DECLINE AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Mughal Empire which had dazzled the contemporary world by its extensive of territories, military might and cultural achievements showed unmistakable signs of decay towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. The reign of Aurangzeb was the swan-song of the Mughal rule in India. A complex disease struck the heart of the empire and gradually spread to different parts. While nine Mughal emperors followed one another in quick succession in the fifty years following the death of Aurangzeb, many adventures, Indian and foreign, carved out independent principalities for themselves. Mughal governors of Oudh, Bengal and the Deccan freed themselves from the control of the central government and the Hindu powers found the time opportune for assertion of their independence. Invaders from the north-west repeated their incursions in search of wealth and the European trading companies dabbled in Indian politics. Notwithstanding all these dangers, internal and external, so great had been the prestige of the empire under the Great Mughals and so strong the central structure that the dissolution was slow and a long-drawn-out process. Baji Rao I’s raid of Delhi (1737) and Nader Shah’s invasion (1739) exposed the hollowness of the Mughal Empire and by 1740 the fall of the Empire was an accomplished fact.

(A) Later Mughal Emperors

Aurangzeb’s death in March 1707 (at the age of 89) was a signal for a war of succession among his three surviving sons, Prince Muazzam, Muhammad Azam and Kam Baksh. The eldest brother got the better of the other two and defeated and killed Muhammad Azam (at Jajau, 18 June 1707) and Kam Baksh (near Hyderabad, 13 January 1709). Muazzam assumed the title of Bahadur Shah I. An elderly man (over 63 years of age), the new emperor was not fitted for the role of an active leader. Whether it was the outcome of statesmanship or weakness, the new emperor favoured a pacific policy. The Maratha prince, Shahu who had been in Mughal captivity since 1689 was released and allowed to return to Maharashtra. Peace was made with the Rajput chiefs confirming them in their states. However, Bahadur Shah was forced to action against the Sikhs whose new leader Banda had become a terror for the Muslims in the Panjab. Banda was
defeated at Lohgarh and the Mughal forces reoccupied Sirhind in January 1711; however, the Sikhs were neither conciliated nor crushed. Bahadur Shah dies on 27 February 1712. “He was the last emperor. ‘Writes Sidney Owen, ‘of whom anything favourable can be said. Henceforth, the rapid and complete abasement and practical dissolution of the Empire are typified in the incapacity and political insignificance of its sovereigns.”

The usual war of succession broke out again in 1712 amongst the four sons of Bahadur Shah—Jahandar Shah, Azim-us-Shan, Rafi-us-Shan and Jahan Shah. The contestants were in such indecent haste about deciding the question of succession that the dead body of Bahadur Shah was not buried for about a month. Jahandar Shah came out successful with the help of Zulfikar Khan, a prominent leader of the Irani party. Jahandar Shah (March 1712-February 1713) appointed Zulfikar Khan as his prime minister. Jahandar Shah’s position was challenged by Farrukhsiyar (son of Azim-us-Shan) who with the help of the Sayyid brothers—Abdulla Khan and Hussain Ali—defeated and killed Jahandar Shah (11 February 1713). In token of gratitude, Farrukhsiyar (1713-19) appointed Abdulla Khan as his Wazir and Hussain Ali as the Mir Bakshi. Soon the emperor found the yoke of the Sayyid brothers galling and conspired to get rid of them. However, the Sayyids proved too clever for him and with the help of Maratha troops they strangled the emperor to death on 28 April 1719. Farrukhsiyar’s reign saw a victory for the Mughal arms over the Sikhs whose leader Banda Bahadur was taken prisoner at Gurdaspur and later executed at Delhi (19 June 1716). In 1717 the Emperor heedlessly granted to the English East Indian Company many trading privileges including the exemption from custom duties for its trade through Bengal.

After the execution of Farrukhsiyar, the Sayyid brothers raised in quick succession Emperor Rafi-ud-Darajat (28 February-4 June 1719), Rafi-ud-Daula (6 June-17 September 1719) and then Muhammad Shah (September 1719-April 1748). The Wheel had gone full circle. The court intrigue under the leadership of Turani nobles succeeded and Hussain Ali was murdered (9 October 1720) and Abdulla Khan made prisoner (15 November 1720). During the reign of Muhammad Shah, Nizam-ul-Mulk set up an autonomous state in the Deccan, Saadat Khan carved out a state for himself in Oudh while Murshid Kuli Khan became virtually independent in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Marathas under
Baji Rao I raided Delhi in March 1737 and terrorised the Emperor. In 1739 Nadir Shah invaded India and left the Mughal empire ‘prostrate and bleeding ‘.

The next Mughal emperors Ahmad Shah (1748-54) and Alamgir II (1754-59) were too weak to check the rot that had set in. Ahmad Shah Abdali from the north-west raided India several times in 1748, 1749, 1752, 1756-57 and 1759 making bold with every successive invasion. The panjáb was lost to the Afghans, while the Marathas snatched Malwa and Bundelkhand and carried on their raids in all parts of India. Shah Alam II (1759-1806) and his successors were emperors only in name, being puppets in the hands of their own nobles or the Marathas or the English. In 1803, the English captured Delhi. The fiction of the Mughal Empire was kept up by the English till 1858 when the last of the Mughal emperors Bahadur Shah Zafar was exiled to Rangoon.

(B) LATER MUGHAL NOBILITY

A sinister development in the later Mughal polities was the rise of powerful nobles who played the role of ‘king-makers’. Wars of succession were fought even in the hey days of the Mughal Empire but then the royal princes were the principal contestants supported by powerful mansabdars. In the later Mughal period the ambitiopus nobles became the real contenders for political power and the royal princes receded in the background. The powerful nobles and leaders of different factions used the royal princes as pawns in their game and set up and removed royal princess from the throne to suit their interests. Thus Jahandar Shah became the emperor not by his own strength but because of the able generalship of Zulfikar Khan, a leader of the Irani party. Similarly, it were the Sayyids brothers who raised Farrukhsiyar to the throne in 1713 and pulled him down in 1719 when he ceased to serve their interests. The three puppet emperors, Rafi-ud-DArarat, Rafi-ud-Daula and mohammad Shah were raised to the throne by the Sayyids. The fall of the Sayyid brothers in 1720 came not because they had lost the confidence of the emperor but was brought about more by the Turani faction under the leadership of Nazim-ul-Mulh and Muhammad Amin khan. And worst of all, these powerful parties were not political parties in the modern sense having different programmes for the welfare of the nation but were factions looking for self-advancement, more often at the cost of the nation and against the interests of the Mughal Empire.
Parties at the Mughal Court.

William Irvine mentions the multiplicity of parties at the Mughal Court. Among these four were prominent—the Turanis, the Iranis, the Afghans and the Hindustanis. The first three were descendants of foreigners from Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan who formed ‘the backbone of the army of occupation’. Their number had greatly increased during the last twenty-five years of Aurangzeb’s reign when he waged incessant war in the Deccan. Descendants from these foreigners held important military and civil offices in India. Among these the Turanis from Transoxiana and the Afghans from Khurasan and Fars were mostly Sunnis, while the Iranis from Persia were mostly Shias. In opposition to the Mughal or Foreign Party was the Indian born or Hindustani Party. It mostly comprised Muhammadans born in India, whose ancestors though originally foreign immigrants has settled in India for generations. The party got the support of the Rajput and the Jat chiefs and powerful Hindu landlords. The Hindus who filled almost all the subordinate civil offices naturally were ranged on their side. However, it will not be correct to assume that the political parties were based entirely on ethnic or religious groupings. As has been rightly pointed out by Prof. Satish Chandrathat “slogans of race and religion were raised by individual nobles only to suit their convenience, and that the actual groupings cut across ethnic and religious divisions”

The Role of Sayyid Brothers in Later Mughal Politics

The Sayyid brothers—Abdulla Khan and Hussain Ali—were the most powerful factor in the Mughal court and Mughal politics from 1713 to 1720. They were the leaders of the Hindustani Party and represented the anti-mughal and quasi-nationalist interests.

