The Mughal Empire

JOHN F. RICHARDS

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The Mughal empire was one of the largest centralized states known in pre-modern world history. It was founded in the early 1500s and by the end of the following century the Mughal emperor ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent with a population of between 100 and 150 millions. As well as military success, the Mughal emperors displayed immense wealth and the ceremonies, etiquette, music, poetry, and exquisitely executed paintings and objects of the imperial court fused together to create a distinctive aristocratic high culture.

In this volume, Professor John Richards traces the history of this magnificent empire from its creation in 1526 to its breakup in 1720. He stresses the dynamic quality of Mughal territorial expansion, their institutional innovation in land revenue, coinage and military organization, ideological change, and the relationship between the emperors and Islam. Professor Richards also analyzes institutions particular to the Mughal empire, such as the *jagir* system, and explores Mughal India's links with the early modern world.

The Mughal Empire offers a concise and up-to-date synthesis of this spectacular period in the history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It will be widely read by students and specialists of South Asian history and civilization and will be of interest to travellers wishing to know more about the background to the great Mughal monuments.

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

The Mughal Empire

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

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Although the original *Cambridge History of India*, published between 1922 and 1937, did much to formulate a chronology for Indian history and describe the administrative structures of government in India, it has inevitably been overtaken by the mass of new research published over the last fifty years.

Designed to take full account of recent scholarship and changing conceptions of South Asia's historical development, *The New Cambridge History of India* will be published as a series of short, self-contained volumes, each dealing with a separate theme and written by a single person, within an overall four-part structure. As before, each will conclude with a substantial bibliographical essay designed to lead non-specialists further into the literature.

The four parts are as follows:

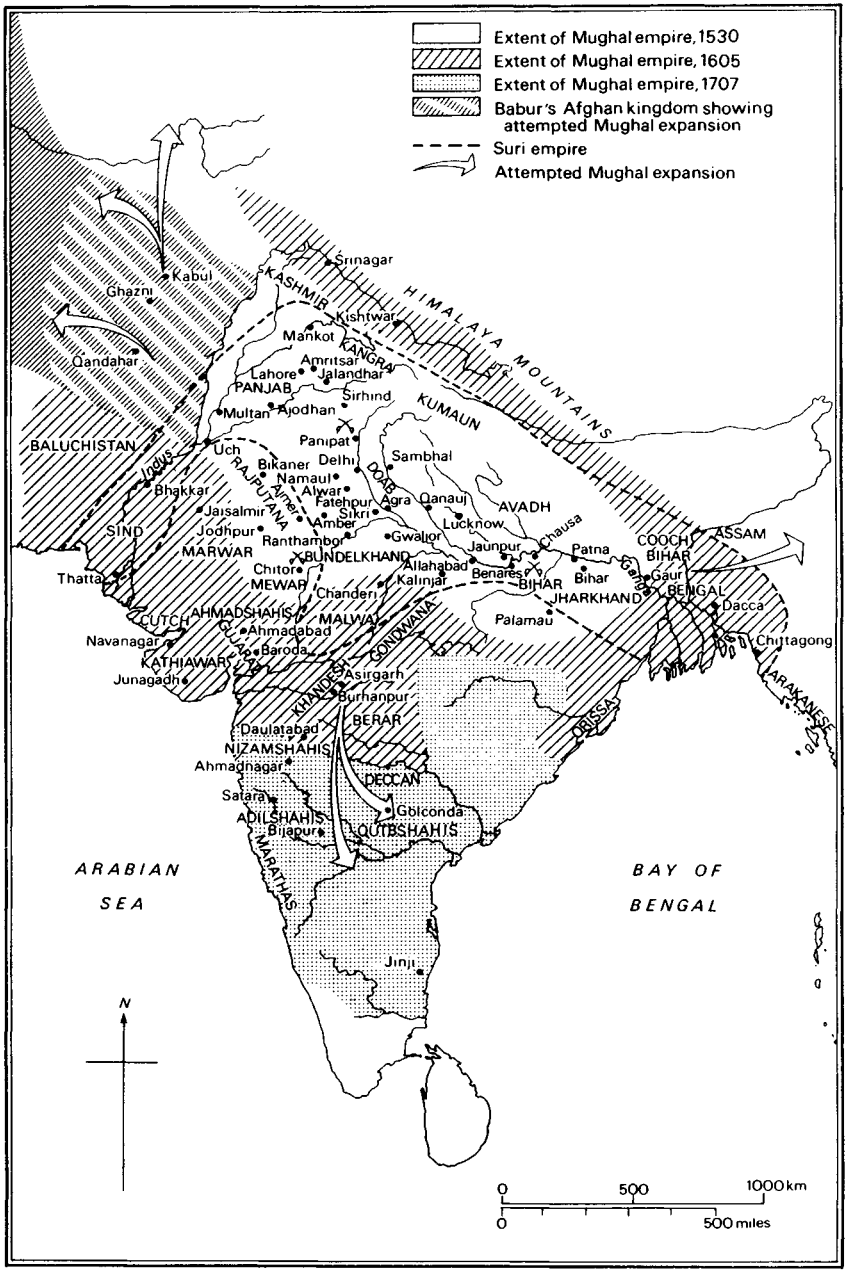
I The Mughals and their Contemporaries.

II Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism.

III The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society.

IV The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia.

A list of individual titles already published and in preparation will be found at the end of the volume.



Frontispiece The Mughal empire, 1526 to 1707
Source: F. Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500* (Oxford, 1982), p. 59.

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I · 5

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Dedicated to the memory of my mother

ELLA HIGGINS RICHARDS

1908–1990

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MAPS

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Cambridge History of India covers the period from the beginning of the sixteenth century. In some respects it marks a radical change in the style of Cambridge Histories, but in others the editors feel that they are working firmly within an established academic tradition.

