



MAD- 2020
Day - 49
HISTORY

To Watch the Video, Click Here:

<https://youtu.be/shuNYYJjzK8>

Question:

Clarify how mid-18th century India was beset with the spectre of a fragmented polity.

Answer:

18th century in India is often regarded as the dark ages when anarchy and chaos became order of the day. There were numerous reasons for the same wherein unlike the centralized, stable Mughal Empire, there was a fragmented polity:

1. **Fall of the Mughals:** Aurangzeb's misguided policies had weakened the stable Mughal polity. His death was followed by weak rulers and wars of succession. Though Muhammad Shah ruled for a long spell of 29 years (1719-48), a revival of the imperial fortunes did not take place as he was an incompetent ruler. In fact, his incompetence led to the breaking away of members of nobility to establish their own kingdoms.
2. **Multiple Successor States:** Muhammad Shah's reign witnessed the establishment of the independent states of Awadh (1722, Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk), Bengal (1717, Murshid Quli Khan) and Hyderabad (1724, Nizam-ul-Mulk) and Punjab. Though they did not challenge the sovereignty of the Mughal ruler, the establishment of virtually independent and hereditary authority by their governors showed the emergence of autonomous polity in these territories.
3. **External Challenges:** In the absence of internal strength, the Mughals could not put a tough front against external challenges which came in the form of several invasions from the north-west – Nadir Shah (1739) and Ahmad Shah Abdali (1748-67) which crushed the Mughal Empire to an extent that they were no longer the dominant power in the country.
4. **Rise of insurgents and rebels:** Insurgent states were set up by the Marathas, Sikhs, Jaats and Afghans. There was a continuous struggle among the Mughals, Marathas and Afghans which eventually led to the third battle of Panipat.
5. **Rise of Independent Kingdoms:** These states came into existence primarily due to the destabilization of the Mughal control over the provinces, examples being Mysore, Kerala and the Rajput states.
6. **Economic crisis:** There was a major crisis in the Mughal economic system with the most important being the crisis in the jagirdari system, caused by a shortage of jagirs and over-abundance of jagirdars, making the agrarian system more exploitative. This sparked off peasant revolts which ruined imperial stability.
7. **The rise of British power:** The mid-18th century saw the transformation of the English East India Company from a trading enterprise to a political power. The lack of a strong imperial power, the decline of Marathas and the limitations of successor states opened space for the British colonizers. The beginning of the empire is usually traced to 1757 when the British defeated the Bengal Nawab at Plassey. The ground for the victory of 1757 was laid in South India where British military might and diplomatic strategy were successfully tested out in the Anglo-Carnatic wars where the fragmented polity led to competition between the British and French.

The regional powers were not able to take the place of the Mughals. Though some states were very prosperous, and some achieved considerable military powers, none could achieve resources and power to maintain an all-India polity. Ironically, it was only under the colonial rule, that the fragmented nature of the Indian Polity could be unified under the imperial hold of the British crown in the 19th century.