

Can the Shah Jahan era be referred to be the Golden Age of Indian History?

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Abstract

One of India's finest Mughal emperors was Shah Jahan. He governed an empire that was comparable in size to the Roman and British Empires. It included portions of what is now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan. During his leadership, Shah Jahan amassed a powerful army that allowed him to maintain control over one of the biggest empires in recorded history. Mewar, a kingdom that had long been hostile to the Mughals, finally succumbed. South Indian kingdoms like Ahmednagar, Bijapur, and Golconda all succumbed to Mughal rule during Shah Jahan's reign. The Red Fort in Delhi, the Taj Mahal in Agra, the iconic peacock throne, and other masterpieces of art and architecture from this era were constructed. During this time, the Empire's financial collections reached their highest point. This period of Indian history was mostly tranquil and forward-thinking. Despite this, many historians have presented this time period in a negative light.

After Shah Jahan's reign came to an end, there was a severe economic slump caused by the extravagant lifestyle of the Emperor, enormous costs for promoting art and architecture, excessive pressure on people to pay taxes, rising levels of corruption in the army, and the royal administration. For these reasons, many historians believe Shah Jahan should be held chiefly accountable for the demise of the Mughal Empire in India. This gave the researcher the chance to investigate whether or not the rule of Emperor Shah Jahan may be referred to be the "golden age" of Indian history.

Key Words: Reign, golden era, glory, frustration etc.

Introduction:

From 19 January 1628 to 31 July 1658, the Mughal Empire in India was controlled by one of the great Mughal kings, Shah Jahan. He had brilliant versatility. He displayed exceptional military prowess from an early age.

Mewar was forced to bow to Mughal power under the reign of Shah Jahan. Nearly the whole Deccan area fell under his rule. There is no proof of a significant uprising or disturbance. During Shah Jahan's reign, revenue collections reached their peak during the Mughal era. At this period, the Indian subcontinent, which includes modern-day India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and portions of Iran, was nearly entirely covered by the Empire. During this time, several of the most well-known architectural structures, like the Taj Mahal and Red Fort, were constructed. Some

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historians think Shah Jahan's reign was one of development, wealth, and peace.

However, criticism of this time period was never entirely absent. The first Mughal Emperor to focus on stifling Hindu voices was Shah Jahan. He caused religious intolerance by ordering the destruction of several Hindu temples in the revered city of Varanasi (also known as Benaras). Despite his military prowess, he was unable to put an end to the uprising in Kandahar. To collect taxes, the tax collectors wreaked devastation across the Empire. There was a surge in poverty. The Emperor was facing an increasing amount of discontent. Shah Jahan too had a very opulent lifestyle. As a result, government spending continued to climb. A large portion of royal funds were dedicated to the creation of art and buildings. Many historians prefer to think that Shah Jahan was largely to blame for the lavish spending that contributed to the economic downturn that followed his reign and caused the Mughal Empire to collapse.

Therefore, the concurrent presence of splendor and great national angst under Shah Jahan's reign offers enough opportunity for investigation into whether or not this time may be referred to as the "golden age" of Indian history.

Literature Review:

A discussion on review of some literatures on the topic/ related to the topic of study are as follows:

Views of Some Eminent Indian Historians about Shah Jahan:

Shah Jahan's reign might be referred to as the "golden period of Indian history," according to eminent Indian historian Dr. A.L. Srivastava, because of his contributions to the fields of art and architecture. The Mughal Empire was largely brought to an end as a result of Shah Jahan's intolerance of many religions. Additionally, he once believed that Shah Jahan's rule was the cause of the corrupted government, the wealthy strata of society, and the Emperor's opulent lifestyle. The tax collectors had to compel the reluctant classes to pay taxes in order to equal that in order to cover the cost of government spending. This fueled a sense of national resentment across the Empire.

Dr. S.R. Sharma emphasized how Shah Jahan's leadership had wasted the nation's resources.

