

Analyse the factors responsible for Decline of the Mughal empire in 18th Century.

Introduction

The great Mughal empire was the most powerful Muslim empire in the history of India as acknowledged by many western and Indian historians. It lived for centuries in the western imagination as a wonderland of unimaginable treasures and most clearly the breath-taking beauty of the Taj Mahal. From the time of its foundation in 1526 by Babur to its absorption into the British empire in 1857, the empire influenced the culture and civilization of the Indian sub-continent. Mughal empire reached its zenith during Aurangzeb's rule and after that vast rule, the symptoms of decline began to appear in the 18th century. Both internal factors such as enormance of the empire, incompetent rulers, undisciplined army etc and external factors such as colonization, strong British hold etc contributed to the decline of Mughal empire. Finally after such a long rule ranging from West India to northwest Punjab, it collapsed in the eighteenth century.

Causes of Decline

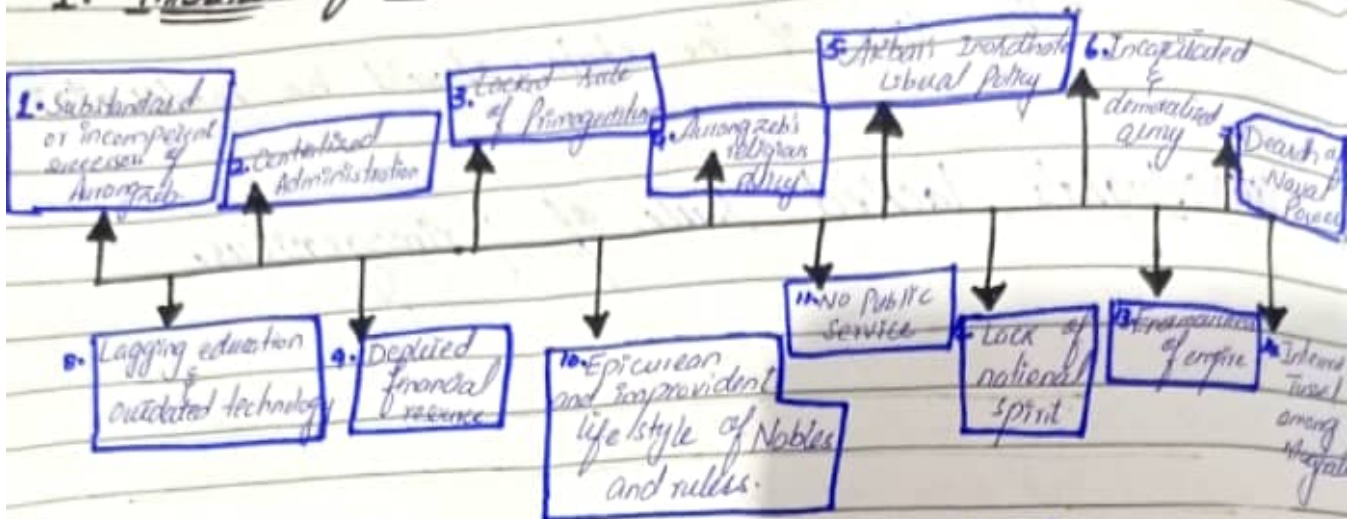
Causes of decline of Mughal empire

Internal factors

External factors.

Both Internal and external factors are responsible for the decline of Mughal empire and their details are given as follows:

1. Internal factors



(i) Substandard or incompetent Successors of Aurangzeb

The main cause of the decline of Mughal empire was worthless and incompetent successors of Aurangzeb. After his death there were 17 claimants of the throne and nearly 17 kings were crowned during that epoch but their character had deteriorated over a period of time. The first six Mughal emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb are described as "The Great Mughals" however their successors are described as "The later Mughals" due to their lacked character, motivation and commitment to the rule.