The Sayyids, the descendants of the Prophet, had for centuries settled in India, principally in the Doab and the district of Muzaffarnagar. The Sayyids were enlisted in Akbar’s army and fought in many campaigns. Abdulla Khan and hussain Ali of Barhs (called Barha probably because of the bara or twelve villages which they held) were descendants from Abul Farrah, a Sayyid adventurer from Mesopotamia who had settled near Patiala centuries earlier. Their father, Sayyid Miyan had served as Subahdar of Bijapur and Ajmer and later joined Prince
Muazzam. In the war of succession that followed Aurangzeb’s death, the two brothers fought in the vanguard of Muzzam’s (Bahadur Shah) army. The emperor duly rewarded their services and raised their rank to 4,000 besides awarding the elder brother Hasain Ali the title of Abdulla Khan. In 1708 Prince Azim-us-Shan appointed Husain Ali to an important assignment in Bihar and in 1711 the same prince appointed Abdulla Khan as his deputy in the province of Allahabad. It was because of the great favours the Sayyid brothers received from Prince Azim-us-Shan that they espoused the cause of Farrukhsiyar (Azim-us-Shan’s son) for the throne of Delhi in 1713. In fact it were these Sayyids who fought and killed Jahandar Shan in the battle and offered the crown of Delhi to Farrukhsiyar on a silver platter.

The grateful Farrukhsiyar on his accession as emperor appointed Sayyid Abdulla Khan as his Vizier or Chief Minister with the title of Nawab Qutb-ul-mulk, Yamin-ud-daula, Sayyid Abdullah Khan Bahadur, Zafar Jang, Sipah-salar, Yar-I Wafadar. The younger brother, Husain Ali Khan was appointed Mir Bakshi or virtually Commander-in-chief and given the title of Umdat-ul-mulk, Amir ul-umara Bahadur, Firoz Jang Sipah-sardar.

Khafi Khan maintains that it was Farrukhsiyar’s initial mistake to appoint Abdulla Khan as Wazir for he could never rid himself of him later on. One wonders how Farrukhsiyar could have safely done otherwise without producing a rupture with the Sayyisa. An effect of the appointment of Sayyid brothers to such exalted offices was the jealously it excited in the minds of the Turani and Irani nobles who spared no efforts to disgrace and procure the removal of these brothers.

The most active noble in the anti-Sayyid intrigues was Mir Jumla, afavourite of the emperor. Mir Jumla had the sympathy and support of turani nobles. The timid emperor—devoid of independent judgment or strength of character—became an unwilling tool in the game of the powerful factions. The results were disastrous. The emperor heedlessly gave authority to Mir Jumla to sign his name in the exercise of the emperor’s patronage. The emperor had said, “The word of Mir Jumal and the signature of Mir jumla are my word and my signature”. Abdulla Khan maintained and rightly too as chief minister that no mansabs or promotions or appointment to offices should be made without consulting him. Even Khafi
Khan maintains that the Sayyid brothers were right for the Emperor’s delegation of his authority to Mir Jumla was contrary to all the rules of the Wazir’s office.

Differences between the Sayyids and the emperor came to a head when Husain Ali requested for appointment to the subahdari of the Deccan, which he proposed to exercise through a deputy Husain Ali did not like to leave his brother exposed to the intrigues of Mir Jumla at the court. At Mir Jumla’s instance the emperor flatly refused Hussain Ali’s request unless Husain Ali would personally proceed to the Deccan to assume the charge of his duties. Differences between the emperor and the Sayyids increased so much that the latter would not attend the court and made elaborate arrangements for self-defence. Outward cordially was, however, restored through the intercession of the Queen mother and it was decided that Hussain Ali would in person assume the subahdari of the Deccan and Mir Jumla also would be sent out of Delhi in a similar capacity to Patna.

The emperor was not really reconciled to the patchwork. He sent several messages to Daud Khan, then Subahdar of Gujarat, to kill Husain Ali and offered him suitable reward. Husain Ali discovered the plot, engaged Daud Khan in action and killed him.

Farrukhsiyar again intrigued against Husain Ali. He sent secret message and firmans to Shahu and the zamindars of the Carnatic not to obey Husain Ali. Once again Husain Ali proved too clever for the emperor. He changed his tactics in the Deccan. Far from making efforts to establish imperial authority in the Deccan he made a rapprochement with the Marathas and signed with Shahu the treaty of 1719, conceding great concessions to the Marathas in return for their active armed assistance of a clash between the emperor’s forces and those of the Wazir was not ruled out.

Husain Ali had received news about the tense relations between his brother and the emperor. Husain Ali proceeded towards Delhi, carrying Maratha troops with him. Clash between the emperor and the Sayyids seemed inevitable. Abdulla Khan, on his part took all precautions. He won over important grandees like Sarbuland Khan, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Ajit Singh to his side by promises of rewards. When the time seemed ripe the Sayyids confronted the emperor with certain demands. Even when the emperor agreed to all their demands—surrender of all
crown patronage in their hands, custody of all the forts to men of the Sayyid’s choice, dismissal of Itikad Khan—so great was mutual suspicion that the Sayyids decided to take the life of Farrukhsiyar which they did on 28 April 1719.

**Sayyids Pre- eminent at Delhi.**

After the death of Farrukhsiyar, the Sayyid brothers were complete masters of the situation at Delhi. They raised to the throne Rafi-ud-Darajat and after his death from consumption Rafi-ud-daula. The latter died of dysentery. The ‘king makers’ now placed Muhammad Shah, son of Jahan Shah and a prince of 18 years on the throne. The control of the Sayyids over all matters of the state was complete. Their agents were attendants at the palace and their soldiers guarded it. The young emperor had no say in the matters of the state. Khafi Khan writes about the treatment meted out to Muhammad Shah, “All the officers and servants around the emperor were, as before, the servants of Sayyid Abdulla. When the young emperor went out for a ride, he was surrounded, as with a halo, by a number of the Sayyid’s adherents, and when occasionally he went out hunting or for an excursion into the country, they went with him, and brought him back”. The Queen mother wrote that ‘constraint used by the Sayyids was so strict that the emperor had only liberty to go to service on the Sabbath”. The Sayyids greatly leaned on the support of the Hindus. One Rattan Chand, an ordinary grain-dealer, was given the title of the Raja and Abdulla Khan “reposed in him authority in all government and ministerial matters”. Khafi Khan writes about Rattan Chand that “his authority extended over civil, revenue and legal matters, even to the appointment of Qazis in the cities and other judicial offices. All the other Government officials were put in the background, and no one would undertake any business but under a document with his seal.” The two Rajput princes, Jai Singh of Amber and Ajit Singh of Jodhopur were the confederates of the Sayyids. The Maraths also supported the Sayyids. After the death of Farrukhsiyar jizya was once again abolished and Ajit Singh, as Subahdar of Ahmadnagar forbade the slaughter of cows there.

**The Mughal Counter-Revolution and the Fall of the Sayyid Brothers.**

The Sayyids had reduced the Irani and Turani nobles to nobodies in politics. The pride of the Mughal race and imperial sentiments were strong cohesive forces. The leader of this counter revolution was Chin Kilich Khan popularly known as
Nizam-ul-Mulk. The Sayyids has sent him out of Delhi as Subahdar of Malwa. The Nizam, calculating that a coup d’etat at Delhi would not be feasible, turned towards the Deccan. In the Deccan the Nizam captured the forts of Asirgarh and Burhanpur and defeated and killed Alam Ali Kahn, Husain Ali’s adopted son and Deputy Subahdar of the Deccan.

Meanwhile, at Delhi a conspiracy was hatched by Itima-ud-Daula, Saadat Khan and Haider Khan. The emperor’s mother and a protégé of Abdulla were privy to the plot. Haider Khan took upon himself to murder Husain Ali. Haider Khan presented a petition, Haider stabbed him to death. Itvine comments: “In the Indian Karbala a second Hussain was martyred by a second Yazid” (8 October 1720). To average the death of his brother, Abdulla Kahn raised a large army and tried to put another puppet, mohammad Ibrahim on the throne in place of Muhammad Shah. However, Abdulla Khan was defeated at Hasanpur on 13 November 1720 and taken prisoner. Two years later Abdulla Khan was poisoned to death (11 October 1722).

Estimate of the Sayyid Brothers.

