

DECLINE OF MUGHAL EMPIRE (PART-3)

मुगल साम्राज्य का पतन (भाग-3)

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CAUSES OF THE DECLINE (पतन के कारण)

► Major Theories on Decline of Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire held sway over a large part of India for nearly three centuries, but a drastic decline in its power and prestige came about by the first half of the eighteenth century. The process of the decline and emergency of regional polities has been intensely debated among historians. It has also been a subject on which scholarly opinion is more sharply divided than on any other aspects of Mughal history. Each and every historian has different theories on the decline of Mughal Empire and the major theories were as follows:

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► Satish Chandra, Jagirdari Crisis:

The first and foremost among them is the thesis put forward by Satish Chandra in his *Parties and Politics of the Mughal Court (1959)*. He builds up the hypothesis of a *Jagirdari Crisis*. According to him, the crisis was

- (a) Contracting hasil from the mahāls;
- (b) An increase in the number of total mansabdars;
and
- (c) A general tendency to allot increasingly high mansabs.

All this, according to Satish Chandra led to a state of *bejāgīri*. Mughal decline has to be seen in the Mughal failure towards the end of Aurangzeb's reign, to maintain the system of the mansabdar-Jagirdar. As this system went into disarray, The Empire was bound to collapse.

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► M. Athar Ali, Jagirdari Crisis:

Athar's Ali Work on *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* [1966]), who made a count of the nobles in the Mughal Empire. According to his count of nobles of the rank of 1000 and above, the percentage of the *khānazāds* and the *Rajputs* started falling, while the *Deccanis* and the *Marathas* was growing which emphasized the subsequent shortage of *jagirs*. The sudden increase in the number of nobles, caused due to the expansion of Empire into the Deccan and the Maratha territory, created a crisis in the functioning of the Jagir system. According to Athar Ali, the nobles competed for better *jagirs*, which were increasingly becoming rare due to the influx of nobles from the South. The logical consequence was the erosion in the political structure which was based on *jagirdari* to a large extent.

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► Irfan Habib, Agrarian Crisis:

The second major theory of the Aligarh School was built by Irfan Habib in his *Agrarian System of Mughal Empire* (1963). He built up the hypothesis of an 'Agrarian Crisis'. He tries to work out the causes of the decline of the Mughal Empire in a class framework which does not stop simply at identifying the classes but extends to identify the Mughal state as 'the protective arm of the exploiting class'. He illustrates the basic nature of the Mughal land-revenue demand. The Mughal *jagirdari* system according to him contributed to a cash nexus and stimulated town-based crafts. Habib implicitly highlights a number of social contradictions in the society controlled and managed by the Mughal Empire.

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Thus he points out the contradiction between the village headmen, the peasant proprietors and menial workers on the one hand and the nobility on the other. He also points out at the intra-ruling class contradictions: the zamindars and the intermediary zamindars on the one hand, and the nobility on the other. He also takes into account the contradictions between the *muqaddams* and the ordinary peasants, and between the ordinary peasants including the *muqaddams* and the menial classes.

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The basic features of this 'Agrarian Crisis' as propounded by Irfan Habib are:

- (a) High rate of demand built in the zabt system (more than half of the actual produce);
- (b) Increasing gap between the actual hasil and the expected jama;
- (c) Rotation of jagirs, pressurizing the peasants and ruination of agriculture;
- (d) Ruination and flight of peasantry from the jagirs, which affected the zamindars also as they were closely linked to the Village Community; and
- (e) Breakout of agrarian revolts which were manifestations of peasant discontent.

So according to Habib these Peasant protests weakened the political and Social Fabric of the Empire.

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➤ J.F.Richards, Bejagiri:

Further improvements were made in the theories of Mughal decline by J.F. Richards who pointed out that the state of bejāgīrī was caused by a deliberate policy of increasing the share of the khalisa revenues, the lack of *Paibaki* land was due to a deliberate decisions on Aurangzeb's part to keep the most lucrative jagirs under Khalisa in order to provide for a continued campaigning in the Karnataka and against the Maratha. This resulted in a further clamour for jagirs by the nobles and the concentration of more funds with the government from 1687 onwards.

(To be continued)