Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (February 19, 1627 – April 3, 1680) is a principle of effulgence, rather a divine inspiration. He is certainly not human, he is God. Shivaji Maharaj is a Primal God who took birth in a divine and pure culture. In history, no other religion has produced such an immaculate personality. One has yet to see a monarch who despite being powerful did not use his powers to torment, who despite being glorified was not arrogant, who conquered valorous enemies and who despite being a human functioned as a God !

Shivaji offered passage and his service to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to invade the declining Sultanate of Bijapur. After Aurangzeb's departure for the north due to a war of succession, Shivaji conquered territories ceded by Bijapur in the name of the Mughals.
Shivaji was born in the hill-fort of Shivneri, near Junnar, which is now in Pune district. Scholars disagree on his date of birth; the Government of Maharashtra lists 19 February as a holiday commemorating Shivaji's birth (Shivaji Jayanti. Shivaji was named after a local deity, the Goddess Shivai Devi.
Shivaji was descended from a line of prominent nobles. India at the time of his birth, in 1630, was under Muslim rule: the Mughals in the north and the Muslim sultans of Bijapur and Golconda in the south. All three ruled by right of conquest, with no pretense that they had any obligations toward those who they ruled. Shivaji, whose ancestral estates were situated in the Deccan, in the realm of the Bijapur sultans, found the Muslim oppression and religious persecution of the Hindus so intolerable that, by the time he was 16, he convinced himself that he was the divinely appointed instrument of the cause of Hindu freedom—a conviction that was to sustain him throughout his life.

Collecting a band of followers, he began about 1655 to seize the weaker Bijapur outposts. In the process, he destroyed a few of his influential coreligionists, who had aligned themselves with the sultans. All the same, his daring and military skill, combined with his sternness toward the oppressors of the Hindus, won him much admiration. His depredations grew increasingly audacious, and he overcame the minor expeditions sent against him.

Challenging the Mughals

When the sultan of Bijapur in 1659 sent an army of 20,000 under Afzal Khan to defeat him, Shivaji, pretending to be intimidated, enticed the force deep into difficult mountain terrain and then killed Afzal Khan at a meeting to which he had lured him by submissive appeals. Meanwhile, handpicked troops that had been previously positioned swooped down on the unwary Bijapur army and routed it. Overnight, Shivaji had become a formidable warlord, possessing the horses, the guns, and the ammunition of the Bijapur army.

Alarmed by Shivaji’s rising strength, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ordered his viceroy of the south to march against him. Shivaji countered by carrying out a daring midnight raid right within the viceroy’s encampment. The viceroy lost the fingers of one hand and his son was killed, which prompted him to withdraw his force. Shivaji, as though to provoke the Mughals further, sacked the rich coastal town of Surat.

Aurangzeb could hardly ignore such a challenge and sent out his most prominent general, Mirza Raja Jai Singh, at the head of a vast army, said to number some 100,000 men. Shivaji was compelled to sue for peace and to agree that he and his son would attend Aurangzeb’s court at Agra in order to be formally accepted as Mughal vassals. In Agra, hundreds of miles from their homeland, Shivaji and his son were placed under house arrest, where they lived under the threat of execution.
Escape from Agra

Undaunted, Shivaji feigned illness and, as a form of penance, began to send out enormous baskets filled with sweets to be distributed among the poor. On August 17, 1666, he and his son had themselves carried past their guards in these baskets. His escape, possibly the most thrilling episode in a life filled with high drama, was to change the course of Indian history.

Independent sovereign

In the summer of 1674, Shivaji had himself enthroned with great fanfare as an independent sovereign. His coronation marked the formal beginning of the Maratha empire. The suppressed Hindu majority rallied to him as their leader. He ruled his domain for six years, through a cabinet of eight ministers. A devout Hindu who prided himself as the protector of his religion, he broke tradition by commanding that two of his relatives, who had been forcibly converted to Islam, should be taken back into the Hindu fold. Even though both Christians and Muslims often imposed their creeds on the populace by force, he respected the beliefs and protected the places of worship of both communities. Many Muslims were in his service. After his coronation, his most noteworthy campaign was in the south, during which he forged an alliance with the sultans and, by doing so, prevented the Mughals from spreading their rule over the entire subcontinent.

