

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE, ITS DECLINE & AFTERMATH

Decline of the Mughal Empire

Key Question: What were the causes of the decline of the Mughal Empire? [14]

Focus Points:

- The role of Aurangzeb in the decline of the Mughal Empire.
- Did the Mughal weaknesses from 1707 make decline inevitable?
- The internal split & disintegration amongst the local Indians as a cause.
- How far was the East India Company responsible in the decline of the Empire?

Specified content:

Internal reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire:

- The impact of Aurangzeb's policies on the stability of the Mughal Empire. (Jizya/forceful conversions/destruction of Hindu temples)
- The ineffectiveness of his successors as rulers, problems of controlling the empire.
- The rise of the Maratha and Sikh empires.
- The rebellion by the locals disgruntled with the continuous chaos and battles.

External reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire:

- In **1739** the Persian invader **Nadir Shah** captured Delhi. He did not stay in Delhi but emptied royal treasury. He also took with him the symbols of the Mughal pride; the **Koh-i-Noor** diamond and Shah Jehan's **Peacock Throne**.
- It was in **1747** that **Ahmed Shah Durrani** attacked Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore. By **1749** he had gained control of Punjab and by **1756** he had captured Kashmir and Multan too.
- The already weakened empire faced further intrusion by the **British** in **1608** in the form of EIC and the **French**, who in **1664** launched their own **Compagnie des Indes**, which proved to be the last nail in the coffin. The British, who had initially entered as traders took full advantage of the weakening empire and soon became masters of whole India.

CAIE Exam Questions

1. Who was Aurangzeb? [4]
2. What was the Jizya Tax? [4]
3. Why was Aurangzeb unpopular at the time of his death? [7]
4. 'The coming of the British was the main reason for the decline of the Mughal Empire'. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer. [14]

Decline of the Mughal Empire

Although the Mughals had been ruling India for the past 200 years and reached its zenith at the time of Aurangzeb Alamgir, it collapsed within a few decades after his death.

Aurangzeb as a ruler:

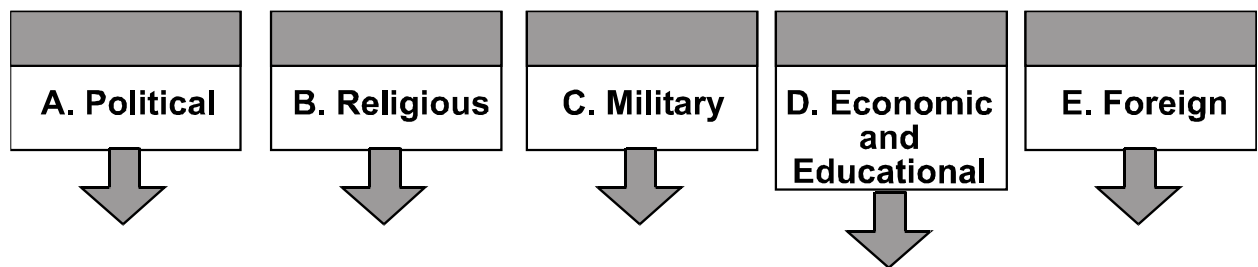
- Aurangzeb is considered to be an ardent believer of Islamic norms and values.
- Aurangzeb's first real challenge was against the Assamese (**1664-1666**) who had invaded Bengal, and though they never completely conquered Assam itself, the king had to accept Aurangzeb as his overlord and give large amount of treasure.
- There was a war against the **Rajputs** from **1680-82** that was a big mistake on his part as they had been reasonably friendly with the earlier Mughals. Also, the rebellion by the Sikhs and Satnamis in Mewar and Jatts in Gokal created problems.
- In order to extend his empire northwards, he had to fight against Pathans in NWFP.
- Marathas were a militant force of peasants and poor farmers who belonged to state of Maharashtra. Under the fierce leadership of **Shivaji** in Hyderabad Deccan area, they were gradually increasing to other parts of India too. Even 25 years of fighting Aurangzeb had not subdued Marathas. He had almost emptied the royal treasury. Still, the Empire was largest till 1707 from Kashmir to Karnatak and Ghazni to Bengal.