As far as Farrukshiayr was concerned, the Sayyid brothers were more sinned against than sinning. The constant intrigues of the emperor turned them to the point of desperation and their safety seemed to lie in the end of the emperor. The Sayyids disarmed and dislodged their opponents. They reduced the succeeding emperors to the position of roi fainéants.

The Sayyids were Hindustani Muslims and they prided themselves on being so. They were not prepared to accept the superiority of the Turani party or be treated as a conquered, inferior or non-privileged race. It is difficult to establish as to what extent they worked for a non-Mughal monarchy and anationalist set up against the foreign court parties.

The Sayyids followed a tolerant religious policy, reminiscent of the days of Akbar. It was under their influence that jezia was abolished in 1713 and after reimposition again abolished in 1719. Further, the Sayyids won over the confidence of the Hindus and gave them high posts. The appointment of Rattan Chand as Diwan is illustrative of their policy. They also won over the Rajputs to their side and transformed Raja Ajit Singh from a rebel to an ally. Ajit Singh gave
his daughter in marriage to Emperor Farrukhsiyar. The Sayyids showed sympathy towards that Jats and it was on their intervention that the siege of the fort of Thuri was raised and Churaman visited Delhi in April 1718. Above all, the Marathas sided with the Sayyids and the Chatrapati became a deputy of the Mughal emperor. The history of India would have been certainly different if the enlightened religious policy of the Sayyids had been continued by their successors in high offices.

Select Opinions

Khafi Khan, author of Muntakhab-ul-Lubab. Both the brothers were distinguished in their day for their generosity and leniency towards all mankind. The inhabitants of those countries which were innocent of contumacy and selfishness made no complaints of the rule of the Sayyids. In liberality and kindness to learned men and to the needy, and in protection of men of merit Husain Ali Khan excelled his elder brother, and was the Hatim suited to his day. Numbers owed their comfort to the cooked food and raw grain which he gave away. At the time of the scarcity at Autrangabad, he appropriated a large sum of money and a great quantity of grain to supply the wants of the poor ans of widows. In their native country of Barha they built Sarais, bridges and other buildings for the public benefit. Sayyid Abdulla was remarkable for his patience, endurance and wide sympathy.

Ghulam Husain Salim.

There was some inequality in the merits of these two celebrated persons. It was universally acknowledged that Husain Ali Khan, the younger, was superior to his elder brother in many qualifications which bountiful heaven has bestowed on him. In actual power he excelled all the princes of his time, nay, he surpasses several that bore a character in history, for having bestowed kingdoms and crowns, and conquered empires, but neither his power nor his life was destined to endure long. If they had, it is probable that the times which we have now the mortification to behold, would not be so humiliating as they have proved, nor had the honour of Hindustan been thrown to the winds, nor the Indian nobility and gentry been reduced to the deplorable condition, to which we now see them brought. Siyar-ul-Mutakherin.

Sidney J.Owen.
It would not be easy to exaggerate the important consequences of this counter-revolution on the future fortune of India. Had not the main Knot been cut by the assassination of Hussain, the Sayyids might have prevailed. And they might have established and maintained a strong government on a tolerant basis, with the support of the Indian Mussulmans and the Hindoo Princes.

(C) The Rise of New States

The weakening central political structure of the Mughal empire and erosion of its military strength created some sort of a political vacuum in India—tempting ambitious subahdars and powerful regional chiefs to carve out semi-independent or independent principalities for themselves; greedy foreign adventures from across the north-western frontier repeated their incursions into India and these internal and external enemies lent a multi-dimensional character to the political confusion—all hastening the doom of the Mughal empire.

Nizams of the Deccan.

The founder of the Asafjahia house of Hyderabad was Kilich Khan, popularly known as Nizam-ul-Mulk.

It was Zulfikar Khan who had first conceived the plan of an independent state in the Deccan. In 1708, through the generosity of Bahadur Shah, Zulfikar Khan had obtained the viceroyalty of the Deccan and administrated it through the deputy, Daud khan. The death of Zulfikar khan in 1713 ended his dream. In 1713 Kilich Khan through the good offices of the Sayyid brothers obtained the viceroyalty of the Deccan. In 1715, however, Husain Ali replaced him as Subahdaar of the Deccan. After the assassination of Husain Ali in 1720 fortune again smiled on Kilich Khan and he was reappointed Subahdar of the Deccan.

In 1722 the Nazim was appointed Wazir at Delhi. At the court the Nazim tried to put things in order but all his efforts were thwarted by the pleasure-loving sovereign and his flatters. Like Clarendon at the court of Charles II of England, he urged the emperor to his sense of duty. His strict discipline provoked dislike and jealousy. Soon the Nizam felt very unhappy and set his heart on the viceroyalty of the Deccan. As Wazir he had added Malwa and Gujarat to the subahdari of the
Towards the end of 1723, on the pretext of going out on a hunting expedition, the Nizam headed towards the Deccan.

Muhammad Shah, offended at the insolence of the Nizam, appointed Mubariz Khan as full-fledged viceroy of the Deccan with instructions that he should send the Nizam dead or alive to the court. The Nizam, however, proved too strong for Mubariz Khan and the latter was killed at the battle of Shakr-Kheda (11 October 1724). The Nizam was now the master of the situation in the Deccan. Finding himself helpless, the emperor confirmed the Nizam as viceroy of the Deccan in 1725 and conferred on him the title of Asafjah.

The Nizam had difficult time in the Deccan on account of the Maratha raids. A clever politician that he was, the Nizam sought to divert Maratha energy by suggesting to the Peshwa the possibility of Maratha expansion in Northern India, a suggestion welcomed by Baji Rao I.

On more than one occasion the Nizam posed as defender of the Mughal Empire. He fought against Baji Rao I but suffered defeat at Bhopal (9 December 1737). He also accompanied the emperor to Karnal to fight against Nadir Shah.

Before leaving Delhi, Nadir Shah cautioned the emperor against the Nizam whom he “found to be full of cunning and self-interested, and more ambitious than becomes a subject”. After Nadir Sha’s invasion, the Nizam retired to the Deccan and further consolidated his position there.

The Nizam had all the qualities necessary for founding an independent kingdom. He was a diplomat and a benevolent ruler. He established peace and order in the Deccan, promoted agriculture and industry and endeared himself to the people.

Sidney Owen calls the Nizam a wily politician and an opportunist. He tried to put the Mughal Empire on its legs. Finding that impossible and perceiving the state hopelessly doomed, the Nizam took a boat and saved himself and some of the crew from the shipwreck.

Oudh.
EXCELL CAREER INDIA

The founder of the independent principality of Oudh was Saadat Khan, popularly known as Burhan-ul-Mulk.

Saadat Khan was a Shia and descendant from Sayyids of Nishapur. In 1720 he was appointed the Faujdar of Biyana. He joined in the conspiracy against the Sayyid brothers rose in the estimation of the emperor. He was amply rewarded by a grant of a mansab first of 5,000 and then of 7,000 as also given the title of Burhan-ul-Mulk. From 1720 to 1722 he was Governor of Agra which he administered through his deputy, Nilkanth Nagar. Soon he fell in favour at the court and was driven out of the capital and appointed as Governor of Oudh. This proved a blessing in disguise for Saadat Khan and he converted Oudh into an independent Muslim kingdom for himself. In 1739 Saadat khan was called to Delhi to assist the empire in fighting against Nadir Shah. He fought bravely at Karnal but was taken prisoner. The dirty game he played in inducing Nadir Shah to invade Delhi recoiled on him when the invader at Delhi demanded the sum of Rs. 20 crores promised to him. Finding himself helpless, Saadat Khan took poison and ended his life in 1739.

Saadat Khan had no son. He had married his daughter to his nephew, Safdar Jang and the latter succeeded him at Oudh. Muhammad Shah issued a firman confirming Safdar Jang as Nawab of Oudh. In 1748 Emperor Ahmed Shah appointed Safdar Jang as his Wazir and he and his successors came to be popularly known as Nawab-Wazirs.

In 1819 the seventh ruler of the house of Saadat Khan took the title of “the King of Oudh”.

Ruheals and Bangash Pathans.

