



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Analyze the factors that led to the decline of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of successor states in India. **(250 Words)**

18 Mar, 2024 GS Paper 1 History

### Approach

- Start the answer by introducing the Mughal Empire and its decline.
- Discuss the factors that led to the decline of the Mughal Empire.
- Highlight the emergence of successor states in India after decline of Mughal Empire.
- Conclude as per the requirement of keywords.

### Introduction

The Mughal Empire, which existed from the early 16<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the most powerful and influential empires in Indian history, which reached its zenith under Akbar, began to decline after his reign, leading to the emergence of several successor states in different parts of India.

### Body

#### Factors That Led To the Decline of Mughal Empire:

- **Economic Factors:**
  - **Agricultural Crisis:** The Mughal Empire faced agricultural stagnation due to factors like excessive land revenue demands, which led to the decline of agricultural productivity and rural prosperity.
  - **Revenue System:** The burden of the jagirdari and zamindari systems increased over time, leading to discontent among the peasants and a decline in revenue collection for the empire.
  - **Decline in Trade and Commerce:** The Mughal Empire's control over key trade routes was weakened by the emergence of European powers like the British, Dutch, and Portuguese, leading to a decline in revenue from trade.
  - **Drain of Wealth:** The wealth of the empire was drained by the extravagant lifestyles of the nobility, the cost of maintaining a large army, and the outflow of precious metals for trade with European powers.
- **Administrative Factors:**
  - **Weak Successors:** The decline in the quality of leadership after Aurangzeb's reign resulted in weak and ineffective rulers who were unable to maintain the unity and stability of the empire.
  - **Decentralization of Power:** The empire's administrative structure became increasingly decentralized, with provincial governors gaining more autonomy, weakening the central authority of the Mughal Emperor.
- **Political Factors:**
  - **Regional Revolts:** Various regions within the empire, such as the Deccan, Bengal, and Awadh, started asserting their independence and challenging Mughal authority, leading to the fragmentation of the empire.

- **External Invasions:** The Mughal Empire faced invasions from external powers like the Persian and Afghan rulers, who exploited the empire's weakened state to expand their territories.
- **Social and Cultural Factors:**
  - **Religious Intolerance:** The policies of Aurangzeb, who imposed restrictions on non-Muslims and persecuted other religions, alienated large sections of the population and led to internal strife.
  - **Social Heterogeneity:** The Mughal Empire was a diverse empire with a complex social hierarchy, and the failure to integrate different communities and castes led to social unrest and disunity.

### Emergence of Successor States:

- **Rise of the Marathas:**
  - The Marathas, under the leadership of Shivaji and later Peshwas, emerged as a formidable force in western India.
  - Their guerrilla warfare tactics and strong administrative systems enabled them to challenge Mughal authority.
  - The Marathas established their dominance over large parts of present-day Maharashtra and surrounding regions.
- **Expansion of Sikh Power:**
  - The Sikh Misls capitalized on the weakening Mughal Empire to assert their authority in Punjab.
  - Led by charismatic leaders like Banda Singh Bahadur, the Sikhs organized themselves into military confederacies and carved out territories, laying the foundation for the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- **Rise of Regional Powers:**
  - Various regional powers, including the Nawabs of Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad, emerged as influential players in the post-Mughal era.
  - These regional powers capitalized on the Mughal decline to assert their autonomy and expand their territories.
  - The Nawabs of Bengal, for instance, gained significant economic and political power, challenging Mughal suzerainty.
- **European Colonial Intrusions:**
  - The decline of the Mughal Empire also paved the way for European colonial powers to establish control over parts of India.
  - The British East India Company, in particular, exploited the political fragmentation and economic instability to expand its influence, eventually leading to British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent.

### Conclusion

The decline of the Mughal Empire was a complex process influenced by economic, administrative, military, and socio-religious factors. This decline created opportunities for various successor states and European powers to assert control over different regions of India, shaping the course of Indian history for centuries to come.