

their court ceremonies, dress and etiquette produced such a spectacular effect upon the people that the system with its ceremonials was borrowed by semi-independent Hindu rajas and became part and parcel of Indian life. The Mughul fondness for elegant dress, luxurious articles of food and new styles of crockery, perfumes, music and dance, was imitated by upper-class Hindus. This brought the leading Hindu families in the land in line with the Mughul aristocracy.

Causes of the fall of the Mughul Empire

The first and foremost cause of the downfall of the Mughul empire was the progressive deterioration in the character of the later Mughul emperors. The Mughul government was a centralized despotism. In such a system of government everything depends upon the personality and character of the reigning sovereign ; if he happens to be strong and efficient, the administration goes on well : but if contrary is the case, his weakness is reflected in every branch of government and things invariably go wrong. The first six Mughul emperors were men of ability and strength of character.

But Aurangzeb's successors from Bahadur Shah I to Bahadur Shah II were mere nonentities with little personal ability and no strength of will. For this Aurangzeb was to a great extent responsible; his life was so prolonged that his second son succeeded him at the age of sixty-two and his grandson became ruler at fifty-one, when they had little energy or ambition left in them. Moreover, he was suspicious of his sons that he cast two of them into prison and surrounded them all by spies who reported to him their plans and designs and prevented the development in them of initiative enterprise and a sense of responsibility. His successors accelerated the process of deterioration, by keeping the princes at court and not allowing them an opportunity of acquiring a practical knowledge of administration, diplomacy and war in distant provinces.

The Mughul princes in the 18th century degenerated into helpless puppets in the hands of the nobles. Bahadur Shah I who succeeded Aurangzeb was popularly called a "heedless king". His successor Jahandar Shah was a profligate fool ; Farrukh-Siyar was the most cowardly prince of the Mughul house, and Muhammad Shah was known as "Rangila". Ahmad Shah and his successors were no better than tools in the hands of their selfish and unscrupulous ministers. It was not possible for such incompetent men, who could not rule over themselves to manage the affairs of an empire.

The next cause of the decline and fall of the empire was the degeneration of the Mughul nobility. The history of India of the time of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan was made by Bairam Khan and Munim Khan, Muzaffar Khan and Abdur Rahim Khan Khana, Itimad-ud-daula and Mababat Khan, Asaf Khan and Saadulla Khan. But with decline in the character of the later Mughul emperors, decline also set in the character of the nobility. Wealth and leisure which the

foreign Muslims acquired in India fostered luxury and sloth and the presence of many women in their harems encouraged debauchery, which, in their turn, undermined their character and love of adventure. Consequently, physical, moral and intellectual degeneration overtook the governing classes.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar rightly observes that on account of such a degeneration hardly could any aristocratic Mughul family retain its official importance for more than one or two generations. If, in the Dictionary of the Mughul peerage, called the *Maasir-ul-Umra*, a nobleman's achievements were mentioned in three pages, his son's usually occupied nearly one page, and the grandson was dismissed in a few lines such as these, 'that he did nothing worthy of being recorded here.' The Turks, the Afghans, the Persians, and other Central Asian Muslims were exotics in India, and it was natural for them to deteriorate in the uncongenial soil of this country. It must not be forgotten that the Turks and Afghans are essentially a military people who could not but degenerate when little work of active military conquest was left for them to do. And when the emperor ceased to be the judge and rewarder of merit, the nobles had little encouragement or incentive to die for the empire.

The third important cause was the demoralization of the Mughul army which by its origin and composition was weak and defective. It consisted chiefly of contingents recruited and maintained by the high officers and nobles who were assigned revenues of large tracts of the country for their maintenance. On account of this the individual soldier looked upon his mansabdar as his chief and not as his officer. There was no touch between the emperor and the individual soldiers who were paid by their commander or mansabdar and not directly from the royal treasury. The inherent defects of this radically unsound system were aggravated during the reigns of Aurangzeb and his successors.

