

Factors Leading To Decline of Mughals

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Role of East India Company and Political, Socio-economic & military factors in Decline of Mughals

The **decline of the Mughal Empire** has been a topic of historical debate, with two main perspectives: the Mughal-centric view focusing on internal factors and the region-related view emphasising external turmoil. While the disintegration began during Aurangzeb's reign, it gained momentum after he died in 1707. Challenges to Mughal authority from various factions were present, but no one could achieve complete independence. The subsequent weak and inept rulers further accelerated the empire's collapse.

After Aurangzeb's death, the succession of incapable rulers weakened the Mughal Empire's foundation. **Internal issues**, such as administrative corruption and infighting among nobles, eroded the centralised authority. Simultaneously, **external factors**, like regional turmoil and instability, added to the empire's challenges. The failure to address these issues and govern effectively led to the empire's eventual collapse. Had capable rulers followed Aurangzeb, the empire's decline might have been avoided or significantly delayed.

Political factors leading to the decline of Mughals

The political weaknesses encompassed succession issues, regional disintegration and weak rulers. These factors collectively contributed to the erosion of the empire's power and paved the way for its eventual downfall.

Succession issues

- **Lack of rule of succession:** Unlike **primogeniture**, the Mughal succession was often influenced by factors such as the preferences of the ruling emperor, the support of influential courtiers, and the power dynamics within the imperial family.
 - This ambiguity and lack of a clear succession mechanism led to disputes and conflicts over the rightful heir to the throne.
- **Fatricidal wars:** Succession disputes in the Mughal Empire frequently resulted in fratricidal wars, where brothers fought against each other to claim the throne.
 - Following the death of emperor **Aurangzeb** in 1707, a war of succession erupted among his sons to claim the throne.
- **Court factions:** The influential nobles and court factions often played a significant role in shaping the outcome of succession disputes. They viewed power and sought to influence the selection of the next emperor based on their personal interests and ambitions.
 - Two prominent court factions, led by the sons of Shah Jahan, **Dara Shikoh** and **Aurangzeb**, viewed for control and sought to secure their positions as the next emperor.
- **Weak central authority:** The lack of a clear succession mechanism and the resulting power struggles **weakened** the central authority of the Mughal Empire.

Regional disintegration

- **Regional governors:** The Mughal Empire relied on regional governors known as **Subahdars** to administer and govern different provinces. Gradually they aspired to establish their own kingdoms as the central authority was declining.
 - For example, **the Marathas**, led by influential leaders like **Shivaji** and his successors, carved out their kingdom in western India and challenged Mughal authority.
- **Regional rebellions:** The **Deccan Sultanates** in the southern region of the empire, such as **Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar**, declared their independence and fought against Mughal forces.
- **Regional centres:** The weakening of the central authority allowed local rulers and aristocratic families to consolidate power in their respective regions.
 - The rise of the **Rajput states**, such as Mewar, Marwar, and Amber, as powerful regional entities illustrates this trend.

Weak and inefficient rulers after Aurangzeb

Several emperors lacked the qualities and skills required for effective governance, weakening the empire's administration and ability to respond to challenges.

- **Lack of leadership and vision:** Emperor **Farrukhsiyar** (1713-1719 AD) was known for his indecisiveness and inability to control the power of the nobles.

- His reign witnessed increased political corruption, court intrigues, and the erosion of central authority.
- **Corruption and favouritism:** Incapable rulers often succumbed to corruption and nepotism, favouring their loyal courtiers and family members over competent and qualified individuals.
 - Emperor Muhammad Shah (1719-1748 AD) was known for his indulgence in a luxurious lifestyle and his lack of interest in the affairs of the state.
- **Ineffectiveness in military matters:** Emperor **Alamgir II** (1754-1759 AD) faced numerous military challenges during his brief reign but proved ineffective in countering them.
 - He failed to address the rising power of regional kingdoms like the Marathas and provide strong leadership to the Mughal army.

Economic factors leading to the decline of Mughals

Several economic factors played a significant role in the decline of the Mughal Empire. These factors include the decline in agricultural productivity, excessive taxation, and the emergence of European trading powers.

The Decline of Trade and Commerce

The Mughal Empire, once a thriving hub of trade and commercial activity, witnessed a gradual deterioration of its trade networks and a decline in economic prosperity.

- **Depletion of Treasury:** The continuous wars and extravagant lifestyle of the Mughal court depleted the empire's treasury, leading to financial instability and inability to maintain a strong military and administrative apparatus.
- **Loss of Control over Trade Routes:** Initially, the Mughal Empire boasted a robust trade network that connected various regions, facilitating extensive international trade with neighbouring countries and distant territories.
 - However, over time, the empire lost control over crucial trade routes due to internal strife and **external invasions**, resulting in disruptions and hindrances to the flow of goods and commodities.
- **Impact of European Trading Companies:** These European powers established fortified trading posts and gradually gained control over key coastal regions, bypassing traditional Mughal trade routes and diverting lucrative trade opportunities to their own territories.
- **Decline in Manufacturing and Crafts:** The Mughal Empire boasted a rich tradition of manufacturing and crafts, producing highly sought-after goods like textiles, carpets, metalwork, and ceramics.
 - However, as the empire weakened, so did its ability to sustain and support these industries.
- **Agrarian Crisis:** Mismanagement of agricultural resources, heavy taxation, and frequent wars led to a decline in agricultural productivity.
 - This crisis not only reduced the availability of food and essential commodities but also disrupted the rural economy and weakened the overall economic foundation of the empire.
- **Monetary Issues: Devaluation** and inflation eroded the value of the empire's currency, making trade transactions more complicated and uncertain. This monetary instability had adverse effects on trade and commerce, **discouraging merchants** and traders from engaging in commercial activities.