Shivaji had several wives and two sons. His last years were shadowed by the apostasy of his elder son, who, at one stage, defected to the Mughals and was brought back only with the utmost difficulty. The strain of guarding his kingdom from its enemies in the face of bitter domestic strife and discord among his ministers hastened his end. The man that British politician and author Thomas Babington Macaulay called “the Great Shivaji” died after an illness in April 1680, in the mountain stronghold of Raigad, which he had made his capital.

Shivaji breathed new life into a people that for centuries had resigned itself to serfdom and led them against Aurangzeb, a powerful Mughal ruler. Above all, he was one of the few rulers of his time who practiced true religious tolerance.

Maratha empire

Maratha empire, early modern Indian empire that rose in the 17th century and dominated much of the Indian subcontinent during the 18th century. The Marathas were a Marathi-speaking warrior group mostly from what is now the state of Maharashtra in India. They became politically active under the leadership of Shivaji, their first king, in opposition to the Islamic rulers of the time. The formal Maratha empire began in 1674 with the coronation of Shivaji as Chhatrapati (“Keeper of the Umbrella”) and ended in 1818 after defeat by the English East India Company.
The 17th-century politics in the Indian subcontinent were dominated by multiple Islamic kingdoms, with the Mughal Empire controlling most of north India. The Deccan region of central India had been split among five Deccan sultanates, but by the 1630s only three of them remained active—Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar. Shahaji Bhosale was a Maratha general who served these sultanates.

Shivaji, the son of Shahaji, started a campaign to establish Hindavi Svarajya (self-rule of Hindu people) by revolting against the Bijapur sultanate and capturing many forts in the Deccan region. He warred against the Deccan sultanates and the Mughal Empire, as well as the newly emergent English East India Company operating in the ports of western India. Shivaji conquered his first fort in 1645 and eventually established a stable kingdom with the capital at Raigad, with the support of powerful Maratha warrior families. Shivaji’s army was primarily comprised of highly mobile peasant pastoralists. For many years, while Shivaji remained the titular head of the Maratha empire, he was

not officially its king, as his coronation had not taken place. It was only in 1674 that Shivaji was crowned as Chhatrapati.

Upon his death, Shivaji was succeeded on the throne by his son Sambhaji, in 1680. Sambhaji was king until 1689, when he was ambushed, captured, and executed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb also captured Sambhaji's son Shahu, and Sambhaji's half-brother Rajaram thus ascended the throne.

Civil war erupted in 1707 after Aurangzeb's death, when the new Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah I, released Shahu. Shahu promptly staked his claim to the throne in opposition to Shivaji II (Rajaram's son), who was ruling with the support of his mother, Tarabai. In 1713 Shahu appointed Balaji Viswanath as his peshwa (chief minister). This began the peshwa era of the Maratha empire, during which all effective power was concentrated in the peshwa. Pune (called Poona during the British raj) in India became the capital of the peshwas. Between 1720 and 1761 the Maratha empire expanded rapidly, gradually taking over Mughal territory. The Marathas took over Malwa and Gujarat in the 1720s and raided Delhi in 1737. At their peak they controlled most of the subcontinent, from Rajasthan and Punjab in the north to Bengal and Orissa in the east and Tanjore in the south. By 1758 they had expanded up to Peshawar in present-day Pakistan. The Maratha king was recognized as the overlord of the Deccan during this period and had the right to levy *chauth* (literally, "one-fourth"), a 25 percent land revenue tribute from the zamindars (landlords). This phase during the 1740s and '50s is recognized by heavy tributes levied by the Marathas on local rulers, increasing the hostility to Maratha rule.

