

Background Note on Medieval History¹

For a period that has come to be so strongly associated with the Islamic influence and rule in India, Medieval Indian history went for almost three whole centuries under the so-called indigenous rulers, that included the Chalukyas, the Pallavas, the Pandyas, the Rashtrakutas, the Muslims rulers and finally the Mughal Empire. The most important dynasty to emerge in the middle of the 9th century was that of the Cholas.

The Palas

Between 8th and 10th centuries A.D., a number of powerful empires dominated the eastern and northern parts of India. The Pala king Dharmapala, son of Gopala reigned from the late 8th century A.D. to early 9th century A.D. Nalanda University and Vikramashila University were founded by Dharmapala.

The Senas

After the decline of the Palas, the Sena dynasty established its rule in Bengal. The founder of the dynasty was Samantasena. The greatest ruler of the dynasty was Vijaysena. He conquered the whole of Bengal and was succeeded by his son Ballalasena. He reigned peacefully but kept his dominions intact. He was a great scholar and wrote four works including one on astronomy. The last ruler of this dynasty was Lakshmanasena under whose reign the Muslims invaded Bengal, and the empire fell.

The Pratihara

The greatest ruler of the Pratihara dynasty was Mihir Bhoja. He recovered Kanauj (Kanyakubja) by 836, and it remained the capital of the Pratiharas for almost a century. He built the city Bhojpal (Bhopal). Raja Bhoja and other valiant Gujara kings faced and defeated many attacks of the Arabs from west.

Between 915-918 A.D, Kanauj was attacked by a Rashtrakuta king, who devastated the city leading to the weakening of the Pratihara Empire. In 1018, Kannauj then ruled by Rajyapala Pratihara was sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni. The empire broke into independent Rajput states.

The Rashtrakutas

This dynasty, which ruled from Karnataka, is illustrious for several reasons. They ruled the territory vaster than that of any other dynasty. They were great patrons of art and literature. The encouragement that several Rashtrakuta kings provided to education and literature is unique, and the religious tolerance exercised by them was exemplary.

The Chola Empire of the South

¹ <https://knowindia.gov.in/culture-and-heritage/medieval-history.php>

It emerged in the middle of the 9th century A.D., covered a large part of Indian peninsula, as well as parts of Sri Lanka and the Maldives Islands.

The first important ruler to emerge from the dynasty was Rajaraja Chola I and his son and successor Rajendra Chola. Rajaraja carried forward the annexation policy of his father. He led armed expedition to distant lands of Bengal, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.

The successors of Rajendra I, Rajadhiraj and Rajendra II were brave rulers who fought fiercely against the later Chalukya kings, but could not check the decline of Chola Empire. The later Chola kings were weak and incompetent rulers. The Chola Empire thus lingered on for another century and a half, and finally came to an end with the invasion of Malik Kafur in the early 14th century A.D.

The Rise of Islam in South-Asia

The initial entry of Islam into South Asia came in the first century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan and Sindh in 711 led by Muhammad bin Qasim. He captured Sindh and Multan. Three hundred years after his death Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the ferocious leader, led a series of raids against Rajput kingdoms and rich Hindu temples, and established a base in Punjab for future incursions. In 1024, the Sultan set out on his last famous expedition to the southern coast of Kathiawar along the Arabian Sea, where he sacked the city of Somnath and its renowned Hindu temple.

Muslim Invasion In India

Muhammad Ghori invaded India in 1175 A.D. After the conquest of Multan and Punjab, he advanced towards Delhi. The brave Rajput chiefs of northern India headed by Prithvi Raj Chauhan defeated him in the First Battle of Terrain in 1191 A.D. After about a year, Muhammad Ghori came again to avenge his defeat. A furious battle was fought again in Terrain in 1192 A.D. in which the Rajputs were defeated and Prithvi Raj Chauhan was captured and put to death. The Second Battle of Terrain, however, proved to be a decisive battle that laid the foundations of Muslim rule in northern India.

The Delhi Sultanate

The period between 1206 A.D. and 1526 A.D. in India's history is known as the Delhi Sultanate period. During this period of over three hundred years, five dynasties ruled in Delhi. These were: the Slave dynasty (1206-90), Khilji dynasty (1290-1320), Tughlaq dynasty (1320-1413), Sayyid dynasty (1414-51), and Lodhi dynasty (1451-1526).