History Khafi Khan wrote:

"In the brief reign of Jahandar, violence had full sway. It was a fine time for minstrels and singers and all the tribes of dancers and actors"

(i) Enormousness of Empire

The great Mughal empire extended to almost all the territories of the Indian Sub-continent. Akbar led the expeditions to widen his empire but Aurangzeb was able to cover almost whole of the India from Kashmir to river Kaveri and from Kabul to Chittagong. Enormousness of empire contributed to the decline of empire because incompetent Mughal rulers cannot sustain the empire once a symbol of glory and grandeur.

following way:
"The size of the state should be moderate"
since it was practically impossible to control an
empire and finally led to its downfall.
(iii) Mughals lacked rule of Primogeniture

The absence of a definite law of succession was another
factor. The war of succession not only led to bloodshed
and loss of money and prestige of empire, but to its
eventual fall. Lack of rule of primogeniture led to the
war of succession among the claimants of throne.
For example, Aurangzeb's son Bahadur Shah I ascended
the throne after a bloody combat with his brothers and
after his death, within five years to accession, Jahandar Shah
ascended the throne by killing his three brothers. Such wars
of succession inflicted great damage to the empire.

(iv) Centralized administration

The Mughals had centralized administration system in
which "The emperor" was considered as source of power
and dispenser of Justice. Being an autocrat he had unlimited
freedom in making law and the provincial government
looked to the emperor for orders. The ruler just had
to follow guidelines in the Scripture and Islamic teaching.
The lacking equality in distribution of power was another
important factor to the decline of Mughal empire.

(v) Akbar's Inordinate Liberal Policy

Although Akbar was a great administrator but his inordinate
liberal policies such as introduction to Din-i-Ilahi led
him to take measures which were against the teachings of
Islam. He was so liberal that he married Hindu women
and appointed Hindus on key posts which caused a great
harm to his empire as Hindus became influential and

begin to conspire/exercise their power in state power/affairs.
(vi) Aurangzeb's Strict religious policy
Aurangzeb's strict religious policies also aroused controversies in the empire and weakened the empire due to discriminatory policies.

vii) Incapacitated and demoralized Army

As George Washington says:

"Discipline is the soul of an army."

But military standards of the Mughals declined as security and luxuries increased. Outdated and ill-equipped army was also a leading cause of the decline. Degeneration in the military resulted to the war of Succession and intrigues of the Nobles.

Army became too inefficient to suffer hardship and they lacked courage as the generals became so ease-loving that they went in letters to the battlefield and were accompanied by servants and women. During 18th Century, the European took advantage of their incompetency and captured their territories.

viii) Dearth of Naval Power

The Mughal emperor gave no importance to the Navy whereas the European countries had developed their fleet to gain supremacy over coastal countries. The Mughal army had no Navy and only maintained small ships that were no match for the well-equipped ships of the foreign traders. It is the weakness that the French and the British used to their advantage and established their control over India by forming Colonies in the coastal areas.

ix) Lagging education & outdated technology

Another drawback of the Mughal rule was that the Mughal rule failed to lead the foundation of modern education and scientific advancement in India. Especially Aurangzeb was a skeptical

about the relevance modern science and technology whereas European countries began to invest in education and public universities and improved their military capabilities. But Mughals did not pay attention to this field hence they lacked in bigger arsenals, modern weaponry and latest techniques of the warfare.

(x) Depleted Financial resources

As the world knows:

"Economy and development of nation go hand in hand."

Hence growing economy plays vital role in the stability of the country. But the miserable financial condition of Mughals became a leading cause of their downfall. The war of Successions, rebellions, and luxurious lifestyle had disrupted the enormous treasury and led to the bankruptcy. Agricultural sector and Trade were adversely affected by the Wars or expeditions led by the Mughals as a result markets of Delhi, Agra, Mathura and Lahore become desolate due to shortage of buyers.

Some historians say:

"In the 18th Century, a powerful class of traders and bankers emerged having close relationship with EIC which used to give loans on high interest and also collected revenue from indigenous people."

(i) Epicurean and Improvident lifestyle of the Mughals.

Epicurean and Improvident lifestyle of the Mughals due to opulence and prologation of wealth and reign was one of the potent cause of its decline. The later Mughals were fond of dancing, singing and drinking more than state affairs. Their Courts were full of musicians, dancers and artists and the rulers became puppets in the hands of the Nobles like Sayyid brothers eventually leading to

(xii) Lack of National Sense

There was lack of nationalism in army and the masses in the Mughal empire because the empire lacked the elements that constitute a modern nation. The people did not think that they belong to one nation and similarly the soldiers, instead of identifying and uniting as Mughal Indians, identified themselves as with their ancestral ethnicities.

