
UNIT 6 EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION: 1556-1707

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Power Politics and Regency of Bairam Khan : 1556-1560
- 6.3 Territorial Expansion
 - 6.3.1 North and Central India
 - 6.3.2 Western India
 - 6.3.3 Eastern India
 - 6.3.4 Rebellions of 1581
 - 6.3.5 Conquests in the North-West
 - 6.3.6 Deccan and South
- 6.4 Administrative Reorganisation
- 6.5 Territorial Expansion under the Successors of Akbar
- 6.6 Policies Towards Autonomous Chieftains
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit. You would learn about:

- how Bairam Khan's regency came to an end and Akbar took control of the affairs of the state;
- the territorial expansion of Mughal Empire under Akbar and his successors;
- the problems faced by the Mughals in expanding the Empire;
- the formation of provinces under Akbar; and
- the relationship between the Mughals and autonomous chiefs and appreciate how did it help in the expansion and consolidation of the Empire.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Humayun had rescued and restored the Mughal Empire in 1555. But, had it not been for Akbar, the Empire perhaps would not have sustained. It was during his rule that the Mughal Empire became a political fact and an important factor in Indian politics. Akbar's policies were emulated by his successors with few changes or as suited the political atmosphere of their times.

In this Unit we will not go into the details of administrative machinery and the creation of the ruling class. This we will discuss in Block 4. Here we will confine ourselves mainly to the territorial expansion and the problems related to it. In the course of developing a large Empire the Mughal rulers had to deal with some political powers who held sway in various regions. Important of these were the Rajputs and the rulers to the south of the Vindhyas like Bijapur, Golkonda and Ahmadnagar and the Marathas. We will study this aspect in detail in Block 3.

We begin this unit with Akbar's efforts to get rid of his adversaries and to establish himself at the helm of affairs at the Mughal court. Let us take up Bairam Khan's regency.

At Humayun's death, Akbar was only thirteen years old. It was his tutor and Humayun's confidant, Bairam Khan, who served as the regent from 1556-1560. The period of Bairam Khan's regency could be divided into four phases: The first was from the accession of Akbar to before the second battle of Panipat; i.e., January-October 1556. This was a period when the nobles accepted Bairam Khan's leadership to protect their interests. The second phase was marked by the second battle of Panipat and the arrival of the royal ladies (Hamida Banu Begum and Maham Anaga) in India. During this period, Bairam Khan was in absolute control of the state affairs. He attempted to create a personal following. In the third phase, which lasted till mid-1559, Bairam Khan's influence and power declined. The last phase witnessed the attempts of Bairam Khan to regain control. There was also growth of factional strife which ultimately led to the dismissal of Bairam Khan.

Politically, the first phase was insecure. It saw not only Humayun's death but also a challenge to the Empire by the Afghan forces under Hemu. The events especially cast a gloom since Akbar was a minor. The only alternative to save the situation was to appoint a regent. But the fear was that the exercise of *de facto* sovereignty by one of the nobles as regent would disrupt the mutual relations of the nobles and threaten the administration. Despite these fears, Bairam Khan was appointed *wakil*. Surprisingly, there was no opposition to the appointment even by those nobles who could claim *wikalat* either on the basis of long service, blood relationship or past association with Akbar. These included even the most severe critics of Bairam Khan.

While accepting Bairam Khan as the regent, it appears that these nobles wanted to share power and influence with Bairam Khan. Bairam Khan, on the other hand, was determined to exercise power rigidly. On the assumption of the office as *wakil-us Sultanat*, he expected factional conflict and tussle for power. He, therefore, began the process of eliminating all those nobles who would challenge him. He dismissed and imprisoned Shah Abul Ma'ali, his ardent critic. This did not arouse much opposition since Ma'ali was generally unpopular among the nobles.

Subsequently, all such nobles who posed a challenge to Bairam Khan were sent to Kabul. Bairam Khan, however, attempted to win the support of Mun'im Khan, the governor of Kabul and Ali Quli Khan Uzbeg, the commander of the Mughal forces in Awadh. Bairam Khan did not trust Mun'im Khan. He wanted to confine him to Kabul and distance him from the court. The opportunity came in May 1556 when Mirza Sulaiman attacked Kabul. Mun'im Khan's contacts were delinked with the court for the next four months and Bairam Khan used this period to strengthen his power at the court.

Tensions were developing in the nobility and it was on the verge of crisis by the second battle of Panipat. The imperial forces led by Tardi Beg failed to defend themselves against the Afghan forces at the battle of Tughlaqabad. At this juncture, trying to assert himself, Bairam Khan, without the sanction of the emperor, ordered the execution of Tardi Beg on charges of treachery. This aroused dissensions in the nobility. But the victory at Panipat revived Bairam Khan's power. He further strengthened his position by distributing titles and *jagirs* in the Doab and granting promotions and rewards to his loyalists. He also gave important positions to his favourites. Pir Muhammad Khan was appointed his personal *wakil*, Khwaja Aminuddin as *bakshi* and Shaikh Gadai as *sadr*.

