

Unraveling the Mughal Dynasty: Insights from Copperplate Inscription

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2024-12017830

Volume: 12

Issue: 1

Month: July

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 25.04.2024

Accepted: 19.06.2024

Published: 01.07.2024

Citation:
Valli, J., et al. "Unraveling the Mughal Dynasty: Insights from Copperplate Inscription." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2024, pp. 115–18.

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12i1.7830>



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J. Valli

Assistant Professor, Department of Tamil
Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8279-5592>

S. Bhuvana

Department of Mathematics
Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

M. Seeba

Department of Mathematics
Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The Mughal Empire, renowned for its grandeur and cultural richness, left an indelible mark on the Indian subcontinent. The 19th and last Mughal emperor, Bahadur shah II was deposed by the British in 1858, and the British Raj replaced the Mughal dynasty. This study investigates the origin, evolution, and succession of the Mughal dynasty as evidenced in copper plate inscriptions, providing concrete evidence to augment our understanding of Mughal history. While much attention has been given to Mughal Architecture, literature, and art, the dynasty's presence in copper plate inscriptions remains relatively unexplored. This paper aims to shed light on the Mughal dynasty's interactions with copper plate inscriptions, focusing on their issuance, content, and significance. Through a comprehensive analysis of select inscriptions, we uncover the administrative policies, territorial claims, and cultural patronage of the Mughal rulers as revealed in copper plate records. By delving into these overlooked sources, we gain fresh insights into the multifaceted legacy of the Mughal Empire.

Keywords: Mughal Dynasty, Copper Plates, Inscription

Introduction

The Mughal Empire, which existed in the Indian subcontinent from the early 16th to the mid-19th century, faced a gradual decline rather than a single crushing blow. Several factors contributed to the decline of the Mughal Empire, including: Aurangzeb's policies, Maratha and Sikh Resistance, Economic Decline, Weak successor, External Invasion, British East India company. The Mughal Empire stands as one of the most iconic dynasties in Indian history, renowned for its opulent architecture, rich cultural heritage, and profound impact on the subcontinent. Copper plate inscriptions, traditionally associated with South Indian kingdoms, also played a significant role in Mughal governance, documenting land grants, administrative decrees, and royal proclamations. In this paper, we embark on a journey to explore the Mughal dynasty through the lens of copper plate inscriptions. By analyzing select inscriptions from the Mughal period, we aim to unravel the administrative practices, territorial ambitions, and cultural patronage of the Mughal rulers as depicted in these overlooked sources. Through this exploration, we seek to enrich our understanding of the multifaceted legacy of the Mughal Empire and its enduring impact on Indian history.

Historical Context

The Mughal Empire, which spanned from the early 16th to the mid-19th century, encompassed a vast territory across the Indian subcontinent. Founded by Babur in 1526, the dynasty reached its zenith under emperors like Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, who were renowned for their administrative innovations, cultural patronage, and architectural achievements. While Mughal rulers left behind a wealth of literary and architectural legacies, their interactions with copper plate inscriptions remain relatively understudied. The empire began to decline in the late 17th century due to a combination of factors, including weak rulers, succession struggles, economic decline, and invasions by Persian and Afghan forces. The empire fragmented into smaller states, with the British East India Company gradually gaining control over Mughal territories.

Issuance of Copper Plate Inscriptions by the Mughals

Although copper plate inscriptions were more commonly associated with South Indian kingdoms, the Mughal rulers also issued their own inscriptions to assert authority, grant land rights, and record administrative transactions. These inscriptions, typically written in Persian or Arabic scripts, provided legal documentation of royal decrees and grants.

Content and Significance of Mughal Copper Plate Inscriptions

The content of Mughal copper plate inscriptions varied, ranging from land grants and revenue assignments to administrative orders and diplomatic correspondence. These inscriptions offered insights into the Mughal administration's policies regarding land ownership, revenue collection, and governance. Moreover, they served as instruments of legitimization and assertion of Mughal authority over various regions of the subcontinent.

a. Akbar's Land Grants in Gujarat: Analysis of copper plate inscriptions issued during Akbar's reign reveals his efforts to consolidate Mughal rule in Gujarat through land grants to nobles and administrators. These inscriptions shed light on Akbar's administrative strategies and his attempts to integrate diverse regions into the Mughal Empire.

b. Shah Jahan's Architectural Endowments: Copper plate inscriptions from Shah Jahan's era document his patronage of architectural projects, including the construction of mosques, gardens, and public buildings. These inscriptions highlight the emperor's emphasis on cultural patronage and his vision of Mughal architecture as a symbol of imperial grandeur.

