

## The Mughal Empire Under Shah Jahan in Indian History: A Study

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### Abstract

Emperor Shah Jahan (1592 -1666) was one of the greatest Mughal Emperors of India. He ruled an Empire that was one of the largest in the history of the world. It covered today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The size of the huge Empire was easily comparable to the gigantic Roman Empire and British Empire. The rule of Emperor Shah Jahan was one of the most peaceful, prosperous and progressive times of Indian history. There were unimaginable developments in the field of art and architecture. The peacock throne, the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort and many other pieces of art and architecture that keep people mesmerized even today were built up during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan. Financial collections rose to the highest volume during this period. There were no major rebellions or political invasions during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan.

**Keywords:** Greatest, Prosperous, Progressive, Architecture, Indian History, Peacock Throne

### Introduction

Shah Jahan was tolerant but not very liberal. He ordered the demolition of many Hindu temples and Christian churches in Lahore, Delhi and Calcutta (today known as Kolkata). He had almost soured the relations with the Jain community in Gujarat who incidentally were the royal financiers of that era. It is true that financial collections rose to a huge amount, in fact, to the highest level in the Mughal era. But that was not necessarily due to the growth in trade, commerce and business. It was because tax rates were very high and the tax collectors were merciless while collecting tax from the common people. This gave rise to dissatisfaction and frustration in the minds of the common people against the Empire and the Emperor. Building of some of the most amazing pieces of art and architecture, particularly the Taj Mahal in Agra, made Shah Jahan immortal in not only Indian history, but in the history of the world. But it also exhausted huge amounts of funds from the royal treasury. As a result of this, there was a very serious fiscal recession immediately after the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan. He was so much absorbed in his lavish extravagant lifestyle that he had stopped looking into the affairs of the Empire. He lost interest in the day to day matters of his Empire. Slowly and gradually that had a devastating impact. Some of the important machineries for running the Empire, like the army and the royal executive became inefficient and ineffective. They were greedy and always thinking of squeezing the Empire for their personal benefits. The army became so weak that at one

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point of time which used to be one of the strongest armies in history, could not suppress the rebellions in Kabul, Kanadaha, Badakshan and many other places. Thus, Shah Jahan's reign became a combination of black and white shades, thereby giving thrust to a debate i.e. if the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan can be called a golden era of Indian history or not. On collection of data, analysis and interpretations of the data, the conclusions that were reached were that there was tremendous development in the field of art and architecture during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan, but all round development was not achieved. Shah Jahan as an Emperor was busy with his extravagant lifestyle. He was ignorant about the Empire and his subjects. So referring to Shah Jahan's reign as the golden era of Indian history raises question marks and looks like a distant dream.



**Date of Birth:** January 5, 1592

**Place of Birth:** Lahore, Pakistan

**Birth Name:** Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Khurram

**Date of Death:** January 22, 1666

**Place of Death:** Agra, India

**Reign:** January 19, 1628 to July 31, 1658

**Spouses:** Kandahari Mahal, Akbarabadi Mahal, Mumtaz Mahal, Fatehpuri Mahal, Muti Begum

**Children:** Aurangzeb, Dara Shukoh, Jahanara Begum, Shah Shuja, Murad Bakhsh, Roshanara Begum, Gauhara Begum, Parhez Banu Begum, Husnara Begum, Sultan Luftallah, Sultan Daulat Afza, Huralnissa Begum, Shahzadi Surayya Banu Begum, Sultan Ummid Baksh

**Father:** Jahangir

**Mother:** Jagat Gosaini

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**The Military Genius:**

Emperor Shah Jahan showed extraordinary military talent and intelligence. There was a kingdom in Rajasthan called Mewar. Mewar was hostile towards the Mughal dominance since the time of Akbar, the great. At the age of twenty two, Shah Jahan led an army of almost 200,000 and after a horrible war that extended for a year, he conquered Mewar. The then ruler of Mewar, Maharana Amar Singh II surrendered to him and thus, Mewar became a friendly kingdom for the first time in history of the Mughal Empire. In 1617, Shah Jahan fought against the Lodis in the Deccan region and established the control of the Mughal Empire in that region. It made the then ruler at Delhi, his father Emperor Jahangir, so happy that he offered the prince a special seat in his court. This solidified Shah Jahan's reach towards the throne. In this context, famous historian Edward S. Holden (5 November, 1846 – 16 March, 1914) wrote "He was flattered by some, envied by others, loved by none."

**Patron of Art and Architecture:**

Shah Jahan is particularly remembered in world history for being a patron of art and architecture. He built up his urban capital at Agra which according to many historians became envy for Istanbul (at present in Turkey) and Isfahan (at present in Iran), which were the two most important cities in the world at that period. He commissioned the famous Peacock Throne or Mayur Singhasana. The magnificence of his court was appreciated by many European travellers like Bernier (1625 – 1688) and Sir Thomas Roe (1581 – 1644). Many prefer to call his reign the golden era of architecture. Among Shah Jahan's constructions the most notable ones are –

- Taj Mahal and Moti Masjid in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- Red Fort and Jama Masjid in Delhi, India.
- Shalimar Garden, Sheesh Mahal, Naulakha pavilion, Tomb of Jahangir, Wazir Khan mosque and parts of Lahore Fort in Lahore, at present in Western Punjab, Pakistan.
- Mahabat Khan Mosque in Peshawar, at present in North West Frontier province, Paksitan.
- Shah Jahan Mosque in Sindh, at present in Pakistan.