Bairam Khan was virtually in complete control of the affairs within six months of Tardi Beg's execution. To vest considerable power in himself, he prevented access to the king especially that of his possible rivals. Mun'im Khan and Khwaja Jalaluddin Mahmud were sent away to Kabul and were not allowed to come to the court. The strengthening of Bairam Khan's power and the exercise of *de facto* authority by him was resented by the nobility.

The first evident decline in Bairam Khan's power was when Akbar was married to the daughter of Mirza Abdullah Mughal, a son-in-law of Mun'im Khan despite

Bairam Khan's resistance. Bairam Khan's position was also affected after the arrival of Hamida Banu Begum from Kabul in April 1557. She was accompanied by Maham Anaga who had earlier supported Bairam Khan in the event of Tardi Beg's execution.

Bairam Khan was compelled to compromise on the functioning of the Central government, i.e., he had to share power with leading nobles. Bairam Khan as **wakil** could not place any proposal before the king without the consent of leading nobles. This compromise diminished his power and by 1558 even his personal **wakil**, Pir Muhammad, turned against him.

To regain his power, he attempted a coup in 1559. He replaced Pir Muhammad by Muhammad Khan Sistani as his personal **wakil**. Shaikh Gadai was given additional charge apart from being a **sadr**. Many small ranking officials were also given promotions. But Bairam Khan remained isolated from the large section of the nobility and the king. He aroused their resentment by his authoritarianism.

Scholars like R.P. Tripathi, have accused Bairam Khan of granting favours to the shias to the disadvantage of the sunnis and thus annoying them. But I.A. Khan argues that although Bairam Khan was a shia, there is no historical evidence to prove that he granted favours on religious grounds. In fact, Bairam Khan's favourite Shaikh Gadai, the **sadr** was a Sunni and not a Shia.

Bairam Khan had underestimated the shrewdness of Akbar. He had made no attempt to win the confidence of the king and when the king announced his dismissal in March 1560, all the loyalists of Bairam Khan either supported the king or declared their neutrality.

The study of the period of Bairam Khan's regency indicates that actually the political power was vested in the nobility. The nobles accepted the authority of Bairam Khan in a limited sense. They were not willing to accept his de facto sovereign power.

Bairam Khan tried to curb the nobility but he failed to acquire absolute power. To maintain his position, he had to depend on one or the other section of the nobility. Thus he failed to acquire a stable independent following. In fact, he alienated large sections of the nobility by giving high ranks and promotions to junior officers and creating inefficient **amirs**. At the end of his career, Bairam Khan realised that even his favourites opposed him.

The tussle between Bairam Khan and the nobility was in fact a conflict between the central authority represented by the regent and the nobility. The king during this period was a mere figurehead who often became a tool in the hands of Bairam Khan's opponents. Bairam Khan had tried to weld together the two main groups of the Mughal nobility, i.e., the Chaghatai and Khurasani. But most of the nobles regarded this as an attempt by the regent to curb their power and independence. Even the loyalists of Bairam Khan realised that they could not accept the central authority as represented by Bairam Khan.

Bairam Khan's regency was a period of dilemma for him. While he wanted to curtail the independence of the nobility, he needed their support for his power. This created contradictions in his position throughout this period. It was not possible for him to counterbalance this opposition by introducing a new group. The Afghans could not be recruited because they were the main contenders to the throne. The only alternatives were, therefore, the Rajput chiefs, the **zamindars** or other local chiefs. But, inducting them would have been a long process. Thus, whenever, Bairam Khan tried to recover his position, he was opposed by the court nobility. Consequently, he often found himself isolated and was ultimately overthrown.

Bairam Khan's exit confirmed the struggle between the central authority and the forces against it in the Mughal polity. It resulted in the triumph of the latter. This trend would help to understand the difficulties which Akbar faced with his nobility between 1562-1567 after he assumed complete sovereign powers.

We notice that throughout Bairam Khan's regency, political power rested with the dominant section of the nobility which consisted of the Chaghtais and other groups of Turani origin. Bairam Khan was able to exercise power as the regent as long as

they supported him. The nobles, as mentioned earlier, accepted Bairam Khan in a limited sense and not as a de facto sovereign. They did not oppose him till the Afghans were crushed. But after Hemu's defeat in the second battle of Panipat, they resisted the regent's efforts at centralisation and forced him to accept the authority of the leading nobles.

Check Your Progress 1

1) How did Bairam Khan deal with the initial challenges to his power?