In the Gangetic valley the Ruheals and Bangash Pathans carved out independent principalities for themselves. Daud, an Afghan soldier of fortune and his son Ali Mohammad Khan enlarged their small estate in the Bareily district in the south. Further east, Mohammad Khan Bangash, another Afghan adventurer declared himself the ruler of Farrukhabad and later extended his sway over Allahabad and Bundelkhand.

Bengal.
Murshid Kuli Khan was the founder of the independent state of Bengal. Ever since the time of Aurangzeb, Murshid Kuli Khan held the office of the Diwan and deputy Governor of Bengal first under Prince Azim-us-Shan and later under Prince Farrukhsiyar. In 1713 Murshid Kuli Khan was appointed Governor of Bengal and in 1719 Orissa was added to his charge. Murshid Kuli was a capable administrator and Bengal made great strides in trade and commerce.

After Murshid Kuli’s death in 1727, his son-in-law Shuja-ud-Din succeeded him. The governorship of Bihar was added to his charge by Muhammad Shah in 1733. After Shuja-ud-Din’s death in 1739 his son Sarfaraz Khan succeeded him. In 1740, however, Alivardi Khan, the Deputy Governor of Bihar, rebelled against his master and defeated and killed Sarfaraz Khan at Gheria (10 April 1740) and seized power. Alivardi Khan obtained the emperor’s consent for his usurpation by sending a present of two crores of rupees to Delhi. In 1746 the emperor asked him for money but Alivardi Khan paid no heed to it. Thus the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were virtually lost to the empire.

Alivardi Khan did not depend upon the emperor for the defence of his provinces against the frequent raids of the Marathas. However, like the Nizam and Nawab-WAzirs of Oudh, Alivardi Khan kept up the fiction of the sovereignty of the Mughal emperor.

The Rajputs.

The Rajputs alienated by the imprudent policies of Aurangzeb found in the weakness of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century the right opportunity to re-establish their independence and even extend their sway in all directions. The love-hate Mughal-Rajput relationship resulted in Emperor Bhadur Shah’s march towards Jodhpur and submission of Ajit Singh in 1708, followed by the formation of an anti-Mughal league by Ajit Singh, Jay Singh II and Durgadas Rathor the same year; in 1714 Hussain Ali, Commander-in-chief, again headed towards Jodhpur and forced Ajit Singh to sue for peace by giving one of his daughters in marriage to Emperor Farrukhsiyar.

In the Farrukhsiyar-Sayyid brothers tussle at Delhi, the chiefs of Jodhpur and Jaipur followed the policy of “opportunete aloofness or adherence” to suit their interests. Thus to win Ajit Singh to their side, the Sayyids rewarded Ajit Singh
with the governorship of Ajmer and Gujarat, a position which he held till 1721. The anti-Sayyid party appointed Jay Singh II of Jaipur as governor of Agra in 1721 and he was further given the Sarkar of Surat in the time of Emperor Muhammad Shah.

Thus the Rajputs at one stage controlled the entire territory extending from some 600 miles south of Delhi to Surat on the Western Cost. However, the internal dissensions prevented the Rajputs from consolidating their position and made them a prey to Maratha intervention.

The Jats.

The agriculturist Jat settlers living round Delhi, Mathura and Agra had revolted against the oppressive policies of Aurangzeb. The imperialists have suppressed the revolt but the area remained disturbed. Churaman (1660-1721) the Jat leader built a strong fort at Thun and challenged Mughal authority in the region. The Mughal army under Jay Singh II, the governor of Agra, marched against Churaman, now assumed leadership of the Jats. He considerably strengthened his army and built four forts of Dig, Kumber, VEr and Bharatpur. Protesting from the paralysis that struck the Mughal empire after Nadir Shah’s invasion, Badan Singh established his sway over the districts of Mathura and Agra and laid the foundation of the Bharatpur Kingdom. Ahmad Shah Abdali accepted ‘Mahendra’. Suraj Mal (1707-63), who succeeded to the kingdom in 1756 further added to the domination of the Bharatpur kingdom and ‘for his political sagacity, steady intellect and clean vision’ is remembered, as ‘the Plato of the Jat tribe’ and as ‘the Jat Ulysses’. After Surajmal’s death in 1763 the Jat kingdom gradually sank into insignificance. However, Lord Lake had to suffer humiliation when he attempted to capture Bharatpur in 1805.

The Sikhs.

Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the Sikh Gurus had transformed the Sikhs into a militant sect in defence of their religion and liberties. Banda Bahadur, who assumed leadership of the Sikhs after the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 17008, waged a relentless struggle against the imperialists for eight years but found odds heavily ranged against him; he was captured and killed in 1716. The fortunes of the lowest ebb in 1716.
The invasion of Nadir Shah and repeated incursions of Ahmad Shah Abdali virtually demolished the Mughal central authority and brought about the collapse of Mughal administration in the Panjab. This political confusion gave the much sought for opportunity to the Sikh misls (brotherhoods) who brought a large part of the Panjab under their sway in the 1760s and 1770s.

The Marathas.

Perhaps the most formidable challenge to Mughal authority both in the Deccan and the north came from the Marathas. Under the capable leadership of the Peshwas, the Marathas uprooted Mughal authority from Malwa and Gujarat, extended their sway over Rajputana in the 1703s and made a determined bid to fill in the political vacuum caused by the disintegration of the Mughal empire.

The Maratha position swiftly improved and at one stage in the 1750s they seemed to have established their claim as chief inheritors of the Mughal dominion till their authority was challenged by Ahmad Shah Abdali in the third Battle of PaniPat (1761). The Marathas quickly recovered from the reverse suffered at Panipat and offered the most formidable challenge to the English East India Company in the struggle for political supremacy in India.

(D) Foreign Incasions from the North-West

(a) Nadir Shah’s Invasion, 1738-39

The general deterioration in the Mughal Administration was visible in the neglect of the defence of the north-western frontier. Aurangzeb had kept a vigilant eye on the defence of the north-western frontier and the Mughal provinces in these region. The Mughal province of Kabul was very well-administered and the people regularly paid to taxes. The tribal people in the north-west were pacified and regular subsides were paid to them, the roads towards India were kept open and a constant and brisk communication of political intelligence had been maintained between Kabul and Delhi. However, after the departure of Prince Muazzam from Kabul in 1707 the administration of Kabul and Ghazni became lax. The general rot that has sapped the vitality of the empire was visible in the helpless condition of the defences of the frontier. The same jobbery, corruption and carelessness which had exposed Gujarat and Malwa to the attacks of the Marathas, exposed the north-
west frontier to the ambition of Nadir Shah of Persia. Ghulam Hussain, the author of *Siyar-ul-mutakherin*, writes that incapable viceroys were appointed by favoritism; the garrisons in the north-west were totally neglected; the tribal subsides were withheld to swell the illicit gains of those in power or their dependants; and the frivolous sovereign and his like-minded ministers heard little, and cared less, about what was going on beyond the mountains. To cite an example, when the Mughal Governor of Kabul reported the threat of a Persian invasion, Khank-i-Dauran simply ridiculed the news and described it the outcome of baseless fears; when the governor reported that the salary of the soldiers had been in arrears for the past five years, evasive replies were sent to him.

Nadir Quli was born in 1688 in a Turkoman family of Khorasan. He had a stormy career in his youth. He proved the Saviour of Persia against domination. The Afgan under their leader Mahmud had snatched Kandhar from the Persians and later (1722) attacked and captured Isfahan, the capital of Persia. Nadir Kuli took upon himself the task of liberating his adopted country from the rule of the Afghans. In 1927 Nadir occupied nishapur and turned out the Afghans from that region. Nadir acknowledged the overlordship of the Safawid Princece Shah Tahmas and preferred to work as his Commander-in-chief. Before long the whole of Persia was liberated from Afghan rule. The grateful Shah shared his kingdom with Nadir Kuli and allowed him to rule over half of Persia in full sovereign rights including the right to issue coins in his name. In 1736 the last of the Safawadi reuler died and Nadir became the ruler of the whole of Persia and assumed the title of Nadir Shah.

