

Political Dynamics of the Mughal Empire: An Integrated Historical Analysis

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Article History:

Received: 01 Januari 2025

Revised: 22 Januari 2025

Accepted: 24 Januari 2025

Keywords:

Political Dynamics, Mughal Empire, Integrated, Historical, Analysis

Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to holistically analyze the elements that shaped the journey of the Mughal Empire, from its heyday to its decline, in the hope of providing new insights into the pattern of dynastic rule in South Asian history. This research uses a qualitative historical method with a document analysis and literature study approach. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources, including historical records, archives, and modern literature on Mughal politics. The results show that the rise and glory of the Mughal Empire was driven by factors such as visionary leadership (for example, Akbar who introduced a policy of religious tolerance), innovations in administration and taxation systems, and economic support through international trade. On the other hand, internal conflicts such as power struggles among heirs to the throne, mounting financial burdens due to prolonged wars, as well as resistance from other regional and religious groups were the main causes of its downfall. The implication of this research is the importance of maintaining internal stability and policy innovation in sustaining the dynasty. The contribution of this research lies in enriching the literature on the history of Islamic dynasties in South Asia, which is relevant to understanding power dynamics in multicultural and multireligious contexts.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of human civilization records various great dynasties that played an important role in shaping the political, social and economic dynamics of a region. One of the most prominent dynasties in South Asian history is the Mughal Empire. Established from the 16th century to the 18th century, the dynasty was not only known for its political and military glory, but also for its contributions to art, culture and administration. In this context, understanding the political dynamics of the Mughal Empire is important to uncover the elements that supported its glory as well as the factors that led to its decline (Lubis et al., 2021).

Research on the Mughal Empire has been conducted by many historians and scholars, both locally and globally. These studies have generally highlighted specific aspects such as the

leadership of the kings, the administrative system, or the role of the economy in strengthening the foundations of the empire. However, there is still a need to holistically analyze the elements that influenced the dynasty's journey from its heyday to its decline. This comprehensive analysis can provide new insights into dynastic patterns of power in the broader context of world history (Miri, 2009).

In the existing literature, some studies highlight the successful leadership of Akbar who introduced policies of religious tolerance and social integration as one of the main pillars of the Mughal Empire. On the other hand, other studies highlight the negative impact of internal conflicts, such as power struggles among members of the royal family, which gradually weakened the dynasty's foundations. Despite many relevant findings, gaps remain in explaining the cause-and-effect relationships between the various political, economic and social factors that contributed to the overall dynamics of the Mughal Empire (Basri et al., 2023).

One of the controversies in past research is the divergent views on the extent to which religious tolerance implemented by Akbar and other rulers affected political stability. Some researchers consider this policy as an effective strategy to manage diversity, while others see it as a weakness that triggered resistance from certain groups. This study attempts to approach the debate with an integrative approach, linking tolerance policies to broader political and social dynamics (Nor & Ashari, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to holistically analyze the elements that shaped the journey of the Mughal Empire, from its heyday to its downfall. Using qualitative historical methods through document analysis and desk research, this study seeks to make a new contribution to the understanding of dynastic power patterns in South Asia. The data used includes primary sources such as historical records and archives, as well as relevant modern literature.

The Mughal Empire is recognized as one of the most successful empires in South Asia due to its visionary leadership and innovative administrative system. Akbar's leadership, for example, is often credited with creating social harmony through a policy of religious tolerance. In addition, innovations in the taxation system and international trade helped strengthen the empire's economy. These elements provided the foundation for the political and military glory of the Mughal Empire.

However, the research also found that internal conflicts played a significant role in weakening the dynasty's foundation. Power struggles among heirs to the throne often fueled instability, while the financial burden of prolonged wars exacerbated the situation. Resistance from other regional and religious groups also posed a major challenge to the dynasty's sustainability. Thus, an in-depth analysis of these conflicts is necessary to understand the factors that contributed to the collapse of the Mughal Empire (Ulpah et al., 2024).