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2) Explain the revival of Bairam Khan's power after the second battle of Panipat.

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3) Discuss the decline in Bairam Khan's position subsequent to 1557.

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6.3 TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

After overcoming initial problems and consolidating his hold on the throne, Akbar started a policy of extending Mughal territories. Any policy of expansion meant conflict with various political powers spread in different parts of the country. A few of these political powers were well organised, the Rajputs, though spread throughout the country as autonomous chiefs and kings, had major concentration in Rajputana. The Afghans held political control mainly in Gujarat, Bihar and Bengal. In Deccan and South India, the major states were Khandesh, Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golkonda and other southern kingdoms. In the North-west some tribes held their sway. Kabul and Qandahar, though held by Mughal factions, were opposed to Akbar.

Akbar through a systematic policy started the task of expanding his Empire. It must be noted that the major expansion of Mughal Empire took place during the reign of Akbar. During the reigns of his successors (Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb), very little was added in terms of territory. The main additions in the later period were made during Aurangzeb's reign in South India and North-East (Assam).

6.3.1 North and Central India

The first expedition was sent to capture Gawaliar and Jaunpur in 1559-60. After a brief war, Ram Shah surrendered the Gawaliar fort. Khan Zaman was sent to Jaunpur ruled by Afghans who were defeated easily and it was annexed to the Mughal Empire.

Malwa in central India was ruled by Baz Bahadur. Adham Khan and others led the expedition against Malwa. Baz Bahadur was defeated and fled towards Burhanpur.

Next, Garh Katanga or Gondwana, an independent state in central India ruled by Rani Durgawati, widow of Dalpat Shah, was conquered in 1564. Later, in 1567, Akbar handed over the kingdom to Chandra Shah, the brother of Dalpat Shah.

During this period Akbar had to face a series of revolts in central India. Abdulah Khan Uzbek was the leader of the revolt. He was joined by a number of Uzbeks.

Khan Zaman and Asaf Khan also rebelled. Akbar with the help of Munim Khan succeeded in suppressing them and consolidated his position.

A long conflict with nobility, which had started after the dismissal of Bairam Khan (1560), now came to an end. Akbar through his diplomatic skills, organisational capabilities and the help of some trusted friends tackled this serious crisis.

6.3.2 Western India

Conquest of Rajputana

Akbar realised that to have a stable Empire, he must subjugate the large tracts under Rajput kings in the neighbouring region of Rajputana. A calculated policy was devised not only to conquer these areas but turn their rulers into allies. Here we will not go into the details of Akbar's policy towards the Rajput kings. You would study the details in Unit 11 of Block 3. Akbar with the exception of Chittor's Rana Pratap, managed to secure the allegiance of all the Rajput kingdoms. A large number of them were absorbed in Mughal nobility and helped Akbar in expanding and consolidating the Mughal Empire.



Raja Surjan Hada surrendering the Keys of Ranthambhor fort to Akbar.

Conquest of Gujarat

Having consolidated his position in Central India and Rajputana, Akbar turned towards Gujarat in 1572. After Humayun's withdrawal, Gujarat was no longer a unified kingdom. There were various warring principalities. Gujarat, apart from being a fertile region, had a number of busy ports and thriving commercial centres.

Sultan Muzaffer Shah III was the nominal king claiming overlordship over 7 warring principalities. One of the princes, I'timad Khan, had invited Akbar to come and conquer it. Akbar himself marched to Ahmedabad. The town was captured without any serious resistance. Surat with a strong fortress offered some resistance but was also captured. In a short time most of the principalities of Gujarat were subdued.

Akbar organised Gujarat into a province and placed it under Mirza Aziz Koka and returned to capital. Within six months various rebellious groups came together and revolted against the Mughal rule. The leaders of rebellion were Ikhtiyarul Mulk and Mohammad Husain Mirza. The Mughal governor had to cede a number of territories.



Victory of Surat : Akbar entering the city

On receiving the news of rebellion in Agra, Akbar started for Ahmedabad. This march is considered as one of the most outstanding feats of Akbar. Travelling at a speed of 50 miles a day Akbar along with a small force reached Gujarat within 10 days and suppressed the rebellion.

For almost a decade there was peace in Gujarat. Meanwhile, Muzaffar III escaped from captivity and took refuge in Junagadh. After 1583 he tried to organise a few rebellions.

6.3.3 Eastern India

Ever since the defeat of Humayun at the hands of Sher Shah, Bengal and Bihar were governed by Afghans. In 1564, Sulaiman Karrani the governor of Bihar, brought Bengal also under his rule. Sulaiman realising the growing strength of Akbar had acknowledged the overlordship of the Mughals. He used to send presents to Akbar. After his death in 1572, followed by some infighting, his younger son Daud came to occupy his throne. Daud refused to acknowledge Mughal suzerainty and got engaged in conflict with the Mughal governor of Jaunpur.