The Slave Dynasty

The concept of equality in Islam and Muslim traditions reached its climax in the history of South Asia when slaves were raised to the status of Sultan. The Slave Dynasty ruled the Sub-continent for about 84 years. It was the first Muslim dynasty that ruled India. Qutub-ud-din Aibak, a slave of Muhammad Ghori, who became the ruler after the death of his master,

founded the Slave Dynasty. He was a great builder who built the majestic 238 feet high stone tower known as Qutub Minar in Delhi.

The next important king of the Slave dynasty was Shams-ud-din Iltutmush, who himself was a slave of Qutub-ud-din Aibak. Iltutmush ruled for around 26 years from 1211 to 1236 and was responsible for setting the Sultanate of Delhi on strong footings. Razia Begum, the capable daughter of Iltutmush, was the first and the only Muslim lady who ever adorned the throne of Delhi. She fought valiantly, but was defeated and killed.

Finally, the youngest son of Iltutmush, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud became Sultan in 1245. Though Mahmud ruled India for around 20 years, but throughout his tenure the main power remained in the hands of Balban, his Prime Minister. On death of Mahmud, Balban directly took over the throne and ruled Delhi. During his rule from 1266 to 1287, Balban consolidated the administrative set up of the empire and completed the work started by Iltutmush.

The Khilji Dynasty

Following the death of Balban, the Sultanate became weak and there were number of revolts. This was the period when the nobles placed Jalal-ud-din Khilji on the throne. This marked the beginning of Khilji dynasty. The rule of this dynasty started in 1290 A.D. Ala-ud-din Khilji, a nephew of Jalal-ud-din Khilji hatched a conspiracy and got Sultan Jalal-ud-din killed and proclaimed himself as the Sultan in 1296. Ala-ud-din Khilji was the first Muslim ruler whose empire covered almost whole of India up to its extreme south. He fought many battles, conquered Gujarat, Ranthambhor, Chittor, Malwa, and Deccan. During his reign of 20 years, Mongols invaded the country several times but were successfully repulsed. From these invasion Alla-ud-din Khilji learnt the lessons of keeping himself prepared, by fortifying and organizing his armed forces. Alla-ud-din died in 1316 A.D., and with his death, the Khilji dynasty came to an end.

The Tughlaq Dynasty

Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, who was the Governor of Punjab during the reign of Ala-ud-din Khilji, ascended the throne in 1320 A.D. and founded the Tughlaq dynasty. He conquered Warrangal and put down a revolt in Bengal. Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq succeeded his father and extended the kingdom beyond India, into Central Asia. Mongols invaded India during Tughlaq rule, and were defeated this time too.

Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq first shifted his capital from Delhi to Devagiri in Deccan. However, it had to be shifted back within two years. He inherited a massive empire but lost many of its provinces, more particularly Deccan and Bengal. He died in 1351 A.D. and his cousin, Feroz Tughlaq succeeded him.

Feroz Tughlaq did not contribute much to expand the territories of the empire, which he inherited. He devoted much of his energy to the betterment of the people. After his death in 1388, the Tughlaq dynasty came virtually to an end. Although the Tughlaqs continued to

reign till 1412, the invasion of Delhi by Timur in 1398 may be said to mark the end of the Tughlaq empire.

Timur's Invasion

It was during the reign of the last king of the Tughlaq dynasty that the mighty king Timur or Tamerlane invaded India in 1398 A.D. He crossed Indus and captured Multan, and just walked over to Delhi without much resistance.

Sayyid Dynasty

Then came the Sayyid dynasty founded by Khizar Khan. The Sayyids ruled from about 1414 A.D. to 1450 A.D. Khizar Khan ruled for about 37 years. Last in Sayyid dynasty was Muhammad-bin-Farid. During his reign there was confusion and revolts. The empire came to an end in 1451 A.D. with his death.

Lodhi Dynasty

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The Slave Dynasty

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Sikander Khan Lodhi (1489-1517 A.D.)

After Buhlul Khan's death, his second son Nizam Shah was proclaimed the king, under the title of Sultan Sikander Shah, in 1489. He made all efforts to strengthen his kingdom and extended his kingdom from Punjab to Bihar. He was a good administrator and a patron of arts and letters. He died in 1517 A.D.

