

TOPIC 1:

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

1707–1857:

The Mughal Empire reached its greatest extent in the time of Aurangzeb Alamgir, but it collapsed with dramatic suddenness within a few decades after his death. The Mughal Empire owes its decline and ultimate downfall to a combination of factors; ***firstly Aurangzeb's religious policy*** is regarded as a cause for the decline of the Mughal Empire as it led to disunity among the INDIAN people.

Another reason was unworthy ***and incompetent successors*** of Aurangzeb. The character of Mughal kings had deteriorated over a period of time. The successive rulers after Aurangzeb were weak and lacked the character, motivation and commitment to rule the empire strongly. They had become ease loving and cowardly. They totally disregarded their state duties and were unable to detain the declining empire from its fall. These later Mughal rulers were absolutely incompetent and weak. They were proven neither ***good generals nor good statesmen*** who could control or administer the large empire which covered nearly the whole of the subcontinent during Aurangzeb's rule. The later rulers were also pleasure loving and were renowned for ***living an extravagant lifestyle*** with little thought to the effect it had on the economy of the empire. They also lacked courage, determination and training. Money was spent lavishly on fine buildings, jewellery, fine clothes and food. No infrastructure was created for the improvement of administration, industry or agriculture.

The ***absence of any definite law of succession*** was another important factor. The war of successions not only led to bitterness, bloodshed, and loss of money and prestige of the empire over a period of time, but to its eventual fall. Wars of succession were also an important reason. After the death of a ruler, the princess fought for the throne. This eroded the strength and led to the instability of the Mughal Empire. **Aurangzeb** fought against his brothers ***Dara Shiko and Shuja***, and later got ***Kamran*** killed. Infighting continued even after Aurangzeb like ***Moazzam*** who succeeded the throne under the name of **Bahadur Shah** after Aurangzeb, defeated his brothers ***Azam and Kam Baksh*** and killed them. Bahadur Shah ruled for 5 years and died in 1712. His sons also fought for the throne. The infighting for the throne greatly weakened the Mughal Empire.

Local and foreign Invasions on Delhi also made the Mughals weak. Marathas were the major opponents of Mughals. They were from central and south India. Aurangzeb fought with them but could not control them. Until 1750, they had become a major threat for the Mughals. However, Marathas were defeated in 1761 in the battle of Panipat and powerless Mughals got some more time to rule India. Besides Marathas, two more invasions took place from Afghanistan and Persia. In 1738, Persian General Nadir shah invaded Delhi and looted their wealth. Between 1747 and 1769, Afghan General Ahmed Shah invaded India ten

times. Even in Punjab, Sikhs were also a major threat for the Mughals. All these invasions made the Mughals virtually bankrupt and they lost their power completely. Mughal Kingdom was reduced to an area 300 miles long and 100 miles wide near Delhi within 100 years after the death of Aurangzeb.

The **rise of British** power was the main reason of the decline of the Mughals. The British took full advantage of the weakness of the Mughals and gradually increased their power. The British expanded the territory under their control with the help of their superior administration and organization. A series of battles and annexations, through steps like '**Subsidiary Alliance**' and '**Doctrine of Lapse**' and effective administration the British gradually assumed control over a vast territory in the subcontinent. They also had clear military advantage because of **Industrial development** in England (1750-1850). The British had better weapons, superior war techniques and a well-trained and disciplined army. The British possessed a strong **naval** force. The result was that by 1803 the British took over Delhi and placed Shah Alam under British protection with a pension.

MINOR REASONS:

The degeneration of the rulers had also led to the **moral degeneration of the nobility**. Under the early Mughals, the nobles performed useful functions and distinguished themselves both in war and peace. But the elite under the later Mughals was more interested in worldly pursuit and self-enhancement. The nobles who had once been talented men with integrity, honesty, and loyalty, turned selfish and deceitful. Growth of hostile and rival clique in the court also undermined the strength of the government. Widespread **corruption** in the administration started and taking bribes became common.

One of the most potent causes of the fall of the Mughal Empire was the deterioration and **demoralization of the army**. The military had not only become inefficient but also lacked in training, discipline and cohesion. The army was out-dated in regard to equipment. It consisted of contingents maintained by various nobles, which was the main source of Army's weakness. As the weakening of the nobles occurred, so did the army. This was because of the soldiers, instead of identifying and uniting as Mughal Indians, identified themselves with different ethnic groups like Persian, Afghans and Central Asians. The Mughals had **no navy** 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

Another factor contributing to the decline was the **financial position of the Mughals**, which had become deplorable. The war of successions, rebellions and luxurious style of living had depleted the once enormous treasury and had led to financial bankruptcy. During the time of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire had expanded to reach its maximum size. This **vast area** had become impossible for one ruler to control and govern from one centre. It was during the later Mughals that Deccan, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa declared their independence.

Expected Questions Topic 1:

Question No.1: Was the infighting between Aurangzeb's successors the most important reason for the collapse of the Mughal Empire? Explain your answer. (14) November 2001. (Q.1.c)

Question No.2: Briefly explain three reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire. (7) June.2002. (Q.1.b)

Questions No.3: "Aurangzeb's successors failed to live up to his courageous and determined personality". Was this the most important reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire? Give reasons for your answer.

(14) November 2003 (Q.1.c)

Questions No.4: Why were the British able to replace the Mughals as the dominant force in the Sub Continent by 1850? (7) November 2004. (Q. 1.b)

Question No.5: Were the weak and greedy characteristics of Aurangzeb's successors the most important reasons for the collapse of the Mughal Empire? Explain your answer. (14) November 2005. (Q.1.c)

Questions No.6: Explain why the Mughal Empire declined following the reign of Aurangzeb.