During the summer of 1896, F. W. Maitland and Lord Acton between them evolved the idea for a comprehensive modern history. By the end of the year the Syndics of the University Press had committed themselves to the *Cambridge Modern History*, and Lord Acton had been put in charge of it. It was hoped that publication would begin in 1899 and be completed by 1904, but the first volume in fact came out in 1902 and the last in 1910, with additional volumes of tables and maps in 1911 and 1912.

The *History* was a great success, and it was followed by a whole series of distinctive Cambridge Histories covering English Literature, the Ancient World, India, British Foreign Policy, Economic History, Medieval History, the British Empire, Africa, China and Latin America; and even now other new series are being prepared. Indeed, the various Histories have given the Press notable strength in the publication of general reference books in the arts and social sciences.

What has made the Cambridge Histories so distinctive is that they have never been simply dictionaries or encyclopedias. The Histories have, in H. A. L. Fisher's words, always been "written by an army of specialists concentrating the latest results of special study". Yet as Acton agreed with the Syndics in 1896, they have not been mere compilations of existing material but original works. Undoubtedly many of the Histories are uneven in quality, some have become out of date very rapidly, but their virtue has been that they have consistently done more than simply record an existing state of knowledge: they have tended to focus interest on research and they have provided a massive stimulus to further work. This has made their publication doubly worthwhile and has distinguished them intellectually from

other sorts of reference book. The editors of the *New Cambridge History of India* have acknowledged this in their work.

The original *Cambridge History of India* was published between 1922 and 1937. It was planned in six volumes, but of these, volume 2 dealing with the period between the first century A.D. and the Muslim invasion of India never appeared. Some of the material is still of value, but in many respects it is now out of date. The last fifty years have seen a great deal of new research on India, and a striking feature of recent work has been to cast doubt on the validity of the quite arbitrary chronological and categorical way in which Indian history has been conventionally divided.

The editors decided that it would not be academically desirable to prepare a new *History of India* using the traditional format. The selective nature of research on Indian history over the past half-century would doom such a project from the start and the whole of Indian history could not be covered in an even or comprehensive manner. They concluded that the best scheme would be to have a *History* divided into four overlapping chronological volumes, each containing about eight short books on individual themes or subjects. Although in extent the work will therefore be equivalent to a dozen massive tomes of the traditional sort, in form the *New Cambridge History of India* will appear as a shelf full of separate but complementary parts. Accordingly, the main divisions are between I. *The Mughals and their Contemporaries*, II. *Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism*, III. *The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society*, and IV. *The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia*.

Just as the books within these volumes are complementary so too do they intersect with each other, both thematically and chronologically. As the books appear they are intended to give a view of the subject as it now stands and to act as a stimulus to further research. We do not expect the *New Cambridge History of India* to be the last word on the subject but an essential voice in the continuing discussion about it.

PREFACE

The starting point for this volume is 1526, the date of Babur's victory at Panipat. The ending point is 1720, the date of Muhammad Shah's accession in Delhi. By the latter date the essential structure of centralized empire was disintegrated beyond repair. Behind my choice of 1720, rather than 1739, or 1761, or even 1803, is the belief that the collapse of the centralized formal apparatus of the Mughal empire was an important turning point in Indian history. Three decades of study have convinced me that Mughal centralized power was a reality and that its effect on Indian society was considerable. Whether this was good or bad is a different question. After 1720 the Mughal empire became a substantially different entity.

Within these dates I have tried to describe the construction of the Mughal empire, its operation, and its destruction. One of my aims has been to explain as clearly as possible the design and operation of the imperial system. This is no small matter, for generations of scholars have worked hard to try and decipher the intricacies of this enterprise.

Another goal has been to write a concise, coherent narrative history from 1526 to 1720. The narrative is conventional in that I trace the large public events, primarily political and military, that shaped imperial history. Partly this is because I believe that we ought to take the military history of the Mughal empire more seriously than is our current custom. After all, war was the principal business of the Mughal emperors, who committed by far the bulk of their resources to the military. It is also difficult to understand the nature of the empire without some knowledge of its dynamic growth in territory and resources.

A third aim is to encourage further scholarly work on the Mughal period. We simply do not know enough. The secondary literature on the Mughals is thin despite its great importance in South Asian and world history. Many more detailed local histories need doing. A host of scholarly monographs and lengthy articles on various castes and ethnic groups are waiting for their historian. New sources in different genres and languages need to be identified, authenticated, collated, and

published in the original text and in translation. We need better integration of the Indian and European sources by someone who reads Rajasthani, Persian, French, and Dutch, for example. For such new work our best hope lies in the originality of young historians from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Finally, my most important goal is to offer a one-volume synthesis that will be comprehensible to the non-specialist. I hope that this book can be read with profit by anyone interested in this most fascinating of historical periods. If successful, the volume should create a context for further reading and study.

In writing this volume I have become deeply conscious of my debt to colleagues in this field. I am especially grateful to Irfan Habib, Ashin Das Gupta, Satish Chandra, Tapan Raychaudhuri, and M. Athar Ali for their inspired scholarship and leadership in Mughal history over the past decades. Peter Hardy and Simon Digby have provided warm support and encouragement for my work over the years. A more immediate debt is to my two fellow editors, Gordon Johnson and Christopher Bayly, for their patience and their criticism. I especially wish to thank Muzaffar Alam for his incisive comments on an earlier draft. I have also benefited from discussions with Catherine Asher, Stewart Gordon, Bruce Lawrence, Om Prakash, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Ellen Smart. And, as always, I must thank my wife and children for their continuing love and understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The Mughal empire was one of the largest centralized states known in pre-modern world history. By the late 1600s the Mughal emperor held supreme political authority over a population numbering between 100 and 150 millions and lands covering most of the Indian subcontinent (3.2 million square kilometers). Timurid India far outstripped in sheer size and resources its two rival early modern Islamic empires – Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey. The Mughal emperor's lands and subjects were comparable only to those ruled by his contemporary, the Ming emperor in early modern China.