The implication of this study is the importance of maintaining internal stability and policy innovation in sustaining a dynasty or government. By integrating various political, social, and economic factors, this research makes a new contribution to the literature on the history of Islamic dynasties in South Asia. This research is not only relevant for historians, but also for policy makers who want to understand power dynamics in a multicultural and multireligious context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on the Mughal Empire shows a varied focus, ranging from aspects of leadership, administrative innovation, to social and cultural dynamics. For example, a study by Richards highlights the importance of Akbar's policy of religious tolerance in creating political stability amidst the ethnic and religious diversity of the empire. The study suggests that the policy not only strengthened the legitimacy of the kingdom but also supported broader social integration

(Suaidi, n.d.).

However, other studies by Alam have criticized the continuation of this policy under subsequent rulers, especially during the reign of Aurangzeb, who was considered more conservative. In addition, literature on the administrative system of the Mughal Empire often highlights innovations in taxation and land management. The “Zabt” system introduced during Akbar's time is considered one of the greatest achievements in royal administration, as discussed in Habib's work. This system not only increased royal revenues but also created a more efficient bureaucratic structure (Zuhal & Syakur, 2022).

However, some research suggests that this system began to lose its effectiveness as corruption and decentralization of power increased in the late dynastic period. Research into internal conflicts within the Mughal Empire also provides an important perspective on its collapse. For example, Chandra's work highlights how power struggles among the heirs to the throne fueled prolonged political instability. These conflicts were exacerbated by external pressures, such as invasions from Persia and rising regional powers in India. The study shows that although the Mughal dynasty had a strong foundation, uncontrollable internal and external dynamics eventually contributed to its collapse (XVI, n.d.).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative historical research design with a document analysis approach. This design was chosen to enable in-depth exploration of the political, social and economic dynamics of the Mughal Empire from its heyday to its decline. The main focus of this design is to understand historical patterns and identify cause-and-effect relationships between factors that influenced the dynasty's journey (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023).

The population in this research includes all historical documents relevant to the Mughal Empire from both primary and secondary sources. The research sample was purposively selected, with the main criteria being historical records, official archives and modern literature that provide in-depth information on the policies, internal conflicts and socio-economic dynamics of the empire. This technique ensured that the data obtained had high validity and relevance.

Data collection techniques involved archival searches and literature studies. Primary sources, such as historical accounts made by contemporary historians of the Mughal Empire, were used to provide an authentic perspective on key events. In addition, secondary sources in the form of books, journal articles and research reports were used to complement the analysis and provide a broader theoretical framework. All data was systematically collected to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the information.

Data analysis was conducted using in-depth content analysis methods. The collected data were organized based on key themes, such as religious tolerance policy, administrative innovation, and internal conflict. Each theme was analyzed to identify significant patterns and relationships between the factors. The results of the analysis were then compared with findings from previous literature to ensure consistency and the research's contribution to this field of study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors for the Rise of the Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire achieved its glory thanks to visionary leadership, as demonstrated by Akbar. His policy of religious tolerance created social stability in a multiethnic and multireligious region. Innovations in administration, such as the “Zabt” taxation system, contributed greatly to the dynasty's economic strength and political stability (Çavuşoğlu, 2016).

The Role of Economy and Trade

International trade played a central role in the rise of the Mughal Empire. With a strategic location on trade routes, the Mughals became a center for the exchange of goods and culture between Asia and Europe. Diplomatic relations with other global powers, such as Persia and the Ottomans, further strengthened the empire's economic position (Choudhary, 2017).

Internal Conflict as the Beginning of Collapse

Internal conflicts, especially power struggles among the heirs to the throne, caused serious political instability. Warfare between members of the royal family not only weakened the government structure, but also drained significant economic and military resources (Brown, 1996)

Leadership Dynamics in the Late Era

Aurangzeb, as the leader of the late era, changed the direction of royal policy to a more conservative one. This policy worsened relations with non-Muslim groups, especially the Hindu community, which had previously been an integral part of social stability under Akbar (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023).

