



Fig. 2.3: The Taj Mahal

Exam-type Questions

Q. What does the picture of the Taj Mahal tell us about the Mughal Empire?

The Reign of Aurangzeb (1707)

Aurangzeb Seizes Control

In 1657 Shah Jehan fell seriously ill. This presented a serious problem for the Empire as he had four sons, all of whom were of mature age, were all Governors of important parts of the Empire and had large armies available. They all wanted to be the emperor! When it appeared that Shah Jehan was dying, they began to jostle for power. Two of them, Shah Shuja and Murad, actually had coins struck in their name showing them as the new Emperor. However, the eldest son, Dara Shikoh, was thought to be the emperor's preferred successor.

But could he establish himself in power? It seemed that he could not because in 1658 two of his brothers, Murad and Aurangzeb, joined forces and defeated Dara Shikoh's army. But then Shah Jehan recovered and ordered his sons not to march on Agra. Aurangzeb replied that his father had lost control and it was important that he, Aurangzeb, take over and re-establish order. In May 1658 he defeated the Imperial army, led by Dara Shikoh and took his father prisoner. Shah Jehan was allowed to remain in Agra until his death in 1666, where he was buried in the Taj Mahal.



ingzeb

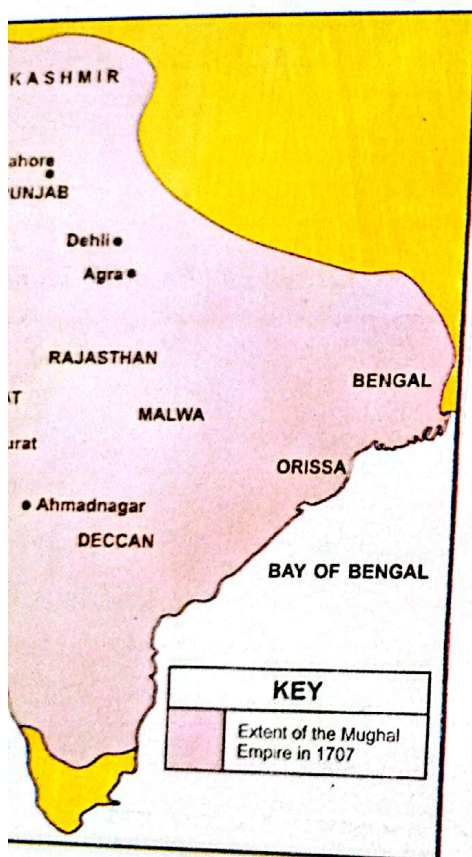
Murad was imprisoned and later executed. Shah Shuja was killed whilst trying to raise an army to oppose his brother. Dara Shikoh proved more troublesome. Aurangzeb had to pursue him and take him prisoner before executing him in 1659.

The impact of Aurangzeb's Policies on the Stability of the Mughal Empire

After defeating the Imperial army Aurangzeb took steps to establish himself as Emperor.

Although Shah Jehan had left the empire larger and more peaceful than at any other time in its history, this did not last. Aurangzeb was soon finding that much of his time (and money) was spent fighting.

- There was a war against the Rajputs from 1679-81 and rebellions by the Sikhs, and the Satnamis in Mewar and the Jats in Gokal.
- Since Aurangzeb was keen to extend his Empire northwards, he also had to fight a tough campaign against Pathan tribes in the North West Frontier.



of Aurangzeb

- Perhaps most costly for Aurangzeb was the campaign fought against the Maratha tribe in the Deccan. The Maratha leader, Shivaji, was originally defeated in 1665 and brought as a prisoner to Agra. However, he escaped and was soon back in the Deccan leading the fight against Aurangzeb. Even after 25 years of fighting Aurangzeb had not subdued the Marathas. He had, however, almost emptied the Mughal treasury. Although Aurangzeb did face many problems in extending the Empire, by the time of his death in 1707 it was larger than it had ever been, stretching from Kashmir to the Karnatak and Gazni to Chittagong.

Aurangzeb's Reforms

Historians are divided about Aurangzeb's attitude towards religion. Some say that he was intolerant and wanted to destroy other religions. They point out that he re-introduced the tax on non-Muslims, the *Jizya*, he destroyed a number of Hindu temples and he tried to ban some old Hindu practices, such as suttee. He also enforced Islamic law making Hindus and Sikhs live according to the Quran.

Other historians, however, argue that Aurangzeb was not intolerant, but that he was more 'orthodox' than some earlier Emperors. They emphasise that he employed some Hindu advisors and there are recorded instances of him making donations to Hindu temples.

Jizya tax
Destroyed hindu temples
Banning other religious practices
Enforced islamic laws on Hindus & Sikhs

There are mixed views on how successful Aurangzeb was as an emperor. Perhaps much of the criticism is a result of his more austere measures, such as appointing censors of public morals, banning the consumption of alcohol, stopping singing and dancing at 'court' and even determining the maximum length for beards. But to many people these were wise and needy measures helping to ensure that peoples' lives were lived in the correct manner.

(Aurangzeb made himself popular with traders by abolishing many local taxes, but generally taxation was very high during his reign.) Not only did he have to pay for the cost of his military campaigns (but he also spent huge sums on building luxurious palaces. An example of his extravagance is the famous Pearl Mosque at Delhi, which was built for his private prayers.) The taxes resulting from Aurangzeb's heavy spending meant that, by his death in 1707, he had become an unpopular ruler. Aurangzeb was 89 years old when he died and had ruled the Empire for almost fifty years. He achieved much, but it is also true that, during his reign, the start of decay in the empire could be seen.



SOURCE A

Aurangzeb keeps the fast on Fridays and during the period of Ramadan. He does not eat forbidden meats and does not listen to music. In his court, no wicked talk, no backbiting or lying is allowed.

This is an extract from 'The History of Aurangzeb' written by an official in his court in 1668.

SOURCE B

Aurangzeb says:

'My kingdom is now full of mosques instead of the most hideous temples. Instead of poisonous inns and brothels we find groups of holy men'.

But despite what Aurangzeb says in his kingdom every day the most monstrous crimes in the world are committed!

This was written by an Italian who visited India during Aurangzeb's reign and wrote a book called 'The History of the Mughals'.

1. What does source A make you think about Aurangzeb?
2. Do you agree that Source B makes you think about Aurangzeb in a slightly different way from Source A? Explain your answer.
3. As Source A and Source B were written at about the same time, why do you think they don't say the same things about the Emperor?

The Effectiveness of Aurangzeb's Successors

Aurangzeb had become emperor by defeating his rivals in battle. He was determined to avoid such a war after his death so he divided the Empire between his three sons. But he did not succeed. Fighting broke out between them, and eventually Prince Muazzam established himself as Emperor. He survived only a few years after Aurangzeb's death. The stable