In 1761 Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founder of the Durrani empire of Afghanistan, invaded north India. The Maratha army met the Afghan army in the Third Battle of Panipat. Because of past animosities, many local rulers including the Rajputs did not support the Marathas, leading to a heavy Maratha defeat at Panipat. The bulk of the Maratha army was destroyed, and, even though the battle was followed by a peace treaty, it severely diminished Maratha power in the subcontinent.

In the aftermath of the loss at Panipat, Madhavrao I became peshwa and helped rebuild the authority of the Marathas in many of their core territories. To better manage the Maratha empire, he gave autonomy to many of his chieftains, leading to the formation of a Maratha confederacy. Prominent among these were the Gaekwars of Baroda, the Sindhias of Gwalior, and the Holkars of Indore, who all went on to form independent kingdoms after the end of the Maratha empire. But the death of Madhavrao in 1772 created a power vacuum at the centre of the empire. Henceforward, the Maratha chieftains would wield power, the peshwa retaining only titular control.

The later Maratha years were characterized by wars with the kingdom of Mysore and with the East India Company. The First Anglo-Maratha War ran from 1775 to 1782 and ended with a Maratha victory. The First Maratha-Mysore War lasted from 1785 to 1787 and led to animosity with Tippu Sultan, the de facto ruler of Mysore. The Marathas then aided the British in the last two of four Anglo-Mysore wars, helping turn the tide against Mysore and leading to a British victory in 1799. British interventions in the Maratha chieftains' affairs led to the Second Anglo-Maratha War, from 1803 to 1805, causing significant loss of territory for the Marathas. The Marathas were the last major force opposing the British in the subcontinent, and this came to an end in 1818, with Maratha defeat in the Third Anglo-Maratha War, followed by the exile of the peshwa, Bajirao II, and Maratha territory coming under direct British rule. Some territories such as Baroda and Indore retained titular independence as princely states under the British.

The Maratha empire was noted for developing an efficient administration system, with strong encouragement for agriculture and trade. It was also noted for building a strong navy under Kanhoji Angre and a series of forts on the western coast of India. In the wake of the Indian independence movement, the Maratha empire and especially Shivaji received a lot of focus, with Indian nationalists defining the Marathas as heroes of Hindu nationalism against Mughal tyranny. The Marathas perfected the art of guerrilla warfare and used it effectively against the Mughals. The restoration of several temples, such as the Saptakoteshwar Temple in Goa, has been cited as evidence of the Marathas' fight for Hindu freedom.

Mughal dynasty

Mughal dynasty, Muslim dynasty of Turkic-Mongol origin that ruled most of northern India from the early 16th to the mid-18th century. After that time it continued to exist as a considerably reduced and increasingly powerless entity until the mid-19th century. The Mughal dynasty was notable for its more than two centuries of effective rule over much of India; for the ability of its rulers, who through seven generations maintained a record of unusual talent; and for its administrative organization. A further distinction was the attempt of the Mughals, who were Muslims, to integrate Hindus and Muslims into a united Indian state.