Evidence from Fergus Nicoll:

Shah Jahan's life was about mercilessly crushing his opponents and moving forward to promote Mughal art and architecture, according to Fergus Nicoll's book "Shah Jahan: The Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire." He was the Mughal Emperor who elevated creativity to its highest level. He is renowned in history as the Mughal Emperor who, by misusing wealth to support art and architecture, also brought about the demise of the empire.

Evidence from "Encyclopaedia Britannica":

In "Shah Jahan," the Encyclopaedia Britannica writers noted that Shah Jahan revolted against his father in 1612. He became involved in this uprising out of a desire to take the throne. He later succeeded to the throne with Asaf Khan's assistance. The editors thought that Shah Jahan's victories

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added significance to his rule. By 1636, Golconda and Bijapur on the Deccan peninsula had also been compelled to join, and Ahmadnagar had been annexed. The Mughals received the Persian governor of Kandahar's capitulation in 1638. The Mughals took control of Balkh and Badakshan in 1646. However, they lost Balkh the very following year, in 1647. Kandahar was also abandoned in 1649.

Shah Jahan had a love for construction. He constructed the Taj Mahal, the Lal Qilla (Red Fort), the Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque), the Jama Masjid (Great Mosque), and several other gardens.

Evidence from Avni Kher:

An essay titled "Jahan - E - Shaan" on Emperor Shah Jahan was included in the book "Bygone Times - Special Reference to Mughal Era" in the years 2015–2016. Avni Kher was the name of the author. According to the author of this page, Shah Jahan was a military genius, as shown by his victories in the Deccan and Mewar regions.

According to the author, Shah Jahan was the ultimate king. Under him, the magnificence of the Mughal court peaked. But he had also started the processes that ultimately brought to the demise of the Mughal Empire. His explorations in Balkh and Badakshan as well as his endeavors to reclaim Kandhar were unsuccessful. He was an orthodox religious guy. Emperors Akbar, his paternal grandfather, and Jahangir, his paternal father, were more liberal than he was. Shah Jahan was more liberal than his son, Emperor Aurangzeb, nevertheless.

The Reign of Shahjahan considered the Golden Age

The most notable emperors who reigned over India between A.D. 1556 and A.D. 1657 were Akbar and Shahjahan. Due to the magnificence of the Mughal emperors and their nobility, it was a time of peace and prosperity that awed people both at home and abroad. Bernier, Tavernier, and Mannucci, among others, have shown them unwavering admiration. While the rule of Akbar has been acclaimed by all historians, the rule of Shahjahan has been the subject of conflicting views. According to Smith, Shahjahan was a failure as a person and as a ruler, hence his reign could hardly be characterized as a Golden Age. However, the modern scholars Khafi Khan and Rai Bharmal assert that given the calm and prosperity of Shahjahan's reign, it is very possible to conclude that it was a Golden Age. Because the Mughal Empire reached its pinnacle of strength and splendor during Shahjahan's reign, European visitors and authors like Bernier, Mannuci, Lane-pool, and Elphinstone concur with the viewpoint of contemporaneous writers. The Mughal Empire "attained its maximum combination of might and splendour under Shahjahan," according to Hunter.

The words of S. R. Sharma, who writes, "In spite of the early rebellions, which were soon put down, in spite of the foreign wars of aggression beyond the frontiers, which cost enormously with no return whatever, in spite of the famine in Deccan and Gujarat, which devastated a vast portion of the country, and in spite of the constant fighting in Deccan, which while it resulted in the subjugation of the Deccan people, was also a source of great suffering for the Dec

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Thus, notwithstanding certain flaws that emerged under Shah Jahan's rule, the reasons listed below unequivocally show that it was a great period.