The "Great Mughal's" wealth and grandeur was proverbial. His coffers housed the plundered treasure of dozens of conquered dynasties; his regalia and throne displayed some of the most spectacular precious stones ever mounted. Nearly all observers were impressed by the opulence and sophistication of the Mughal empire. The ceremonies, etiquette, music, poetry, and exquisitely executed paintings and objects of the imperial court fused together to create a distinctive aristocratic high culture. Mughal courtly culture retained its appeal and power long after the empire itself had declined to a shell. Today the Mughal style as represented in miniature paintings, or much-admired buildings like the Taj Mahal, has an immediate and powerful attraction.

For nearly one hundred and seventy years (1556–1719) the Mughal empire remained a dynamic, centralized, complex organization. The emperor commanded cadres of officials and soldiers of proven loyalty who carried out his orders in every province. Men, money, information, and resources moved regularly and routinely throughout the empire as official needs dictated. Mughal success was the product of hard-driving, active rulership exercised by extremely capable rulers who acted as their own chief executives. Military victory, territorial expansion, and centralized control rested upon the management skills and strategic vision of the emperors and their advisers.

The empire was more than a superficial canopy stretched over the substantial social life lived in each region. It was an intrusive, centralizing system which unified the subcontinent. Imperial military power

imposed an unprecedented level of public order. The scale and level of organized violence diminished perceptibly in the lands within its borders. Imperial demands for revenue and tribute stimulated production and encouraged market growth. The uniform practices and ubiquitous presence of the Mughals left an imprint upon society in every locality and region of the subcontinent. Few persons and communities, if any, were left untouched by this massive edifice.

Although the first two Timurid emperors and many of their noblemen were recent migrants to the subcontinent, the dynasty and the empire itself became indisputably Indian. The interests and futures of all concerned were in India, not in ancestral homelands in the Middle East or Central Asia. Furthermore, the Mughal empire emerged from the Indian historical experience. It was the end product of a millennium of Muslim conquest, colonization, and state-building in the Indian subcontinent.

Muslim and Hindu-Buddhist warriors first clashed in the early seventh century in Seistan on the border between Iran and Afghanistan. Century after century their descendants skirmished, raided, and fought bloody battles along a slowly eastward-moving military frontier. From the western edge of Afghanistan and the shores of Makran and Sind, the area of Muslim political conquest reached Kabul in the ninth century, Delhi in the early thirteenth century, and the cities of the Deccan and South India in the fourteenth century. Behind this frontier line Muslim generals built new states commanded by Turkish, Persian, Afghan, and other foreign Muslim elites. For a few decades in the mid-fourteenth century, the Sultans of Delhi ruled over an empire extending over most of the subcontinent before it broke apart. Thereafter, the locus of Indian Muslim political power reverted to regional kingdoms.

Indo-Muslim rulers appealed regularly to Muslim militancy in the *jihad* or holy war against the idolatrous Hindus of the subcontinent. Indo-Muslim rulers relied heavily upon the support of the Islamic religious establishment for legitimacy and political backing. In return the state supplied money and administrative support for the essential institutions of organized Islam. Theologians, preachers, and judges, often employed by the state, actively sought to retain the orthodox purity of the community in India against the absorptive power of Hindu Brahminical religion. Sufi *shaikhs*, who were influential leaders of the Muslim community and who also received royal largess, met a

wide range of religious and social needs among lay adherents. The implicit contract between ruler and religious leaders was an important aspect of Islamic conquest and expansion.

By 1500 Hindu society in nearly every region of the subcontinent save the extreme south was conditioned to accept the authority of an Indo-Muslim ruler – whether of foreign or Indian origin. Generations of Hindu kings, warriors, and priests, fought and lost, rebelled and lost, and finally accepted service within the Muslim political order. Rajput, Maratha, and Telugu and other warrior castes recognized the legitimacy of Islamic political power in return for assurances of continued dominance in the countryside. Men from various secretarial castes, such as the Kayasths or the Khatris, adapted to the new order by learning Persian and becoming experts in the administrative procedures required by Indo-Muslim states. Generation after generation the process of political socialization continued. The Mughals were the beneficiaries of that process when they began to construct their overarching imperial system.

As heirs to the Indo-Muslim political tradition, the Mughals found conditions favorable for political centralization. They could turn to numerous precedents in their efforts to build a reliable yet flexible political and administrative system. All earlier sultans had recruited and maintained a nobility firmly bound to themselves and relatively free of constraining local ties. If continually reinforced, bonds of fealty and personal loyalty imposed open-ended obligations of service for each grandee. Earlier regimes had induced local Hindu warrior-aristocracies to maintain order and help levy taxes in the countryside. Royal officials could obtain cooperation to the limits spelled out in contractual arrangements. These were the two essential joints in the articulated structure of the Indo-Muslim state. Without a reliable imperial elite, no ruler could function. Without cooperating local aristocracies the countryside was lost. An unresolved question was the extent to which powerful armed nobles could be transformed into royal officials at the center and armed lords of the land be transformed into royal officials in the countryside.

Another, often-ignored technological advance aided Indo-Muslim rulers. The introduction and wide use of paper in the eleventh century made the centralized administration of large, complex organizations much easier. Rulers could exercise tighter control over people, land, resources, and money by using paper documents and records.