Bābur and the establishment of the Mughals

The dynasty was founded by a Chagatai Turkic prince named Bābur (reigned 1526–30), who was descended from the Turkic conqueror Timur (Tamerlane) on his father's side and from Chagatai, second son of the Mongol ruler Genghis Khan, on his mother's side. Bābur's father, ʿUmar Shaykh Mīrzā, ruled the small principality of Fergana to the north of the Hindu Kush mountain range; Bābur inherited the principality at a young age, in 1494.
In 1504 he conquered Kabul and Ghaznī and established himself there. In 1511 he captured Samarkand, only to realize that, with the formidable Safavid dynasty in Iran and the Uzbeks in Central Asia, he should rather turn to the southeast toward India to have an empire of his own. As a Timurid, Bābur had an eye on the Punjab, part of which had been Timur's possession. He made several excursions in the tribal habitats there. Between 1519 and 1524—when he invaded Bhera, Sialkot, and Lahore—he showed his definite intention to conquer Hindustan, where the political scene favoured his adventure.
Having secured the Punjab, Bābur advanced toward Delhi, garnering support from many Delhi nobles. He routed two advance troop contingents of Ibrāhīm Lodī, Delhi's sultan, and met the sultan's main army at the First Battle of Panipat. By April 1526 he was in control of Delhi and Agra and held the keys to conquer Hindustan.
The Rajput confederacy, however, under Rana Sanga of Mewar threatened to revive their power in northern India. Bābur led an expedition against the *rana* and crushed the *rana*'s forces at Khanua, near Fatehpur Sikri (March 1527), once again by means of the skillful positioning of troops. Bābur then continued his campaigns to subjugate the Rajputs of Chanderi. When Afghan risings turned him to the east, he had to fight, among others, the joint forces of the Afghans and the sultan of Bengal in 1529 at Ghaghara, near Varanasi. Bābur won the battles, but the expedition there too, like the one on the southern borders, was left unfinished. Developments in Central Asia and Bābur's failing health forced him to withdraw. He died near Lahore in December 1530.

Humāyūn

Bābur's son Humāyūn inherited the hope rather than the fact of empire, because the Afghans and Rajputs were merely restrained but not reconciled to Mughal supremacy by the Mughal victories at

Panipat (1526), Khanua (1527), and the Ghaghara (1529). Bahādur Shah of Gujarat, encouraged by Afghan and Mughal émigrés, challenged the Mughals in Rajasthan, and, although Humāyūn occupied Gujarat in 1535, the danger there ended only with Bahādur's death in 1537. Meanwhile, an Afghan soldier of fortune, Shēr Shah of Sūr, had consolidated his power in Bihar and Bengal. He defeated Humāyūn at Chausa in 1539 and at Kannauj in 1540, expelling him from India.
Reaching Iran in 1544, Humāyūn was granted military aid by Shah Tahmāsp and went on to conquer Kandahār (1545) and to seize Kabul three times from his own disloyal brother, Kāmrān, the final time being in 1550. Taking advantage of civil wars among the descendants of Shēr Shah, Humāyūn captured Lahore in February 1555, and, after defeating Sikandar Sūr, the rebel Afghan governor of the Punjab, at Sirhind, he recovered Delhi and Agra that July. Humāyūn was fatally injured by falling down the staircase of his library. His tomb in Delhi, built several years after his death, is the first of the great Mughal architectural masterpieces; it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1993.

