



Mains Practice Question

Q. "The emergence of regional power centers in the 18th century was not merely a sign of Mughal decline but represented new forms of state-building." Discuss (250 words)

25 Nov, 2024 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce the answer by marking the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire and the rise of regional powers in 18th Century
- Give arguments to Regional Power Centers as a Reflection of Mughal Decline
- Delve into the Emergence of New Forms of State-Building
- Conclude suitably

Introduction

The **18th century** witnessed the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire and the rise of regional powers like the **Marathas, Nawabs of Bengal, Nizam of Hyderabad**, and others.

- While often **seen as a symptom of Mughal decline**, this period also represented a transformative phase in state-building, marked by the adaptation of new administrative, economic, and military frameworks suited to local conditions and aspirations.

Body

Regional Power Centers as a Reflection of Mughal Decline:

- **Breakdown of Central Control:** The weakening of imperial finances, **inability to manage vast territories**, and internal rebellions diminished the Mughal capacity to govern.
 - Regional elites, including **governors (subedars) and zamindars**, asserted autonomy.
- **Fragmentation of Military Authority:** Mughal military decline allowed regional powers like the **Marathas and Sikhs** to expand territorially.
- **Collapse of Administrative Networks:** Declining revenue collection mechanisms and **corruption led to regional powers building localized governance** structures.

Emergence of New Forms of State-Building:

- **Localized Governance:** Regional powers like the Marathas adapted decentralized governance through the **ashtapradhan** system.
 - **Nawabs of Bengal and Awadh** emphasized pragmatic revenue collection suited to local agrarian conditions.
- **Revenue Systems:** Marathas developed the **chauth and sardeshmukhi** systems to extract revenue across vast territories.
- **Trade and Commerce:** Regional states fostered commercial networks and trade links with European companies.
 - Bengal, under **Murshid Quli Khan**, became a hub of textile production and international

trade.

- **Professional Armies:** Many states moved from **feudal contingents to standing armies**, such as the Maratha light cavalry or the **Mysorean armies under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan**.

Conclusion

The emergence of regional power centers in the 18th century was more than a **symptom of Mughal decline**. It marked a phase of creative **state-building, characterized by administrative pragmatism, economic innovation, and cultural resurgence**. This period laid the groundwork for modern state systems and demonstrated the adaptive capacity of Indian political structures in the face of changing circumstances.

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