In 1574, Akbar along with Mun'im Khan Khan-i Khanan marched towards Bihar. In a short time, Hajipur and Patna were captured and Daud fled towards Garhi. After a brief stay Akbar returned. Mun'im Khan and Raja Todar Mal continued to chase Daud who later submitted to the Mughals. After a short time, he again rebelled and was finally killed by the Mughal forces under Khan-i Jahan and Gaur (Bengal) was taken. This ended the independent rule of Bengal in 1576 which had lasted with few



Akbar's success against Bengal: Daud Shah is taken Prisoner

interruptions, for almost two centuries. Parts of Orissa were still under some Afghan Cheifs. Around 1592, Mansingh brought the whole of Orissa under the Mughal rule.

6.3.4 Rebellions of 1581

According to V.A. Smith, "The year 1581 may be regarded as the most critical time in the reign of Akbar, if his early struggle to consolidate his power be not taken into account."

After the conflict of nobility which had lasted till 1567, now again serious conflicts came to the surface in Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat and in the north-west. At the root was the discomfort of Afghans who were overthrown everywhere by the Mughals. Apart from this, Akbar's policy of strict administration of **jagirs** was also responsible for this. By this new policy the **jagirdars** were asked to submit the accounts of their **jagirs** and a cut was enforced in military expenditure. The governor of Bengal enforced these regulations ruthlessly, giving rise to revolt. Soon the rebellion spread to Bihar. Masum Khan Kabuli, Roshan Beg, Mirza Sharfuddin and Arab Bahadur were the main leaders of rebels. Muzaffer Khan, Rai Purshottam and other imperial officers tried to crush the rebellion but failed. Akbar immediately sent a large force under Raja Todar Mal and Shaikh Farid Bakshi. A little later Aziz Koka and Shahbaz Khan were also sent to help Todar Mal. Meanwhile, the rebels declared Akbar's brother Hakim Mirza, who was in Kabul, as their king. The Mughal forces crushed the rebellion in Bihar, Bengal and adjoining regions. A few rebel leaders escaped and took shelter in the forest region of Bengal. They had lost all following but for a few years they continued to harass Mughal officers with their small bands without much success.

Mirza Hakim, to put greater pressure on Akbar, attacked Lahore. Akbar also marched towards Lahore. Hakim Mirza, after hearing the news of Akbar's march, immediately retreated. Hakim Mirza was expecting a number of Mughal officers to join him but all his calculations failed. Akbar after organising the defence of North West frontier, sent an army to Kabul. Akbar also marched towards it. By the time he reached there Hakim Mirza had left Kabul and Akbar occupied it. Akbar gave the charge of Kabul to his sister Bakhtunnisa Begam and left for Agra (1581). After some time, Mirza Hakim came back and continued to rule in his sister's name. Mirza Hakim died after four years and Raja Man Singh was appointed governor of Kabul.

Gujarat also witnessed some rebellion at around the same time when Bihar, Bengal and North-West regions were in trouble. Here the ex-ruler Muzaffar Shah escaped from captivity and organised a small force. He started attacking the Mughal territories in Gujarat. I'timad Khan was deputed as governor of Gujarat. Nizamuddin Ahmed in the capacity of **bakshi** helped him in his operations against the rebels. In 1584 Muzaffar Shah was defeated at Ahmedabad and Nandod. He escaped towards the Kutch region. Nizamuddin Ahmed followed him there also. In the whole of Kutch region a number of forts were erected and Mughal officers were appointed. Muzaffar kept brewing some trouble in that region till 1591-92 when he was finally captured.

6.3.5 Conquests in the North-West

After the death of Hakim Mirza, Kabul was annexed and given to Raja Man Singh in **jagir**. At around the same time, Akbar decided to settle the various rebellions in the North-West Frontier region and conquer new areas.

Suppression of the Roshanais

The first to attract Akbar's attention was the Roshanai movement. Roshanai was a sect established by a soldier who was called Pir Roshanai in the frontier region. He had a large following. After his death his son Jalala became the head of the sect. The Roshanais rebelled against the Mughals and cut the road between Kabul and Hindustan. Akbar appointed Zain Khan as commander of a strong force to suppress the Roshanais and establish Mughal control in the region. Sayid Khan Gakhar and Raja Birbal were also sent with separate forces to assist Zain Khan. In one of the operations Birbal was killed with most of his forces (around 8 thousand). Subsequently, Zain Khan was also defeated but he could survive to reach Akbar at the fort of Atak. Akbar was greatly shocked by the death of Birbal, one of his most favourite companions. Akbar appointed Raja Todar Mal with strong force to capture the region. Raja Man Singh was also asked to help in the task. The combined efforts of the two yielded success and the Roshanais were defeated.