Social Reforms

- He imposed high taxes on common men, though he abolished many local taxes on traders.
- He spent huge amount on military expeditions to extend his empire.
- He spent huge money on palaces and luxurious mosques such as Pearl Mosque in Delhi.

Causes for the Downfall of the Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire owes its decline and ultimate downfall to a combination of factors, which may be classified into political, religious, military, economic, educational and foreign.



POLITICAL

❖ Succession Disputes

The charm of ruling the empire had enticed many a ruler to gain the control of the empire. Therefore, the Mughal era witnessed civil war at the death of its rulers. The war of successions not only led to bitterness, bloodshed, loss of money and prestige of the empire over a period of time, but to its eventual downfall also. A major cause for the degeneration of the Mughal Empire was the absence of any definite law of accession. This in turn allowed the British to impose territorial acquisition policies, mainly the **Doctrine of Lapse in 1852**.

Aurangzeb's successors and decline of Mughal Empire

Aurangzeb himself had gained the control of the Empire by overcoming his brothers. He was determined to avoid such a war after his death so he divided the empire between his three sons but it proved in vain. Fighting broke out between them and eventually **Prince Muazzam** established himself as emperor. He survived only a few years and then his four sons fought over the throne but the victor **Jahandur Shah** was murdered within a year. In the ten years after Aurangzeb's death, twelve different people claimed to be emperors at one time! The stable Mughal Empire became weak and divided. **Muhammad Shah**, also known as **Shah Alam I** became emperor in **1719** and ruled for almost 30 years but he faced so much opposition that he was really last Mughal Emperor who claimed to be an emperor.

❖ Rise of Marathas, Sikhs and other militant groups

Marathas were a much more serious and long-lasting threat to the Muslim kingdoms of the subcontinent. They first appeared in the early 17th century in the Western Ghats where they built large fortresses in the mountains that were almost impossible to capture. They emerged under the fierce leader **Shivaji** in Hyderabad Deccan area. They forced the Sultan of Bijapur to surrender in 1659 and even defeated the Mughal army in **1661**. Their influence further grew when they sacked the rich Mughal port of **Surat** in **1664** and were gradually increasing to other parts of India. Aurangzeb now realized the strength of his enemy and sent a huge Muslim army which defeated the Marathas in 1665. They were forced to sign a treaty but that didn't last long. The most costly expedition of Aurangzeb was against Marathas in Deccan. Even 25 years of fighting Aurangzeb had not subdued Marathas. He had almost emptied the royal treasury. During the time of the Early Mughals, Sikhs also organized themselves as militant groups but their power reached to the heights during the time of Aurangzeb and later Mughals. During the time of Aurangzeb, the peasantry, almost throughout the Mughal territories, was under the burden of high taxes. This situation was exploited in Punjab against the Mughal rulers by the Sikh leaders which led to a number of rebellions across the country. The government was soon exhausted in dealing with the rebellions groups and the empire started showing the signs of disintegration.

❖ Weak central government and rise of independent regional kingdoms

As the control of the Mughal government was getting weaker, the regional administrators declared their independence in the Afghan region, Kashmir, Oudh and Bengal. Many other regional kingdoms refused to pay tribute to the Mughal government by breaking the Mughal authority and weakening their Empire. It was during the rule of the later Mughals that **Bengal (1720), Deccan (1724) Bihar and Orissa (1748)** declared their independence. Another sign of Mughal weakness appeared when in **1738** the Marathas swarmed outside Agra and reached Delhi. Although not successful there, they were able to capture large areas of modern day Madhya Pradesh and southeastern Rajasthan state and west central India.

❖ Large size of the Empire

During the time of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire had expanded to reach its maximum size. This vast area had become impossible for any ruler to control and govern from one center without efficient means of communication.

❖ Conspiracies in Mughal courts and corruption

Another reason for the crumbling down of the Mughal Empire was the disloyalty of the courtiers who were involved in conspiracies against the Mughal government and sided with the enemies after receiving huge sum of money or land as bribe. Growth of hostile and rival clique in the court also undermined the strength of the government. The degeneration of the rulers had also led to the moral degeneration of the nobility. Widespread corruption in the administration started and taking of bribes became common. This eventually weakened the economic structure of the government leading to its downfall.

RELIGIOUS

Historians are divided about Aurangzeb's attitude towards religion. According to many western and Hindu historians Aurangzeb's religious policy is regarded as a cause for the decline of the Mughal Empire as it led to disunity among the people.

