Comparative Challenges of Imperial Expansion and Colonial Rule

Posted on September 17, 2018

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Empire, Expansion, and the Problem of Governing Diversity

An empire basically entails a central state that has a hold on diverse areas and populations. Empires rise and spread as their power gets strengthened, but they do fall as soon as they lose control over the territory or are conquered by someone else. As these empires are large, they are usually reduced to much smaller political and manageable units named provinces.

While comparing the rise and development of empires, we reviewed some history and came up with some similarities and differences. Cyrus the Great, who had control over the Achaemenid Persian Empire, developed it significantly in less than 30 years, and it reached its greatest extent within 75 years. In the sixth century, the Roman Republic came into being, but on the other hand, the Roman Empire didn't reach its greatest extent until 117 CE. Certain reasons emerged as causes of rise and growth. The Achaemenid Persian Empire was built mostly through military conquest. The Maurya Empire in India combined religious conversions, political sabotage, and military defeat in order to increase its tenure of rule (Said, 1978). In an aggressive society, the Romans did not set out to conquer the place, but they got involved in many wars. After defeating enemies, Romans offered them citizenship to some extent as a reward for loyalty. Alexander the Great is known as one of the greatest empire builders in history. The growth of his empire within a short time set an example for everyone of how one small state can be turned into a huge empire, depicting the way in which situations and events elsewhere in the central state play a role in the state's success in building an empire. Philip II of Macedon, also known as the father of Alexander, ruled from 359 BCE to 336 BCE; he was a talented commander in the army and king. He created the platform for the victories of Alexander over Persia. He used threats, bribery, and warfare to make his kingdom secure. Plus, without his understanding and willpower, Alexander would not have been highlighted in history.

When we talk of the fall of empires, we basically mean that the principal government did not implement its extensive power. This situation happened because the government was terminated, or the government's power was reduced as parts of the country became independent of its control. As kingdoms are complicated and big, when we hear about their fall, there must be multiple reasons rather than one cause.

Financial, Social, Ecological, and Political Pressures on Imperial Rule

Major issues historians suggested were:

- Financial issues
- Societal and ethnic issues
- Ecological issues
- Governmental issues

Reviewing history, before the conquest of Alexander, Achaemenid Persia had internal conflicts, plus the kingdom remained integral during the fourth to fifth centuries BCE. Conversely, the reality of the internal divisions made Persia vulnerable to intruders eager to take Persian territory.

Alexander of Macedon occupied the Persian Empire in 334 BCE, but in 330 BCE, Darius III, the Persian King, died, rumoured to have been murdered by one of his generals. Alexander took over the power of Persia and gave charge to all the institutions and officials to manage his massive empire. Hence, we can observe that Alexander was taking over as a new ruler and securing the Persian Empire instead of destroying the Persian state. After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE, he was without an heir. So, the empire was distributed among the generals, and thus, at that point, Persia collapsed and was replaced by multiple competing states. This division was completed within years.

So, the main factors that played a vital role in the fall of Achaemenid Persia were military and political factors. Political divisions made the empire militarily weaker. During the reign of the Guptas, they had control of a large empire in the northern area of India, which lasted from 320 CE to 550 CE. From 450 CE onwards, the Kingdom of the Guptas was exposed to assaults in the northwest region of the kingdom from the Hephthalites, known as the White Huns. Such unending invasions weakened the Gupta military and its financial resources, thus leading to the long process of decline.

External Invasion and the Decline of the Gupta Empire

A continuous grudge against the White Huns made the Gupta Empire lose a great area of its territory by 500 CE. The Gupta Empire compelled the Huns to leave the territory in 528 CE. However, the fiscal impact of the loss of territory and a long period of fighting made the Gupta Empire tired and weak. Within the next several decades, many regions were taken away from the control of the Gupta Empire, while the Vakataka Kingdom, Malwa, and neighbouring states became more powerful. By 550 CE, the Gupta Empire didn’t exist, but a small area of the empire survived for another decade. This Gupta Empire is an illustration of imperial downfall where the dominant government was still not in a state to exercise its authority and affect more than an inadequate region. The scenario can be

compared with the Western Roman Empire, whose latter ruler was compelled to move beyond the authority, eradicating Roman municipal control.

Factors that were seen as major causes of the fall of the Gupta Empire were mainly economic and military. The financial issues were the result of many challenges the military of the empire faced (Osterhammel, 2005). This led to political issues as the state lost territory and deteriorated.

Furthermore, other issues include culture. British culture was forced on colonists, whereas their original culture was banned, forgotten, and ignored. The economy, being one of the issues for colonists, declined as the profit earned from goods was taken to Britain. Soldiers of the colonies, for the sake of Britain, struggled and perished. Without the empire, the soldiers would not have died or even fought. Religion was one of the sensitive causes. The preachers who came along with the empire imposed Christianity on the colonists, banning the practice of various religions. Disease was another issue, as the British brought new viruses to distant colonies, and a great many people died due to lack of immunity. Theft became one of the issues as the empire took charge of the assets and areas of the colonies, resulting in the death of many native tribes like the Aborigines. Similarly, slavery was also one cause. African slaves were sent to America to be sold.

References

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