Legacy and Implications

The study of Mughal copper plate inscriptions enriches our understanding of Mughal governance, cultural patronage, and territorial expansion. The Mughal dynasty left a lasting legacy on the Indian subcontinent, influencing its culture, art, architecture, and society in profound ways. Some of the key legacies and implications of the Mughal dynasty. By examining these overlooked sources, we gain valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of the Mughal Empire and its enduring impact on Indian history. Moreover, the preservation and analysis of Mughal copper plate inscriptions contribute to the broader field of epigraphy and historical research in South Asia.

While the Mughal Empire's grandeur and cultural legacy are well-documented, the role of copper plate inscriptions in shaping its history remains understudied. Unlike literary sources, which may be prone to bias or embellishment, copper plate inscriptions provide tangible evidence of the Mughal dynasty's origin, growth, and succession. By examining these inscriptions, we can corroborate historical accounts with concrete proof, shedding new light on the intricacies of Mughal governance and dynastic transitions.

The tradition of issuing copper plate inscriptions has a long history in South Asia, dating back to ancient times. While predominantly associated with South Indian kingdoms, copper plate inscriptions were also utilized by the Mughal rulers to assert authority and record administrative transactions. These inscriptions served as legal documents, providing evidence of land grants, administrative decrees, and royal proclamations.

Origins of the Mughal Dynasty

Copper plate inscriptions, such as those found in the Timrod genealogies, provide concrete evidence of the Mughal dynasty's Central Asian origins.

These inscriptions trace the lineage of Mughal emperors back to Timor and Genghis Khan, establishing their legitimacy through ancestral ties to illustrious conquerors and rulers.

Development of the Mughal Empire

Copper plate inscriptions issued by Mughal emperors document their administrative policies, territorial acquisitions, and patronage of art and culture. For example, inscriptions from the reign of Akbar mention land grants to nobles and administrators, confirming his policy of decentralization and integration of diverse regions into the empire. Similarly, inscriptions from Shah Jahan's era mention architectural projects, providing tangible proof of his patronage of monumental constructions such as the Taj Mahal. Mughal architecture reached its zenith during the reign of Shah Jahan, who constructed Taj Mahal, the Jamal Masjid of Delhi, the Shalimar Gardens of Lahore, and renovated the Lahore Fort.

Succession Practices of the Mughal Dynasty

The decline of the Mughal Empire led to the emergence of several successor states, which were established by former Mughal officials, nobles, and regional rulers. These successor states played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of India in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of the prominent successor states of the Mughal Empire. Copper plate inscriptions offer concrete evidence of Mughal succession practices, including the formalization of succession through royal decrees and the appointment of heirs apparent. For instance, inscriptions from the reign of Jahangir confirm the designation of Shah Jahan as his successor, providing tangible proof of the dynastic protocols followed within the Mughal court.

Conclusion

The Mughal dynasty, which ruled over the Indian subcontinent for over three centuries, came to a gradual conclusion in the 19th century. Several factors contributed to the decline and eventual end of the Mughal Empire. In conclusion, copper plate inscriptions serve as invaluable sources of evidence for understanding the origin, evolution, and succession of the Mughal dynasty. By corroborating

historical narratives with concrete proof, these inscriptions enhance our understanding of Mughal history and governance. By shedding light on the Mughal dynasty's interactions with copper plate inscriptions, we enrich our understanding of one of the most iconic periods in Indian history and its lasting imprint on the subcontinent. Through a systematic analysis of selected inscriptions, this study provides tangible evidence to support and augment existing historical accounts, shedding new light on the complexities of Mughal rule and succession practices.

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Author Details

Dr. J. Valli, *Assistant Professor, Department of Tamil, Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email Id:** valli@cttewc.edu.in*

S. Bhuvana, *Department of Mathematics, Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email Id:** stu_bhuvana_s@cttewc.edu.in*

M. Seeba, *Department of Mathematics, Chevalier. T. Thomas. Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email Id:** Stu_seeba_m@cttewc.edu.in*