failed repeatedly. Finally Farrukh was deposed and killed in 1719.

Muhammad Shah (1719-48):

As successors Sayyid the brothers quickly raised two young princes, Rafi-ud-Darajat and Rafi-ud- Daula (Shah Jahan II) who died within months. Finally Roshan Akhtar, the son of Jahan Shah was placed on the throne under the title of Muhammad Shah. The Sayyid brothers followed a policy of religious tolerance.

They abolished the jizyah as well as the pilgrimage tax at many places. In order to maintain harmony, they advocated a policy of associating Hindu chiefs and nobles with Muslim nobles. In their struggle against Farrukh Siyar, the Sayyid brothers sided with the Rajput's and the Marathas. Ajit Singh of Marwar and Jai Singh of Amber were won over by giving them high positions in the administration.

Alliance was made with Churaman Jat and later placated Shahu by granting him Shivaji's swarajya and the right to collect the chauth and sardeshmukhi in six provinces of the Deccan. In return Shahu promised them help in the Deccan with fifteen thousand soldiers.

The efforts made by the Sayyid brothers did not yield great results because they were constantly faced with rival factions and conspiracies in the court. The financial position of the empire was also dwindling as the rebellious elements refused to pay the land tax. This led to increased indiscipline amongst the soldiers.

The hostile nobles united themselves under the leadership of Nizam-ul-Mulk of the Deccan. Further the murder of Farrukh Siyar created a wave of terror and repulsion against the Sayyid brothers who were looked down upon as traitors.

They were branded as anti-Islamic for their policies. The anti-Sayyid nobles were strongly backed by Muhammad Shah who wanted to free himself from the hold of the brothers. In 1720, Hussain Ali was killed by the rebellious nobles and Abdullah Khan died in 1722 after he was defeated at Agra. This ended the rule of the Sayyid brothers in the Mughal Empire.

After the fall of the Sayyid brothers Muhammad Shah had a long reign (1719-48) to save the empire. The Mughal rule was still held in high esteem by the people. The Mughal army especially the artillery was still the most important force; administration in northern India had deteriorated but not collapsed entirely. The Maratha sardars were still confined to the south and the Rajput's were loyal to the Mughals.

But Muhammad Shah was not a good ruler. His first Wazir after the fall of the Sayyid brothers was Muhammad Amin Khan. After his death Nizam-ul-Mulk was appointed the wazir in 1722. But instead of supporting Nizam, the emperor suspected his own ministers. The attempts to reform the administration proved futile and disgusted with the inability and fickle mindedness of the emperor the Nizam chose to pursue his own ambitions.

He gave his office in 1724 and proceeded to the south and found the state of Hyderabad. He was the most pleasure-loving ruler of loose morals and is therefore called Muhammad Shah 'Rangila'. After the fall of Sayyid brothers he fell into the clutches of a dancing girl Koki Jiu and the eunuch Hafiz Khidmatgar Khan.

The already declining Mughal Empire received another fatal blow when the Persian monarch, Nadir Shah invaded India in 1738-39. Nadir Shah was attracted to India by her fabulous wealth for which she was famous. The bankrupt Persian Empire found an easy prey in the weak Mughal rule with loose defences on the north-west frontier and used the golden opportunity.

The disunity amongst the nobles too proved an added advantage for the invaders. The two armies met at Karnal in 1739 and the Mughals suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Nadir Shah. Emperor Muhammad Shah was taken prisoner and Nadir Shah marched on to Delhi.

He plundered the royal treasury at his, own pleasure and carried back the immense wealth from India. He carried away with him the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond and the jewel studded Peacock throne of Shahjahan. Nadir Shah's invasion inflicted a heavy damage on the Mughal Empire and its dwindling image suffered a severe blow.

The invasion affected the imperial finances and the economic life of the people adversely. Ahmad Shah Abdali, the successor of Nadir Shah invaded the kingdom for the first time during Muhammad Shah's reign in 1748. Ahmad Shah Abdali was defeated at Manpur by Ahmad

Shah, the Mughal heir-apparent and Mir Mannu, the son of the deceased wazir Qamruddin.

Ahmad Shah (1748-54 A.D.):

The death of emperor Muhammad Shah in 1748 saw the beginning of bitter struggles among power hungry nobles of Turani and Irani factions. His successor Ahmad Shah born of Udham Bai, a public dancing girl, ascended the throne but was unable to cope with the disintegrating forces.

The weak defenses of the northwest encouraged Ahmad Shah Abdali, who invaded India twice in 1749 and 1752, when he marched upto Delhi. The emperor, with a view to buy peace and save Delhi from devastation, ceded Punjab and Multan to Abdali. Imad ul Mulk ousted the Wazir Safdar Jang and became the wazir. Ahmad Shah was blinded and deposed by this new wazir.

Alamgir II (1754-1759 A.D.):

After the dethronement of Ahmad Shah, Imad-ul-Mulk raised Azizuddin, Jahandar Shah's son on the throne who styled himself after Aurangzeb as Alamgir II. The military and financial position of the empire during this period became worst to the extent that the emperor's household troops carried off the articles from the houses of the wazirs and nobles and sold them into the market. Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded Delhi in 1757 and the imperial city was plundered.

The relations between Alamgir II and Wazir Imad-ul-Mulk were not satisfactory and the latter got him murdered in 1759.

Shah Jahan III (1759-60 A.D.):

Muhi-ul-Milat, the grandson of KamBaksh was placed on the throne as Shah Jahan III by Imad-ul- Mulk. 'He was deposed by the Marathas who captured Delhi in 1760.

Shah Alam II (1759-1806 A.D.):

Ali Gauhar, the son of Alamgir II became the Mughal emperor in 1759 and took up the title of Shah Alam II. At the time of his father's death

he was in Bihar. Although he was declared the Mughal Emperor, he did not proceed to Delhi for 12 years (the Wazir Imad ul Mulk placed Shah Jahan III on the throne of Delhi and after his deposition by the Marathas, Najib Khan Rohilla made himself dictator of Delhi till his death in 1770).

Ultimately in January 1772, Shah Alam II was reinstated at Delhi by the Marathas. Ghulam Qadir (grandson of Najib and son of Zabita Khan Rohilla) occupied Delhi in 1788, blinded Shah Alam II and deposed him. Ghulam Qadir was defeated and executed by Mahadji Sindhia at Meerut in 1789 and Shah Alam II was reinstated as Sindhia's pensioner. In 1803, Delhi was captured by the English after Lord Lake defeated the Marathas and Shah Alam became the British pensioner. David Ochterlony became the first resident.

Akbar Shah II (1806-1837 A.D.):

After the death of Shah Alam II, his son succeeded as Akbar Shah II. Akbar sent Raja Ram Mohan Roy to England to seek a raise in pension. The presentation of Nazrs (gifts involving sovereign status) was ended by Lord Hastings in 1813.

Bahadur Shah II (1837-57 A.D.):

After the death of Akbar II, Bahadur Shah II became the Emperor. He was allowed to retain the imperial title. He was fond of poetry and had the title of "Zafar." He took part in the Revolt of 1857. He was captured and tried by the British. Bahadur Shah II was deported to Rangoon where he died in 1862. Thus ended the Mughal dynasty.

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