(7) June 2006. (Q.1.b)

Question No.7: "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) June 2007(Q.1.c)

Question No.8: Explain why the successors of Aurangzeb failed to prevent the decline of the Mughal Empire.

(7) November 2008 (Q.1.b)

Question No.9: 'The policies of Aurangzeb were the main reason for the decline of the Mughal Empire'. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer. (14) November 2009(Q.1.c)

Question No.10: The spread of Maratha power was the main reason for the decline of the Mughal Empire. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer. (14) June 2011 (Q.1.c)

Question No.11: Explain why the Mughal Empire declined following the reign of Aurangzeb.

(7) June 2012 (Q. 1.b)

Question No.12: Read the source below carefully to answer question (a).

The Mughal Empire took 150 years from the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 to break up. His empire was facing difficulties at the time of his death and following this, the tensions and problems only became worse. The most serious challenge to Mughal authority came from the Marathas.

(a) Describe what the Marathas did. (4) June 2013 (Q.1.a)

Question No.13: How did the successors of Aurangzeb contribute to the downfall of the Mughal Empire?

(7)November 2013 (Q.1.b)

MANSABDARI SYSTEM:

“Mansab” is an Arabic word which means a post, an officer a rank, or status. Therefore, Mansabdar means an officer or the holder of the rank, status, and post. Akbar introduced a new system for regulating imperial services which was called Mansabdari system. It was introduced in 1570 A. D. All the imperial officers of the state were styled as Mansabdars. They were classified into (66) grades, from the rank of (10) to ten thousands (10,000) constituted. The (10) was the lowest rank and the ten thousand (10,000) was the highest. The Mansabdars belonged to both Civil and Military department.

AURANGZEB'S DECCAN POLICY:

Aurangzeb spent the last 25 years of his life (1682-1707) in the Deccan. During all this long period, he had practically no rest. The object of his Deccan wars was to conquer the states of Bijapur & Golconda & crush the power of Marathas. But the Marathas did not submit themselves and continued their struggle till the end. Thus his 25 years of campaign in Deccan resulted in nothing. The wars in the Deccan drained his resources & loosened his grip in the north. This led to his tragic end in 1707 at Ahamadnagar and slowly led to downfall of Mughal Empire.

SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE:

The doctrine of subsidiary alliance was introduced by Lord Wellesley, (1798-1805). According to this the Indian rulers were not allowed to have their own armed forces. They were protected by the company's forces but had to pay for them. If any ruler failed to make the payment, a part of his territory would be taken away.

PARAMOUNTCY:

Under Warren Hasting (1774-85), a new policy of paramount was initiated. The company claimed its authority was paramount or supreme as its power was greater than the Indian rulers. So they decided that they could annex or threaten to annex any state of India. It was applied by Lord Dalhousie in 1852. when a ruler didn't govern his state the British would annex his land. (Oudh, Nagpur)

RELIGIOUS POLICY OF AURANGZEB:

- 1. Demolishing temples and breaking idols :** Mosques were built at the sites of different temples
- 2. Imposed Jaziya:** Akbar had abolished this tax on the Hindus but Aurangzeb again levied this tax. Aurangzeb issued very strict instructions to the officers regarding the collection of Jaziya.
- 3. Discriminatory toll fare:** The Hindu traders were required to pay a toll tax of 5 per cent as against half of it paid by the Muslim traders. Later on Muslim traders were totally exempted from the payment of this tax.
- 4. Removal of the Hindus from Government jobs:** Aurangzeb's predecessors, especially Akbar had appointed a large number of Hindus in the various departments, but Aurangzeb followed the policy of removal of the Hindus from these jobs. The Hindus were not allowed to occupy high administrative or executive posts. A general order prohibiting the employment of the Hindus in the revenue department was passed in 1670.
- 5. Restrictions on Hindu educational institutions:** For destroying the culture of the Hindus, Aurangzeb destroyed their several educational institutions at Varanasi, Multan and Thatta. He placed restrictions on

the starting of new pathshalas. The Hindu children were disallowed to study the fundamentals of their faith. They were not allowed to attend Muslim Madaras and Maqtabas.

6. Conversion through different means: For the Hindus the only way to escape from the payment of various taxes like pilgrim tax, trade tax, Jizya, etc. was conversion to Islam. Getting jobs after conversion also became easier. The Hindu prisoners were freed on their conversion to Islam. All sorts of promises were made to the converted.

7. Social restrictions: Aurangzeb issued order that except Rajputs, no Hindu could ride an elephant, a horse and a palanquin. Holi and Diwali festivals were allowed to be celebrated with certain restrictions. The Hindus could no longer put on fine clothes. The Hindus were not allowed to burn their dead on the banks of the river Sabarmati in Ahmedabad. Similar restrictions were placed at Delhi on the river Jamuna.

Results of the religious policy of Aurangzeb:

The religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb overshadowed his virtues. His reversal of Akbar’s policy of religious toleration resulted in weakening the entire structure of the Mughal Empire. It led to several conflicts and wars in different parts of the country.

These conflicts were:

- (i) Conflict with the Jats
- (ii) Conflict with the Satnamis
- (iii) Conflict with the Sikhs
- (iv) Conflicts with the Rajput’s
- (v) Conflict with the Marathas.

All these rebellions destroyed the peace of the empire, disrupted its economy, weakened the administrative structure, and diminished its military strength, led to the failure of Aurangzeb to make any impact. Ultimately all these contributed to the downfall of the Mughal enterprise.