Conquest of Kashmir: Akbar for a long time had his eyes set on conquering Kashmir. While camping in Atak, he decided to despatch an army for the conquest of Kashmir under Raja Bhagwan Das and Shah Quli Mahram. Yusuf Khan, the king of Kashmir, was defeated and he accepted suzerainty of Mughals. Akbar was not very pleased with the treaty as he wanted to annex Kashmir. Yusuf's son Yaqub along with a few **amirs** also decided to oppose the Mughals and waged war. But some desertions set in the Kashmiri forces. Finally, the Mughals emerged victorious and Kashmir was annexed to the Mughal Empire in 1586.

Conquest of Thatta: Another region in the North-West which was still independent was Thatta in Sindh. Akbar appointed Khan-i-Khanan as governor of Multan and asked him to conquer Sindh and subdue Bilochis in 1590. Thatta was annexed and placed under the governor of Multan as a **sarkar** in that **suba**.

The Mughal forces continued the suppression of Bilochis in the adjoining regions. Finally, by the year 1595, the complete supremacy of Mughals over North-West region was established.

6.3.6 Deccan and South

Akbar had started taking interest in Deccan states of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golkonda after the conquest of Gujarat and Malwa. The earlier contacts were limited to the visits of emissaries or casual contacts. After 1590, Akbar started a planned Deccan policy to bring these states under Mughal control. Around this time, the Deccan states were facing internal strife and regular conflicts.

In 1591, Akbar sent a few missions to the Deccan states asking them to accept Mughal sovereignty. Faizi was sent to Asir and Burhanpur (Khandesh), Khwaja Aminuddin to Ahmednagar, Mir Mohammad Amin Mashadi to Bijapur, and Mirza Ma'sud to Golkonda. By 1593 all the missions returned without any success. It was reported that only Iqbal Ali Khan, the ruler of Khandesh, was favourably inclined towards the Mughals. Now Akbar decided to follow a militant policy. Here we will not go into the details of the Deccan policy. We will provide only a brief account of Mughal expansion there. The details would be discussed in Block 3 Unit 9.

The first expedition was despatched to Ahmednagar under the command of Prince Murad and Abdul Rahim Khan Khanan. In 1595, the Mughal forces sieged Ahmednagar. Its ruler Chand Bibi at the head of a large army faced the Mughals. She approached Ibrahim Ali Shah of Bijapur and Qutub Shah of Golkonda for help but with no success. Chand Bibi gave a very serious resistance to the Mughal Army. After heavy losses on both sides, a treaty was formulated. According to this treaty Chand Bibi ceded Berar. After some time Chand Bibi attacked Berar to take it back. This time Nizamshahi, Qutabshahi and Adilshahi troops presented a joint front. The Mughals suffered heavy losses but could manage to hold the field. Meanwhile, serious differences between Murad and Khan Khanan weakened Mughal position. Akbar therefore despatched Abul Fazl to Deccan and recalled Khan Khanan. After Prince Murad's death in 1598, Prince Daniyal and Khan Khanan were sent to Deccan. Akbar, too, joined them. First, Ahmednagar was captured. Meanwhile, Chand Bibi died. Next, Asirgarh and adjoining regions were conquered by the Mughals (A.D. 1600). Adil Shah of Bijapur also expressed allegiance and offered his daughter in marriage to Prince Daniyal. Now Mughal territories in the Deccan included Asirgarh, Burhanpur, Ahmednagar and Berar.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How was Gujarat brought under the Mughal rule?

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- 2) Which were the main areas affected by the rebellion of 1581.

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6.4 ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANISATION

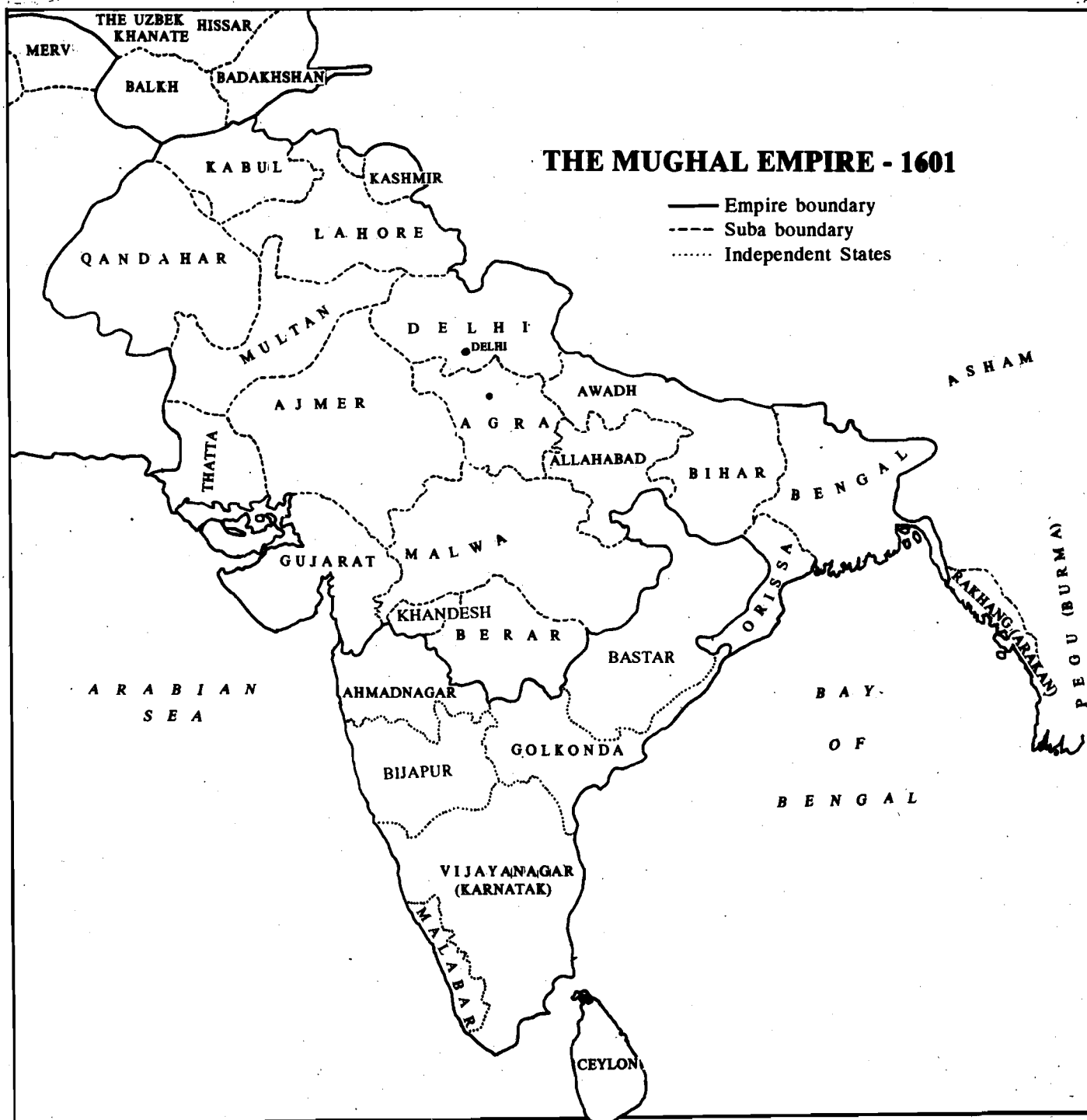
Akbar's policy of conquests and territorial expansion was accompanied by consolidating the new territories into Mughal administrative structure.

Formation of Subas

In 1580, Akbar divided the whole territory under the Mughals into 12 provinces which were called **subas**. These were Allahabad, Agra, Awadh, Ajmer, Admedabad (Gujarat), Bihar, Bengal (including Orissa), Delhi, Kabul, Lahore, Multan and Malwa. After the Deccan conquest, three new **subas** were added making them to 15. These were Berar, Khandesh and Ahmednagar.

These provinces were governed by a definite set of rules and a body of officers. The details of Provincial administration would be discussed in Block 4, Unit 14.

Military Administration : Akbar gave a new shape to the military administration also. He combined the earlier practices and new measures for organising army and tried to evolve a centralised military structure. He gave **mansabs** to both military and civil officers on the basis of their merit or service to the state. **Mansab** literally means an office or rank and **mansabdar** means holder of a rank. Akbar created 66 grades in



his **mansabari** system, i.e., from the command of ten (**dehbashi**) to the commander of Ten Thousand (**dahhazari**).

All **mansabdars** were paid in cash or in the form of a **jagir**. The military administration evolved under Akbar underwent many changes during the rule of his successors. Here we will not go into the details of **mansab** system as these would be discussed separately in Unit 15 of Block 4

6.5 TERRITORIAL EXPANSION UNDER THE SUCCESSORS OF AKBAR

The territorial expansion under Akbar gave a definite shape to the Mughal Empire. Very little progress was made during the reigns of his successors, viz., Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. After Aurangzeb we find that the process of disintegration of the Empire began. In this section we will trace the expansion of the Empire during the reigns of Akbar's successors.

During the seventeenth century the main areas of activity were the North-West frontier, South India, North-East and some isolated regions.

