

Mughal Decline and British Entry (1608–1756)

Decline of the Mughals

After Aurangzeb's death, the Mughal Empire grew weak. Successors were unable to control nobles or provinces. Wars, invasions, and corruption reduced central power. Provinces like Bengal and Awadh started acting independently. This created a political vacuum in India, which outsiders, including the British, used for their advantage.

British Interest in India

Britain was attracted by India's wealth—cotton, silk, spices, and tea. The Industrial Revolution increased demand for raw materials and new markets. India's location was also important for controlling trade routes. The decline of Mughal authority made it easy for the British to expand their influence, especially against European rivals like the French.

East India Company's Early Development

The **East India Company**, formed in 1600, started as a trading body. Its first factory opened at Surat in 1608 under Jahangir's permission. Later, it established bases at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. The Mughals allowed this because they thought the Company was only interested in trade. Strong British naval power gave them an edge over Portuguese, Dutch, and French competitors.

Company's Growth by 1756

The Company gradually expanded beyond trade. Bombay became a strong British base after 1661. Calcutta, with **Fort William**, grew into the main center of Company activities. By the mid-1700s, the Company had its own army and collected revenues in Bengal. Its clashes with the French in the Carnatic Wars showed its political ambitions. By 1756, it was ready to challenge Indian rulers directly.

Importance for Pakistan Studies

This period marked the decline of Muslim political dominance in India. The fall of Mughal power and the rise of the British changed the balance of power. Economic exploitation hurt Indian peasants and traders. These developments set the stage for later struggles by Muslims to protect their identity, eventually leading to the Pakistan Movement.