Akbar the Great and the consolidation of the empire

Within a few months of Humāyūn's death, his governors lost several important cities and regions, including Delhi itself, to Hemu, a Hindu minister who had claimed the throne for himself. Humāyūn's son Akbar (reigned 1556–1605), under the guidance of the regent Bayram Khan, defeated Hemu at the Second Battle of Panipat (1556), which commanded the route to Delhi, and thereby turned the tide in Hindustan to the Mughal dynasty's favour.
Although Akbar inherited an empire in shambles, he proved an extremely capable ruler. His expansion and absorption of vast territories established an empire across northern and parts of central India; at his death in 1605 the empire extended from Afghanistan to the Bay of Bengal and southward to what is now Gujarat state and the northern Deccan region (peninsular India). The political, administrative, and military structures that he created to govern the empire were the chief factor behind its continued survival for another century and a half.
One of the notable features of Akbar's government was the extent of Hindu, and particularly Rajput, participation. Rajput princes attained the highest ranks, as generals and as provincial governors, in the Mughal service. Discrimination against non-Muslims was reduced by abolishing the taxation of pilgrims and the tax payable by non-Muslims (*jizyah*) in lieu of military service. Yet Akbar was far more successful than any previous Muslim ruler in winning the cooperation of Hindus at all levels in his administration. The further expansion of his territories gave them fresh opportunities.
The incorporation of the zealously independent Hindu Rajputs inhabiting the rugged hilly Rajputana region came about through a policy of conciliation and conquest. When in 1562 Raja Bihari Mal of Amber (now Jaipur), threatened by a succession dispute, offered Akbar his daughter in marriage, Akbar accepted the offer. The raja acknowledged Akbar's suzerainty, and his sons prospered in Akbar's service. Akbar followed the same feudal policy toward the other Rajput chiefs. They were allowed to hold their ancestral territories, provided that they acknowledged Akbar as emperor, paid tribute, supplied troops when required, and concluded a marriage alliance with him. The emperor's service was also opened to them and their sons, which offered financial rewards as well as honour. However, Akbar showed no mercy to those who refused to acknowledge his supremacy; after protracted fighting in Mewar, Akbar captured the historic fortress of Chitor (now Chittaurgarh) in 1568 and massacred its inhabitants.
Meanwhile, Akbar needed a way to maintain his status as a Muslim ruler while eliciting active support from his now predominantly non-Muslim subjects. In addition to annulling the *jizyah*, he abolished the practice of forcibly converting prisoners of war to Islam and encouraged Hindus as his principal confidants and policy makers. To legitimize his nonsectarian policies, he issued in 1579 a

public edict (*maḥẓar*) declaring his right to be the supreme arbiter in Muslim religious matters—above the body of Muslim religious scholars and jurists, whom Akbar had come to consider as shallow. He had by then also undertaken a number of stern measures to reform the administration of religious grants, which were now available to learned and pious men of all religions, including Hindu pandits, Jain and Christian missionaries, and Parsi priests. The emperor created a new order commonly called the Dīn-e Ilāhī ("Divine Faith"), which was modeled on the Muslim mystical Sufi brotherhood but was devised with the object of forging the diverse groups in the service of the state into one cohesive political community.

Other notable features of Akbar's government included the streamlining of both military and civil administration. He consolidated military ranks into a standard system under his authority, and regular checks on rank holders (*manṣabdār*s) ensured a reasonable correlation between their obligations and their income. He also seems to have instituted more efficient revenue assessment and collection in an effort to safeguard the peasants from excessive demands and the state from loss of money.

Toward the end of his reign, Akbar embarked on a fresh round of conquests. The Kashmir region was subjugated in 1586, Sindh in 1591, and Kandahār (Afghanistan) in 1595. Mughal troops now moved south of the Vindhya Range into the Deccan. By 1601 Khandesh, Berar, and part of Ahmadnagar had been added to Akbar's empire. His last years were troubled by the rebellious behaviour of his son Prince Salīm (later the emperor Jahāngīr), who was eager for power.

Jahāngīr and Nūr Jahān

Akbar's son Jahāngīr (reigned 1605–27) continued both his father's administrative system and his tolerant policy toward Hinduism. His most significant achievement in his own right was the cessation of the conflict with Mewar, a Rajput principality that had eluded Akbar's subjugation. Its *rana* accepted Jahāngīr as suzerain but retained greater independence than the other principalities.

In 1611 he married Mehr al-Nesāʾ, who was afterward known as Nūr Jahān. His third son, Prince Khurram (later the emperor Shah Jāhan), married her niece Arjūmand Bānū Begum (Mumtāz Maḥal) the following year. When Jahāngīr left Agra in 1613 for several years to pursue campaigns in the south, Nūr Jahān—along with her father, Iʿtimād al-Dawlah (Mirzā Ghiyās Beg); her brother Āṣaf Khan (Arjūmand's father); and her niece's husband, Prince Khurram—became heavily influential, if not decisive, in the royal court. After Jahāngīr's return, his health deteriorated. Nūr Jahān took charge of many of the ruler's duties and even issued *farmān*s (sovereign mandates) in her name. But, after her attempt to arrange her son-in-law as Jahāngīr's successor, she stoked the ire of Prince Khurram and Āṣaf Khan. Upon Jahāngīr's death, she was held in confinement for the remainder of her life.