Nadir Shah was greatly ambitious and sought extension of his dominions at the expense of his neighboring countries. His first target was Kandhar. So long as Kandhar was not conquered it would remain a menace to the safety of Persia and constantly disturb the peace and prosperity of Khorasan. Moreover, without the conquest of Kandhar the full heritage of the Safawids could not be said to have come into his possession. To isolate the Afghan rulers of Kandhar, Nadir Shah entered into correspondence with Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah soliciting that Afghan fugitives might not find shelter in Kabul. Muhammad Shah gave assurances to Nadir’s envoy about that. When, however, Nadir Shah conquered Kandhar in March 1738, a number of Afghan fugitives took shelter at Kabul and Ghazni. Under Nadir’s strict instructions his soldiers did not violate Mughal territory and refrained from pursuing the Afghan fugitives in Kabul and Ghazni.
Notwithstanding the breach of promises on the part of the Mughal government, Nadir had dispatched in 1737 an imperative emissary—third of its kind—towards Delhi. Nadir’s emissary was attacked and cut off at Jalalabad by the Mughal soldiers.

The indifference with which the Mughal emperor treated the envoys of Nadir Shah and the cruel treatment meted out to the last emissary was made an excuse by Nadir Shah to invade India. Besides, the Mughal emperor had insulted Nadir Shah by discontinuing the practice of exchange of ambassadors with the Persian court when Nadir ascended the throne. However, the real causes of Nadir Shah’s invasion of India are to be found in the ambition of Nadir Shah on the one hand apparent weakness of the Mughal Emperor on the other. Nadir had heard about the fabulous India and his greed was excited. To top all, Nadir had received definite information about the condition of the Mughal administration and the internal dissensions which had shaped its belief of his was fortified by the number of letters of goodwill and invitation he had from Indian Amirs soliciting him to invade India.

Nadir Shah entered Ghazni on 11 June 1738 and captured Kabul on 29 June. Nadir Shah had created for himself a reputation as a merciful enemy and liberal master, held out inducer deserters. Nasir Khan, the Mughal governor of Kabul, surrendered without resistance and with doned and restored to the viceroyalty of Kabul and Peshawar on profession of loyalty to master. Crossing the Indus at Attock, Nadir easily defeated the governor of Lahore and treat kindly and the latter also like Nasir Khan joined the conqueror’s train on a rapid march toward.

**The Battle of Karnal. 24 February 1739.**

Nadir’s rapid advance towards Delhi alarmed Mughal emperor. The emperor gathered an army of 80,000 and accompanied by the Nizam-ul-Qamar-ud-Din and Khan-i-Dauran marched from the capital to confront the invader. Saad joined them soon after. The weakness of the Mughal side was soon clear from the fact that in knowledge of the enemy’s whereabouts until Nadir’s advance-guard attacked the baggage Saadat Khan. Further, there was neither any general plan of action nor an agreed leader. The Karnal lasted only three hours. Khan-i-Dauran fell fighting in the battlefield while Saadat Khan taken prisoner by Nadir Shah.
Nizam-ul-Mulk played the role of the peace-maker. It was agreed that Nadir would lakhs of rupees, 20 lakhs immediately and 30 lakhs in three equal instalments of 10 lakhs each at Lahore, Attock and Kabul respectively on him the office of the Mir Bakshi which had fallen vacant on the Khan-i-Dauran.

**Nadir’s March to Delhi.**

The selfishness and mutual rivalries of the Mughal noble havoc at this stage. Saadat Khan, who had coveted the office of the Mir Bakshi, was so disappointed at the conferment of the post on the Nizam that he sought a meeting with Nadir, him that he could easily secure 20 crores of rupees only if he would proceed from the Nizam, his meeting with the Nizam earlier, the Persian invader had asked him why in spite of the pre brave men like him the Maratha had captured large territories of the empire. The Nizam had told him that the court factions had created great confusion and that was why he had himself away to the Deccan in disgust. Now Nadir had himself tested the truth of the Nizam’s obsession.

Nadir Sha now decided to march to Delhi where he reached on 20 March 1739. At khatna (emblem of sovereignty) was read for Nadir and coins were struck in his name. the Empire had ended, the Persian Empire had begun.

On 22 March a rumour spread in Delhi that Nadir had suddenly died. There was a rising in the city in which 700of Nadir’s soldiers were killed. Thereupon, Nadir gave a general massacre. It has been estimated that about 30,000 persons were slaughtered. On the solicitation of Muhammad Shah, Nadir ordered his men to stop the massacre.

**Return of Nadir Shah.**

Nadir Shah remained in Delhi for about two months. He tired to collect the maximum booty from Delhi. He laid all the nobles and even the general population under contribution. Saadat Khan, the villain of the piece, was threatened with corporal punishment if he did not collect for the invader an amount of 20 crores. Helpless, Saadat Khan took poison and ended his life. Saadat Khan’s successor, Safdar Jang paid two crores as his part of the contribution. The booty collected by Nadir amounted to 30 crores of rupees in cash besides jewels, gold and silver plates, besides “100 elephants, 7,000 horses, 10,000 camels, 100 eunuchs, 130
writers, 200 smiths, 300 masons and builders, 100 stone-cutters and 200 carpenters”. Above all, the invader carried with him the Peacock Throne of Shahjehan which alone had cost a crore of rupees. The Mughal emperor was also compelled to give a royal princess in marriage to Nadir’s son, Nasir Allah Mirza.

Muhammad Sha also surrendered to Nadir Shah the Mughal provinces west of the river Indus including Kashmir and Sind. The subah of Thatta the ports subordinate thereto were also surrendered to the invader. Besides, the Governor of the Panjab agreed to pay to Nadir a sum of rupees 20 lakhs per annum “to remove the reason for any Persian garrison being left east of the Indus”.

Nadir on his part declared Muhammad Sha as Emperor of the Mughal Empire once again with the right to issue coins and have the khutba read his name. Before leaving Delhi, Nadir also gave advice to Muhammad Shah and exhorted his subjects to obey him. He also promised military support to the Mughal emperor in time of need.

(b) Ahmad Shah Abdali’s Invasions and the Third Battle of Panipat.

Ashmad Shah Abdali (so called because of the name of his tribe ooloos) was a young Afghan officer of noble lineage. Nadir Sha held high opinion about his merits and once said, “I have not found in Iran, Turan or Hindi any man equal to Ahmad Shah declared himself as ruler of Kandhar. He also issued coins bearing his name. Soon after he seized Kabul and founded the modern kingdom of Afghanistasn. He enlisted a large army of 50,000. As the rightful successor of Nadir, he laid claim to Western Panjab. He invaded India five times and fought the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761.

Ahmad Shah Abdali’s first invasion of India in 1748 ended in a fiasco. Abdali was not a man to be easily baulked. Early in 1749 he again crossed the frontier and defeated Muni-ul-Mulk, the Governor of the Panjab. However, he induced to return on apromise by muin-ul-Mulk of an annual remittance of fourteen thousand rupees. As he did not get regularly the promised tribute, Abdali invaded India the third time in 1752. Fearing a repetition of Nadir’s outrages, the Mughal Emperor Ahmad invaded India the third time in 1752. Fearing a repetition of Nadir’s outrages, the mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah appeased Abdali by surrender of the Panjab and Sindh. To restore order in the Panjab, which had been
a prey to anarchy after the death of Muin-ul-mulk, in November 1753 Wazir Imad-ul-Mulk appointed Adina beg Khan as Governor of the Panjab. This was, however, interpreted as interference in the affairs of the Panjab by Abdali who crossed into Indian Territory for the fourth time in November 1756. In January 1757 the invader entered Delhi and plundered as far as Mathura and Agra. Before his return Abdali recognized Alamgir II as the emperor, Imad-ul-Daula as the Wazir and the Rohilla chief najib-ud- Daula as his personal ‘supreme agent’ and as mir Bakshi of the Empire.

In March 1758 Raghunath Rao appeared at Delhi, expelled Najib from the capital and later overran the Panjab, appointing Adina Beg as governor of the Panjab on behalf of the Peshwa. Abdali returned to India in 1759 to avenge on the Marathas. The third battle of Panipat was fought on 14 January 1761, resulting in the total defeat of the Marathas.

