

Political Formation in Eighteenth Century India

The Mughal Empire was at its zenith under Aurangzeb. After his death, the empire weakened and many new regional powers emerged and gained strength before the establishment of British.

The great Mughal Empire rapidly declined after the death of Aurangzeb. The Indian subcontinent witnessed major political changes in the 18th century. The period between Aurangzeb's death and the establishment of the British Empire in India was a time when many independent states rose to power. The subcontinent was fragmented and ruled by different rulers. In this final chapter, we shall study about these rulers and the political scenario of the subcontinent just before the British came to power. The 18th century also marked the end of the medieval period in India.

CRISIS IN MUGHAL EMPIRE AND LATER MUGHALS

Aurangzeb died in 1707. Soon after his death, the disintegration of the Great Mughal Empire began. There were a series of inconsequential kings known as the Later Mughals. After Aurangzeb's death, a war of succession broke out and finally, **Bahadur Shah I** ascended the throne. It was difficult for him to hold the large empire together which was already in a state of collapse. Also, the Sikhs rose up in revolt during his reign. He tried to implement peace. His reign was short and lasted till 1712.

History Reveals

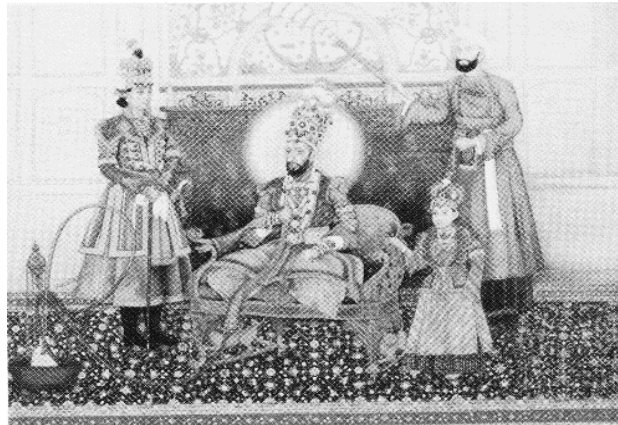
When Aurangzeb died, he left numerous successors that included sons, grandsons and great grandsons.

Bahadur Shah's sons fought for the throne and the survivor **Jahandar Shah** ascended the throne in 1712. He was lazy and neglected his duties and the power was in the hands of his Prime Minister **Zulfikar Khan**. Jahandar Shah was defeated and killed by Farruksiyyar who ascended the throne with the help of the **Sayyid brothers** who were very powerful nobles. However, he was merely a puppet in their hands and was later killed by them.

Q. The Sayyid brothers were also called 'Kingmakers'. why ?

Muhammad Shah came to the throne in 1719. He got rid of the Sayyid brothers. It was during his reign that many provinces like Deccan, Bengal and Awadh became independent.

Bahadur Shah Zafar was an emperor in name only. His empire was limited to the Red fort. After the Revolt of 1857, the British exiled him to Burma where he died in 1862. His sons were executed and with that the glorious Mughal Empire came to an end.



Bahadur Shah Zafar with his Princes

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The decline of the Mughal Empire was due to a combination of many reasons. It began during the last years of Aurangzeb's rule.

Aurangzeb's intolerance to other religions His orthodox religious policy led to dissatisfaction among the people and invoked the wrath of both the Hindus and the Shia Muslims.

Lack of competent rulers

The successors were weak and the empire was left in the hands of the nobles who were corrupt, selfish and greedy. Widespread corruption weakened the empire.

No definite laws of succession

There was frequent change in the succession of emperors. The wars of succession led to bitterness, bloodshed, loss of money and prestige and the eventual downfall of the empire.

Lack of zeal among later Mughals

The Later Mughals had little interest in reviving the declining empire. Many states of the empire had already declared themselves independent during Aurangzeb's rule, and such developments increased after his death.

Size of the empire

The huge size of the empire made administration very difficult. The Later Mughals were not able leaders to unite such a large empire.

Financial crisis

The Emperors like Shah Jahan squandered away the wealth in construction. Aurangzeb faced many revolts and the royal treasury was burdened in paying for the long wars fought to suppress the rebellions.

Sikhs

The Sikhs emerged as a powerful group. They challenged the authority of the Mughals.

Marathas

The Marathas rose to power and became the nchallenged rulers of the Deccan.

Advent of the British

The last nail in the coffin was the advent of British in India. They came in as traders but slowly established themselves as the dominant power in India. They made India a colony and ruled for the next 200 years.

EMERGENCE OF NEW POWERS AND KINGDOMS

The post Mughal era saw the rise of small regional succession states². This was because the Later Mughals were weak, the empire was very huge and the distant areas were difficult to manage. Governors were appointed to look after the areas which were distant from the Mughal capital. However, they declared themselves independent from the Mughals and established their own states.

OLD MUGHAL PROVINCES THAT BECAME INDEPENDENT STATES

Hyderabad

Hyderabad became a part of the Mughal Empire in the Deccan during the rule of Aurangzeb. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor appointed **Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jahi** as the governor of the Deccan in 1713. Later, he was made the wazir of the Mughal Empire. But, later he moved back to the Deccan. In 1724, he declared himself the governor of the six Deccan provinces, Hyderabad being one of them. He started the Asaf Jahi dynasty. During this period, Persian, Urdu, Telugu and Marathi developed simultaneously. The highest official positions were given to the deserving person irrespective of their religion.

History Reveals

Aurangzeb's contribution to the city of Hyderabad was the completion of the Mecca Masjid in 1693. The city lost its importance when the capital of the province was shifted to Aurangabad which became the new headquarters of the Mughals in the Deccan.

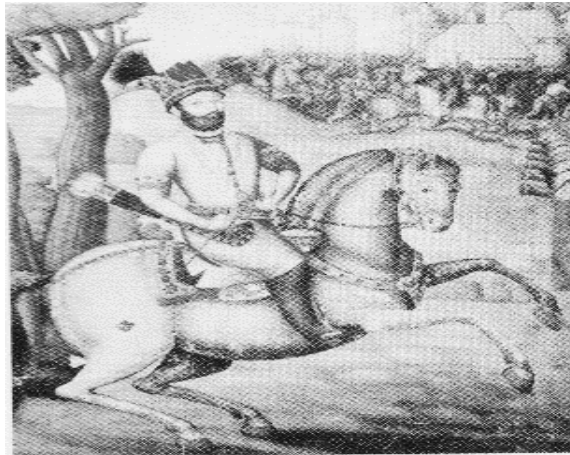
Nizam-ul-Mulk's successors ruled as Nizams of Hyderabad. Nizam Ali Khan, Asaf Jahi II, moved the capital back to Hyderabad from Aurangabad. Hyderabad became the largest Indian state in British India and the Nizams, the rulers of the state were the richest in the world till 1940's.



Nizam-ul-Mulk of Hyderabad

PERSIAN INVASIONS

Muhammad Shah came to the throne in 1719. He got rid of the Sayyid brothers. It was during his reign that many provinces like Deccan, Bengal and Awadh became independent. In 1739, **Nadir Shah** invaded India. He plundered the Mughal Empire and carried away treasures worth crores of rupees. He also carried away the **Peacock throne** and the **Koh-i-noor** diamond. This invasion resulted in a loss of prestige of the Mughal Empire and revealed its weakness.



Nadir Shah

Ahmad Shah Abdali led as many as seven expeditions against India between 1748 and 1767 for financial gains. He carried with him a lot of money from India which were utilised by him for increasing his military strength. The invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali led to loss of prestige and finances of the Mughal Empire.

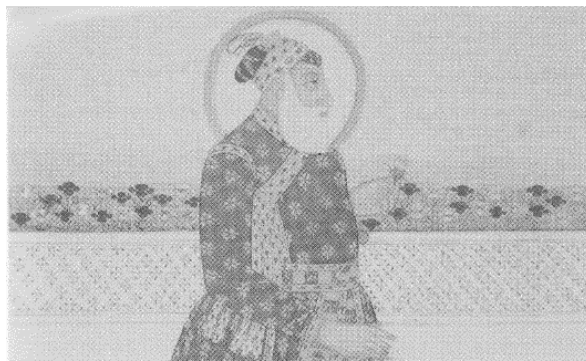


Awadh

Awadh roughly occupied the area of modern day Uttar Pradesh. It was an important province because of its strategic location which was an advantage for trade and commerce. Also, agriculture flourished there because of fertile soil. In 1722, **Saadat Khan** was appointed the governor of Awadh by the Mughal Emperor. As the power of the Emperor declined, he established a strategic favourable and suitable. Established his own dynasty. He was succeeded by Safdarjung, his son-in-law. He faced many problems—the corrupt policy of the Delhi court, lawlessness and the army. He dealt with all the problems and established peace in the province.

Bengal

Bengal has a rich and diverse cultural history that dates back to the ancient times. The state was ruled by numerous dynasties. During Mughal Bengal became a recognised commercial centre in the country. They were patrons of art and culture and Bengal's already rich culture blossomed even more.



Saadat Khan of Awadh

The Mughals appointed governors to rule Bengal. **Murshid Ali Khan** became the governor of Bengal in 1717 CE. He shifted the capital of Bengal from Dacca to Murshidabad and declared himself the Nawab. He paid a nominal allegiance to the Mughal emperor. He built the beautiful Katra Masjid.