Shahjahan Man

Shahjahan was a guy of many virtues. He was a forward-thinking individual who effectively succeeded his father and grandparents. Before leveling this accusation at Shahjahan, we should also consider that he was compelled to rebel as a result of the overbearing policies of queen Noorjahan. As he hoisted the flag of revolt against his father, academics like V.A. Smith have blamed him for not being an obedient son. Additionally, it was not a singular incidence. He inherited this propensity. Jahangir, his father, had also rebelled against Jahangir. He has also received criticism from Dr. Smith for not making a good spouse. However, if we examine the Mughals' customs and traditions, we may conclude that since they had large harems, they were unable to be limited to a single bride. However, as long as Mumtaj Mahal was still alive, he stayed deeply in love with her. Shahjahan was a kind, kind, and intellectual king in his private life. He had a passion for the arts and literature and generously supported writers and artists.

Administrative Success

The frequency of thefts and other criminal activity, which used to be rather widespread, has significantly decreased, and general public safety has improved. Traveling was no longer dangerous under his rule, and the riches that filled his coffers was a major factor in the empire's stability and prosperity.

His Military Achievements

Shahjahan excelled as a fighter in addition to being an effective leader. He constantly participated actively in battles and had great victories over his adversaries. Even at his advanced age, he actively participated in military operations. By his skill and prowess, he restructured and reinforced the Mughal army. He successfully overturned Deccan laws and established his power in Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golkunda. Even under the rule of his father, the names of other valiant Generals were overshadowed by his military prowess.

Enhancing the Mansabdari System

He changed and enhanced several aspects of the then-current mansabdari system. He decreased the mansabdars' salaries and mandated that they keep a contingent in line with their position and title. A person with a Jagir in India was expected to keep at least one-third of his Mansab contingent, but someone with a Jagir outside of India was only needed to keep one-fourth of his Mansab contingent.

Income system

In order to fill his coffers with the riches he required for the construction of magnificent palaces and the wellbeing of his people, Shahjahan made several substantial adjustments to the tax system. He increased it to 1/2 of all the produce from the previous 1/3, which was recognized as income. The empire's revenue increased as a result. Shahjahan received acclaim from Moreland for increasing the empire's revenue. Shahjahan's reign saw a boom in trade and commerce as his realm experienced unbroken calm.

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Criminal Justice Administration

Shahjahan, like his forebears, administered impartial justice to all of his subjects without discrimination of rank, caste, or faith. He heard all of the appeals for all cases while serving as the empire's Chief Justice. Because of the heavy penalties, no one dared to commit a crime. The emperor set the date of Wednesday for the execution of justice in his court. He maintained a careful watch on the behavior of his subordinates and harshly reprimanded those who either failed to carry out their tasks effectively or created obstacles for the administration of fair justice to everyone.

Efforts for the general good

Even though Shahjahan was an autocrat, he was constantly concerned about his subjects' well-being. For the advantage of the peasantry, he had canals constructed and created suitable irrigation systems. For the benefit of his people, he also constructed schools, colleges, mosques, sarais, and landscaped gardens. He was perhaps a little fanatical and conservative, but this had no bearing on how well-liked he was. He was a diligent and obedient monarch who spent a significant portion of his life in administration. He took whatever action he could to alleviate the suffering of the populace during the famines of A.D. 1630 and 1646.

Education and literary advancement

Like his predecessors, Shahjahan was a major supporter of learning and literature. He carried on his great-liberal grandfather's educational philosophy. Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit literature all advanced significantly under Akbar's rule. Following in the footsteps of their forerunner, Jahangir and Shahjahan let the literary movement to continue throughout their reigns. During his rule, a number of Sanskrit texts were translated into Persian. Abdul Hamid Lahori, Khafi Khan, and other historians benefited from the emperor's kind support. During his rule, astrology as a field of study, technology, and science all advanced.

The Growth of Diverse Arts

Shahjahan was more than just a military leader or warrior. He possessed a profound understanding of numerous arts. During his rule, architecture reached its pinnacle. He was a true master builder, and from the perspective of architecture, his was unquestionably the golden period. It was difficult to enhance art, so naturally he moved to architecture, which offered a wide range of opportunities for development, according to Dr. B.P. Saxena. Additionally, his reign's constructions must have gratified both his goals and ego. The Red Fort and its affiliated structures in Delhi are magnificently beautiful, and Shahjahan built great architectural examples such as Moti Masjid, Diwan-i-Aam, Diwan-i-Khas, and Musammam Burj in the fort of Agra.