Before leaving Delhi on 20 march 1761 Abdali name Sha Alam II as emperor, Imad-ul-Mulk as WAzir and Najib-ud-Daula as Mir Bakshi. The last of Abdali’s invasions came in 1767. Ahmad Shah Abdali’s invasions hastened the downfall of the Mughal Empire and created anarchy and confusion all around. So shallow was the reality of the Mughal Empire that the new Emperor Sha Alam II was not allowed to enter Delhi for twelve years and was escorted to his throne in 1772 only by the Maraths. The Rohilla leaders Najib-ud-Daula and later his son Zabita Khan and grandson Ghulam Qadir exercised undisputed power at Delhi. On 30July 1788 Ghulam Qadir took possession of the royal palace and deposed Sha Alam and later blinded him completely (10 August 1788). It was the Maratha leader Mahadaji Sindhia who recovered Delhi for the emperor once again in October 1788. In 1803 the English captured the imperial city and Sha Alam II became a pensioner of the East India Company.

(E) Cause of the Downfall of the Mughal Empire

1. Aurangzeb’s Responsibility.

Although the expansion of the Mughal Empire reached its optimum point under Aurangzeb yet it only resembled an inflated ballon. The Mughal Empire had
expanded beyond the point of effective control and its castness only tended to weaken the centre. Considering; the undeveloped means of communications in those days, Mughal Empire was faced with a stupendous task far beyond the capacity of Alamgir Aurangzeb himself not to speak of his weak successors.

Whatever his compulsions, Aurangzeb sought to restore the Islamic character of the state which he believed, had been disturbed by Akbar and his successors. His policy of religious bigotism proved counter-productive and provoked a general discontent in the country and the empire was faced with rebellions of the Sikhs, the jats, the Bundelas, the Rajputs and, above all, the Marathas. Aurangzeb was no less stupid than his contemporary James II of England.

‘The Ass
Who lost three Kingdoms for a Mass.’

Again like JamesII, Aurangzeb knew the art of making enemies. The imperialist designs and narrow religious policy of Aurangzeb turned the Rajputs, reliable supporters of the Imperial dynasty, into foes. The wanton destruction of Hindu temples and the reimposition of jizyah (1679) and other political and social indignities on the Hindus led to the rising of the Satnamis, the Bundeals and the Jats. In the Panjab the Sikhs to the last man rose against the empire paralyzing Imperial administration in the province. In Maharashtra, Maratha resistance to Mughal rule assumed a national character and the whole people participated in the struggle for the defence of their religion and liberties. The Maratha guerrillas demoralized the splendid armies of Aurangzeb, broke their spirit of superiority and wore them out.

The over ambitious Aurangzeb followed the policy of aggressive imperialism towards the Shia sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur. Being a fanatical Sunni, perhaps an additional reason for his onslaught on these Deccan kingdoms was religious. However, the Deccan state of Golconda, Bijapur, Karnataka and the Marathas occasionally patched up their mutual jealousies and offered a united front to Mughal imperialism. Though Aurangzeb succeeded in reducing Bijapur(1686), Golcaonda (1687) and killing Sambhaji (1689), but these successes only marked the beginning of greater difficulties. The conquest of these Muslim kingdoms of
the south removed the strongest local check on Maratha activities and left them free to organize resistance to Mughal imperialism.

Aurangzeb’s mistaken policy of continuous war in the Deccan which continued for twenty seven years drained the resources of the empire. These wars meant a great financial drain on the treasury and the flower of the Mughal soldiery perished in the long wars. Manucci noted in his book, Storia Do Moger, “thus until this day he has not been able to accomplish the enterprise be interned (as he said) in two years. He marched carrying with him three sons, Shah Alam, Azam Tara and Kam Baksh, also his grandons. He had with him much treasure-houses of Akbar, Nur Jehan, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Besides this, finding himself with very little cash, owing to the immense expenditure forced on him, and because the revenue payers did not pay with the usual promptitude, he was obliged at Aurangabad to melt down his household silver-wares.” The ‘Deccan ulcer’ proved as fatal to the Mughal Empire as the ‘Spanish ulcer’ was to prove later on to the Napoleonic Empire.

2. Weak Successors of Aurangzeb.

The Mughal system of government being despotic much depended on the personality of the emperor. Under a strong monarch all went with the administration, but the succession of a weak emperor was reflected in every field of administration. Unfortunately, all the Mughal emperors after Aurangzeb were weaklings and therefore unable to meet the challenges from within and without. Far from stemming the tide of decline they aggravated the situation by their idiosyncrasies and lax morals. Bahadur Shah I (1702-12) was over 63 at the time of his succession to the throne and was too old to maintain the prestige of the empire. He liked to appease all parties by profuse grants of titles and rewards and was nicknamed Shah-i-bekhabar (The Heedless King), Jahandar Shah (1712-13), the next in succession, was a profligate fool, Farrukhsiyar (1713-19) a contemptible coward, while Moahmad Shah (1719-48) spent most of his time watching animal fights. For his indifference towards public affairs and addition to wine and woman. Mohammad Shah was nicknamed ‘Rangila ‘Ahmad Shah (174-54) excelled his predecessors in his sensual pursuits. His harem extended over a full kos (an area of four square miles) whereform all males were excluded and the emperor spent a week and sometime as month in the company of women. In the
administrative sphere Ahmad Shah did equally foolish thing. In November 1753, he appointed his two and half years old son, Mahmud as Governor of the Panjab and in perfect keeping with the spirit named a one-year old baby, Muhammad Amin as the deputy under him. Similarly the governorship of Kashmir was conferred on one-year old Tala Sayyid Shah with a boy of fifteen as the Deputy. These appointments were made and imbecile emperors could hardly act as worthy custodians of public interest or maintain the integrity of the empire.

3. Degeneration of Mughal Nobility.

“When gold rusts what will iron do?”, is an old adage. Following the unworthy example of the emperors, the nobles discarded hard life of military adventure and took to luxurious living. They became ‘knights of romance’ against ‘knights at arms.’ The nobles of their time in drinking bouts and gambling dens. Nobles like Bairam Khan, Muzzaffar Khan, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, Mahabat Khan, Asaf Khan, Saidulla Khan were no longer available for the service of the state. The new nobility under the later Mughals were at best courtiers and rivaled one another in the subtle arts of finesse and flattery. At a time when the emperors ceased to be impartial judges for rewarding merit, the nobles had no incentive to fight and die for the empire. J.N. Sarkar points out in Massir-ul-Umra (Dictionary if Mughal Peerage) that if a nobleman’s achievements were recorded in three pages that of his son usually filled a page, that of the grandson only a few lines such as ‘nothing worthy of being recorded’. The senile decay that had set in the ranks of the upper classes deprived the state of the services of capable administrators and energetic military leaders.

4. Court Factions.

Towards the end of Aurangzeb’s reign influential nobles at the court organized themselves into pressure groups. Though these groups were formed on clan or family relationships, personal affiliations or interests were the dominating factors. These groups kept the country in a state of perpetual political unrest. The Turani or Central Asian party consisted of nobles from Trans-Oxiania. During the reign of Mohammad Shah, Asaf Jah, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Qamruddin and were Amir Khan, Ishaq Khan and Saadat khan. These factions kept their own retainers who were mostly recruited from Central Asia or Persia as the case might be. Together
these two factions known as the ‘Mughal or Foreign Party’ were pitched against
the Hindustani Party whose leaders during this period were Sayyid Abdulla Khan
and Sayyid Hussain Ali who enjoyed the support of the Hindus. Each faction tried
to win the Emperor to its viewpoint and poison his ears against the other faction.
They fought battles, upsetting the peace of the country and throwing administration
to dogs. Even in the face of foreign danger these hostile groups could not forge a
united front and after intrigued with the invader. The personal interests of Nizam-
ul-Mulk and Burhan-ul-Mulk led them to intrigue with Nadir Shah and barter away
national interests.

