Medieval History · GS - I

Clarify how mid-eighteenth century India was beset with the spectre of a fragmented polity.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2017	GS - I	Medieval History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Mughal decline; weak central authority; regional successor states; Marathas; Nawabs of Bengal and Awadh; Hyderabad; Afghan invasions; European trading companies; political instability

Model Answer

Introduction

By the mid-eighteenth century, India was experiencing a major political transition as Mughal imperial authority weakened and competing regional powers emerged.

Causes of Political Fragmentation

1. Decline of the Mughal Empire: After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, succession disputes, weak rulers and factional conflicts undermined central authority.

2. Rise of Regional States: Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad increasingly operated independently, even when nominally recognising Mughal sovereignty.

3. Maratha Expansion: The Marathas expanded across large parts of India but faced resistance from regional powers and difficulties in establishing a stable subcontinental political order.

4. Invasions: Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 and Ahmad Shah Abdali's repeated incursions exposed the empire's military weakness.

5. Rajput and Sikh Assertions: Several regional powers strengthened their autonomy, further reducing effective Mughal control.

6. European Intervention: The English and French East India Companies exploited local rivalries to expand their political and military influence.

Consequences

The absence of a dominant central power produced shifting alliances, frequent warfare and revenue instability. The Battle of Plassey (1757) illustrated how European commercial interests could become political and territorial powers.

Conclusion

Mid-eighteenth-century India was not without powerful states, but it lacked a durable overarching authority. This fragmentation created opportunities for European colonial expansion.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP