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1. Examine the administrative structure of the Mughal Empire and assess its impact on the socio-religious fabric of India during that period.

Introduction

The Mughal Empire, which ruled over much of the Indian subcontinent from the 16th to the 19th centuries, had a complex and well-organized administrative structure that significantly impacted the socio-religious fabric of India.

Central Administration:

At the apex of the Mughal administration was the Emperor, who held absolute authority. The Emperor was assisted by a council of ministers, each responsible for specific departments. The most important ministers included:

- Wazir: The Prime Minister, responsible for revenue and general administration.
- Diwan: The finance minister, responsible for managing the state's finances.
- Mir Bakshi: The head of the military department, responsible for recruitment, training, and deployment of troops.
- Sadr-us-Sudur: The chief religious' advisor and administrator of religious endowments.

Provincial Administration:

The Mughal Empire was divided into provinces called Subas, each governed by a Subedar. The Subedar was responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting revenue, and implementing the emperor's orders in their province. The Subas were further divided into districts (Sarkars) and smaller administrative units (Parganas).

Key Features of Mughal Administration:

- **Centralized Authority:** The Mughal administration was highly centralized, with the Emperor holding ultimate power. This ensured uniformity in policies and administration across the vast empire.
- **Bureaucracy:** The Mughals developed a sophisticated bureaucracy, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for various officials. This ensured efficiency and accountability in administration.
- **Land Revenue System:** The Mughals implemented a well-organized land revenue system, which was crucial for generating revenue for the empire. The land was surveyed and classified based on its fertility, and taxes were levied accordingly.
- **Military Organization:** The Mughal army was well-organized and efficient, with a mix of cavalry, infantry, and artillery. The Mansabdari system, in which military officers were granted land instead of salary, was a key feature of the Mughal military organization.

Impact on Socio-Religious Fabric:

The Mughal administration had a profound impact on the socio-religious fabric of India. Some key points to consider are:

- **Religious Tolerance:** While some Mughal rulers, like Aurangzeb, were known for their religious intolerance, others, like Akbar, adopted a policy of religious tolerance. Akbar's policy of Sulh-i- kul (universal peace) sought to promote harmony among different religious groups.
- **Integration of Elites:** The Mughal administration often involved the integration of local elites, including Hindus, into the administration. This helped to foster a sense of shared governance and reduce regionalism.
- **Cultural Development:** The Mughal era witnessed a flourishing of art, architecture, literature, and music. Mughal emperors were patrons of the arts, and their court attracted artists and scholars from all over the world. For Example, the construction of grand architectural marvels like the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort showcases the cultural achievements of the Mughal era.

- **Social Hierarchy:** Mughal society was hierarchical, with the nobility and the ruling class at the top, followed by merchants, artisans, and peasants. While there was some social mobility, it was limited. For example, The Mansabdari system, while efficient, also led to the exploitation of peasants by some Mansabdars.

Conclusion

The Mughal administration was a complex and influential system that shaped the socio-religious landscape of India for centuries. While it had its strengths, such as centralized authority and an efficient bureaucracy, it also had its weaknesses, such as religious intolerance under some rulers and a rigid social hierarchy. Overall, the Mughal administration left a lasting legacy on India's administrative, social, and cultural fabric.

2. Discuss the role of Shivaji in challenging Mughal authority and evaluate how the rise of the Maratha Empire reshaped the political landscape of India.

Introduction

Shivaji Maharaj, a charismatic and visionary leader, played a pivotal role in challenging the mighty Mughal Empire and establishing the independent Maratha kingdom in the 17th century. His exploits not only shook the foundations of Mughal power but also significantly reshaped the political landscape of India.

Body

Shivaji's Challenge to Mughal Authority:

- **Early Resistance:** Shivaji's defiance of Mughal authority began with his refusal to acknowledge their suzerainty. He strategically captured forts in the Deccan region, gradually expanding his territory and influence. This posed a direct challenge to the Mughal dominance in the area.
- **For Example:** Battle of Pratapgarh (1659): Shivaji's decisive victory against the larger Mughal army led by Afzal Khan demonstrated his military prowess and undermined Mughal prestige.
- **Guerrilla Warfare:** Shivaji was a master of guerrilla warfare, utilizing his intimate knowledge of the terrain to outmanoeuvre the larger and less agile Mughal army. His hit-and-run tactics, surprise attacks, and swift retreats inflicted heavy losses on the Mughals, frustrating their attempts to subdue him.
- **Naval Power:** Recognizing the importance of naval power, Shivaji built a formidable Maratha navy. This allowed him to control the coastal regions, protect his territories from sea attacks, and disrupt Mughal trade routes.
- **For Example:** Sack of Surat (1664): Shivaji's daring raid on the wealthy port city of Surat, a major Mughal trading centre, not only acquired wealth for his kingdom but also inflicted a significant blow to Mughal finances and reputation.
- **Strategic Alliances:** Shivaji was a shrewd diplomat, forging strategic alliances with various regional powers to strengthen his position against the Mughals. These alliances provided him with crucial support in his struggle for independence.
- **Symbol of Resistance:** Shivaji emerged as a symbol of resistance against Mughal oppression. His courage and determination inspired the Marathas and other local populations to challenge the Mughal rule, contributing to the weakening of the empire.
- **For Example:** Coronation as Chhatrapati (1674): Shivaji's coronation as the Chhatrapati (sovereign ruler) of the Maratha kingdom was a symbolic declaration of independence from Mughal rule and marked the formal establishment of the Maratha Empire.

Reshaping the Political Landscape:

- **Decline of Mughal Power:** Shivaji's relentless challenge significantly weakened the Mughal Empire. His victories and territorial gains eroded Mughal control over the Deccan region, paving the way for their eventual decline.
- **Rise of the Marathas:** The establishment of the Maratha Empire under Shivaji's leadership created a new regional power in India. The Marathas, with their strong military and efficient administration, soon expanded their influence, challenging Mughal dominance across the subcontinent.
- **Decentralization of Power:** The rise of the Marathas contributed to the decentralization of political power in India. With the weakening of the Mughal Empire, various regional forces emerged, vying for control and shaping the future political landscape.

- **New Political Order:** The Marathas, under Shivaji and his successors, established a new political order in India. Their emphasis on regional identity, military prowess, and efficient administration influenced the political dynamics of the subcontinent for centuries to come.

Conclusion:

Shivaji's role in challenging Mughal authority was instrumental in the rise of the Maratha Empire. His military genius, strategic thinking, and inspiring leadership not only defied Mughal dominance but also laid the foundation for a new political order in India. The Marathas, under his guidance, emerged as a major force, significantly reshaping the political landscape and contributing to the eventual decline of the Mughal Empire.