

Q. What were the chief features of the political conditions of India in the 18th century?

Ans. There was lack of political unity in India in the 18th century. The Mughal empire had declined and there was no power to replace it. There were revolts in different parts of the country and soon the Marathas, the Jats, the Sikhs and the Rajputs declared their independence. The Mughal Governors broke all their connections with the centre and became independent. Thus came into being the independent states of Bengal, Oudh and Hyderabad. There were rivalries among all these powers. In 18th century India was also attacked by the Afghan invaders like Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. It was during this century the European powers began to meddle in the Indian affairs. Truly, the 18th century was the darkest period in the history of India.

Q. Why did the authority of the central Government decline after the death of Aurangzeb?

Ans. The unity and stability of the Mughal Empire had been shaken up during the reign of Aurangzeb. It began to disintegrate rapidly after his death. All the Mughals who succeeded him on the throne of Delhi were very weak and inefficient. They didn't have ability or will power to control such a vast empire. The Mughal governors took the advantage of this situation and broke all the connections with the centre and became independent. More over, the economic stability of the empire was resigned because of the constant wars. At the same time there was invasion of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali which proved fatal for the Mughal Empire and completely shattered the economy. Thus the central Government became weak and its authority declined.

Q. Why was the provincial kingdoms always engaged in wars?

Ans. After the death of Aurangzeb the central power began to decline and the provincial governors took advantage of this situation and broke all their connections with the centre and became independent. These provincial governors in order to become strong started expanding their empires. So there were rivalries among all these powers which this led to frequent wars among the neighbouring provinces.

Q. What was the impact of invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali on the Mughal Empire and other Indian powers?

Ans. Nadir Shah invaded India in 1739 with a view to plunder its wealth. He gave a death-blow to the Mughal Empire and destroyed its prestige. The imperial treasury became empty. Economic life of the country was paralysed. The Marathas got a chance to increase their power. Hyderabad, Oudh and Bengal asserted their independence. His invasion in short left the Mughal Empire bleeding and prestart.

Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ablest general of Nadir Shah invaded India many times from 1748-1761. He gave a blow to the Mughal Empire and restricted the rising power of Marathas. In the 3rd battle of Panipat the political prestige and military strength of the Marathas Chiefs began to fight among themselves. It gave a chance to the British East India Company to establish its hold in Bengal and South India. Thus it paved the way for the establishment of British power in India.

Q. Why did the Rajput power decline after the death of Aurangzeb?

Ans. The Rajputs never organised themselves in a single power. They were frequently involved in petty quarrels among themselves and thus could never emerge as a greater central power even after the death of Aurangzeb, when the Mughal Empire was decaying; they failed to rise to the occasion. They still continued their in-fighting and thus neutralized their resources. During the 18th century, the Rajputs became very weak due to the rise of the Sikhs, Jats and the Marathas.

Q. In spite of being a dominant power for about four decades, why couldn't the Marathas establish their empire in India?

Ans. The Maratha power suffered from certain weaknesses because of which they were not able to establish their empire in India.

1. The Marathas couldn't emerge as a united nation because of mutual rivalries and quarrels among the various chiefs.
2. The policy of expansion proved suicidal. They conquered vast country from Attack to Cuttack but couldn't exercise effective control over it.
3. The defeat of the Marathas in the 3rd Battle of Panipat gave a severe blow to their power.
4. Their policy of plundering and looting the Hindu states of northern India alienated them from the Rajputs and Sikhs.
5. The Maratha hordes robbed both the Hindus and the Muslims of their riches and realized various taxes such as chauth and sardeshmukhi. The result was that they failed to win the confidence of the people and lost their sympathy.

Q. What were the main political divisions among the Marathas? Name the Centre of each of them?

Ans. The main political divisions among the Marathas were.

1. Peshwa at Pune
2. Gaikwad at Baroda
3. Bhonsle at Nagpur
4. Nolkar at Indore
5. Sindhia at Gwalior