

# JALALUDDIN MUHAMMAD AKBAR: THE GREAT MUGHAL EMPEROR

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## INTRODUCTION

**Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar** also known as **Akbar the Great** (November 23, 1542 – October 17 or October 27, 1605) Born, Badr-ud-din Muhammad Akbar, his name was changed to Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar and his birthdate was officially changed to October 15, 1542. He was the son of Nasiruddin Humayun whom he succeeded as ruler of the Mughal Empire from 1556 to 1605. He was the grandson of Babur who founded the Mughal dynasty. On the eve of his death in 1605, the Mughal empire spanned almost 1 million square kilometers.

Akbar, widely considered the greatest of the Mughal emperors, was only 14 when he ascended the throne in Delhi, following the death of his father Humayun<sup>[3]</sup>. He was descended from Turks, Mongols, and Iranians — the three peoples who predominated in the political elites of northern India in medieval times. It took him the better part of two decades to consolidate his power and bring parts of northern and central India into his realm. During his reign, he reduced external military threats from the Pashtun (Afghan) descendants of Sher Shah by waging wars against Afghan tribes, and at the Second Battle of Panipat he defeated the Hindu king Samrat Hemu Chandra Vikramaditya, also called Hemu. The emperor solidified his rule by pursuing diplomacy with the powerful Rajput caste, and by admitting Rajput princesses in his harem.

Akbar was an artisan, warrior, artist, armorer, blacksmith, carpenter, emperor, general, inventor, animal trainer (reputedly keeping thousands of hunting cheetahs during his reign and training many himself), lacemaker, technologist and theologian. His most lasting contributions were to the arts. He initiated a large collection of literature, including the Akbar-nama and the Ain-i-Akbari, and incorporated art from around the world into the Mughal collections. He also commissioned the building of widely admired buildings, and invented the first prefabricated homes and movable structures. Akbar began a series of religious debates where Muslim scholars would debate religious matters with Sikhs, Hindus, Cārvāka atheists and even Jesuits coming from Portugal. He founded his own religious cult, the Din-i-Ilahi or the "Divine Faith"; however, it amounted only to a form of personality cult for Akbar, and quickly dissolved after his death leaving his wife behind.

## NAVRATNAS, THE NINE JEWELS IN AKBAR'S COURT

- Abul-Fazel - was the vizier of Akbar, and author of the Akbarnama, the official history of Akbar's reign in three volumes, the third volume is known as the Ain-i-Akbari and a Persian translation of the Bible <sup>[14]</sup>. He was also the brother of Faizi, the poet laureate of emperor Akbar.
- Faizi - was the poet laureate of Akbar's Court. He was the brother of Akbar's historian Abul Fazl. He composed beautiful poetry in Persian and is estimated by his contemporaries to have composed nearly 100 poetic works. He wanted to produce a Panj Ganj (lit. five treasures) in imitation of the Persian poet Nezami, but died after writing only three out of the five works. Towards this end he wrote Nal u Daman, Makhzan ul-advar, and Bilqis va Salman. These were in imitation of Nezami's Layla va Majnun, Makhzan ul-Asrar, and Shirin va Khusrau, respectively. Akbar highly recognized the genius in him and appointed him teacher for his son and gave place to him among his decorative 'Nav Ratnas'.
- Miyan Tansen - was a musician in Akbar's court and is considered among the greatest composer-musicians in Hindustani classical music. He was an extraordinarily gifted vocalist, known for a large number of compositions, and also an instrumentalist who popularized and improved the rabab (of Central Asian origin).
- Birbal - was the Grand Vizier (Wazir-e Azam) of the Mughal court in the administration of Akbar and one of his most trusted members. He was the only person other than Akbar who was a Din-i-Ilahi believer. Birbal's duties in Akbar's court were mostly military and administrative but he was also a very close friend of the emperor, who liked Birbal most for his wit and wisdom, as a result of which they frequently had witty and humorous exchanges between them. These exchanges and stories have become part of a rich tradition of folklore and legend.
- Raja Todar Mal- rose to become the Finance Minister in Akbar's Darbar. Todar Mal overhauled the revenue system of Akbar's Mughal empire. He was from the Khatri (or Khattri/Khattree) community of Punjab. Todar Mal had developed his expertise in Sher Shah's employment.
- Raja Man Singh- was the Kacchwaha Rajah of Amber, a state later known as Jaipur. He was a trusted general in Akbar's army. However, he was a devotee of Shri Krishna, and not an adherent of Akbar's religion, Din-i-Ilahi.