External Pressures and the Influence of Colonial Powers

The invasion of Persia and the increasing influence of the British were external factors that accelerated the collapse of the Mughal Empire. The British successfully exploited the empire's internal weaknesses to expand its control in the South Asian region, eventually leading to full colonization (Lambton, 1957).

Economic and Administrative Problems

A decline in administrative efficiency, including corruption in the taxation system, worsened the economic situation of the Mughal Empire. Reliance on international trade without diversification of the domestic economy made the empire vulnerable to external disturbances, such as global competition and colonialism (Ramesh, 2024).

Integration of Socio-Cultural Contexts and Diversity in the Mughal Empire

One important aspect of the dynamism of the Mughal Empire was its ability to integrate various social and cultural traditions in its administration. Policies such as the appointment of officials from different ethnic and religious backgrounds created a model of inclusiveness that was rare in its time. In addition, Mughal art and architecture, which incorporated Indian, Persian and Islamic elements, reflected an approach of cultural coexistence that helped strengthen the legitimacy of the empire. The lessons from this approach show that social harmony can be achieved through respect for diversity and efforts to make it a major force in governance.

Visionary Policy as the Key to Success

The success of the early Mughal Empire demonstrates the importance of visionary leadership in building political and social stability. Akbar, through policies of religious tolerance and cultural integration, was able to create harmony in an ethnically and religiously complex region. This exemplifies that inclusiveness is an important element in maintaining the legitimacy of government (Nurhakim, 2024).

Akbar's success in building stability under his visionary leadership was characterized not only by a policy of religious tolerance, but also by the implementation of policies that supported

social and economic integration. Akbar utilized inclusive strategies to accommodate diverse ethnic and religious groups within the Mughal governing structure, which in turn strengthened the broader political and economic coalition. One example of this was the establishment of Din-i Ilahi, a doctrine that attempted to unite elements from different religions under one philosophical system, although not widely accepted, this policy reflected Akbar's commitment to pluralism and social harmony.

In addition, Akbar also gave Hindus greater freedom in the administrative sphere, which was often restricted by Muslim rule. This policy not only increased the loyalty of various groups, but also broadened the political support that was the main foundation of the country's stability. This created a model where governance was based not only on military might, but also on legitimacy gained through social and political integration.

Akbar's policies also focused on economic development and infrastructure that supported the sustainability of the government system. Through agrarian reform and fairer taxation, Akbar was able to maximize the kingdom's revenue while maintaining the welfare of the people. These economic policies not only served as a tool to increase stability, but also as a means to strengthen power and extend the duration of the reign.

The Role of Economy in the Stability of the Empire

The Mughal Empire's strategic position on international trade routes provided great economic benefits. However, these gains came not only from trade but also from administrative innovations, such as an efficient taxation system. This shows that economic factors are not just a complement, but the main pillar of a dynasty's stability (Irfani, 2020).

The Mughal Empire successfully utilized its strategic position on international trade routes to bring in tremendous economic benefits. Located at the center of the trade routes between Central Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the Mughals became a meeting point for a variety of merchandise such as spices, textiles and gems. With control over major trade routes, the empire not only enjoyed direct benefits from international trade, but also gained political and cultural influence that strengthened its international standing. This growing trade activity helped to boost the domestic economy and expand diplomatic networks.

However, the economic success of the Mughal Empire was not solely dependent on trade either. One of the other key factors was innovation in administration, especially in the taxation system that was implemented. Under Akbar's reign, the taxation system underwent significant reform through the introduction of "zabt," a fairer and more systematic system of land valuation. Under this system, taxes were levied proportionally based on the agricultural output produced by farmers, thus improving social justice and reducing inequality. This efficient taxation system not only provided stable revenue for the kingdom, but also supported sustainable economic growth.