As the authority of the later Mughul emperors relaxed, the great nobles or officers of the empire began to convert the assignment which they held for maintaining troops, into their hereditary possessions. This left the emperor without a strong body of personal troops to enable him to assert his authority. Besides, on account of the weakness of imperial authority the mansabdars became so jealous of one another that a commander would often deliberately refrain from bringing a three-fourth won battle or a siege to a successful conclusion, if he felt that another officer would share the credit of his success.

It became the habit of Mughul officers from the last quarter of the 17th century to be in treacherous correspondence with the enemy. As the emperor and the Mir Bakhshi themselves lacked ability and firmness of character they could not enforce proper discipline in the army which was reduced to a well-armed mob. Military crimes were overlooked even by Aurangzeb and no regular punishments were

inflicted for dereliction of duty. For these reasons the army which had carried the Mughul banners to the extreme corners of the country and even beyond to the river Oxus and the Helmand in Central Asia, became useless for offence and defence.

Fourthly, another main cause of the fall of the empire must be ascribed to its economic bankruptcy. Akbar had established an equitable financial system under which the country had prospered, the government had become rich and the people had led fairly comfortable lives. Under his successors this arrangement deteriorated. The demands made by the government upon the producer became so heavy that the latter succumbed under them. On the contrary, the court squandered huge sums of money in rewarding energy and ingenuity employed in unproductive work. Akbar's revenue system which dealt directly with the tillers of the soil began to fall into disuse in the time of his son and grandson. It was mostly abandoned under Aurangzeb and his successors who farmed out the land to contractors. The result was that the direct demand on the producers was greatly increased and the reward that fell to their share was reduced "to a figure at which it ceased to offer an adequate incentive to productive toil." This became clear in the time of Shah Jahan. "All the writers of the time," observes William Foster, 'extol the splendour of his (Shah Jahan's) court, the liberality of his rules, and his personal popularity. At the same time, they do not conceal the fact that this splendid facade hid a crumbling interior. Such extravagant expenditure was a crushing burden upon the resources of the country ; while the venality of the officials and the tyrannical caprice of the Mughul governors added to the misery of the people, who had little or no means of obtaining redress.'*

Shah Jahan increased the state demand to one-half of the produce of the soil and as the revenue demand rose, the production fell in the same proportion. The cultivators began deserting their fields, but they were compelled by force to carry on the cultivation. Bankruptcy began to stare the Mughul government in the face in the times of Aurangzeb and his successors who had to fight many wars to gain the throne and retain it. The economic collapse came in the time of Alamgir II (1754-1759) who was starved and the revenues even of the royal privy-purse-estate were usurped by the unscrupulous wazir Imad-ul-Mulk. A month and a half after his accession, Alamgir II had no suitable conveyance to enable him to ride in procession to the Idgah and he had to walk on foot from the harem to the stone mosque of the fort.

The historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes that 'once no fire was kindled in the harem kitchen for three days, and one day the princesses could bear starvation no longer and in frantic disregard of *parda* rushed out of the palace to the city ; but the fort gates being closed,

* W. Foster : *English Factories in India (1655-60)*, pp. 1-2.

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they sat down in the men's quarters for a day and a night after which they were persuaded to go back to their rooms."* This happened in 1755. The wonder is that the bankrupt Mughul government lasted for another fifty years.

Fifthly, Aurangzeb's unwise policy of religious persecution of the Hindus, who formed the bulk of the country's population, hastened the fall of his dynasty. Akbar had won over the Hindus by giving them religious toleration and opening careers to talent irrespective of caste, race or creed. He had enlisted Hindu warrior tribes, chiefly the Rajputs, as reliable defenders of his throne. The Rajputs under him and his three immediate successors had carried the Mughul banners to the extreme corners of the sub-continent of India and also into the heart of Central Asia. But Aurangzeb reimposed the hated *jiziya* on the Hindus, distrusted the Rajputs and made an unworthy attempt to convert the heir to the *gaddi* of Marwar to Islam. Hence, the Rajputs were alienated and were determined to fight the Mughul oppressor. The Rathors and the Sisodias remained practically in rebellion till the downfall of the empire. Their example was followed by the Bundelas and the Sikhs. The Jats were, of course, the first to lodge a strong protest against the policy of religious persecution and to attack the Mughul district officer of Mathura who had built a mosque on the site of a sacred Hindu temple known as Abdun-Nabi's Mosque, and was abducting Hindu girls. The Jat rebellion with temporary breaks remained a sore in the side of the Mughul empire and did not come to an end even after the establishment of the independent Jat kingdom of Bharatpur. The Sikhs under Guru Govind Singh vowed vengeance against the Mughuls for the emperor's brutally putting the ninth guru Tegh Bahadur to death. He converted his followers into a militant sect by establishing the famous Khalsa which became a potent factor in the downfall of Aurangzeb's dynasty.