In the North-West the Roshanais were decisively curbed by 1625-26. Qandahar became a region of conflict between the Persians and Mughals. After Akbar's death, the Persians tried to capture Qandahar but failed under Shah Abbas I, the Safavi ruler. Following this, Shah Abbas I in 1620 requested Jahangir to hand over Qandahar to him but the latter declined to do so. In 1622, after another attack, Qandahar was captured by the Persians. The struggle to capture Qandahar continued till Aurangzeb's reign but Mughals got little success. The details of these would be discussed in the next Unit (7).

Mewar was the only region in Rajputana which had not come under the Mughals during Akbar's time. Jahangir followed a persistent policy to capture it. After a series of conflicts, Rana Amar Singh finally agreed to accept Mughal suzerainty. All the territories taken from Mewar including the fort of Chittor were returned to Rana Amar Singh and a substantial **jagir** was granted to his son Karan Singh. During the reigns of the successors of Akbar, the Rajputs generally continued to be friendly with the Mughals and held very high **mansabs**.

During the last years of Akbar and early years of Jahangir, Ahmednagar under Malik Ambar started challenging Mughal power. Malik Ambar succeeded in getting support of Bijapur also. A number of expeditions were sent by Jahangir but failed to achieve any success. During Shahjahan's reign, Mughal conflict with the Deccan kingdoms of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golkonda was revived. Ahmednagar was first to be defeated and most parts were integrated into Mughal territory. By 1636, Bijapur and Golkonda were also defeated but these kingdoms were not annexed to the Mughal Empire. After a treaty the defeated rulers were to pay annual tributes and recognise Mughal authority. For almost ten years Shahjahan kept his son Aurangzeb as governor of Deccan. During this period, the Marathas were emerging as a strong political power in the region. During Aurangzeb's reign, the struggle with Deccan states and Marathas became more intensive. In fact, Aurangzeb spent the last twenty years of his life in Deccan fighting against them. By 1687, the Deccan kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkonda were annexed to the Mughal Empire. The details of the Mughal relations with Deccan states would be discussed in Block 3.

Annexation of Assam : The major success of the Mughals in the north-east was annexation of Assam. In 1661 Mir Jumla, the governor of Bengal invaded the Ahom kingdom. Mir Jumla had 12,000 cavalry, 30,000 soldiers and a fleet of boats with guns under his command. The Ahom resistance was very feeble. Mir Jumla succeeded in capturing Kamrup the capital of Ahom kingdom. The king fled from the kingdom. In early 1663, the Swargdeo (heavenly king) surrendered and peace was established. Assam was annexed and Mughal officers were appointed. Mir Jumla died in 1663. Another notable achievement in north-east was capture of Chatgaon in 1664 under Shaista Khan the new governor of Bengal.

The Ahom kingdom could not be directly controlled for long. The Mughal **faujdar**s posted there had to face a number of confrontations. By 1680 Ahoms succeeded in capturing Kamrup and Mughal control ended.

6.6 POLICIES TOWARDS AUTONOMOUS CHIEFTAINS

In his efforts to consolidate the Mughal Empire, Akbar concentrated his attention on chieftains also. Chieftains is a term which is generally used (and has got wide acceptance among historians) for the ruling dynasties spread throughout the country. These rulers enjoyed a different sort of relationship with the Mughals. On the one hand they were free to carry out administration within their territories. On the other hand they held subordinate position vis-a-vis the Mughal Emperor.

Akbar's success lies in the fact that he could enlist the support of this group for the stability of his Empire. The subsequent Mughal Emperors also followed more or less the similar path.

Nature of the Powers of Chieftains

In contemporary accounts these chiefs are referred to by different names such as Rai, Rana, Rawats, Rawals, Raja, Marzban, Kalantaran, etc. Sometimes the term **zamindar** is used to denote both ordinary landholders and autonomous chiefs. But there is a definite difference between the two. The **zamindars** were not independent of the Mughal authority while the chiefs enjoyed comparative autonomy in their territories and had a different relationship with the Mughal Emperors.

The first major study on chieftains was made by Ahsan Raza Khan. He established that they were not confined to peripheral areas of the Empire but were also found in the core regions in the *subas* of Delhi, Agra, Awadh and Allahabad. The largest number of these chieftains were Rajputs but they belonged to all castes including Muslims.

The chieftains were a powerful group possessing large infantry, cavalry and hundreds of miles of land area yielding vast amount of revenue.

Mughal Encounters with Chieftains

After the defeat of the Lodis, the central power in India, Babur had to face joint rebellions of Afghans and chieftains. Humayun also had to face their hostility.