- Abdur Rahim Khan-I-Khana- was a poet in Akbar's darbar, and one of his main nine ministers (Diwan) in his court, also known as the Navaratnas; he is most known for his Hindi couplets and his books on Astrology. The village of Khankhana, named after him, is located in the Nawanshahr district of the state of Punjab in northwest India.
- Fakir Aziao-Din - (Faqr means Sage or Ascetic in Urdu) was one of Akbar's chief advisors, and belonged to his inner circle. Akbar regarded his advice in high esteem.
- Mullah Do Piazza- was among the Mughal emperor Akbar's chief advisors. Akbar regarded his advice in high esteem and included him among the nine gems of the Mughal court, or Navratnas, as he was known for his intelligence. He was a close competition to Birbal, but he always lost at the end.

## AKBARNAMA

The **Akbarnāma**, which literally means Book of Akbar, is a biographical account of Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, written in Persian. It includes vivid and detailed descriptions of his life and times.

The work was commissioned by Akbar, and written by Abul Fazl, one of the Nine Jewels of Akbar's royal court. It is stated that the book took seven years to be completed and the original manuscripts contained a number of paintings supporting the texts, and all the paintings represented the Mughal school of painting.

The Akbarnama consists of three volumes or parts. The first volume deals with the genealogy of the descendants of Timur, and detailed information from the birth of Akbar, his accession to the throne, and the first seventeen years of his reign. The second volume narrates the reign of Akbar from the eighteenth year of his reign to the forty sixth year of his reign. It stops there because Abu'l Fazl was assassinated at the order of Jahangir, Akbar's son and heir on August 12, 1602.

The third volume named *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* and details the administrative system of the Empire as well as containing the famous "Account of the Hindu Sciences". In this section, he expounds the major beliefs of not the six major Hindu philosophical schools of thought, and those of the Jains, Buddhists, and Nāstikas. He also gives several Indian accounts of geography, cosmography, and some tidbits on Indian aesthetic thought.

## MUGHAL EMPIRE

The **Mughal Empire** was a Muslim Persianate imperial power of the Indian subcontinent which began in 1526, ruled most of the Indian Subcontinent as Hindustan by the late 17th and

early 18th centuries, and ended in the mid-19th century. The Mughal Emperors were descendants of the Timurids, and at the height of their power, around 1700, they controlled most of the Indian Subcontinent — extending from present-day Bangladesh in the east to Balochistan in the west, Kashmir in the north to the Kaveri basin in the south. Its population at that time has been estimated as between 110 and 130 million, over a territory of over 4 million km<sup>2</sup> (1.5 million mi<sup>2</sup>). Following 1725 it declined rapidly, weakened by wars of succession, agrarian crises fueling local revolts, the growth of religious intolerance, and British colonialism. The last Emperor, Bahadur Zafar Shah II, whose rule was restricted to the city of Delhi, was imprisoned and exiled by the British after the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

The classic period of the Empire starts with the accession of Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar, better known as Akbar the Great, in 1556, and ends with the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, although the Empire continued for another 150 years. During this period, the Empire was marked by a highly centralized administration connecting the different regions. All the significant monuments of the Mughals, their most visible legacy, date to this period.

## MUGHAL DYNASTY

The Mughal Empire was the dominant power in the Indian subcontinent between the mid-16th century and the early 18th century. Founded in 1526, it officially survived until 1858, when it was supplanted by the British Raj. The dynasty is sometimes referred to as the Timurid dynasty as Babur was descended from Timur.



The Mughal dynasty was founded when Babur, hailing from Ferghana, invaded parts of northern India and defeated Ibrahim Shah Lodhi, the ruler of Delhi, at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526. The Mughal Empire superseded the Delhi Sultanate as rulers of northern India. In time, the state thus founded by Babur far exceeded the bounds of the Delhi Sultanate, eventually encompassing a major portion of India and earning the appellation of Empire. A brief interregnum (1540-1555) during the reign of Babur's son, Humayun, saw the rise of the Afghan Suri Dynasty under Sher Shah Suri, a competent and efficient ruler in his own right. However, Sher Shah's untimely death and the military incompetence of his successors enabled Humayun to regain his throne in 1555. However, Humayun died a few months later, and was succeeded by his son, the 13-year-old Akbar.

The greatest portions of Mughal expansion was accomplished during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). The empire was maintained as the dominant force of the present-day Indian

subcontinent for a hundred years further by his successors Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb.

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