High taxation burden

The empire heavily relied on revenue from land taxation, known as the **Zabt system**, which placed a substantial burden on the peasantry and various economic sectors.

- **The strain on the peasantry:** The Mughal Empire's taxation policies placed a disproportionate burden on the peasantry, who constituted the majority of the population. Peasants were subject to **high land taxes**, often exceeding their agricultural capacity.
- **Agricultural productivity:** Excessive taxes compelled farmers to focus on meeting tax obligations rather than investing in agricultural improvements or diversifying their crops, leading to a reduction in production and productivity.
- **Tax farmers and corruption:** The Mughal Empire relied on **tax farmers** or revenue collectors known as **zamindars** to collect taxes from the population. However, the system of tax farming often led to corruption and abuse.
- **Artisanal industry:** Artisans, such as weavers, metalworkers, and artisans, faced high taxes on their tools, raw materials, and finished products. This industry witnessed a decline under the tax burden.

Social and cultural factors leading to the decline of Mughals

The decline of the Mughal Empire was not solely attributed to political and economic factors. Social and cultural issues also played a role in the empire's decline.

Religious and communal divisions

- **Aurangzeb's policies:** Emperor Aurangzeb's policies profoundly impacted religious and communal relations within the empire.
 - Unlike his predecessors, Aurangzeb adopted a more orthodox interpretation of Islam and implemented measures favouring Muslims while suppressing other religious communities.
- **Hindu-Muslim relations:** The policies of Aurangzeb, along with the **perceived favouritism towards Muslims**, resulted in heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions, at least among the ruling class.
 - Hindu resistance movements, such as the Marathas and Rajputs, emerged to challenge Mughal authority and protect their religious and cultural identity.
- **Sikh resistance:** The rise of Sikhism in the Punjab region presented a unique challenge to the Mughal Empire. **Sikh gurus** and their followers faced persecution under Aurangzeb's religious policies, leading to the **militarisation** of the Sikh community.

The influx of foreign influences

- **European trading companies:** European trading companies, such as the British East India Company, Dutch East India Company, and French East India Company, established a strong presence in India during the decline of the Mughal Empire.
 - These companies sought to **exploit India's wealth** and resources, leading to the establishment of trade settlements, forts, and factories along the coastal regions.
- **Power imbalance:** The arrival of European powers brought with them advanced **military technologies** and tactics that outmatched the traditional Mughal military forces.

- The Mughal Empire's army, which had once been formidable, struggled to keep pace with the modernised European armies.

Military factors leading to the decline of Mughals

The Mughal Empire faced several military challenges during its decline, significantly contributing to its weakening and eventual downfall.

Rise of the Maratha Confederacy

The Marathas' military campaigns, territorial expansion, and political manoeuvres weakened the already declining Mughal authority and hastened the empire's demise.

- **Territorial losses:** Through their military campaigns and conquests, the Marathas gradually captured territories that were previously under **Mughal control**.
 - They expanded their influence across western and central India, establishing their own regional power.
- **Drain on resources:** As the Marathas gained control over key regions, they imposed taxes and collected revenues from these territories.
 - This reduced the revenue available to the Mughal Empire, as they lost control over prosperous regions that were now under the Maratha administration.
- **Military pressure:** The Marathas posed a **direct military threat** to the Mughals. The Mughal Empire had to divert its military forces and resources to counter the Maratha advancements and defend against their attacks.

The threat of Afghan and Persian invaders

- **Invasion of Nadir Shah:** His invasion culminated in the sack of Delhi, a devastating event known as the **Battle of Karnal**. Nadir Shah's forces plundered the city, looting its wealth and treasures, including the famous Peacock Throne.
- **Invasion of Ahmedshah Abdali:** He continuously harassed the Mughals, who tried to buy peace in 1751-52 by ceding Punjab to him. In 1757, Abdali **captured Delhi** and left behind an Afghan caretaker to watch over the Mughal emperor.

Lack of technological developments in the military

The Mughal Empire faced challenges from external powers that possessed superior military technology.

- **Enemies possessed advanced technology:** The invaders, such as the Afghan and Persian forces, utilised advanced firearms and artillery, giving them a significant advantage over the Mughals.
- **Mughals not kept pace:** The Mughals, on the other hand, did not keep pace with advancements in military technology, relying heavily on **traditional warfare** methods.
- **Disparity:** This technological disparity weakened the Mughal military and made it difficult for them to defend their territories effectively.

Role of East India Company in the decline of Mughals

The East India Company played a significant role in the fall of the Mughal Empire. Initially arriving in India as a trading entity, the company gradually expanded its influence and power, eventually leading to the downfall of the Mughals.

- **Political manipulation:** The East India Company skillfully exploited the political divisions and instability within the Mughal Empire.
 - They **formed alliances** with disaffected regional powers and played them against each other, weakening the central authority of the Mughal emperors.
- **Economic exploitation:** Through unfair trade practices, imposition of high tariffs, and monopolistic policies, the company **systematically undermined** the indigenous industries and artisans, leading to a decline in Mughal economic power.
- **Military supremacy:** The East India Company had a superior military organisation and weaponry than the Mughals. **The Battle of Buxar (1764)** was a significant turning point that showcased the military superiority of the East India Company over the Mughal Empire.
- **Annexation of provinces:** The East India Company gradually annexed Mughal provinces and territories through a series of wars and diplomatic manoeuvres.
- **Financial drain:** The Mughal emperors increasingly became dependent on **financial assistance** from the East India Company, which hastened the submission of the Mughals to the Company.
- **The capture of Delhi:** In 1803, the East India Company captured Delhi, the Mughal capital, and **deposed** the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II.

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