Information flows became more copious and reliable. Enforcement of standardized rules and regulations became more feasible.

The economy of the subcontinent responded buoyantly to new markets and new demands under the Indo-Muslim states. By the sixteenth century regional economies were linked together in a dense overland and coastal trading network. Agriculture, industry and trade could readily support the economic needs of a rising empire. The wealth of Hind was proverbial in the relatively less fertile and sparsely settled lands of the medieval Islamic world to the west.

In each region on the subcontinent, peasant cultivators living in peasant villages grew dozens of varieties of foodgrains and specialized crops for subsistence and for sale in a hierarchy of cash markets. Wells and riverine irrigation helped to improve production and partially offset years when the annual monsoon rains failed. Industrial production was impressive – especially from the intricately organized textile industry. Weavers, dyers, bleachers, and painters produced an enormous range of cotton and silk cloth for sale in local, regional, and international markets. Markets for commodities and labor were extensive and efficient. Overland, coastal, and deep-water trade routes linked local economies with the wider world. Indian trading communities in Gujarat, North India, and the south could scarcely be equalled for the sophistication of their skills and resources. The Indian population was long-accustomed to a money economy using gold, silver, copper, and mixed silver and copper coinage. Meager domestic production of gold and silver was augmented by large imports paid for by India's trade surplus.[1]

The subcontinent's productivity ensured that it enjoyed a continuing favorable balance of trade. Apart from precious metals, India's only other unmet needs included large numbers of horses (primarily for military use), black slaves and ivory from Africa, and other exotic consumption goods. Exports included much sought-after Indian cotton cloth bound for Southeast Asia, East Africa and the Middle East as well as spices, narcotics, and other agricultural commodities.[2]

In the early decades of the sixteenth century, the compressed social energy of western Europe began to have an impact upon the Indian subcontinent. New ideologies, technologies, products, and markets

[1] See Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), I, Part 1, *c.* 1200–1500, pp. 45–162 for a full description.

[2] Simon Digby, "The Maritime Trade of India," in Raychaudhuri and Habib, pp. 125–162.

pressed upon the subcontinent. These forces traversed long-established overland and sea routes through the Middle East and the Mediterranean to reach northern and western India. In addition, under the impetus of Iberian expansion, new maritime connections with western Europe became the conduit for direct, unmediated transfers to India. Many diffusions originated in Europe's discoveries in the New World. This new conjuncture stimulated growth in the economy of the subcontinent and, indirectly, the growth and expansion of the Mughal empire.

The direct maritime connection was established by the Portuguese, who, sailing around the coast of Africa, entered the Indian Ocean trading world for the first time in 1498. Portuguese round ships equipped with numerous light cannon were far superior to indigenous vessels.[3] In 1509 the first viceroy, de Almeida, destroyed an allied war fleet sent by the Mamluk ruler of Egypt and the Sultan of Gujarat. For the next century or more the Portuguese were the dominant naval power in the Indian Ocean. From a command post on the western coast of India, they administered a new, unprecedented political entity: a maritime empire.

In 1510 Albuquerque occupied the estuarine island of Goa on the Mandovi river and held it against a besieging army commanded by the Sultan of Bijapur whose principal port Goa had been. Goa became the seat of the viceroy and a council appointed by the Portuguese king in Lisbon. Between Goa and Lisbon a new, formal, sea borne linkage was established by which a European state exercised direct control over its subsidiary realm in the east. Each year a flotilla of vessels armed and equipped by the king sailed from Lisbon to Goa; each year a flotilla returned from the Indies. Portuguese and their slaves, precious metals, orders and correspondence, officials, supplies including firearms and other commodities travelled out to India. Returning Portuguese, spices, official dispatches and correspondence, and other commodities made the return voyage. An aggressive early modern state in Europe administered a direct political and economic connection between India and Europe.

[3] Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 214–219.

