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Mughal Empire

## **Introduction**

### **The Mughal Empire**Famous white domes and towers of the Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal houses the jewelled tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, much loved wife of emperor Shah Jehan

The Mughal (or Mogul) Empire ruled most of India and Pakistan in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It consolidated Islam in South Asia, and spread Muslim (and particularly Persian) arts and culture as well as the faith.

The Mughals were Muslims who ruled a country with a large [**Hindu**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/) majority. However for much of their empire they allowed Hindus to reach senior government or military positions.

The Mughals brought many changes to India:

* Centralised government that brought together many smaller kingdoms
* Delegated government with respect for human rights
* Persian art and culture
* Persian language mixed with Arabic and Hindi to create Urdu
* Periods of great religious tolerance
* A style of architecture (e.g. the Taj Mahal)
* A system of education that took account of pupils' needs and culture

**Question 1:** Name a few of the changes that the Mughals brought to India. Do you think these changes were positive or negative?

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### **Muslims in India**

There had been Muslims in India long before the Mughals. The first Muslims arrived in the 8th century.

In the first half of the 10th century a Muslim ruler of Afghanistan invaded the Punjab 11 times, without much political success, but taking away a great deal of loot.

A more successful invasion came at the end of the 12th century. This eventually led to the formation of the Delhi Sultanate.

A later Muslim invasion in 1398 devastated the city of Delhi.

The Mughal Empire grew out of descendants of the Mongol Empire who were living in Turkestan in the 15th century. They had become Muslims and assimilated the culture of the Middle East, while keeping elements of their Far Eastern roots.

They also retained the great military skill and cunning of their Mongol ancestors, and were among the first Western military leaders to use guns.

**Question 2:** The Mughals were a combination of different cultures. Which cultures? How were they influenced by both cultures?

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## **Babur**

### **Babur**Gemstones in the arches of Humayun's tomb

Babur, the first Mughal Emperor, was a descendant of Genghis Khan and Temur.

Babur succeeded his father as ruler of the state of Farghana in Turkestan when he was only 12, although he was swiftly deposed by older relatives.

Babur moved into Afghanistan in 1504, and then moved on to India, apparently at the invitation of some Indian princes who wanted to dispose of their ruler. Babur disposed of the ruler, and decided to take over himself.

He captured the Turkic Ghur'iat Sultanate of Delhi in 1526, imposing his rule on most of Northern India.

The Empire he founded was a sophisticated civilization based on religious toleration. It was a mixture of Persian, Mongol and Indian culture.

Under Babur Hinduism was tolerated and new Hindu temples were built with his permission.

Trade with the rest of the Islamic world, especially Persia and through Persia to Europe, was encouraged.

The importance of [**slavery**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/slavery_1.shtml) in the Empire diminished and peace was made with the Hindu kingdoms of Southern India.

Babur brought a broad-minded, confident Islam from central Asia. His first act after conquering Delhi was to forbid the killing of cows because that was offensive to Hindus.

Babur may have been descended from brutal conquerors, but he was not a barbarian bent on loot and plunder. Instead he had great ideas about civilization, architecture and administration.

He even wrote an autobiography, *The Babur - Namah*. The autobiography is candid, honest and at times even poetic.

Babur was followed by his son Humayun who was a bad emperor, a better poet, and a drug addict. He rapidly lost the empire. He did eventually recover the throne but died soon afterwards after breaking his neck falling downstairs.

While Humayan was certainly disastrous as a ruler, his love of poetry and culture heavily influenced his son Akbar, and helped to make the Mughal Empire an artistic power as well as a military one.

**Question 3:** Who was Babur a descendant of?

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**Question 4:** What cultures were Babur’s empire a mixture of?

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**Question 5:** What religion was tolerated under Babur?

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**Question 6:** Why did Babur forbid the killing of cows?

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**Question 7:** What kind of ruler was Babur’s son?

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### **Abu Akbar**Intricately decorated stonework around the arched doorway to Itimad-ud-Daulah's tomb

The third Emperor, Abu Akbar, is regarded as one of the great rulers of all time, regardless of country.

Akbar succeeded to the throne at 13, and started to recapture the remaining territory lost from Babur's empire. By the time of his death in 1605 he ruled over most of north, central, and western India.

Akbar worked hard to win over the hearts and minds of the Hindu leaders. While this may well have been for political reasons - he married a Hindu princess (and is said to have married several thousand wives for political and diplomatic purposes) - it was also a part of his philosophy.