(xiii) Internal Tussle or rifts among Mughals

The war of Succession among Shah Jahan's son marked the beginning of conspiracies among the Mughals. The ministers and the Nobles started to plot against the empire. Jealousy and hypocrisy ruled the Country hence state became too weak to survive.

(xiv) No Public Service and Capacity Building

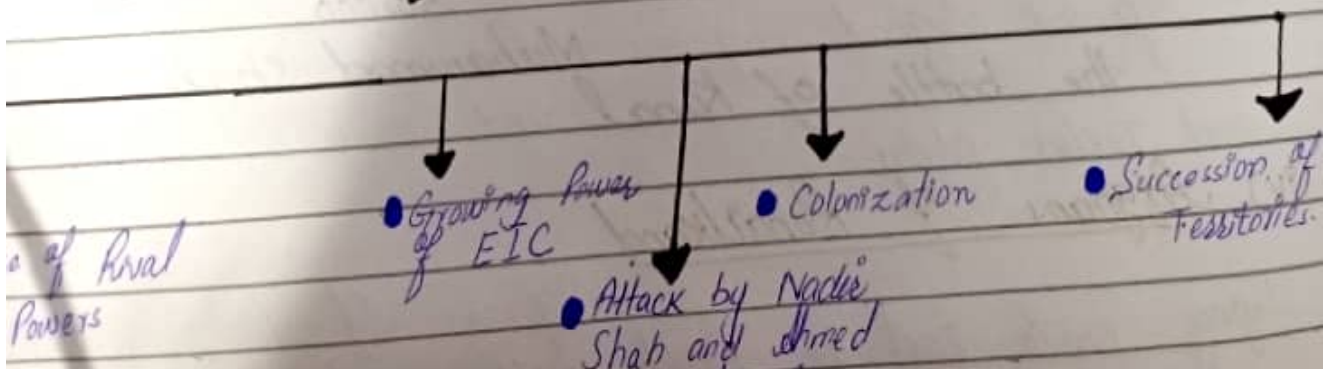
Incompetent rulers lacked administrative training. They paid no attention to education and other public services rather were involved in singing and dancing.

Former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli says about public welfare:-

“Power only has one duty to secure the social welfare of people.”

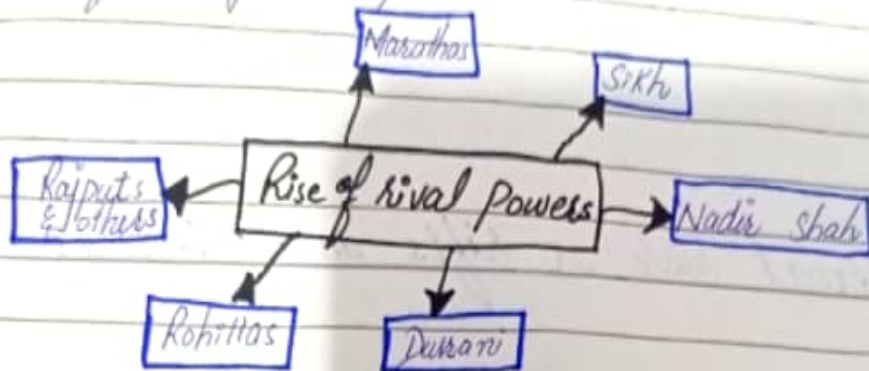
As the Mughal rulers did not pay heed to the public welfare and better administration which eventually led to their decline.

2. External factors



i) Rise of rival powers

in Indian Sub-continent played a crucial role in the decline of Mughal empire:-



(i) Rise of Maratha empire

The founder of Maratha empire **Shivaji** proclaimed himself as "**Chhatrapati**" and took the empire to its zenith and Pune became the center of Hindu learning. The Marathas ravaged the Mughal provinces and conquered Punjab, Peshawar and Kashmir and other provinces on the South-eastern side of Afghanistan border were under Maratha empire by 1758. Their effective invasions on Mughal territory weakened the Mughal empire.