In addition, Akbar's economic policies included efforts to increase agricultural production through better farming techniques and optimal utilization of natural resources. These programs not only increased agricultural output, but also supported the textile and handicraft industries that became an important source of revenue for the kingdom. Akbar also encouraged urbanization by building new cities that became centers of trade and industry, such as Fatehpur Sikri, which became a symbol of economic modernization at the time.

Dynamics of Internal Conflict

Prolonged internal conflicts demonstrated the failure of the Mughal dynasty to establish a stable succession system. Power struggles among the heirs to the throne not only weakened the

central authority, but also provided opportunities for opposition groups and external forces to exploit the situation. This emphasizes the importance of a structured power transition mechanism in dynastic sustainability (Fauzan & Setiawan, 2022).

Internal conflicts within the Mughal dynasty, particularly in the struggle for power among the heirs to the throne, created instability that undermined the foundations of royal power. One of the most striking examples was the struggle for the throne between Shah Jahan's children, namely Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb and Shuja. Although Shah Jahan initially attempted to maintain stability by appointing his eldest son, Dara Shikoh, as heir, tensions between the heirs to the throne escalated and eventually led to prolonged strife. As a result, after a bitter power struggle, Aurangzeb succeeded in seizing the throne by defeating his brother, leading to the collapse of stable political influence.

In addition to the internal problems arising from the struggle for the throne, the uncertainty of succession also provided an opening for opposition groups to increase their influence. For example, during the reign of Shah Alam II, the collapse of Mughal power occurred partly due to rebellions from various regional groups who felt neglected by the center. These rebellions created wider instability and worsened the economic and social conditions of the empire. Moreover, external enemies such as the Persian and British empires capitalized on this instability to expand their influence in Mughal territory.

The inability of the Mughal empire to create a structured and guaranteed succession system was also a key factor in the weakening of their rule. In the absence of a clear and transparent mechanism for the transfer of power, tensions and divisions within the royal family intensified. Uncertain succession often fosters distrust among high-ranking officials and layers of society as to the legitimacy of the new leader. This uncertainty also contributed to the disintegration of the kingdom's previously tightly knit territories, as local rulers began to favor self-interest over maintaining the integrity of the state.

Aurangzeb's Controversial Policies

Aurangzeb, although known as a strong leader, faced criticism for his conservative policies that worsened interfaith relations. These policies not only triggered internal resistance but also reduced support from groups previously loyal to the monarchy. This shows how non-inclusive policy changes can affect social and political stability (Isnaini, 2021).

Aurangzeb's conservative policies, especially in matters of religion, caused significant tension within the Mughal Empire. One of his most controversial policies was the reintroduction of the jizya, a tax imposed on non-Muslims, which had previously been abolished by Akbar. This decision caused discontent among the Hindu community and sparked protests from various groups. In addition, Aurangzeb also issued regulations that restricted religious freedom, such as the destruction of several Hindu temples and the persecution of followers of certain religions. These policies went against the approach of religious tolerance that had been adopted by his predecessors, creating social tensions that further worsened stability within the kingdom.

Reaction to Aurangzeb's policies came not only from non-Muslims, but also from internal groups that had previously supported Mughal rule. Under Akbar, the empire enjoyed relatively harmonious relations between different religious groups, but Aurangzeb's policies worsened interfaith relations. Many high-ranking officials from Hindu and other communities felt excluded from government and treated more discriminatorily. As a result, many of them turned to opposition, and some even joined the rebellions that arose in various parts of the kingdom.

Aurangzeb's policies that emphasized more on religious observance and enforcement of

sharia also worsened the political stability within the empire. As the discontent of various groups grew, there were many rebellions across the Mughal territories. One of the major rebellions was that of the Marathas, who had long resisted Mughal domination, but were further exacerbated by Aurangzeb's perceived oppressive policies. In addition, rebellions also occurred in the Deccan and Punjab regions, demonstrating how difficult it was for Aurangzeb to effectively maintain power across the empire. This created prolonged conflicts, drained the kingdom's resources, and weakened the position of the center of power.