CHAPTER 1

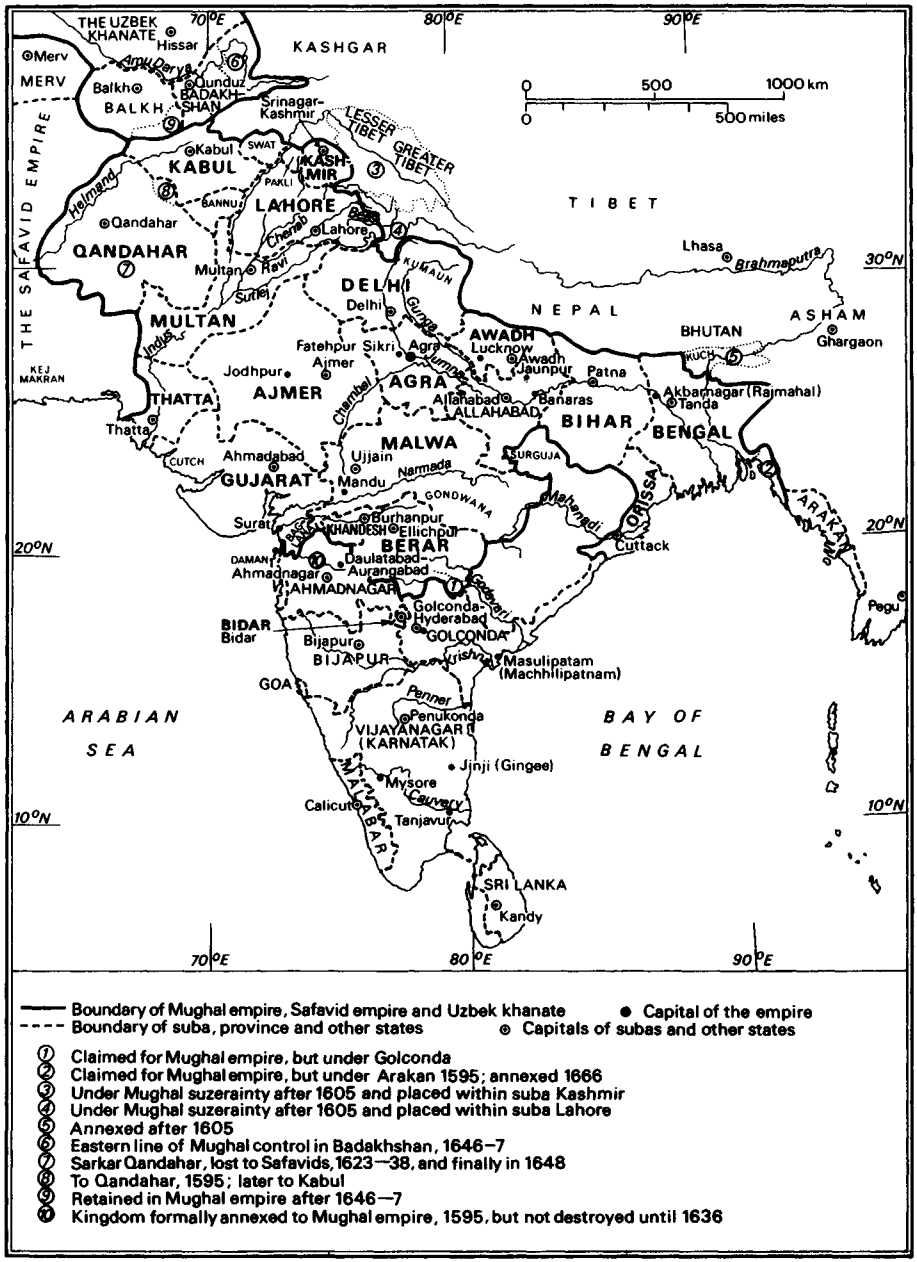
CONQUEST AND STABILITY

The legacy of the Indo-Muslim frontier, the medieval Indian economy, and new connections with Europe helped to create conditions favorable to the rise of an imperial state in North India. These conditions by no means assured that such a state would arise, or that it would be ruled by the Timurids. The Mughal empire was the product of a prolonged political struggle whose outcome was in large measure due to the abilities and good fortune of its founders and builders. The two founders of the Mughal empire, Babur and his son and successor, Humayun, eventually won a bitter struggle with the Afghans for supremacy in northern India. In this conflict the Mughals, although kings, were scarcely to be viewed as emperors. They fought, sometimes against overwhelming odds, to create a Mughal domain in the rich Indo-Gangetic plain of north India.

Their principal adversaries were Afghans who had supplanted Turks and Persians to become the most powerful and widely dispersed foreign Muslim group in northern India. Under the Lodi dynasty thousands of Afghan soldiers and traders had migrated from the mountain valleys of Afghanistan to the plains of north India. Many, like the founder of the Lodi dynasty, Buhlul Lodi, could trace their origins to the overland horse trade. North Indian demands for riding and battle horses created a ready market for the hardy horses of the Central Asian steppe. By this point in time many of these Afghan adventurers had settled on the land as local lords who controlled a Hindu peasantry.

BABUR 1526–1530

The Mughal empire was founded by Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur, a Chaghatai Turkish ruler, who invaded the Lodi-governed Punjab several times from his capital at Kabul before winning a decisive victory. The unexpected entry of Babur into the Indian scene added a third party to the Afghan–Rajput struggle that had just begun. The Mughal intrusion displaced the indigenous Hindu Rajputs and the



1 The Mughal empire, 1601
Source: I. Habib, *An atlas of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi, 1982), OA

long-domiciled Afghans by the foreign elite – Turks and Uzbeks from Central Asia.

In 1526, at the battle of Panipat, only a few miles from Delhi, Babur's compact twelve thousand man army defeated a much larger force under the command of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan of Delhi. At Panipat Babur was equipped with both matchlockmen and field cannon which he employed to good effect against the Afghan cavalry. Like most Indian rulers the Lodis had not adopted firearms. Ibrahim Lodi died in the battle along with dozens of other Afghan chiefs. After occupying Delhi, the victor sent his son Humayun to Agra, the Lodi capital, to seize the royal palaces and treasure. Shortly thereafter Babur joined his son, distributed much of the enormous treasure to his followers, and mounted his throne at Agra, which became his capital.[1]

The next year, at the battle of Kanua, Babur led his army to victory over a confederacy of Rajput kings headed by Rana Sanga, ruler of the state of Mewar in Rajasthan. Eighty thousand Rajput cavalrymen and five hundred armored war elephants charged the much smaller Mughal force. Babur's guns and his long-practiced use of the enveloping tactics of Central Asian cavalry proved to be as effective against the Rajputs as the Afghans. The death of the Rana of Mewar and many other Rajput leaders at Kanua shattered the possibility of a Rajput resurgence of power in the north. In 1528 Babur marched to the great bastion of Chandiri, the stronghold of a great Rajput chief feudatory to the Rana of Mewar. The Mughal troops stormed the fort and slaughtered the garrison.

These brisk victories, achieved over the dominant warrior coalitions themselves struggling for control of Hindustan, gave Babur a base from which to consolidate his rule in nothern India. He could have treated these engagements as simply the culmination of a giant, and highly successful, plundering raid into Hind and withdrawn to Kabul. Many of his followers probably looked forward to this withdrawal. Humayun had already been sent back to Kabul to defend that city and its region against further Uzbek assaults. Instead, however, Babur decided to stay and to strengthen his hold over the fertile lands and wealthy cities of Hindustan.