(ii) Rise of Sikhs in Punjab

In Punjab, Sikhs under the leadership of Guru Gobind became a powerful force. Sikh empire emerged in Punjab when in 1799 **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** captured Lahore.

(iii) Attack by Persian Nadir Shah

Persian King Nadir Shah attacked Delhi and massacre of citizens was carried out that resulted in death of **30,000** people. He defeated Mughal emperor **Muhammad Shah** at the **battle of Karnal** and occupied Balochistan and Indus plain.

(iv) Afghans of Roharkhand

Afghans of Roharkhand lying north-east to Delhi were another major threat

to Mughal empire. By the middle of 18th century Rohillas became independent of the Mughal rule.

(v) Rise of Durranis:

After Nadir Shah's death the Durrani Kingdom was established in 1747 by one of his general Ahmed Shah Abdali who not only defeated Maratha empire and captured Punjab and Kashmir but also captured Today's Pakistan and Afghanistan.

(ii) Growing Power of British

East India Company taking the advantage of chaotic situation, strengthened their military capabilities. They conspired with Hindu traders and moneylenders against Nawab Sirajuddaulah of Bengal to take over his rule. The battle of Plassey in 1757 paved the way for the Company's rule in Bengal and weakened the Mughal empire.

(iii) Succession of Territories

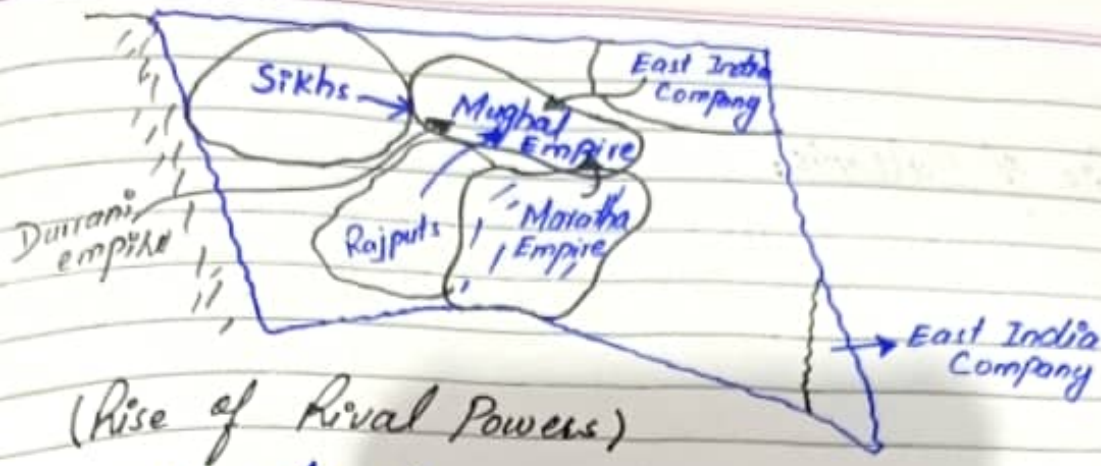
Rajput and several other Kingdoms of independent Hindu states started flourishing.

- Vijaynagar empire — Southern
- The Maratha empire — Western
- Ganga empire — Eastern
- The Ahom Kingdom — North-Eastern

Some Coastal areas were under control of mutually competing and armed portugese, French and Dutch trading Companies.

Dutch Colony: Surat, Cochin, Kasarkal

Portugese Colony: Goa, Diu.



Critical Analysis

Circumspet analysis of the causes of the decline of the Mughal empire clearly indicates that the glory and grandeur of the Mughal empire come to a tragic end due to internal and external factors. The war of succession, incompetency of rulers, outdated educational system, undisciplined army, depleted financial resources and several other factors internally weakened the empire and paved the ways for external rival powers such as Marathas, British, Sikhs & Durranis to assuage and disintegrate the empire. In contemporary world, many Muslim countries including Pakistan are under the same circumstances and facing same issues such as incompetency of ruler, lack of interest in public welfare, internal conspiracies, miserable foreign economic conditions and many more which are weakening their hold on all making it easy for outside invaders to jeopardize their stability. Hence it is need of the hour to work on the internal issues and pay attention for their eradication. Eradication of internal conspiracies and unity is the only way stand against the foreign powers.