Ibrahim Khan Lodhi (1489-1517 A.D.)

After the death of Sikandar, his son Ibrahim ascended the throne. Ibrahim Lodhi did not prove to be an able ruler. He became more and more strict with the nobles. He used to insult them. Thus, to take revenge of their insults, Daulat Khan Lodhi, governor of Lahore and Alam Khan, an uncle of Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi, invited Babar, the ruler of Kabul, to invade India. Ibrahim Lodhi was killed at Panipat in 1526 A.D. by Babar's army. Thus came the final collapse of Delhi Sultanate and paved the establishment of Mughal Empire in India.

Vijayanagar Empire

When Muhammad Tughlaq was losing his power in Deccan, the two Hindu princes, Harihar and Bukka founded an independent kingdom in the region between the river Krishna and Tungabhadra in 1336. They soon established their sway over the entire territory between the rivers Krishna in the north and Cauveri in the south. The rising powers of the Vijayanagar empire brought it into clash with many powers and they frequently fought wars with the Bahmani kingdom.

The most famous king of the Vijayanagara Empire was Krishnadeva Raya. The Vijayanagar kingdom reached the pinnacle of its glory during his reign. He was successful in all the wars he waged. He defeated the king of Odisha and annexed Vijaywada and Rajmahendri.

Krishnadeva Raya encouraged trade with the western countries. He had a cordial relationship with the Portuguese who had at that time established trade centres on the west coast of India. He was not only a great warrior, but was also a playwright and a great patron of learning. Telegu literature flourished under him. Painting, sculpture, dance and music were greatly encouraged by him and his successors. He endeared himself to the people by his personal charm, kindness, and an ideal administration.

The decline of the Vijayanagar kingdom began with the death of Krishnadeva Raya in 1529. The kingdom came to an end in 1565, when Ramrai was defeated at Talikota by the joint efforts of Adilshahi, Nizamshahi, Qutubshahi and Baridshahi. After this, the kingdom broke into small states.

Bahmani Kingdom

The Muslim kingdom of Bahmani was established by some nobles of the Deccan who revolted against the repressive policies of Sultan Muhammed Tughlaq. In 1347, Hasan became the king under the title Abdul Muzaffar Ala-Ud-Din Bahman Shah and founded the Bahmani dynasty. This dynasty lasted for about 175 years and had 18 rulers. At the height of its glory, the Bahmani kingdom extended from north of Krishna river up to Narmada, and stretched east-west from the coasts of the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. The rulers of Bahmani were often at war with the neighbouring Hindu kingdom Vijayanagar.

The most distinguished figure of the Bahmani kingdom was Mahmud Gawan, who was the principal minister of the state - Amir-ul-umra for over two decades. He fought many wars, subdued many kings and annexed many territories to the Bahmani kingdom. Within the kingdom, he improved the administration, organized finances, encouraged public education, reformed revenue system, disciplined army and removed corruption. A man of character and integrity, he was held in high esteem by the Deccani group of nobles, especially Nizam-ul-Mulk, and their machinations led to his execution. With this, started the decline of the Bahmani empire, which came to an end with the death of its last king Kalimullah in 1527. Thereafter, Bahmani Empire was disintegrated into five regional independent principalities - Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Berar, Bidar and Golkonda.

Bhakti Movement

An important landmark in the cultural history of medieval India was the silent revolution in society brought about by a galaxy of socio-religious reformers, a revolution known as the Bhakti Movement. This movement was responsible for many rites and rituals associated with the worship of God by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Indian subcontinent. For example, Kirtan at a Hindu Temple, Qawaali at a Dargah (by Muslims), and singing of Gurbani at a Gurdwara are all derived from the Bhakti movement of medieval India (800-1700). The leader of this Hindu revivalist movement was Shankaracharya, a great thinker and a distinguished philosopher. And this movement was propounded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Namadeva, Tukaram, Jayadeva. The movement's major achievement was its abolition of idol worship.