Akbar believed that all religions should be tolerated, and that a ruler's duty was to treat all believers equally, whatever their belief.

He established a form of delegated government in which the provincial governors were personally responsible to him for the quality of government in their territory.

Akbar's government machine included many Hindus in positions of responsibility - the governed were allowed to take a major part in the governing.

Akbar also ended a tax that had been imposed on non-Muslims. This discriminatory tax had been much resented, and ending it was a popular move.

An innovation was the amount of autonomy he allowed to the provinces. For example, non-Muslims were not forced to obey [**Islamic law**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/sharia_1.shtml) (as was the case in many Islamic lands), and Hindus were allowed to regulate themselves through their own law and institutions.

**Question 8:** Why was Akbur considered a great leader?

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### **Jahangir**

Akbar's son, Emperor Jahangir, readopted Islam as the state religion and continued the policy of religious toleration. His court included large numbers of Indian Hindus, Persian [**Shi'a**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml) and [**Sufis**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sufism_1.shtml) and members of local heterodox Islamic sects.

Jahangir also began building the magnificent monuments and gardens by which the Mughals are chiefly remembered today, importing hundreds of Persian architects to build palaces and create magnificent gardens.

Jahangir's approach was typified by the development of Urdu as the official language of Empire. Urdu uses an Arabic script, but Persian vocabulary and Hindi grammatical structure.

### **Jahan**

The architectural achievements of the Mughals peaked between 1592 and 1666, during the reign of Jahangir's successor Jahan.

Jahan commissioned the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal marks the apex of the Mughal Empire; it symbolises stability, power and confidence.

The building is a mausoleum built by Jahan for his wife Mumtaz and it has come to symbolise the love between two people.

Jahan's selection of white marble and the overall concept and design of the mausoleum give the building great power and majesty.

Jahan brought together fresh ideas in the creation of the Taj. Many of the skilled craftsmen involved in the construction were drawn from the empire. Many also came from other parts of the Islamic world - calligraphers from Shiraz, finial makers from Samrkand, and stone and flower cutters from Bukhara.

By Jahan's period the capital had moved to the Red Fort in Delhi, putting the Fort at the heart of Mughal power. As if to confirm it, Jahan had these lines inscribed there: "If there is Paradise on earth, it is here, it is here."

Paradise it may have been, but it was a pricey paradise. The money Jahan spent on buildings and on various military projects emptied his treasury and he was forced to raise taxes, which aggravated the people of the empire.

**Question 9: What was the Taj Mahal? Why is it so famous?**

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## **Aurangzeb**

Jahan's son Aurangzeb was the last great Mughal Emperor.

History's verdict on Aurangzeb largely depends on who's writing it; Muslim or Hindu.

Aurangzeb ruled for nearly 50 years. He came to the throne after imprisoning his father and having his older brother killed.

He was a strong leader, whose conquests expanded the Mughal Empire to its greatest size.

Aurangzeb was a very observant and religious Muslim who ended the policy of religious tolerance followed by earlier emperors.

He no longer allowed the Hindu community to live under their own laws and customs, but imposed [**Sharia**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/sharia_1.shtml) law (Islamic law) over the whole empire.

Thousands of Hindu temples and shrines were torn down and a punitive tax on Hindu subjects was re-imposed.

In the last decades of the seventeenth century Aurangzeb invaded the Hindu kingdoms in central and southern India, conquering much territory and taking many slaves.

Under Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire reached the peak of its military power, but the rule was unstable. This was partly because of the hostility that Aurangazeb's intolerance and taxation inspired in the population, but also because the empire had simply become to big to be successfully governed.

The Muslim Governer of Hydrabad in southern India rebelled and established a separate Shi'a state; he also reintroduced religious toleration.

The Hindu kingdoms also fought back, often supported by the French and the British, who used them to tighten their grip on the sub-continent.

The establishment of a Hindu Marathi Empire in southern India cut off the Mughal state to the south. The great Mughal city of Calcutta came under the control of the east India company in 1696 and in the decades that followed Europeans and European - backed by Hindu princes conquered most of the Mughal territory.

Aurangzeb's extremism caused Mughal territory and creativity to dry up and the Empire went into decline. The Mughal Emperors that followed Aurangzeb effectively became British or French puppets. The last Mughal Emperor was deposed by the British in 1858.

**Question 10:** What kind of leader was Aurangzeb? Was he like the leaders before him? Do you think he was successful?

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