In December, 1530 Babur died. His kingdom included Central Asian territories, Kabul, the Punjab, Delhi, part of Bihar to the east,

[1] For further details see Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1922).

and south to Gwalior. As yet it was a new conquest state with little done to consolidate Mughal rule in the new Indian territories.

Babur bequeathed to his successors a distinguished lineage stretching back to the great Central Asian conqueror Timur, and also through the Chaghatai Turks back to Chingiz Khan. Through Timur, the Mughal dynasty claimed impeccable credentials as rulers and conquerors of extraordinary luster. (Hence the term Timurid used synonymously for Mughal in this volume.) In addition Babur's legacy included Central Asian horsemanship and battle tactics, life lived comfortably under canvas in tents, and the Turki language. He left a persistent and abiding Sunni Islamic faith and a familial connection with the orthodox Naqshbandi Sufi order which had originated in Central Asia. His legacy included a sophisticated cultural style derived from Timur's patronage at Samarkhand and refined at the courts of his successors in Central Asia. Finally, not least of Babur's heritage were his memoirs, written in Turki, which recounted his life adventures from his early youth in the valley of Ferghana to his conquest of India. Copied by distinguished calligraphers and illustrated by the finest painters, manuscript copies of Babur's remarkable journal became a primary source for the familial pride of the Mughal or Timurid dynasty.

HUMAYUN 1530–1556

The emperor Humayun (1530–1556) encountered massive difficulties in his efforts to retain and expand Babur's conquests in India. The source of one of his major problems was another of Babur's legacies. In keeping with the appanage system of the Timurids, Humayun distributed provinces to administer to each of his four brothers. In the northwest Mirza Sulaiman obtained Badakhshan, and Kamran governed Kabul and Qandahar. In India Askari and Hindal each were given large districts to administer. Within a year, Kamran, with the support of his brother Askari, occupied the Punjab and forcibly removed Humayun's governor. He then forced Humayun to agree to his possession of the province.[2] Humayun was thereby denied access to the resources of both the Punjab and the Central Asian bases of the Mughals.

[2] Ishwari Prasad, *The Life and Times of Humayun* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1956) pp. 44–45.

Humayun's immediate concerns lay with the Afghans to the east who looked to restore an heir to the Lodi throne. After an initial victory over the Afghan forces in the east, Humayun retreated into nearly a year of profound inactivity at Agra induced, it seems, by a growing addiction to opium taken with wine. During this period two powerful enemies consolidated their positions.

In the south Bahadur Shah, ruler of the prosperous maritime state of Gujarat, challenged Humayun by seizing control of the Sultanate of Malwa. Bahadur Shah was busily negotiating Afghan support in the northeast to try to eject the Mughals from North India. The Gujarat court was the refuge of many Lodi exiles who urged Bahadur Shah to action. Bahadur Shah had built up an extremely large army equipped with the latest cannon. He employed an Ottoman Turkish engineer and Portuguese gunners.[3]

In 1535 Humayun launched a campaign against the Gujarat ruler who was then engaged in his own invasion of Rajasthan. The Mughals defeated and drove back the Gujarat armies and captured the fortress of Champanir in Gujarat in a very short time. But delay and indecision on Humayun's part, largely brought on by opium use, forced him to withdraw from Gujarat without deposing Bahadur Shah or formally annexing the kingdom. Further danger from Gujarat ended with the untimely death of Bahadur Shah at the hands of the Portuguese.

While the Mughals were engaged on the seacoast, an extremely able Afghan nobleman, Sher Khan Sur, had quietly gained control of the military fief of his father in southern Bihar. During the five years consumed by Humayun's campaigns in the south, Sher Khan became the acknowledged leader of the Afghan resistance against the Mughals and a king in all but name. In 1537 Sher Khan invaded Bengal, defeated Mahmud Shah, the ruler of Bengal, and besieged him at Gaur, his capital. Fearing Sher Khan's growing power, Humayun marched to the east to relieve the Bengal Sultan. Unfortunately, Humayun's ill-advised attempt to take Chunar fort rather than pressing on to Gaur permitted Sher Khan to capture Gaur and take control of Bengal. Mahmud Sultan fled his lost kingdom to seek an insecure refuge with Humayun at Chunar.

The fall of Chunar was followed by months of maneuvering which left Sher Khan with strong Afghan support and Humayun in a precarious position in the east. The Mughals and the Afghans met once

[3] Prasad, *Humayun*, p. 71.

again at Chausa, a river town on the Ganges. Three months of inconclusive negotiations between Humayun and Sher Khan were ended by an Afghan surprise attack in June, 1539. The battle became a complete rout in which Humayun himself barely escaped alive. Sher Khan, who had defeated the acknowledged ruler of Hindustan, assumed the title of Sher Shah in a coronation ceremony after the battle.

In May, 1540, the Mughal and Afghan armies met once again near Kanauj. The demoralized Mughal army panicked, ran, and was butchered. Humayun fled to Agra and then on to Lahore with a few followers. At Lahore a confused meeting with Kamran and his other brothers produced no plan of action. Kamran refused to allow his brother to take refuge in Kabul. The Timurids decamped from Lahore just ahead of Sher Shah and left the Afghan leader unchallenged ruler of northern India in 1540.