The leader of the bhakti movement focusing on the Lord as Rama was Ramananda. Very little is known about him, but he is believed to have lived in the first half of the 15th century. He taught that Lord Rama is the supreme Lord, and that salvation could be attained only through love for and devotion to him, and through the repetition of his sacred name.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was an ascetic Hindu monk and social reformer in 16th century Bengal. A great proponent of loving devotion for God, bhakti yoga, Chaitanya worshiped the Lord in the form of Krishna.

Sri Ramanuja Acharya was an Indian philosopher and is recognized as the most important saint of Sri Vaishnavism. Ramananda brought to North India what Ramanuja did in South India. He raised his voice against the increasing formalism of the orthodox cult and founded a new school of Vaishnavism based on the gospel of love and devotion. His most outstanding contribution is the abolition of distinctions of caste among his followers.

Followers of Bhakti movement in 12th and 13th Century included saints such as Bhagat Namdev, and Saint Kabir Das, who insisted on the devotional singing of praises of lord through their own compositions.

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and founder of the Sikhism, too was a Nirguna Bhakti Saint and social reformer. He was opposed to all distinctions of caste as well as the religious rivalries and rituals. He preached the unity of God and condemned formalism and ritualism of both Islam and Hinduism. Guru Nanak's gospel was for all men. He proclaimed their equality in all respects.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to witness the rise of many religious reformers. The exponent of the Rama cult and the Krishna cult among the Vaishnavas branched off into a number of sects and creeds. The leading light of the Rama cult was saint-poet Tulsidas. He was a very great scholar and had made a profound study of Indian philosophy and literature. His great poem, 'Ramacharitamanasa', popularly called Tulsikrita Ramayana is very popular among the Hindu devotees. He set before the people the image of Sri Rama as all virtuous, all powerful, the Lord of the World, and the very embodiment of the Supreme Reality (Parabrahma).

The followers of the Krishna cult founded the Radha Ballabhi sect under Hari Vamsa in 1585 A.D. Sur Das wrote 'Sursagar' in Brajhasha, which is full of verses of the charm of Lord Krishna and his beloved Radha.

Sufism

The terms Sufi, Wali, Darvesh and Faqir are used for Muslim saints who attempted to achieve development of their intuitive faculties through ascetic exercises, contemplation, renunciation and self-denial. By the 12th century A.D., Sufism had become a universal aspect of Islamic social life as its influence extended over almost the entire Muslim community.

Sufism represents the inward or esoteric side of Islam or the mystical dimension of Muslim religion. However, the Sufi saints transcending all religious and communal distinctions, worked for promoting the interest of humanity at large. The Sufis were a class of philosophers remarkable for their religious catholicity. Sufis regarded God as the supreme beauty and believed that one must admire it, take delight in His thought and concentrate his attention on Him only. They believed that God is 'Mashuq' and Sufis are the 'Ashiqs'.

Sufism crystallized itself into various 'Silsilahs' or orders. The 4 most popular among these were Chistis, Suhrawardis, Qadiriya and Naqshbandis.

Sufism took roots in both rural and urban areas and exercised a deep social, political and cultural influence on the masses. It rebelled against all forms of religious formalism, orthodoxy, falsehood and hypocrisy and endeavoured to create a new world order in which spiritual bliss was the only and the ultimate goal. At a time when struggle for political power was the prevailing madness, the Sufi saints reminded men of their moral obligations. To a world torn by strife and conflict they tried to bring peace and harmony. The most important contribution of Sufism is that it helped to blunt the edge of Hindu-Muslim prejudices by forging the feelings of solidarity and brotherhood between these two religious communities.

The Mughal Empire

In India, the Mughal Empire was one of the greatest empires ever. The Mughal Empire ruled hundreds of millions of people. India became united under one rule, and had very prosperous cultural and political years during the Mughal rule. There were many Muslim and Hindu kingdoms split all throughout India until the founders of the Mughal Empire came. There were some men such as Babar, grandson to the Great Asian conqueror Tamerlane and the conqueror Genghis Khan from the northern region of Ganges, river valley, who decided to take over Khyber, and eventually, all of India.

Babar (1526-1530): The great grandson of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, was the first Mughal emperor in India. He confronted and defeated Lodhi in 1526 at the first battle of Panipat, and so came to establish the Mughal Empire in India. Babar ruled until 1530, and was succeeded by his son Humayun.

