



Mains Practice Question

Q. The decline of the Mughal Empire has often been attributed to Aurangzeb's policies. To what extent is this assessment justified? Examine other factors that contributed to the empire's disintegration. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the Decline of Mughal Empire
- Aurangzeb's Policies Leading to the Decline Mughal Empire
- Highlight Other Factors Contributing to Mughal Decline
- Conclude by mentioning the event that succeeded mughal decline

Introduction

The decline of the Mughal Empire has often been attributed to **Aurangzeb's policies, particularly his religious orthodoxy and prolonged military campaigns.**

- While Aurangzeb's reign certainly contributed to the empire's weakening, **several structural, economic, and external factors also played a crucial role in its eventual disintegration.**

Body

Aurangzeb's Policies Leading to the Decline of Mughal Empire

- **Religious Intolerance and Alienation of Allies**
 - Aurangzeb reversed the **religious tolerance policies of Akbar**, leading to discontent among **Hindus and Sikhs.**
 - He re-imposed the **jizya** tax on **non-Muslims**, destroyed temples, and forced conversions, which alienated **Rajputs, Marathas, Jats, and Sikhs.**
- **Deccan Policy and Military Overstretch**
 - Aurangzeb's aggressive **expansion in the Deccan** led to the annexation of **Bijapur and Golconda**, which previously acted as buffer states against the Marathas.
 - His **25-year-long war against the Marathas (1680-1707) drained the Mughal treasury**, weakened the central administration, and led to an overextension of resources.
- **Weakening of the Mughal Nobility and Mansabdari System**
 - Aurangzeb's strict control over the **nobility created resentment, and factionalism increased.**
 - The **Jagirdari crisis** emerged as there was a **shortage of fertile lands to be granted as jagirs**, leading to discontent among nobles and weakening military effectiveness.

Other Factors Contributing to Mughal Decline:

- **Weak Successors and War of Succession**
 - After **Aurangzeb's death (1707)**, the empire suffered from repeated **wars of succession** among his weak and inefficient successors.
 - **Nobles and regional governors** took advantage of this instability to assert their independence.
- **Degeneration of the Mughal Nobility**
 - The nobility became **corrupt, luxurious, and inefficient**, prioritizing personal pleasures over governance.
 - Political factionalism among **Turanis, Persians, Afghans, and Hindustanis** weakened the central authority.
- **Decline of the Mughal Army**
 - The Mughal army became undisciplined and disloyal due to:
 - The **mansabdari system's inefficiency**, where soldiers owed loyalty to their immediate commanders rather than the emperor.
 - Frequent **betrayals and treachery**, where nobles often corresponded with the enemy for personal gain.
- **Economic Crisis and Agrarian Decline**
 - **High taxation** and revenue demands caused peasant revolts and economic distress.
 - The decline in trade and commerce due to **European competition** and disruption of trade routes weakened the economy further.
- **Foreign Invasions and External Pressures**
 - **Nadir Shah's invasion (1739)** and **Ahmad Shah Abdali's repeated invasions** in the **mid-18th century severely weakened the empire**, exposing its military weaknesses.
 - The **Third Battle of Panipat (1761)** marked the final nail in the Mughal coffin, as the empire lost its military supremacy to the Marathas.

Conclusion

The Mughal Empire's decline was a result of Aurangzeb's policies, administrative failures, economic crises, and relentless external invasions. A **weakened center and rising regional powers sealed its fate, leading to its eventual disintegration.**