5. Defective Law of Succession.

The absence of the law of primogeniture among the Mughals usually meant
a war of succession among the sons of the dying emperor in which the military
leaders of the time took sides. In the words of Erskine, “The Sword was the grand
arbiter of right and every son was prepared to try his fortune against his brothers”.
Such a system, though not commendable, was not without its advantage. It
provided the country with the ablest son of the dying Emperor as the ruler. Under
the later Mughals a sinister factor entered the politics of the empire bringing out
the worst features of the law of succession. Now, the new principle that worked in
the later Mughal period was ‘the survival of the weakest.’ The princes of the royal
dynasty recede to the background while struggle was fought by leaders of rival
factions using royal princes as nominal leaders. Powerful nobles acted as ‘king-
maker’, making and unmaking emperors to suit their personal interests. Zulfikar
Khan emerged as the ‘king-maker’ in the war of succession that followed the death
of Bahadur Shah I in 1712. The Sayyid Brothers (Hussain Ali and Abdullah Khan)
acted as ‘king-makers’ during 1713-20, when they raised four Imperial princes to
the throne till they were removed from their position by a faction of Mir
Mohammad Amin and Asaf Jah Nizam-ul-Mulk. Thus the defective law of
succession weakened the body politic and crippled it financially and militarily.


Perhaps the most powerful external factor that brought about the collapse of
the Mughal Empire was the rising power of the Marathas under the Peshwa. The
Peshwas consolidated Maratha power in Western India and channelized the
energies of the nation in an attack on the Mughal Empire. They inaugurated the policy of Greater Maharashtra and popularized the ideal of Hindu-pad padshahi. The ideal of Hindu Empire could only be realized at the cost of the Mughal Emperors and their viceroyes on the defensive. The tide of Maratha expansion continued to rise till it engulfed northern India also. At one time the Marathas seemed the most powerful force in the politics of India, assuming the role of defenders of India against foreign invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali and playing the role of ‘king-makers’ at Delhi as Sadashiv Rao Bhau seems to have done in 1759 and Mahadaji Sindhia in 1722. Though the Marathas were not successful in laying the foundations of a stable empire in India, they certainly played a great part in bringing about the disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

7. Military Weakness.

There were inherent defects in the Mughal military system. The army was organized more or less on the feudal basis where the common soldier owed allegiance to the mansabdar rather than the Emperor. The soldier looked upon the mansabdar as his chief, not as an officer. The defects of this system though evident enough in the revolts of Bairam Khan and Mahabat Khan assumed alarming proportions under the later Mughal kings.

William Irvine points out that excepting the want of personal courage every other fault was found among the degenerate Mughals—indiscipline, want of cohesion, luxurious habits, inactivity bad commissariat and cumbrous equipment. Luxury and sloth penetrated every rank of the army and the march of the spectacle of a Mughal army presented “a long train of elephants, camels, carts and oxen, mixed up with a crowd of camp-followers, women of all ranks, merchants, shopkeepers, servants, cooks, and all kinds of ministers of luxury, amounting to ten time the number of the fighting men”.

In fighting capacity the unwieldy Mughal armies were nothing more than an armed rabble. Bernier compares them to a herd of animals who fled at the first shock. The Mughal artillery was crude and ineffective against the guerrilla tactics of the Marathas; the Maratha fortresses which the Mughal armies could not capture despite repeated attempts easily succumbed the British arms. In 1748 the French Commander, Monsieur Paradis, with a small detachment consisting of 230
Europeans and 700 Indian soldiers and without any guns routed a large army of the Nawab of Carnatic consisting of 10,000 men equipped with artillery and entrenched across a river. Dupleix wrote to the Company’s Directors in Paris that “500 European soldiers could reduce all Moslem strongholds and provinces on this side of the Kistna.”

The chief defect of the Mughal armies of eighteenth century was their composition. The soldiers were usually drawn from Central Asia and collected by the captains of companies who supplied men to anyone able to pay for them. These soldiers and their leaders came to India to make fortunes not to lose them. As such, the leaders came to India to make fortunes not to lose them. As such, the leaders of such armies changed sides without scruples and were constantly plotting either to betray or supplant their employers. Even the Mughal viceroys employing such troops were constantly haunted by the fear of desertion. Such hired soldiers without coherence or loyalty were unfit custodians of the interests of the Empire. What the Urdu poet Sauda wrote about Shah Alam II’s time was true of later Mughal period in general

Only forced by need does he (Mughal commander) come out of the moat (of his fort);

His Army but knows how to turn from the flight;

The infantry—afraid of the barber that shaves;

The cavalry—fall off from their beds in their sleep

If but in a dream they see their mount frisk.


What ate into the vitals of the Mughal Empire was the worsening economic and financial conditions which were visible in the 17th century and which steadily worsen end towards the end of Aurangzeb’s reign. Aurangzeb’s long wars in the Deccan besides emptying the royal treasury almost ruined the trade and industry of the country. The marches of the Imperial army damaged crops in the Deccan while the beasts of burden ate away all standing crops and greenery. The emperor ignored all complaints brought to him because of financial difficulties. Whatever
little was left was destroyed by the Maratha raiders—Maratha horses were fed on standing crops and Maratha soldiers destroyed whatever property they found too heavy to be carried. The peasant gave up agriculture in disgust and many took to life of plunder and highway robbery. There was so great dislocation of normal life in the Deccan that the agents of the English and French Companies found great difficulty in procuring supplies for export to Europe.

Under the later Mughal Emperors the financial condition further deteriorated. While the outlying provinces asserted their independence one after the other and ceased the payment of any revenue to the centre, the numerous wars of succession and political conclusions coupled with the lavish living of the Emperors emptied the royal treasury to an extent that salaries of soldiers could not be paid regularly. When the Emperors fell back to the uneconomic device of farming out of Khalisah (crown) lands and granting jagirs in payment of liquidation of arrears of pay. The crisis of the jagirdari was reached when the land in the country was insufficient for the total number of jagirs granted. Many a time jagirs were granted but the recipient had to wait for long to get actual possession of land. An aggrieved grantee sarcastically remarked that the time-gap between the grant of a jagir and its actual possession was long enough to turn a boy into grey-beard person. Jagirdars in turn were so greatly under debt to money lenders that they farmed out their jagirs to them. Commenting on the poor financial condition of the Mughal nobles, the Urdu poet Sauda wrote the mansabdars had no money to pay their retainers.

If you buy a horse, and take service with someone
Of your salary you will see no sign except in the world above.

Writing of the times of Alamgir II, Sir Jadunath Sarkar says that at one time the Emperor was reduced to such hard straits that for three days no fire was kindled in the harem kitchen and the princesses in frantic disregard of purdhah rushed out of the palace to the city.

Jadunath Sarkar argues that the Muslim state in India lacked a sound economic basis. The holy scriptures of the Muslims provide—or at least so the medieval Muslim scholars interpreted—that the true profession of the faithful is war. The state in India kept a huge army and was thus the greatest single employer.
Peace, argues Sir Sarkar, was an anaesthesia to the society and produced far reaching economic repercussions. When the Muslim state in India under Aurangzeb reached its optimum expansion, it was no longer necessary to maintain a huge army and employ it profitably. These conditions accentuated in the eighteenth century.


The Mughal government was essentially a police government and confined its attention mainly to the maintenance of internal and external order and collection of revenue. The Mughals failed to effect a fusion between the Hindus and Muslims and create a composite nation. Whatever little effort was made by Akbar to weld the people into a nation was undone by the bigotry of Aurangzeb and his worthless successors. Far from reconciling the Hindus to the Mughal rule, the Mughal policies goaded them to rebellion: Many Indian chiefs looked upon the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century gave the Marathas, the Rajputs and other Hindu communities their much awaited opportunity.

10. Invasion of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali.

The invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 gave a death blow to the tottering Mughal Empire. Besides depleting the Mughal treasury of its wealth, it exposed to the world the military weakness of the Empire and its utter degeneration. Turbulent elements in the country so far kept in check by the name and prestige of the Empire rose in rebellion and circumscribed the authority of the empire. The repeated invasions of Nadir’s successor, Mughal authority had so greatly shrunk that in 1761 Abdali fought the battle of Panipat not against the Mughal Empire but against the Marathas who virtually controlled the whole of Northern India. For about a decade (1761-72) a virtual dictatorship under Najib-ud-daula was set up at Delhi.