Humayun (1530-1540 and 1555-1556): The eldest son of Babar, succeeded his father and became the second emperor of the Mughal Empire. He ruled India for nearly a decade but was ousted by Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan ruler. Humayun wandered for about 15 years after his defeat. Meanwhile, Sher Shah Suri died and Humayun was able to defeat his successor, Sikandar Suri and regain his crown of the Hindustan. However, soon after, he died in 1556 at a young age of 48 years.

Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545): Was an Afghan leader who took over the Mughal Empire after defeating Humayun in 1540. Sher Shah occupied the throne of Delhi for not more than five years, but his reign proved to be a landmark in the Sub-continent. As a king, he has several achievements in his credit. He established an efficient public administration. He set up a revenue collection system based on the measurement of land. Justice was provided to the common man. Numerous civil works were carried out during his short reign; planting of trees, wells and building of Sarai (inns) for travellers was done. Roads were laid; it was under his rule that the Grand Trunk road from Delhi to Kabul was built. The currency was also changed to finely minted silver coins called Dam. However, Sher Shah did not survive long after his accession on the throne and died in 1545 after a short reign of five years.

Akbar (1556-1605): Humayun's heir, Akbar, was born in exile and was only 13 years old when his father died. Akbar's reign holds a certain prominence in history; he was the ruler who actually fortified the foundations of the Mughal Empire. After a series of conquests, he managed to subdue most of India. Areas not under the empire were designated as tributaries. He also adopted a conciliatory policy towards the Rajputs, hence reducing any threat from them. Akbar was not only a great conqueror, but a capable organizer and a great administrator as well. He set up a host of institutions that proved to be the foundation of an administrative system that operated even in British India. Akbar's rule also stands out due to his liberal policies towards the non-Muslims, his religious innovations, the land revenue system and his famous Mansabdari system. Akbar's Mansabdari system became the basis of Mughal military organization and civil administration.

Akbar died in 1605, nearly 50 years after his ascension to the throne, and was buried outside of Agra at Sikandra. His son Jehangir then assumed the throne.

Jehangir: Akbar was succeeded by his son, Salim, who took the title of Jehangir, meaning "Conqueror of the World". He married Mehr-un-Nisa whom he gave the title of Nur Jahan (light of the world). He loved her with blind passion and handed over the complete reins of administration to her. He expanded the empire through the addition of Kangra and Kistwar and consolidated the Mughal rule in Bengal. Jehangir lacked the political enterprise of his father Akbar. But he was an honest man and a tolerant ruler. He strived to reform society and was tolerant towards Hindus, Christians and Jews. However, relations with Sikhs were strained, and the fifth of the ten Sikh gurus, Arjun Dev, was executed at Jehangir's orders for giving aid and comfort to Khusrau, Jehangir's rebellious son. Art, literature, and architecture prospered under Jehangir's rule, and the Mughal gardens in Srinagar remain an enduring testimony to his artistic taste. He died in 1627.

Shah Jahan: Jehangir was succeeded by his second son Khurram in 1628. Khurram took the name of Shah Jahan, i.e. the Emperor of the World. He further expanded his Empire to

Kandhar in the north and conquered most of Southern India. The Mughal Empire was at its zenith during Shah Jahan's rule. This was due to almost 100 years of unparalleled prosperity and peace. As a result, during this reign, the world witnessed the unique development of arts and culture of the Mughal Empire. Shah Jahan has been called the "architect king". The Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, both in Delhi, stand out as towering achievements of both civil engineering and art. Yet above all else, Shah Jahan is remembered today for the Taj Mahal, the massive white marble mausoleum constructed for his wife Mumtaz Mahal along the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra.

Aurangzeb: Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 and ruled supreme till 1707. Thus Aurangzeb ruled for 50 years, matching Akbar's reign in longevity. But unfortunately he kept his five sons away from the royal court with the result that none of them was trained in the art of government. This proved to be very damaging for the Mughals later on. During his 50 years of rule, Aurangzeb tried to fulfill his ambition of bringing the entire Sub-continent under one rule. It was under him that the Mughal Empire reached its peak in matter of area. He worked hard for years but his health broke down in the end. He left behind no personal wealth when he died in 1707, at the age of 90 years. With his death, the forces of disintegration set in and the mighty Mughal empire started collapsing.