Akbar's initial contacts with the chieftains were through skirmishes and wars. In many cases the chieftains joined hands with Afghan and Mughal rebels. In the process of the conquests and consolidation of Mughal power, Akbar got the support and submission of chieftains. There was no formal declared policy of Akbar towards them. On the basis of references in the contemporary sources, we get an idea about the relations between chiefs and the Mughals. These may be summarised as follows:

- 1) After the conquest of or submission they were generally left free to administer their territories. They also had authority to collect revenue, impose taxes, levies and transit tax etc. In the collection of revenue the chieftains generally followed local practices rather than the Mughal regulations.
- 2) These autonomous chieftains were taken into military service of the Mughals. They were given **jagirs** and **mansabs**. A.R. Khan estimates that around 61 chiefs were given **mansab** during Akbar's reign. The same trend continued during the reigns of successive Mughal Emperors.
- 3) In many cases where chieftains were not directly absorbed as **mansabdars**, they are found helping the Mughal army in their operation against enemy territories or suppression of rebellions. They throughout the Mughal rule helped in conquering extensive areas, at times even against their own clansmen.
- 4) Apart from providing military help, they were given important administrative positions like **subadar** (governors), **diwan**, **bakhshi** etc.
- 5) Often they were assigned their own territories as **jagir** called as **watan jagir** which was hereditary and non transferable.
- 6) An interesting characteristic of their relations was that the Mughal Emperor retained the right to recognise the chieftain as the ruler in case of disputes within the family. At the same time, those who had accepted the Mughal suzerainty were extended military protection.
- 7) The chieftains were supposed to pay a regular tribute to the Mughal Emperor called **peshkash**. It is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of this **peshkash**. This was at times in cash and at others in diamonds, gold, elephants or other rarities.

Apart from being a source of revenue, the payment of **peshkash** was a symbol of submission to the Mughals.

- 8) A number of matrimonial alliances were also established between Mughal roy family and the chieftains.



A Chieftain presenting tribute to Akbar

Rebellions of Chieftains

We come across numerous instances of rebellions by chieftains. The causes for such rebellions are often stated as non-payment of revenue or tribute. In case of rebellions, the Mughal policy was not to dispossess the chieftains from their territories. Some one from the same family was left in control of the territory. In some instances when a chieftain was dispossessed, it was for a short period often as a reprimand. Later, he or one of his family members was reinstated.

The Mughal policy towards chieftains initiated under Akbar continued during the regins of subsequent Mughal Emperors. The policy of absorbing them into Mughal nobility paid rich dividends to the Empire. The Mughal Emperor succeeded in getting the support of chieftains and their armies for new conquests. As part of Mughal nobility, their help was also available for administiring a large Empire. In addition, a friendly relationship with them ensured peace for the Empire.

At the same time, the chieftains also benefited. Now they could retain their territories and administer them as they wished. In addition, they received **jagir** and **mansab**. Often they got territories in **jagir** bigger than their kindgoms. It also provided them security against enemies and rebellions.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) List the **subas** formed in 1580.

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2) List the main achievements in territorial expansion under Aurangzeb.

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3) How the Mughal policy towards chieftains was of mutual benefit?

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6.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we studied that Akbar became Emperor at a very young age. During the first four years Bairam Khan worked as regent for the young Emperor. The nobility was divided into various factions each trying to establish its supremacy. Akbar gradually took control of the situation and created a dedicated group of nobles faithful to him. The Mughal Empire's control was limited to a small territory.

Akbar started a policy of conquests and brought large areas in the east, west, north and south under the Empire, though success in the south was confined to the regions of Deccan only. Along with conquests, the process of consolidation was also initiated. As a result, the conquered territories were placed under a unified administrative system. The consolidated Empire created by Akbar was maintained with a measure of success by his successors for more than hundred years. During the reign of Aurangzeb, new territories in the south (Bijapur, Golkonda, etc.) and in the North-East were added. The notable achievement of the Mughal Emperors was in securing the help of the autonomous chieftains for the expansion and consolidation of the Empire.

6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Please read the first phase of Bairam Khan's regency in section 6.2 and write the answer.
- 2) The victory of Mughal forces in the second battle of Panipat strengthened Bairam Khan's position. Read in section 6.2 the second phase of his regency.
- 3) Bairam Khan alienated large sections of nobility after 1557. These nobles joined together and started opposing him. Read section 6.2.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Akbar made several attempts to capture Gujarat and succeeded by 1580 in subjugating her. Read sub-section 6.3.2.
- 2) The areas mainly affected were Eastern provinces and Gujarat. See sub-section 6.3.4.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 6.4.
- 2) The main expansion under Aurangzeb was done in the Deccan and Assam.
- 3) The Mughal policy allowed the chieftains to retain and administer their territories. At the same time the Mughal emperors could get their help whenever needed. See details in section 6.6.