

Weaknesses of the Mughal Empire – Size and Administration (1658–1761)

Introduction

The Mughal Empire became very large during the reign of Aurangzeb. It stretched from the Deccan in the south to Afghanistan in the north. At first, this size looked like a strength because it showed the power of the empire. But with time, the size turned into a weakness.

Communication between provinces was slow because roads and messages took a long time to travel. Orders from the capital often reached governors late or sometimes never. This created confusion in administration and reduced the authority of the emperor. The army also had to be divided into many regions, which weakened its strength. As a result, the vast size became difficult to manage. This weakness slowly contributed to the decline of the empire.

Aurangzeb's Challenges

Aurangzeb faced many difficulties in ruling such a large empire. He spent most of his reign fighting wars in the Deccan region. These campaigns consumed a lot of money and soldiers but gave very little result. While he was busy in the south, revolts broke out in other provinces. Many local chiefs and zamindars refused to pay revenue or follow his orders. The huge distance between the capital and provinces made it hard to control these problems. Communication was very slow, so decisions from Aurangzeb often arrived too late. The vast size also allowed some groups to grow stronger against the empire. Instead of strength, the large size became a heavy burden for Aurangzeb. This weakened his rule and created instability across the empire.

Successors' Problems

After Aurangzeb's death, his successors faced even greater problems. Unlike him, they were weak and lacked military ability. They could not manage the vast empire that Aurangzeb had left behind. Many provincial governors, such as those in Bengal, Hyderabad, and Awadh, began acting independently. They collected revenue but did not send it to the central treasury. They also ignored the emperor's orders, which reduced Delhi's control over provinces. Internal conflicts between nobles further weakened the empire. The central authority grew weaker every year, and the empire became divided. As a result, the size of the empire became impossible for the weak successors to control. This situation quickly pushed the empire towards decline.

Economic Burden

The large size of the empire also created a heavy economic burden. A vast army was needed to defend distant provinces and maintain order. Feeding and paying this army required huge expenses from the treasury. Collecting revenue from far-off areas was very difficult, and corruption became common. Provincial officials often kept money for themselves instead of sending it to the capital. Long and costly wars in the Deccan worsened the financial crisis. As a

result, the central treasury became weak. Trade and agriculture also suffered because of constant instability. Farmers and traders could not work peacefully, and markets were disturbed. These economic problems further weakened the empire's ability to survive.

Legacy

The size of the Mughal Empire, which was once its greatest strength, eventually became a weakness. Under strong rulers like Akbar and Aurangzeb, it was managed, but under weaker successors it was impossible to control. The vast territories were too difficult to govern with poor communication and weak administration. Provincial rulers gained independence, and the empire lost unity. Economic burdens grew heavier, while invasions from outside further damaged stability. The empire could not respond effectively because it was too large and divided. The decline of central authority encouraged both internal revolts and foreign attacks. By the mid-18th century, the empire had broken into smaller states. Therefore, the size of the empire played a very important role in its decline.