Unmanageable External Pressures

The collapse of the Mughal Empire was largely accelerated by external pressures, such as the Persian invasion and the rise of British colonial power. The failure to anticipate external threats reflected the weak geopolitical strategy of the empire at the time. An important lesson here is the importance of adaptation to geopolitical change to maintain the continuity of power (Aniroh, 2021).

The external pressures faced by the Mughal Empire, particularly the invasion of Persia and the expansion of British colonial power, exposed the failure of the Mughal dynasty to respond to rapid geopolitical change. The Persian invasion of 1739, led by Nader Shah, was one such event that severely shook Mughal power. Nader Shah successfully conquered Delhi, the capital of the empire, and brought back a large amount of treasures, including the Peacocks Throne, the symbol of Mughal power. The fall of Delhi and the damage caused by the invasion demonstrated the Mughals' military weakness and unpreparedness in the face of such a huge external threat. Moreover, the psychological impact of the invasion shattered the image of the empire, worsening internal political stability.

Besides the threat from Persia, the Mughal Empire also faced increasing pressure from European colonial powers, especially the British. As the influence of the East India Company grew, the British began to expand their power in India, taking control of strategic territories such as Bengal. At first, the Mughals did not realize the long-term threat of British colonialism, and even tended to compromise with them in some aspects of the economy and trade. However, the Mughals' failure to maintain control over important areas of wealth, such as Bengal, paved the way for the British to further consolidate their influence in India.

The main cause of the Mughals' failure to manage external pressures was their inability to formulate an effective geopolitical strategy. The once powerful Mughal empire that controlled large areas of India was disintegrating due to internal problems and lack of coordination in responding to external threats. While the British and Persians developed their military and political power, the Mughals were too busy dealing with internal rebellions and conflicts over the throne. This led to neglect of the approaching external threats, and eventually led to the collapse of the once powerful Mughal system of governance.

The lesson to be learned from these events is the importance of adapting to geopolitical changes to maintain continuity of power. The Mughal Empire failed to anticipate the changes in global power that occurred in the 18th century, especially with the rise of colonial powers and countries like Persia that had expansionist ambitions. To maintain its existence, an empire or kingdom needs to constantly update its diplomatic and military strategies to remain relevant in the face of evolving global dynamics. The inability to adapt quickly to these challenges eventually hastened the decline of the Mughal Empire.

Administrative Weakness and its Impact

The rampant corruption at the administrative level reflected the Mughal Empire's failure to

maintain the integrity of the bureaucracy. The decline in administrative efficiency had a direct impact on economic stability and the kingdom's ability to defend its territory. In a modern context, this underscores the importance of clean and efficient governance (SUGENG, 2022).

Rampant corruption within the Mughal bureaucracy was one of the main factors that hindered the effectiveness of the royal administration. Over time, many royal officials were involved in corrupt practices, such as tax evasion, abuse of power, and oppression of the people (Wiranto, 2020a). This led to a decline in the level of public trust in the government and a weakening of the administrative structure that was supposed to manage a vast and diverse territory. With corruption, policies that should benefit the people and strengthen royal power are not implemented properly, exacerbating social and economic inequality in various regions (Anggraeni, 2014).

The decline in administrative efficiency due to corruption also had a direct impact on the economic stability of the Mughal Empire. The inability to manage resources wisely led to reduced royal revenues, which in turn reduced the ability to finance military forces, infrastructure, and social programs. Irregularities in tax collection, which was one of the kingdom's main sources of revenue, further worsened the economic situation (Wiranto, 2020b). Most taxes did not reach the state coffers as local officials preferred to enrich themselves rather than distribute them for development. This led to economic instability that harmed the people, exacerbated social tensions, and reduced the legitimacy of the kingdom in the eyes of the people (Widanarto, 2017).

Corruption in the bureaucracy also made it difficult for the kingdom to maintain its vast and diverse territories. Many territories were administered by incompetent or corrupt officials, leading to discontent from local rulers and revolts from the people. The Mughal Empire, which initially controlled almost all of India, began to lose control of important territories as internal tensions increased and the inability to respond effectively to problems. Regions such as the Deccan and Bengal began to disintegrate, which accelerated the collapse of central power and weakened the kingdom's position before external forces (Hartati, 2020).