- They say that he was intolerant and wanted to destroy other religions. They pointed out that he reintroduced Jizya tax on Non-Muslims.
- Destroyed a number of Hindu temples and tried to ban some old Hindu practices, such as Suttee.
- Fixed the minimum length of beards and put a ban on dancing and use of alcohol. He also forbade the planting of cannabis.
- He also enforced Islamic law making Hindu and Sikhs live according to Quran.
- He encouraged Islamic scholars and built many schools and colleges. He even copied Quran in his own handwriting twice.

MILITARY INEFFICIENCY

- One of the most potent causes of the fall of the Mughal Empire was the deterioration and demoralization of the military. The military had not only become inefficient but also lacked in training, discipline and unity.
- The army was out-dated in regard to weapons. It consisted of armed groups maintained by various nobles, which were the main source of the army's weakness. As the weakening of the nobles occurred, so did lose its effectiveness. Also, the soldiers were more committed with ethnicity (Persians, Afghans and Central Asians) than India itself.
- The Mughals had not developed navigational techniques and only maintained small ships that were no match for the well-equipped ships of the foreign traders. It was this weakness that the French and the British used to their advantage, and were eventually able to establish their control over India.

ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS

- Agriculture was the main source of income of the Mughal government but its management deteriorated over the years. The landlords hardly adopted any modern methods of cultivation, resulting in insignificant increase in agriculture produce. In order to increase government revenue, heavy taxes on farmers and peasants were imposed increasing their economic burden and thus contributed to the deplorable economic conditions.
- As a matter of fact the state invested neither in agricultural expansion nor in manufacturing or infrastructure to increase production and promote trade. The war of successions, rebellions and luxurious style of living had depleted the once enormous treasury and had led to financial bankruptcy.
- Aurangzeb abolished transport duties (10 percent of the value of goods) and the tax on goods brought into cities for sale. It didn't prove successful in the end. Also, customs duties were re-imposed in 1665 at **5 percent for Hindus and 2.5 percent for Muslims**. This led to many Hindus converting to Islam.
- A grave drawback of Mughal rule was the failure of the Mughal rulers to promote modern education. Whereas the European nations had begun to invest in printing books and public universities, the Mughal rulers demonstrated, at best, a passing interest in the sciences. As a result, even though the Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb had successfully dealt with the expansion of European trading settlements in India, no durable foundation for the scientific advancement in India had been laid. Mughal rule had left India largely incapable of dealing with the challenge of European military and cultural domination.

FOREIGN INVASIONS

1738 the Persian leader, **Nadir Shah** invaded the Mughal Empire. He defeated Ahmed Shah's forces in **1739** and captured Delhi. He did not stay in Delhi but emptied royal treasury. Then in **1747**, **Ahmed Shah Durrani** attacked Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore. By **1749** he gained control of Punjab and by 1756 he had had Kashmir and Multan too.

❖ The Arrival of the British

The already weakened empire faced further intrusion by the British and the French, which proved to be the last nail in the coffin. The British, who had initially entered as traders, took full advantage of the weakening empire and soon became masters of the whole of India. Although the French had the same intentions as the British that prompted them to support the Nawab of Bengal in the **Battle of Plassey** in **1757**, they were never a match to British supremacy. In **1764**, Shah Alam II suffered defeat at the hands of the British at the **Battle of Buxur**. This led to the British taking control of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In **1803**, they occupied Delhi and placed the emperor under British protection. A further expansion towards the South and West was carried out when the British were able to annex Sindh in **1843** and Punjab in **1848**. British were now gaining stronghold in India and the final two emperors ruled in name only. Shah Alam's son **Akbar II** ruled parts of Delhi and his son **Bahadur Shah Zafar II** exiled from Delhi to Rangoon in 1857.

Analysis, Evaluation and Judgment:

In my opinion, downfall of the Mughal Empire was inevitable due to internal crisis and external factors. As a matter of fact, Mughals could not keep pace with the changing world and remained within their shell when the world was going through a major change in economic, political and social systems. There was agricultural and industrial revolution in Europe that increased the economic power of European nations. On the other hand, India remained backward and followed traditional ways in industry and agriculture.