



SALTORA NETAJI CENTENARY COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

SEMESTER –IV

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COURSE TITLE: HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL INDIA (C.1526 AD –
C.1757AD)

TOPIC: CAUSES OF THE FALL OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

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Introduction

Babar had laid the foundation of the Mughal empire, his son Humayun had lost it and his grandson Akbar had made the Mughal power in India a paramount power. The glory and power of the empire continued unabated during the reigns of Emperor, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the extent of the empire reached its zenith. But within thirty years of the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire fell to pieces like a house of cards. The causes of the downfall of this empire must take a fascinating study.

1. Inherent defect of personal despotism

The Mughal empire, though imposing, had “shallow roots”. To the vast majority of the people, it was essentially a foreign empire and as such it never evoked that spontaneous popular support which is the basis of the stability of an empire. Besides, the government of the Mughals was a personal despotism and so its success depended on the personal character of the reigning autocrat. From Babar to Aurangzeb, we have on the whole a line of able and competent rulers. But the later Mughals were mostly worthless debauches who buried themselves in the seraglio, leaving the affairs of the government in the hands of unscrupulous ministers, which in their turn produced administrative chaos.

2. Absence of definite law of succession

The same unhappy result was also produced by the absence of any definite law of peaceful accession. The close of almost every reign or the beginning of the next, was disfigured by bloody civil wars. Such fratricidal or patricidal struggles for the throne had a very demoralising effect on the stability of the government . They fostered partisanship at the cost of patriotism.

3. Decline of the nobility and their rivalries

The degeneration of the rulers led to the degeneration of the nobility. Under the early Mughals, the nobles performed useful functions and distinguished themselves both in war and peace. But that race had died out and the nobility under the later Mughals were mostly selfish, parasitical and treacherous. Besides the nobles were split up into three factions- Irani, Turani and Hindustani and these quarrelled with one another for self – aggrandisement and personal ascendancy, quite heedless of the interests of the state. Thus during the crisis of Nadir Shah's invasion, Sadat Khan, an Irani, betrayed his master to the invader for having promoted a Turani.

4. Degeneration of the army and 5. vastness of the empire

4. One of the most potent causes of the fall of the Mughal empire was the deterioration of the army. As early as the reign of Shah Jahan, the military inefficiency of the Mughals was exposed by the failure of the Kandahar campaigns. The same inefficiency was also revealed during Aurangzeb's struggle with the Marathas.

5. The Mughal empire had become too big and unwieldy to be efficiently governed from a single centre under medieval conditions of transport and communication. The outlying provinces were difficult to manage and consequently they suffered from mal-administration as testified to by the European travellers who visited India in the seventeenth century.

5. Aurangzeb's religious policy and 6. weakness of later Mughals

5. Aurangzeb's religious policy was largely responsible for the downfall of the Mughal empire. His intolerance and senseless destruction of the Hindu temples definitely antagonised the vast majority of the Hindu population. As a consequence, the Rajputs, Sikhs, Jats and Marathas were roused against the Mughal rule.

6. It should be noted that none of the successors of Aurangzeb proved himself competent in anyway. Most of them got degenerated into ornamental figure-heads and were entirely at the mercy of the nobles of the Court. This weakness led to internal disintegration and also invited external aggression.

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