Shah Jahān

Prince Khurram succeeded in attaining the throne and took on the regnal name Shah Jahān (reigned 1628–58). His reign was notable for successes against the Deccan states. By 1636 Ahmadnagar had been annexed and Golconda and Bijapur (Vijayapura) forced to become tributaries. Mughal power was also temporarily extended in the northwest. In 1638 the Persian governor of Kandahār, ʿAlī Mardān Khan, surrendered that fortress to the Mughals. In 1646 Mughal forces occupied Badakhshān and Balkh, but in 1647 Balkh was relinquished, and attempts to reconquer it in 1649, 1652, and 1653 failed. The Persians reconquered Kandahār in 1649. Shah Jahān transferred his capital from Agra to Delhi in 1648, creating the new city of Shāhjahānābād there.

Taj MahalThe Taj Mahal, in Agra, Uttar Pradesh state, India, designated a World Heritage site in 1983.

Shah Jahān had an almost insatiable passion for building (*see* Shah Jahān period architecture). At his first capital, Agra, he undertook the building of two great mosques, the Motī Masjid (Pearl Mosque)

and the Jāmiʿ Masjid (Great Mosque) of Agra. The Taj Mahal, also in Agra, is the masterpiece of his reign and was erected in memory of his wife Arjūmand (Mumtāz Maḥal). At Delhi, Shah Jahān built a huge fortress-palace complex called the Red Fort as well as another Jāmiʿ Masjid, which is among the finest mosques in India. Shah Jahān's reign was also a period of great literary activity, and the arts of painting and calligraphy were not neglected. His court was one of great pomp and splendour, and his collection of jewels was probably the most magnificent in the world. But his expeditions against Balkh and Badakhshān and his attempts to recover Kandahār brought the empire to the verge of bankruptcy.

Aurangzeb

AurangzebPortrait of the emperor Aurangzeb, ink, watercolour, and gold on paper, 17th century; in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.(more)

When Shah Jahān fell ill in September 1657, his sons Dārā, Shujāʿ, Aurangzeb, and Murād each sought the throne. A protracted war of succession left Aurangzeb the sole victor and one of his brothers dead; the other two were executed.

Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707) expanded the empire to its greatest extent, particularly after annexing the Muslim Deccan kingdoms of Bijapur (1686) and Golconda (1687), but his political and religious intolerance also laid the seeds of its decline. In the first decades of his long reign, Aurangzeb continued his predecessors' recipe for conquest: defeat one's enemies, reconcile them, and place them in imperial service. Thus, the Maratha chief Shivaji was compelled into vassalage upon his defeat in 1666. Later that same year, however, he escaped the Mughal court and challenged the Mughal Empire anew. His elaborate coronation in 1674, complete with Hindu religious consecration (*abhisheka*), rallied many Hindus to his cause; his successful rise also gained the attention and cooperation of Muslim sultans in the Deccan.

Aside from this already formidable challenge, the Mughals faced several rebellions, and Aurangzeb's attitude and policy began to harden. He excluded Hindus from public office and destroyed their schools and temples, while his persecution of the Sikhs of the Punjab turned that sect against Muslim rule (most notably under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh) and roused rebellions among the Rajputs, Sikhs, and Marathas. The heavy taxes levied by Aurangzeb (including the reimposition of the *jizyah*) steadily impoverished the farming population, the abundant commissioning of *manṣabdār*s far outstripped the empire's growth in area or revenues, and a steady decay in the quality of Mughal government was thus matched by a corresponding economic decline. When Aurangzeb died in 1707, he had failed to crush the Marathas of the Deccan, his authority was disputed throughout his dominions, and Mughal governance was collapsing under its own weight.