11. Coming of the Europeans.

With the weakness of Mughal central authority in the eighteenth century, war-lordism raised its ugly head. The European countries also acted as warlords, and profited from the confused times. The European countries out did Indian princes in every sphere whether it was trade and commerce or diplomacy and war. In fact the static and stationary Indian society faced a challenge from a dynamic
and progressive West. It is a sad commentary on the Mughal aristocracy that while they spent lakhs in importing European luxury articles, none ever thought of purchasing a printing press. When the Renaissance outlook had given an expansive touch to European energies the Indian people were stepped in divinism and drew sustenance from the philosophy of escapism. In fact, India was left far behind in the race of civilization. Sir Jadunath Sarkar very aptly comments: “The English conquest of the Mughal Empire is only a part of the inevitable domination of all Africa and Asia by the European nations—which is only another way of saying that the progressive races are supplanting the conservative ones, just as enterprising families are constantly replacing sleepy self-satisfied ones in the leadership of our society.”

Thus, the inherent weaknesses of the Mughal body-politic and the numerous contemporary operative causes had sapped the vitality of the Empire. When the phantom empire collapsed the surprise was not that it crumbled ignominiously, but that the end was so long delayed.

**(F) SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

Despite political convulsions and instability in the 18th century, the society in general retained most of its traditional features with some changes thrown in by new environments.

**Social Stratification: of the time.**

At the apex of the social order was the emperor closely followed by the nobility which despite hard times led a life of luxury and extravagancy with great weakness for wine, women and music? At the lowest rung of the ladder was the preponderant majority of the poor agriculturalist and artisan in the village. In the middle came the ‘small and frugal’ middle class comprising small merchants, shopkeepers, lower cadre of employees, town artisans etc. Paucity of contemporary evidence and disparities incomes and prices in different regions of the country makes any comparison of living standard of living a difficult exercise.

The institution of caste stands out a striking feature of Hindu society of the time. Caste rules prevailed in matters of marriage, dress, diet and even professions.
However, economic pressures and administrative innovations introduced by the East India Company compelled some to look beyond their ancestral professions.

**Place of Women in Society:**

Women were given a place of respect in home and society but not of equality as we understand the term today. Hindu society being mainly patriarchal (except in the Malabar and some backward areas), the will be of the male head of the family usually prevailed. Though examples can be cited of Hindu and Muslim women having played significant roles in polities, administration and scholastic fields, the common women was denied right place in society. Purdah system was common among Hindu and Muslim women though women of poor families out on work for livelihood could not observe it. Child marriages were common among both girls and boys though consummation usually took place after they attained age of maturity. Dowry system was prevalent among the upper classes. Polygamy in shocking proportions prevailed among the kulin families in Uttar Pradesh and Bengal. Remarriage of widows was generally looked down upon though it prevailed in some places. Surprisingly the Peshwas imposed a tax called patdam on remarriage of widows. The evil practice of Sati mostly prevailed in Bengal, central India and Rajputana among some upper castes. The Peshwas discouraged Sati in their dominion with limited success.

**Slavery:**

Another social evil was the prevalence of slavery. Broadly speaking, slave could be classed into two categories—the domestic slabs and the serfs tied to the hand. In the latter category the serfs were transferred with the sale of land to new masters. European travelers and administrators have testified to the widespread prevalence of slavery in India. Economic distress, famines, natural calamities, extreme poverty compelled some to sell their children for a price. The Rajputs, Khatrias and Kayasthas usually kept slave women for domestic work. However, slaves in India were treated better than their counterparts in America and Europe. Slaves were usually treated as hereditary servants of the family than as menials; they were allowed to meet among themselves and the main offspring’s of such marriages were considered free citizens.
Slavery and slave trade touched new dimensions with the coming of Europeans in India particularly the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. There is mention of a court-house at Calcutta in 1752 which regularly purchased and registered slaves charging a registration fee of Rs. 4 for each entry. The European company purchased slaves at a price ranging between Rs. 5 to Rs. 15 for a girl of 10 years, Rs. 12 to Rs. 20 for a boy of 16 and Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 for a full grown adult slave from the markets of Bengal, Assam and Bihar, and carries them to European and American markets for sale. There are reports of Europeans at Surat, Madras and Calcutta purchasing Abyssinian slaves and employing them for domestic work.

Traffic in slaves was abolished by a proclamation issued in 1789. However, rural slavery shorn of many of its classical crudities continues in India even today.

**Education.**

The love of learning has always exercised a powerful influence on both the Hindu and the Muslim mind. However, the idea of Indian education was culture and not literacy. Vocational education according to one’s varna or family tradition assured specialization. Both Hindu and Muslim systems of education linked learning and religion.

Centers of higher education in Sanskrit were called chatuspathis or Tols in Bengal and Bihar. Nadia, Kasi (Benares), Tirhut (Mithila) and Utkala (Orissa) were reputed centers for Sanskrit education flocked to its numerous institutions. Institutions for learning of higher education in Persian and Arabic were called Madrasahs. Persian being the court language was learnt both by the Muslims and Hindus. Azimabad (Patna) was a reputed centre of Persian education in eastern India. Those interested in the study of Koran and Muslim theology had to acquire proficiency in Arabic.

Elementary education was fairly widespread. The Hindu elementary schools were called pathshallas and Muslim elementary schools were popularly known as maktabs. These school, were not unusually attached to temples and mosques. The students were given instruction in the three R’s of reading, writing and arithmetic. Moral instruction with emphasis on truth and honesty, obedience to parents and faith in one’s religion, found a place in the school curriculum. Though education
was mainly popular with the higher castes, there were cases of children of lower castes attending schools. Female education received scant attention.

**Arts and Literature.**

In the fields of arts and literature the absence of patronage at Delhi led to flight of talent to newly-established state capitals like Hyderabad, Lucknow, Murshidabad, Jaipur etc.

Asaf-ud-Daula built the Great Imambara (a building for celebration of Muharram festival) at Lucknow in 1784; the absence of any pillars or support makes it architecturally interesting. Swai Jai Singh (1686-1743) built the famous pink city of Jaipur and five astronomical observations in India including one at Jaipur, another at New Delhi and a third at Benares. At Amritsar Maharaja Ranjit Singh renovated the Sikh shrine decorating the lower half with marble and the entire upper portion was inlaid with copper surmounted with a thin plate of gold and gave it is modern name of the Golden temple. The palace of Suraj Mal at Dig (the capital of Bharatpur) state was planned to rival in munificence the imperial palaces at Agra; work on its construction was begun in 1725 but the construction was left unfinished.

Vernacular languages like Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Panjabi, Marathi, Telugu and Tamil greatly developed. It was during the 18th century that the Christian missionaries set up printing presses in India and brought out vernacular editions of the Bible, Ziegenbelg, a Danish missionary composed a Tamil grammar and published a Tamil version of the Bible. Even a Tamil dictionary was compiled by these missionaries. In Bengal, the Baptist missionaries (Carey, Ward and Marshman) set up a printing press at Serampur and published a Bengali version of the Bible.

**Economic Conditions.**

In the beginning of the 18th century the basic unit of Indian Economy was still the self-sufficient and self-governing village community which produced almost all for its local needs. Its only link with the state was the payment of land revenue. While rulers and dynasties changed ceaselessly, the village communities carried on as usual. It was this ‘unchangeableness of Asiatic societies’ that
attracted the attention of European observers and drew the cryptic remark that “they lasted when nothing else seemed to last”. These villages complemented communities though factors in economic and social stability were also responsible for economic stagnation.

Town handicrafts in India had reached a high level of development and attracted worldwide markets. The cotton products of Dacca, Ahmadabad and Masulipatnam, the silk fabrics of Murshidabad, Agra, Lahore and Gujarat, the fine woolen shawls and carpets of Kashmir, Lahore Agra, the gold and silver jewelry, metal work, metal utensils, arms, shields found markets both in India and abroad.

The large scale domestic and foreign trade brought into existence the merchant-capitalist and the development of the banking system. The emergence of Jagat Seths, Nagar Seths in northern India and the Chetties in the south with their elaborate banking houses and extensive use of hundies and other banking practices gave great fillip to trade and commerce.

These developments in the Indian economy in the 17th and 18th centuries gave some indications that some pre-conditions for a rapid growth of capitalism did exist. However, certain constraints like the existence of feudal classes the law of escheat, the absence of correct saving habits and the use of such savings for productive purposes and above all, the absence of political stability and a forward-looking state—all ill-boded for economic development on modern lines.

The presence of European trading companies in the 18th century with deep politico-economic interests added to the prevailing confusion and economic stagnation.”