Rise of the Sikh Power

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Guru Nanak was born on April 15, 1469 in the Western Punjab village of Talwandi. Even as a child, he was given to deep thinking with no interest in worldly life. At the age of thirty, he got enlightenment. Thereafter, he travelled almost the whole of the country and went over to Mecca and Baghdad, preaching his message. On his death he was followed by nine other Gurus in succession.

Guru Angad Dev Ji (1504-1552) was Guru for thirteen years (1539-1552). He created a new script gurmukhi and gave the Sikhs a written language. After his death Guru Amar Das Ji (1479-1574) followed in succession. He showed great devotion and made the langar an integral part of Sikhism. Guru Ram Das Ji took over as the fourth Guru, he composed hymns, which were later incorporated in the sacred writings. Guru Arjan Dev Ji became the fifth Guru of Sikhism. He built the world famous Harmandir Sahib, popularly known as the Golden Temple in Amritsar. He also compiled the holy Granth Sahib, a sacred religious book of the Sikhs. Guru Arjan Dev suffered martyrdom in 1606 and was followed by Siri Guru Hargobind, who maintained a standing army and symbolically wore two swords, representing spiritual and temporal power.

Guru Siri Har Rai, the seventh Guru was born in 1630 and spent most of his life in devotional meditation and preaching the teachings of Guru Nanak. He passed away in 1661 and ordained his second son, Harkishan as the Guru. Guru Siri Har Krishan Ji got enlightenment in 1661. He gave his life while serving and healing the epidemic-stricken people in Delhi. The place where he breath his last is the one where, the renowned Gurdwara Bangla Sahib stands in Delhi. Siri Guru Tegh Bahadur became Guru in 1664. When Mughal Governor of Kashmir resorted to forcible conversion of Hindus, Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to fight it out. Gurdwara Sisganj in Delhi stands at the place of Guru Sahib's martyrdom and Gurdwara

Rakabganj at the site of his cremation. The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, was born in 1666 and became guru after the martyrdom of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh, at the time of his death invested the 'guru Granth Sahib' as the supreme head of the sikhs, thus bringing the practice of nominating a religious head to a grinding halt.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

Chhatrapati Shivaji (1630-1680), the great Maratha hero established the Maratha Empire in the Deccan fighting the powerful Mughals who were ruling India then. He motivated and combined the common man to fight against the domination of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, by inculcating wisdom of pride and nationality in them. Shivaji showed his spirit at the young age of 18, when he overran a number of hill forts near Pune. He raised a strong army and navy, built and renovated forts. A regular element of his campaigns was his use of guerilla warfare.

He joined together the Maratha chiefs from Maval, Konkan and Desh regions for the promotion of Maharashtra Dharma and carved out a small kingdom. Shivaji became an inspirational leader to his people and took the responsibility of leadership of the Marathas. The audacious Shivaji provided a thrust to the Marathas and other Hindus with martial tactics, which the Marathas effectively used against the sultans of the peninsula as well as the Mughals.

The small kingdom established by Chhatrapati Shivaji known as "Hindavi Swaraja" (Sovereign Hindu state) grew and stretched from Attock in Northwest India (now in Pakistan) beyond Cuttack in East India, in course of time, to become the strongest power in India. Shivaji died in 1680 at Raigad, at the age of fifty from an attack of dysentery. His premature death at the age of 50 (April, 1680) created a blankness, though his place in Indian history has been documented, recognised and remembered.

The Decline of Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire started disintegrating with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. His son and successor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was already old when he took the throne and was confronted with one rebellion after another. At that time, the Empire was facing challenges from the Marathas and the British. The inflated taxes and religious intolerance weakened the grip of Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire was split into numerous independent or semi-independent states. Nadirshah of Iran sacked Delhi in 1739 and exposed the fragility of the power of Mughals. The empire rapidly shrank to the extent of being reduced to only a small district around Delhi. Yet they managed to rule at least some parts of India until 1850s, although they never regained the dignity and authority of their early days. The imperial dynasty became extinct with Bahadur Shah II who was deported to Rangoon by the British on suspicion of assisting the sepoy mutineers. He died there in 1862.

This marked the end of the medieval era of Indian history, and gradually, the British paramountcy over the nation increased and gave birth to the Indian struggle for freedom.

