

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 2 — Aurangzeb



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AURANGZEB (1618–1707), one of the greatest of the Mogul emperors of Hindustan, was the third son of Shah Jahan, and was born in November 1618. His original name, Mahommed, was changed by his father, with whom he was a favourite, into Aurangzeb, meaning ornament of the throne, and at a later time he assumed the additional titles of Mohi-eddin, reviver of religion, and Alam-gir, conqueror of the world. At a very early age, and throughout his whole life, he manifested profound religious feeling perhaps instilled into him in the course of his education under some of the strictest Mahommedan doctors. He was employed, while very young, in some of his father's expeditions into the country beyond the Indus, gave promise of considerable military talents, and was appointed to the command of an army directed against the Uzbegs. In this campaign he was not completely successful, and soon after was transferred to the army engaged in the Deccan. Here he gained several victories, and in conjunction with the famous general, Mir Jumla, who had deserted from the king of Golconda, he seized and plundered the town of Hyderabad, which belonged to that monarch. His father's express orders prevented Aurangzeb from following up this success, and, not long after, the sudden and alarming illness of Shah Jahan turned his thoughts in another direction. Of Shah Jahan's four sons, the eldest, Dara, a brave and honourable prince, but disliked by the Mussulmans on account of his liberality of thought, had a natural right to the throne. Accordingly, on the illness of his father, he at once seized

the reins of government and established himself at Delhi. The second son, Shuja, governor of Bengal, a dissolute and sensual prince, was dissatisfied, and raised an army to dispute the throne with Dara. The keen eye of Aurangzeb saw in this conjuncture of events a favourable opportunity for realising his own ambitious schemes. His religious exercises and temperate habits gave him, in popular estimation, a great superiority over his brothers, but he was too politic to put forward his claims openly. He made overtures to his younger brother Murad, governor of Gujarat, representing that neither of their elder brothers was worthy of the kingdom, that he himself had no temporal ambition, and desired only to place a fit monarch on the throne, and then to devote himself to religious exercises and make the pilgrimage to Mecca. He therefore proposed to unite his forces to those of Murad, who would thus have no difficulty in making himself master of the empire while the two elder brothers were divided by their own strife. Murad was completely deceived by these crafty representations, and at once accepted the offer. Their united armies then moved northward. Meanwhile Shah Jahan had recovered, and though Dara resigned the crown he had seized, the other brothers professed not to believe in their father's recovery, and still pressed on. Shuja was defeated by Dara's son, but the imperial forces under Jaswant Singh were completely routed by the united armies of Aurangzeb and Murad. Dara in person took the field against his brothers, but was defeated and compelled to fly. Aurangzeb then, by a clever stroke of policy, seized the person of his father, and

threw him into confinement, in which he was kept for the remaining eight years of his life. Murad was soon removed by assassination, and the way being thus cleared, Aurangzeb, with affected reluctance, ascended the throne in August 1658. He quickly freed himself from all other competitors for the imperial power. Dara, who again invaded Gujarat, was defeated and closely pursued, and was given up by the native chief with whom he had taken refuge. He was brought up to Delhi, exhibited to the people, and assassinated. Shuja, who had been a second time defeated near Allahabad, was attacked by the imperial forces under Mir Jumla and Mahommed, Aurangzeb's eldest son, who, however, deserted and joined his uncle. Shuja was defeated and fled to Arakan, where he perished; Mahommed was captured, thrown into the fortress of Gwalior, and died after seven years' confinement. No similar contest disturbed Aurangzeb's long reign of forty-six years, which has been celebrated, though with doubtful justice, as the most brilliant period of the history of Hindustan. The empire certainly was wealthy and of enormous extent, for there were successively added to it the rich kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda, but it was internally decaying and ready to crumble away before the first vigorous assault. Two causes principally had tended to weaken the Mogul power. The one was the intense bigotry and intolerant policy of Aurangzeb, which had alienated the Hindus and roused the fierce animosity of the haughty Rajputs. The other was the rise and rapid growth of the Mahratta power. Under their able leader, Sivaji, these

daring freebooters plundered in every direction, nor could all Aurangzeb's efforts avail to subdue them. For the last twenty-six years of his life Aurangzeb was engaged in wars in the Deccan, and never set foot in his own capital. At the close of the long contest the Mogul power was weaker, the Mahratta stronger than at first. Still the personal ability and influence of the emperor were sufficient to keep his realms intact during his own life. His last years were embittered by remorse, by gloomy forebodings, and by constant suspicion, for he had always been in the habit of employing a system of espionage, and only then experienced its evil effects. He died on the 3rd of March 1707 at Ahmadnagar, while engaged on an extensive but unfortunate expedition against the Mahrattas.

See Lane-Poole, *Aurangzib*, "Rulers of India" series (1893).

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