Sixthly, in his desire to extirpate heresy in Islam, Aurangzeb turned against the Shias with as much bitterness as against the Hindus. The bigoted emperor not only discriminated against the Shias (on account of their belief in the hereditary succession of Ali to the *Caliphate*) in the matter of state employment, but he even put down their teachings, their schools, and religious practices. The Persian Shias were gifted scholars, able administrators of outstanding ability, specially in matters relating to finance. They had contributed richly to the brilliance of the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan; but now they felt that they were not wanted by the staunch Sunni emperor Aurangzeb and, therefore, they ceased coming to India to serve the Mughul empire. The Shia residents in the country, who were equally proficient in war and civil administration had to suffer persecution. Many Shia-Sunni riots took place and the emperor openly sided with the Sunnis. The result was that not only did the migration of fresh

* Sir Jadunath Sarkar : *Fall of the Mughul Empire*, Vol. II, p. 27.

talent from Central Asia come to an end, but that in India also it was killed on account of lack of patronage and of active hostility.

Seventhly, Aurangzeb's Dakhin policy which caused the destruction of the best soldiers and undermined the Mughul prestige beyond repair, contributed materially to the downfall of his dynasty. He destroyed the Shia kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkunda and waged a long, endless war of extermination against the Marathas. This obliged the hardy Marathas to fight in self-defence, and when success came to them they were encouraged to take up the offensive, cross the Narmada and invade the Mughul provinces in Northern India. The Hindus in Northern India were already alienated by Aurangzeb's policy of religious persecution and the Hindu officers and vassals of the empire were either indifferent or secretly hostile to the Mughul cause. This was the opportunity of the Marathas. They appealed to the common religious sentiments of Rajputs, the Bundelas and of the Hindus who secretly allied themselves with Baji Rao when the latter boldly proceeded to execute his policy of striking at the withering trunk of the Mughul empire in the belief that after the fall of that empire the independent provincial Muslim dynasties would fall off themselves. Thus, within thirty-one years of Aurangzeb's death, his successors had to wage war with the Sikhs, Jats, Bundelas, Rathors, Kachhwahas and Sisodias and no Hindu tribe of military value was left on their side." "The Hindus," writes Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "not only ceased to be loyal vassals of the later Mughuls, but became open enemies against whom large forces had to be diverted by the emperor in his day of danger from foreign invasion."*

Eighthly, the formation of hostile cliques at the court in the time of the later Mughul emperors, when they were faced with internal and external dangers, undermined the solidarity of the government and brought about the fall of the empire. It was expected that in the moment of danger and difficulty, Muslim nobility would present a united front against the foreign invaders, like Nadir Shah or Ahmad Shah Abdali, against internal rebels like the Jats, the Sikhs, and the Marathas. But this was impossible under a weak and profligate monarch who did not possess the requisite qualities of leadership and hence the courtiers turned their backs upon the controlling authority at the court. The nobles at the court of the later Mughul emperors were divided into two main factions, the Turani or Central Asian faction and the Irani or Persian faction. The Turanis were Sunnis, while the Iranis were Shias. The chief Turani leaders at the time of Nadir Shah's invasion were Asaf Jah Nizam-ul-Mulk and Qamar-ud-din Khan who were opposed to the Persians whose leaders were Amir Khan, Ishaq Khan and Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk. They were so bitterly hostile to each other that in their quarrels they forgot the interest of the empire and sometimes joined the invader against their

* W. Irvine : *Later Mughuls*, edited by Sarkar, Vol. II, p. 310.