Integrating Political Dynamics from the history of the Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire is known for its progressive approach to integrating the socio-cultural traditions of India's multiethnic and multireligious society. Measures such as the appointment of officials from various communities, including Hindus, Muslims and other ethnic groups, demonstrated the Mughals' commitment to inclusiveness. For example, Akbar appointed Raja Todar Mal, a Hindu, as a high official in the taxation system, which strengthened public confidence in his rule. This strategy not only created social stability, but also minimized the potential for sectarian conflict within the empire (Nata, 2019).

Mughal art and architecture are tangible symbols of the dynasty's diversity. Architectural elements such as the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort reflect the fusion of Indian, Persian and Islamic cultural aesthetics. Mughal building designs often used local techniques and motifs juxtaposed with Persian styles, creating a unique and harmonious cultural heritage. This approach not only strengthened the kingdom's cultural identity, but also increased the people's sense of pride in unity amidst diversity (Mar'ah et al., 2021).

The policy of tolerance adopted by the Mughal rulers, especially Akbar, played a major role in creating coexistence between communities. Akbar, for example, established Din-i Ilahi, a religious philosophy that emphasized universal values from different religions. This policy aimed to foster a spirit of unity without losing each group's religious and cultural identity. In the context of governance, this coexistence enabled the Mughal Empire to maintain political stability,

especially in the face of internal challenges that often arose from religious or ethnic differences (Zalukhu, 2024).

The Mughal Empire's experience in managing diversity provides important lessons for modern governance. The integration of socio-cultural traditions in government policy is proof that diversity can be a strength when managed wisely. The social harmony realized through respect for various cultural identities is also relevant in today's global context, where multicultural societies are increasingly becoming the norm. By understanding the Mughal approach, modern countries can develop inclusive strategies that not only maintain stability, but also strengthen social solidarity amidst the dynamics of global change (Pertiwi & Setiawati, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The Mughal Empire shows that the success and collapse of the dynasty was greatly influenced by complex internal and external factors. Visionary policies implemented by leaders like Akbar, who prioritized tolerance and cultural integration, provided a solid foundation for political and social stability. Inclusiveness was an important element in maintaining the legitimacy of the government, and efficient and innovative economic policies contributed significantly to the prosperity and growth of the empire. However, when these policies began to be neglected, especially under Aurangzeb, internal tensions and social divisions increased, which ultimately undermined the stability of the empire.

However, the collapse of the Mughal Empire also reflects the importance of managing internal and external conflicts wisely. Inability to respond to geopolitical changes and external threats, such as the Persian invasion and British colonial expansion, as well as internal succession tensions, accelerated the empire's decline. Rampant corruption in the bureaucracy also undermined administrative integrity and hampered the kingdom's ability to maintain economic and political stability. This provides important lessons on the importance of clean, efficient governance that is responsive to the challenges of the times.

Overall, the history of the Mughal Empire provides valuable lessons on how a multicultural state can be built and managed well through inclusive and innovative policies, but also reminds us of the dangers of inability to manage internal conflicts and external threats. The management of a stable and sustainable state requires a balance between political, economic, social forces and adaptability to change. The lessons drawn from Mughal history remain relevant today, particularly for states seeking to maintain harmony in diverse societies and facing evolving global challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thanks the lecturer of Islamic Civilization Studies ustadz Prof. Dr. H. Wildana Wargadinata, Lc., M.Ag. and ustadz Dr. Ahmad Kholil, M.Fil.I for providing invaluable guidance and direction during the process of writing this article. The support and insights you provided not only enriched author understanding of the topic, but also motivated author to further explore important aspects of Islamic civilization. Your willingness to share your knowledge and experience has greatly assisted author in developing more in-depth arguments and analysis. Author hope that your guidance and inspiration will continue to benefit author in the future.

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