The Taj Mahal is the Mughal era's finest architectural achievement. The splendor of its architecture beyond words. As a mausoleum for his loving wife Arjumand Banu Begum, also known as Mumtaz Mahal, who passed away in A.D. 1631, it was constructed by the monarch Shahjahan. Nearly all historians and academics have commended its stunning architecture.

Shahjahan's reign has been referred to as a golden age in the medieval history of India, as Dr. A.L. Srivastava correctly noted after seeing the accomplishments of Shahjahan in the area of building. This is true exclusively in relation to the field of art, namely architecture.

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On the basis of the above account, it can be said with great confidence that, notwithstanding certain flaws in the character of Emperor Shahjahan and the eruption of a few early revolts inside the empire, the Shahjahani age was magnificent. It would not be out of place to refer to this time as the Golden Age of Medieval History since we saw widespread advancement and growth throughout this time, as well as the apex of architectural achievement.

Research Methodology:

This study is not related to any prior research in any way. A first of its type, it. These methodologies are referred to as basic, pure, or fundamental research. On the basis of the findings of this study, ever-newer research directions—known as applied research—can be identified.

Data:

The historical era that is the focus of this study dates back between three hundred and three hundred fifty years. As a result, gathering the data for this study was a difficult task. The researcher had to rely heavily on secondary data, or information gathered from books, journal articles, features, and the viewpoints of illustrious academics, historians, and philosophers on the subject or closely connected subjects.

The majority of the information needed for this study was gathered from electronic editions of the writings of illustrious historians like Dr. Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. Nisith Ranjan Ray, the book of three doctors, Dr. A.L. Srivastava, Dr. S.R. Sharma, Dr. Romila Thapar, illustrious author Shyamal Gangopadhyay, and many others. In addition to this, the scholar also used materials from Encyclopedia Britannica, Arthur Mee's encyclopedia, Avni Kher, Fergus Nicoll, and many more sources.

Conclusions:

This research dealt with a period that existed in history about a few centuries ago. It was about exploring if the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan can be called the golden era or not. For this purpose some research objectives were framed. Then research questions were deducted from these research objectives. Adequate data was collected and the research questions were answered.

It is interesting to note in this context that the research questions united to form a major research question which is the title of the paper i.e. can the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan be called the golden era of Indian history or not. In other words, it can be said that effort was made in this research to frame the answers of the research questions so that a conclusion can be reached about it. Research questions going ahead to frame a major research question which is the title of the paper is a unique case. It ensured that at the end it became necessary to answer the question which is synonymous with the title i.e. it became necessary to answer/ reach a conclusion on if the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan can be called the golden era of Indian history or not.

A detailed study of the literatures available on the topic/ related topic, collection of data, subsequent analysis and interpretation of it, enabled the research scholar to conclude that Emperor Shah Jahan was luxurious, ignorant about his Empire and lacked interest on his Empire and his subjects. He showed a lot of promise as a prince when he was under the leadership and guidance of his father, Emperor Jahangir. But when the responsibilities fell on his shoulders and he became the Emperor, he

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indulged in a lavish and extravagant life. Emperor Shah Jahan diverted all his capabilities and concentration towards the development of art and architecture.

In order to call an era in history a golden age, there has to be all round development and not just in one field. Historical data and analysis of it in this research, says that during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan there was growth and development mainly in the field of art and architecture. So there is no doubt about the proposition of calling his reign a golden era of art and architecture. Although Shah Jahan ruled one of the largest Empires ever in history, his tenure as an Emperor was by and large peaceful and prosperous, yet he cannot be held responsible for these. He inherited these from his ancestors and presented an Empire with a fiscal recession and national frustration to his predecessors. So the proposition, if his reign can be called a golden era as a whole probably remains an invalid and unjustified one.

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