**Aurangzeb: Examining His Reign and Legacy**

**Early Life of Aurangzeb:**

* Aurangzeb, the sixth emperor of the Mughal Empire, ruled India from 1658 to 1707.
* His rule was marked by strict adherence to his Islamic beliefs, which garnered mixed reactions among the populace.
* Aurangzeb full name was Abu'l Muzaffar Muhi-ud-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb, was born on October 24, 1618, in Dahod, Gujarat, India.
* Aurangzeb's early life was marked by his exposure to the intricate politics of the Mughal court, family dynamics, and military training.
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**Succession to Throne:**

* When Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb's father, fell seriously ill in 1657, a power struggle erupted among his four sons – Dara Shikoh, Shuja, Aurangzeb, and Murad Baksh.
* Each of them sought to assert their claim to the throne, leading to a period of intense rivalry
* Upon assuming power, Aurangzeb took on the title of "**Alamgir**," meaning World Conqueror.
* His initial decade saw successful military campaigns that quelled minor revolts. However, challenges emerged later in his rule.

**Military Successes and Revolts:**

* In his early years, Aurangzeb effectively suppressed minor uprisings, showcasing his military prowess. Yet, his strict religious policies led to revolts by the Jats, Satnamis, and Sikhs. These rebellions were rooted in discontent over his harsh religious measures.
* **Conquest of Marwar**: Aurangzeb successfully captured the Marwar region, now known as **Rajasthan**, after a protracted conflict with **Maharaja Jaswant Singh.** This conquest solidified Mughal control over a significant portion of northwestern India.
* **War of Succession in the Deccan**: Aurangzeb faced internal conflicts and rebellions within his own family. His own sons, Azam Shah and Akbar, rebelled against him. Aurangzeb managed to suppress these revolts and maintain his authority.
* **Ahom Campaign**: In the northeastern region of Assam, Aurangzeb's forces under **Ram Singh I** launched a campaign against the Ahom kingdom. The Mughals managed to capture the Ahom capital and annex portions of Assam.
* **Sikh Uprising:** The Sikh community in the Punjab region rose in rebellion against Aurangzeb's religious policies, which included the imposition of taxes and the destruction of Sikh shrines. **The Sikh leader Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed under Aurangzeb's orders**, leading to heightened tensions and armed resistance.
* **Jats and Rajputs:** The Jat and Rajput communities also revolted against Aurangzeb's heavy-handed policies, particularly his taxation and religious measures. The Jats, led by Gokula, and the Rajputs, led by Raj Singh, engaged in uprisings against Mughal authority.
* **Maratha Revolt**: One of the most significant revolts was launched by the Marathas under the leadership of Chhatrapati Shivaji and later continued by his successors. The Marathas resisted Mughal control and conducted guerrilla warfare, eventually establishing the Maratha Confederacy.
* **Revolt of the Deccan Sultanates**: While Aurangzeb's campaigns in the Deccan brought some areas under Mughal control, they also led to local resistance. Several Deccan Sultanates, such as the Qutb Shahis and the Adil Shahis, launched revolts against Mughal rule.

**Puritanical Approach and Religious Policies:**

* Aurangzeb, driven by puritanical religious ideals, imposed the jizya tax on Hindus. He drew influence from the **Nakshbandi Sufi order**, shaping his religious inclinations.
* **Promotion of Islamic Law (Sharia):** Aurangzeb aimed to establish Islamic law, or Sharia, as the foundation of his governance.
	+ He enforced a stricter interpretation of Islamic law in his court and administration, which often clashed with the more syncretic and culturally diverse approach of his predecessors.
* **Taxation Policies:** Aurangzeb imposed taxes on non-Muslims, which included the jizya (a tax on non-Muslims) and the pilgrim tax.
	+ These policies were viewed by many as discriminatory and were a departure from the more inclusive practices of previous Mughal rulers.
* **Demolition of Hindu Temples**: Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of Aurangzeb's religious policies was his order to demolish Hindu temples.
	+ He ordered the destruction of several prominent temples, including the **Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and the Keshava Deva Temple in Mathura.** These actions fueled resentment and opposition among Hindu communities.
* **Conversion Policies:** Aurangzeb encouraged the conversion of Hindus to Islam through various means, including incentives and sometimes coercion. While this policy was consistent with his devout Islamic beliefs, it also fueled tensions and resistance among non-Muslim populations.

**Administration under Aurangzeb's Rule**

* **Merit-Based Appointments:**
	+ Aurangzeb aimed for efficient governance, selecting capable and honest officials solely based on skills, disregarding social status or connections. This approach enhanced government efficiency and minimized corruption.
* **Early Appointments and Challenges:**
	+ Initially governing the Balkh region under Shah Jahan's appointment, Aurangzeb faced threats from Uzbeks and Turkmen tribes. Subsequently, he governed Multan and Sind. Efforts to acquire Kandahar from Safavids faltered due to logistical issues and inadequate weaponry.
* **Succession Struggles and Victory:**
	+ Tensions over the throne escalated when ailing Shah Jahan triggered a succession dispute in 1657.
	+ Recovering, Shah Jahan couldn't halt the power struggle. Aurangzeb's valor, determination, and military prowess led to his victory over Dara at Samugarh in May 1658.
* **Centralization of Power:**
	+ Aurangzeb centralized authority, eliminating the prime minister and assuming comprehensive control. His vision held that the emperor should wield absolute authority across the empire.
* **Enforcement of Islamic Law:**
	+ Aurangzeb prioritized adherence to Islamic principles in governance. He implemented stringent regulations to govern societal behavior and religious practices. Non-Muslims were levied a distinct tax, and measures such as music and dance bans and Hindu temple destruction were enforced.

**Economy under Aurangzeb's Reign**

* **Agricultural Focus and Tax Reforms:**
	+ Aurangzeb aimed to bolster the Mughal Empire's economy by prioritizing agriculture and revenue collection. Emphasizing crop expansion, he restructured tax collection methods for greater efficiency.
* **Promotion of Cash Crops:**
	+ The emperor advocated cultivating cash crops like indigo and opium, contributing to increased export earnings. This strategy bolstered the empire's financial resources, amplifying trade revenue during Aurangzeb's era

**Cultural Shifts under Aurangzeb's Rule**

* **Emphasis on Islamic Traditions:**
	+ During his reign (1658-1707), Aurangzeb, a strict adherent of Islamic principles, made substantial cultural changes within the Mughal Empire. He prioritized Islamic teachings, erecting mosques and promoting religious education.
* **Evolution of Art and Architecture:**
	+ Aurangzeb's era witnessed the flourishing of art and architecture. Notably, the Mughal architectural style transitioned from ornate to simpler designs. This shift is evident in the construction of mosques and tombs marked by an emphasis on modesty and elegance.

**Expansion Efforts:**

* **Chittagong Recapture:**
	+ Governor Shaista Khan led the Mughal army to retake the Chittagong port from the Arakanese forces, expanding Mughal control.
* **Conflict with Shivaji Maharaj:**
	+ Aurangzeb's clash with Maratha chief Shivaji resulted in Shivaji's defeat, followed by an unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation in 1666. Aurangzeb shifted focus to control the Maratha territories through Golconda and Bijapur.
* **Capture of Bijapur and Golconda:**
	+ In 1686, Aurangzeb's forces seized the Bijapur fort after defeating Sikandar Ali Shah. He subsequently aimed to capture the Golconda fort in 1687, securing the Kollur diamond mines.

**Conclusion**

* Aurangzeb's reign was defined by his strict Islamic policies, military campaigns, and centralized governance. While successful in some military endeavors, his religious rigidity sparked revolts and cultural shifts. His legacy is one of complex achievements and controversies, shaping the Mughal Empire's trajectory and leaving a lasting impact on India's history.