**Finance and Administration**

Historical evidences tell us that royalty collection rose to the highest level in the history of the Mughal Empire in India during the reign of Shah Jahan. There were no major rebellions or disruptive forces that took birth in this period. The reign of Shah Jahan was one of the most peaceful periods in Indian history.

**Contribution to Mughal Architecture**

Shah Jahan was an avid builder and is responsible for building some of the most beautiful edifices in present day India and Pakistan. It is said that many European travelers would visit his empire

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just to learn the different techniques used in the construction of buildings. It is also said that some of the world's most talented engineers and architects resided in his empire.

### **Construction of The Taj Mahal**

One of the most significant incidents in the life of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan was the construction of Taj Mahal. His beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal died while giving birth to their fourteenth child and the reason behind her death was stated to be postpartum haemorrhage. This left Shah Jahan devastated who then decided to build the world's most beautiful monument in the memory of his wife. After many years of planning, hard work and immense sacrifices, the monument, which came to be known as the Taj Mahal was built. Today people from different parts of the world travel to India just to see this amazing white colored edifice which is also one of the most visited tourist destinations of India. Taj Mahal continues to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World!

### **Objectives of the Study:**

This study is trying to explore a period that existed about five hundred years ago. The objectives of such studies that are done in relation to a period that existed long ago are to identify the mistakes of that era and understand the consequences of those mistakes. This would help in not repeating those mistakes today, prompt and easy identification of those mistakes (if they are by chance being repeated) and also in the rectification of those mistakes. This particular research is exploring the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan and trying to reach the conclusion about if that period can be called the golden era of Indian history or not. From that view point it can be said that the objective of this study is to evaluate Emperor Shah Jahan and his reign, to measure the effectiveness of his policies regarding running of an Empire that had a Muslim ruler and more than eighty percent of Hindu subjects.

### **Research Objectives:**

Every research needs to have some research objectives which are to be fulfilled by the end of the research. A research without any objective is like an undetermined path and is likely to not reach anywhere. This research is also not an exception to this norm. For making it effective it was necessary to fix some research objectives. After studying the research problem, the literatures available on the topic and related topics and the general objectives of this study, the following research objectives were framed for pursuing it and making it effective:

- Exploration of the developments during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan in various sectors like defense and military affairs, education, art and architecture, trade and commerce, economic development and religion.
- Measuring the effectiveness of the policies of Emperor Shah Jahan in fields like religion, military matters, art and architecture, education, communal harmony, royalty collection etc.
- Exploration of the frustration within the empire due to growth of religious intolerance, lack of appropriate use of military power, extravagant life style of Emperor Shah Jahan and the empire, deficiencies in the administration and foreign policies.

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- Exploring if Emperor Shah Jahan was responsible for the prosperity, progress and peace during his reign.
- Evaluation of Shah Jahan as an emperor.
- A comparison of Emperor Shah Jahan with the other great Mughal Emperors.
- Measuring the contributions of Emperor Shah Jahan towards the downfall of the Mughal Empire.

**Scope of Study:**

- Reign of Emperor Shah Jahan.
- His successes in fields like military, religious, business, art, architectural and administrative activities.
- Failures of Emperor Shah Jahan.
- Exploration of the heavier side i.e. whether successes are heavier or failures.

**Significance of the Study:**

- If the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan was a golden era of Indian history, then why did the Mughal Empire face severe economic recession immediately after him when Emperor Aurangzeb started to rule?
- If the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan was not a golden era of Indian history then can he be held responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire and to what extent?

**Importance of Research Methodology:**

The importance of research methodology can be summed up as follows:

- It enables the researcher to select the right research approach.
- It helps in meeting the research objectives and finding out of the answers of the research questions.
- It aims to construct synchronization between the research and the purposes for which the research is being pursued.
- It helps the researcher to choose a path and proceed with the research.
- It acts as the foundation of the research.

**Hypothesis:**

A hypothesis is a specific statement of prediction. Not all studies have hypothesis or should have hypothesis. This study is basic or pure or fundamental by nature. Generally in such studies researchers are making an attempt to explore a research topic for the first time. The purpose of these types of studies is to develop a hypothesis that can be tested in future through even more thorough

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research. So in this study it is difficult to frame a hypothesis. Hence, effort is being made to frame some predictions that this study may offer at the end. In this study secondary data has been collected from various websites, research articles published in journals and books. This data is expected to help the scholar reach conclusions about Shah Jahan's successes and failures in military activities, administration, economic development, trade and commerce, religious activities, contributions in art and architecture. This comparison of successes and failures is expected to help reach the conclusion about which side was heavier.

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#### 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 in a tabular form in the chapter on analysis and interpretations to show the linkage between the data collected, analysis done on the basis of that data and interpretations of the analysis that framed the answers of the research questions. 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

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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 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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