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king and country. "Each fraction tried to poison the emperor against the other, thwart its plans, stir up its discontented servants, and even engaged in active hostility to it when at a distance from the court. Rebels could not be opposed with all the distance strength of the emperor ; they could always count upon secret supporters or at least neutral make-believe opponents in the imperial court and camp."

Ninthly, from the beginning of the 18th century the Muslim community as a whole, including the Mughul nobility and middle-class people suffered from intellectual bankruptcy and mental despondency, which paralysed their activity. Leaving aside Nizam-ul-Mulk there was no able and far-sighted leader among the Mughuls who could produce a well-thought-out scheme of national regeneration. Even Nizam-ul-Mulk was a thoroughly selfish and disloyal noble who instigated the Marathas to invade the Mughul territory in order to preserve the virtual kingdom that he had carved out for himself in the Dakhin. The reason was that there was no education in Mughul India which could properly train the intellect and emotion of the public, impart to them the qualities of leadership and thus ensure the requisite supply of right type of men for various fields of activity from among the masses. For want of a healthy educational system the Mughuls in the 18th century produced no political genius "to teach the country a new philosophy of life, or to kindle aspirations after a new heaven on earth. They all drifted and dozed in admiration of the wisdom of their ancestors and shook their heads at the growing degeneration of the moderns."

The Mughul aristocracy could not retain Persian as their mother tongue after 1750, and they would not adopt Urdu or any other Indian language and make it the medium of their literary expression. While they spoke Urdu at home and outside, they clung to Persian as their court-language and as the language of refinement and culture. This led to the literary barrenness of the Musalmans in general and Mughul aristocracy in particular.

Tenthly, the Mughul government was a police government and except in Akbar's time contented itself with two duties only, namely, maintenance of internal order and external peace, and collection of revenue. But when the government became weak and could not maintain internal order and external peace, it lost all justification for its existence and the people would not respect the authority that could not suppress the rebellions of its vassals and save them from foreign invaders. Ambitious provincial governors took advantage of this state of affairs and established their independence. Early during Muhammad Shah's reign, Nizam-ul-Mulk made himself a virtual ruler of affairs and established Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under Ali Vardi Khan disregarded the authority of Delhi. The Marathas had won their independence long before this time ; next the

established their supremacy over the Mughul provinces of Malwa, Bundelkhand and Gujarat and then sought to bring the entire country under their domination.

Eleventhly, the remnant power, wealth and prestige of the empire was damaged beyond repair by Nadir Shah, who invaded the country early in 1739, defeated Muhammad Shah, ordered a massacre at Delhi and carried away a huge booty, including the famous peacock throne, all estimated at seventy crores of rupees. He tore away the province of Afghanistan from the empire and heaped humiliation upon the Mughul emperor, Muhammad Shah. This was followed by seven invasions of his lieutenant, Ahmad Shah Abdali who had now become king of Kabul after the assassination of Nadir Shah. This ferocious Afghan bled our country white many a time and prostrated the Mughul empire.

Twelfthly, the rise of the English East India Company and its conversion from a trading organization into a territorial power with ambition to conquer and rule over India dealt a death blow to the Mughul empire. The Mughuls failed to keep pace with the times as far as military tactics and weapons were concerned. Their ancestors in the time of Babur had conquered India taking advantage of the decadent military system then in vogue in this country. The British with the help of the new fangled weapons, new system of warfare and military training and discipline after the European model did the same to the Mughuls in the 18th century what the Mughuls had done to the Pathans in the 16th century. The British power was entrenched on the seas and could not be dislodged without a superior navy. The Mughuls had no navy and, therefore, did not count in the struggle with the power that was supreme on the seas.

Finally, after all, the Mughuls were essentially a foreign people and their government an alien domination over the vast majority of the people of this land. Consequently, it lacked spontaneous popular support and its foundation was weak. It could not ever expect to evoke "such feelings as those which led the people of Maharashtra to follow and fight for Shivaji ; it drew no strength from ancient tradition, which has always exerted so marked an influence upon Hindu ideals and sentiments." An alien empire can last only as long as it is powerful. When the Mughul empire became weak, its decay and downfall were inevitable.