During the next fifteen years, Humayun remained a royal exile, a refugee seeking a means to recover his throne in India. From Lahore he and his much-depleted army rode to Sind, then back to Rajasthan and to Sind again with varying responses from local chiefs and rulers. In 1544 he crossed the border to Herat and sought refuge with Shah Tahmasp, the Safavid ruler in Iran. At the Safavid court, Humayun, under extreme duress, accepted the Shia faith in order to keep himself and several hundred followers alive. After this initial test, Shah Tahmasp grew more friendly and eventually agreed to underwrite Humayun's attempt to regain power. With fresh troops and funds Humayun led a combined Mughal–Persian force which seized Qandahar and then occupied Kabul. There followed an eight-year war between Humayun and Kamran for dominance in Afghanistan. Finally, in 1553, the royal exile reoccupied Kabul as its unchallenged ruler. Kamran became his brother's captive and was blinded to render him incapable of rule.

From Kabul Humayun turned to duplicate his father's conquest of northern India. Sher Shar had only ruled at Agra for five years before his death in 1545. During that brief period his energetic administration forecast many of the centralizing measures in revenue assessment and military organization that would be carried to completion by the Mughals. The throne at Delhi passed to his son Islam Shah Sur, who in the course of an eight-year reign was not able consolidate his father's administrative reforms or his own centralized rule. At Islam Shah's

death in 1553 the Sur domains were divided by treaty into the Punjab; Agra and Delhi; Bihar and the eastern region; and Bengal. Each was ruled by a son or relative of Sher Shah Sur. Everywhere the Sur administrative system was breaking up. Drought in preceding years brought famine conditions by early 1555. Popular distress contributed to Afghan demoralization as mortality from starvation and disease shot up.

Humayun, now fully energized, led his army from Kabul back to the northern Indian plain in late 1554. The Mughals met little resistance until Sikandar Shah Sur, the ruler of the Punjab, assembled a large Afghan army at the town of Sirhind. A hard-fought battle ended with Mughal victory. Sikandar Shah Sur fled the battlefield and with him went any hope of further Afghan resistance. Humayun entered Delhi and restored Babur's monarchy by mid-1555.

The Mughal restoration was complete. But Humayun had little time left. Within seven months, in January, 1556, he met a fatal accident on the steps of his library in the fortress at Delhi. Humayun's nobles concealed the fact of his death for seventeen days until they could secure a stable arrangement for the succession. The agreement arrived at permitted Humayun's young son Akbar, then twelve years of age, to be crowned under the title Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar.

AKBAR 1556–1605

During his long reign Akbar made no emotional or political commitment to a permanent capital. His court, household, chancery, treasury, stables, and armories moved from one urban setting to another to suit changing circumstances. When desired, the Timurid ruler became readily mobile. The massive tents of the imperial encampment, emplaced after the day's march, retained the grandeur and fixed spatial arrangements of a permanent city built of stone. The emperor himself, rather than a physical site, was the capital of the empire.

Akbar's changing strategic foci are reflected in the four successive sites – Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, and Agra – adopted as royal capitals. Each phase in his grand strategy is defined by increased Mughal power, resources and territory as the precarious regime inherited by the young Timurid prince grew into a multi-regional empire.

BAIRAM KHAN AS REGENT

Bairam Khan, a dominant member of Humayun's nobility, assumed the role of protector or regent for the young Akbar. Several months after Akbar's enthronement, Hemu, a minister and general of one of the presumptive heirs of Islam Shah Sur, marched with a huge army to attack Delhi. Hemu, a Hindu Vaisya or member of a literate, mercantile caste, who had risen from humble circumstances to be a general for the Sur regime, claimed royal status by employing the ancient Sanskrit title of Raja Vikramaditya. Had he succeeded this would have been a remarkable reassertion of the Sanskritic/Brahminical monarchical tradition in North India – long subservient to Muslim rulers. A much smaller Mughal army assembled by Bairam Khan with Akbar at his side met Hemu's forces at Panipat, the site of the climactic Lodi–Timurid battle three decades earlier. The Sur forces nearly overwhelmed the Mughals but for a stray arrow that wounded Hemu and brought him as a prisoner to the Mughal commanders. Together Bairam Khan and his young protégé slew the helpless Sur general. The dead commander's troops, thoroughly demoralized, rapidly deserted the battlefield to give the victory to the Mughals.

In the next six months the Mughals won another major battle against Sikandar, one of the Sur princes, who then fled east to Bengal. Under Bairam Khan's direction Mughal armies occupied Lahore and seized Multan in the Punjab. In 1558 they took possession of Ajmer, the aperture to Rajasthan, after the flight of its Muslim ruler. Late in the same year a Timurid commander defeated Ibrahim, the remaining Sur prince, and annexed Jaunpur, capital of the former Sultanate of Jaunpur in the eastern Gangetic valley. By early 1557 a Mughal force besieged a Sur commander in control of Gwalior fort, the greatest stronghold north of the Narmada river. After nearly two years the beleaguered Afghan garrison surrendered in January, 1558.

This aggressive flurry of activity put the vital cities and strongholds of a compact region between Lahore, Delhi, Agra, and Jaunpur under Mughal control. This was Hindustan, the old heartland of Muslim political and military power in North India. The Mughals, like their predecessors, now tapped the immense agricultural productivity and busy trade of the epicenter of the Indo-Gangetic plain. Lahore and Delhi stood together as western and eastern redoubts – symbols of Muslim victory and domination in Hindu north India.

By the fourth regnal year Bairam Khan had launched a drive to the south into Rajasthan and Malwa. At this juncture a new political struggle put a temporary halt to expansion. Akbar, then turned seventeen, chafed in adolescent rebellion against Bairam Khan's stern authority. Several clashes with the regent brought the young king to an alliance with a dissident faction of the nobility. This clique consisted of Adham Khan, Akbar's Turani foster brother, the son of his wet-nurse, and a group of his relatives. Hamida Begam, Akbar's mother, actively encouraged the planned coup. Ethnic and religious friction underlay dissatisfaction with the all-powerful minister. The orthodox Sunni Muslim Central Asian (Turani) nobles disliked deferring to a Persian Shia like Bairam Khan. Their dislike intensified when Bairam Khan appointed a fellow Shia theologian as religious minister (*sadr*) who controlled state patronage in the form of gifts, grants and jobs.

