

Akbar Expansion and Strong Central Empire (1556–1605)

Early Life and Rise to Power

Akbar became Mughal emperor in **1556** when he was only **thirteen years old**, after the death of his father **Humayun**. Because he was very young, his guardian and regent **Bairam Khan** helped him rule and defend the empire. The most important early event was the **Second Battle of Panipat (1556)**, where Akbar's forces defeated **Hemu**, a powerful Hindu general. This victory saved the Mughal throne. Later, Akbar took full control by removing Bairam Khan in **1560** and began ruling independently.

Expansion of the Mughal Empire

Akbar expanded the empire more than any previous Mughal ruler. He conquered **Malwa, Gujarat, Bengal, Kashmir, Sindh, Kabul**, and some parts of the **Deccan** region. He also defeated the famous Rajput ruler **Rana Pratap** at the **Battle of Haldighati (1576)**. Akbar used both **war** and **diplomacy**; for example, he married Rajput princesses to build peace and alliances. Controlling **Gujarat** gave the Mughals access to sea trade, while capturing **Kabul and Kandahar** protected the empire's northwestern borders.

Strong Administration and Governance

Akbar created one of the most **organized governments** in Indian history.

- He started the **Mansabdari System**, which ranked nobles and decided their army size and pay.
- He divided the empire into **Subahs (provinces)**, each led by a governor with clear duties.
- His finance minister **Todar Mal** reformed the **revenue system** by measuring land and fixing fair taxes.
- Akbar kept a **spy network** to control corruption and rebellion.
- He chose officials based on **merit**, not only family or tribe, to make the government more efficient.

These systems made the Mughal Empire strong and stable.

Religious and Social Policies

Akbar is famous for his **religious tolerance**. He followed **Sulh-i-Kul** (universal peace) to allow all religions to live together. He **ended the jizya tax** on non-Muslims and also removed the **pilgrimage tax**. Akbar married **Hindu princesses** and respected their traditions. In his palace, he built the **Ibadat Khana (House of Worship)** where Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and other

scholars discussed religion. He introduced **Din-i-Ilahi**, a new spiritual path for tolerance (though few followed it). Akbar also worked to improve women's lives by discouraging **sati** (widow burning) and **child marriage**, and by supporting widow remarriage.

Achievements and Legacy

Akbar ruled for nearly **50 years (1556–1605)** and created a **huge, stable empire**. He changed Indian warfare by using better tactics and strong artillery. His **administration and tax reforms** kept the empire rich and organized. He promoted **art, literature, music, and architecture**, making the Mughal court a cultural center. His policies of **tolerance** made the empire more united. Akbar left a strong foundation for later rulers like **Jahangir** and **Shah Jahan**, and he is remembered as one of the **greatest rulers in South Asian history**.