# Chapter 2: Reshaping India's Political Map

## Questions — Questions and Activities

**Q1** Compare the political strategies of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. What similarities and differences existed between them?

### SOLUTION

Both the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire relied heavily on military conquest to expand their territories, collected land revenue through administrative systems (the iqta system under the Sultanate; the mansabdari and jagirdari systems under the Mughals), and imposed taxes such as the jizya on non-Muslim subjects — though Akbar abolished it while Aurangzeb reimposed it.

A key difference lay in political stability: the Delhi Sultanate suffered extremely violent successions, with almost two out of three sultans seizing power by eliminating their predecessor, giving an average reign of barely nine years; Mughal emperors up to Aurangzeb averaged 27 years per reign.

The Sultans relied almost entirely on military might and plunder; they showed little interest in cultural integration. Akbar, by contrast, pursued diplomacy alongside military force — he formed marriage alliances with Rajput princesses, welcomed regional leaders into his court, promoted sulh-i-kul (peace with all faiths), established a 'house of translation', and appointed Hindu officials to high positions.

Both empires faced persistent resistance: the Sultanate from kingdoms such as the Eastern Gangas, Hoysalas, and later the Vijayanagara Empire; the Mughals from the Rajputs, Ahoms, Marathas, and Sikhs. However, Akbar's blend of tolerance and strategy allowed the Mughal Empire to achieve far greater stability and territorial reach than the Sultanate had managed.

Answer: Both used military force and taxation, but the Mughals — especially under Akbar — added diplomacy, marriage alliances, and religious tolerance (sulh-i-kul) to achieve greater stability and longevity than the Delhi Sultanate.

Q2 Why did kingdoms like the Vijayanagara Empire and the Ahom Kingdom manage to resist conquest for a longer time compared to others? What geographical, military, and social factors contributed to their success?

SOLUTION

The Vijayanagara Empire benefited from its location in the deep south, well away from the main invasion routes through the northwest. It maintained powerful armies and battled multiple rivals — the Bahmani Sultanate and its successor Deccan Sultanates, and the Gajapati rulers of Odisha — while retaining internal cohesion. Under Krishnadevaraya it reached its peak militarily and culturally, and its rulers provided grants to temples and patronised diverse arts, which helped build loyalty among the population.

The Ahom Kingdom owed its resilience largely to geography: the dense forests, hills, and rivers of the Brahmaputra Valley made large-scale invasion extremely difficult. Their unique paik system required every able-bodied man to contribute labour or military service to the state in exchange for land rights, enabling the rulers to raise a large force rapidly without maintaining a permanent centralised army.

Socially, the Ahoms assimilated local culture, promoted agriculture, and encouraged diverse faiths, building broad popular support. In the Battle of Saraighat (1671), Ahom commander Lachit Borphukan and 10,000 men defeated a Mughal force of 30,000 by exploiting their knowledge of the terrain and using guerrilla and riverine tactics.

In both cases, a combination of difficult terrain, adaptive military strategy, strong leadership, and social cohesion made prolonged resistance possible.

Answer: Both empires combined difficult geography (deep south / forested northeast), effective military systems (Vijayanagara's strong armies; the Ahom paik system), strong leadership, and broad social support to resist conquest far longer than most other kingdoms of the period.

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Q3 How come Akbar, a ruthless conqueror in his young days, grew tolerant and benevolent after some years? What could have led to such a change?

SOLUTION

In his early campaigns Akbar showed no mercy — at Chittor he ordered the massacre of around 30,000 civilians, enslaved surviving women and children, and declared the destruction of temples as evidence of his zeal. Yet as his empire

grew, he increasingly adopted political and cultural strategies to stabilise it.

His court historian Abul Fazl recorded Akbar as reflecting, 'Formerly I persecuted men into conformity with my faith and deemed it Islam. As I grew in knowledge, I was overwhelmed with shame. Not being a Muslim myself, it was unmeet [inappropriate] to force others to become such.'

This shift was likely driven by practical statecraft: an empire spanning diverse peoples and faiths required a different approach than outright conquest. Akbar promoted the doctrine of sulh-i-kul — 'peace with all' — abolished the jizya, entered into marriage alliances with Rajput princesses, welcomed regional leaders into his court, and appointed Hindu officials to high positions.

His intellectual curiosity also played a role: despite being illiterate, he explored Persian and Indian texts, established a 'house of translation' at Fatehpur Sikri, and invited scholars and interfaith delegations to his court. Exposure to diverse thought appears to have deepened his understanding of governance and human dignity.

Answer: Akbar's shift from ruthless conqueror to tolerant ruler was driven by both pragmatic statecraft — diverse peoples required inclusion, not just force — and personal intellectual growth; he came to believe that compelling religious conformity was wrong, and promoted sulh-i-kul (peace with all faiths) to stabilise and expand his empire.