In March, 1560, Akbar, who was at Delhi, demanded Bairam Khan's resignation as chief minister. Feeling the erosion of his position, Bairam Khan complied. The disgraced minister could choose between continued personal service at court (but not as regent), or temporary exile in a pilgrimage to Mecca. Choosing the pilgrimage, the unfortunate minister was assassinated on his journey by an Afghan with a long-standing personal grievance, before he embarked for the sea passage.

TOWARD AUTONOMOUS RULE

Between 1560 and 1571, the first period of his mature rule, Akbar remained at Agra. For two years Maham Anaga, Akbar's foster mother, Adham Khan, and Shihab-ud-din, a cousin who served as governor of Delhi, exercised nearly complete political and fiscal powers.

The troika wasted little time in resuming military activity. A Mughal field army under the command of Adham Khan and Pir Muhammad Khan invaded the kingdom of Malwa. The Mughal army defeated Baz Bahadur, the Sultan of Malwa, at the town of Sarangpur. The defeated ruler fled to the Sultanate of Khandesh for refuge leaving his harem, treasure, and war elephants. His principal queen, Rupamati, famed for her beauty, took poison rather than lose her honor in captivity. This tragic theme has inspired many poetic compositions since that date.

Despite its initial success the campaign proved a disaster from

Akbar's point of view. Adham Khan retained virtually all the spoils. The victorious commander then followed Central Asian practice by wholesale slaughter of the surrendered garrison, their wives and children, and many Muslim theologians and Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet). The opprobrium this generated greatly upset Akbar. The emperor rode in person to the army's headquarters to confront Adham Khan and relieve him of command. Akbar sent his other leading general, Pir Muhammad Khan, in pursuit of Baz Bahadur deep into the territory of the Deccan Muslim Sultanate of Khandesh. But the rulers of Khandesh and Berar and the royal fugitive Baz Bahadur allied to beat back the Mughal army.

Baz Bahadur temporarily regained control of Malwa until, in the next year, another Mughal army invaded and firmly annexed the kingdom. Malwa became a province embedded within the nascent imperial administration of the Timurid regime. Baz Bahadur survived as a refugee at various courts until, eight years later, in 1570, he took service with his conqueror as a Mughal noble (*amir*).

Shortly after the return of the Mughal armies, in late 1561, Akbar's conflict with Adham Khan flared up again. Feeling slighted by the appointment of another noble as chief minister (*vakil*), Adham Khan attacked and killed the new minister in his own audience hall in the palace. When the still armed Adham Khan confronted Akbar in the harem, he was struck down by the outraged young emperor and thrown from a terrace into the palace courtyard. Still alive, Adham Khan was dragged up and thrown to the courtyard once again by Akbar to ensure his death. This dramatic event is described in full detail in the histories of the reign and graphically portrayed in miniature paintings. The fate of Adham Khan became part of a growing corpus of stories that together formed the legendary Akbar.

Akbar immediately assumed full executive powers as ruler. In place of the office of chief minister he created four specialized ministerial posts for financial, military, household, and religious affairs. In so doing, he removed one focal point for noble rebellion and discontent. No single member of the Mughal nobility would have unquestioned preeminence and thereby attract dissident adherents. The threat of an over-mighty chief minister had been diverted – at least until the waning days of the dynasty.

Beyond these measures the young ruler faced the problem of political organization. Military victories were not enough; the new

regime required a coherent political statement. Somehow Akbar had to interweave the strands of his inherited Timurid charisma and authority, of centralized authority inherited from the Surs and the Sultans of Delhi, and the notion of Islamic legitimacy. If he failed to do so, North India would undergo once again war between Mughals, Afghans, Rajputs, and regional Muslim rulers which had disfigured the previous three decades. Merely to survive as a ruler, he must win over or break the power of two groups: the Muslim nobility with its armed power and wealth, and the religious elites of Islam, the *ulema* and Sufi shaikhs, with their influence over the Muslim community in India.

NEW CONQUESTS

In 1561 Sher Khan Sur, son of Adil Shah Sur, still unsubdued, marched from the great Afghan bastion at Chunar toward Jaunpur with a large army. Two Mughal commanders, Zaman Khan and Bahadur Khan, Central Asian Uzbek nobles, dealt a sharp defeat to the Afghans and seized arms, treasure and war elephants. Zaman Khan duly reported the victory to the emperor, but retained the battle plunder without permission. Akbar was incensed at the violation of royal prerogatives – especially in the case of the war elephants whose use was a royal symbol in India. He marched in person to Kara and confronted the two generals in person. They paid formal homage to him and dutifully handed over the spoils of battle. The seizure of Chunar rounded out the first phase of Mughal expansion in the east.

In the two years after the departure of Bairam Khan, the Mughal ruler, still not past his twentieth birthday, displayed his true political and organizational capabilities. He asserted his position as an absolutist ruler demanding deference from all. Even victorious generals could be brought to submission if prompt vigorous action were taken by the emperor. Akbar became his own comander-in-chief and most capable strategist and field commander.

As a symbol of his new-found autonomy and military prowess, Akbar sent a mission to the Baghela Rajput ruler Ram Chand at Kalinjar, his capital, to induce the famed singer–musician Tansen to come to the Mughal court at Agra. Ram Chand, who had rejected earlier overtures from the Surs, dared not refuse and sent Tansen with his instruments and lavish presents to Akbar's court. Akbar is said to have given Tansen two hundred thousand rupees as a gift on the