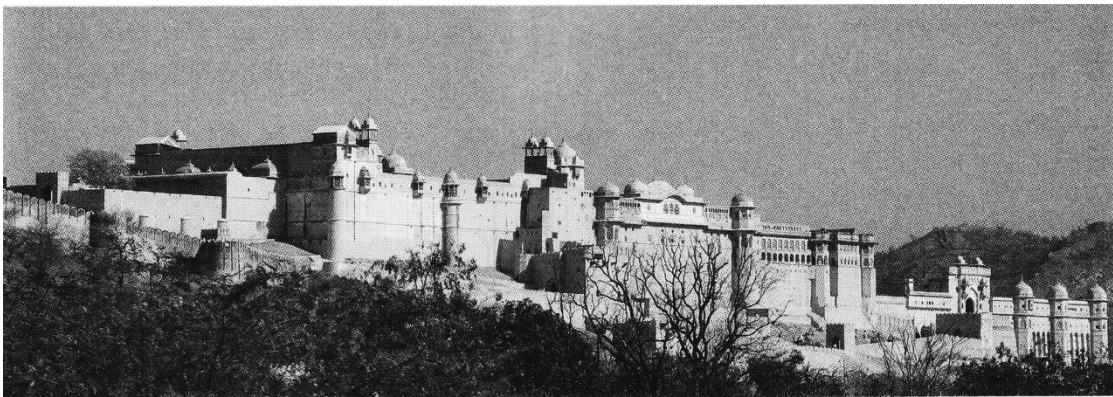
Siraj-ud-din, his son-in-law succeeded him in 1725. He was generous and just. Alvardi Khan became the next Nawab. He faced problems of repeated conflict with the Marathas. His grandson, Siraj-ud-daulah succeeded him. This young Nawab had to face the growing ambitions of the British. He was defeated by them in the **Siraj-ud-Daulah** of Murshidabad Battle of Plassey in 1757. After him, the British placed a puppet Nawab on the throne of Bengal. Peace and prosperity flourished in Bengal under the rule of the Nawabs. Trade and agriculture were promoted and there was no religious bias.



Siraj-ud-Daulah of Murshidabad

THE WATANJAGIRS OF THE RAJPUTS

The Mughal emperors had good relations with the Rajputs. Infact, many Rajput kings had served extremely well under the Mughals. There were many Rajput kings who started enjoying considerable power in their watan jagirs. Due to Aurangzeb's strict religious policy, the relations between the Mughals and Rajputs had soured. As the supremacy of the Mughal empire declined, many Rajput chiefs also asserted their independence. The Rajput kings who had been running an independent state within the Mughal Empire tried to extend their territories, but were thwarted by the kings of the neighbouring regions. Some Rajput kings were made subedars of wealthy provinces of Gujarat and Malwa. Powerful Rajput families claimed the subedari of the rich provinces of Gujarat and Malwa. Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur held the governorship of Gujarat whereas Sawai Raja Jai Singh of Amber was governor of Malwa. In 1713, emperor Jahandar Shah renewed these positions. Some Rajput kings also seized other royal territories surrounding their watans. Nagaur was conquered and annexed to the house of Jodhpur. Amber seized Bundi.



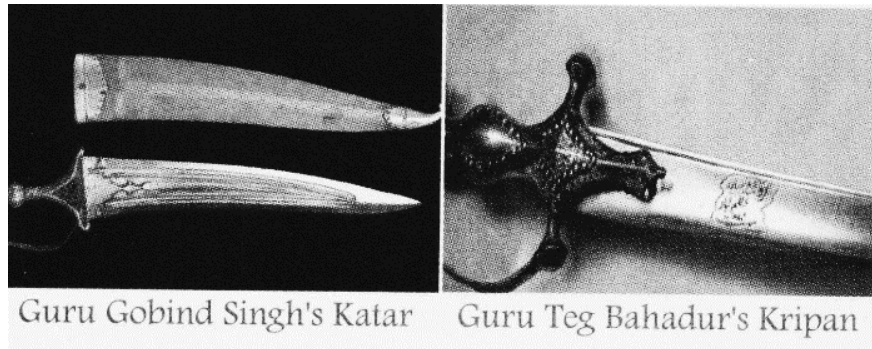
Amber Palace, Jaipur

Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh was the ruler of Amber. After the death of Aurangzeb, he remained in the good books of Muhammad Shah because of his diplomacy. He founded his new capital at Jaipur. He was given the subadari of Agra in 1722. However, in 1740s, the Marathas prevented the Rajput kings from expanding their territories.

SEIZING INDEPENDENCE

Sikhs

Aurangzeb was against the Sikhs and forced them to convert to Islam. Those who refused were killed. **Guru Teg Bahadur** and **Guru Gobind Singh** were put to death. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur became the commander of the Khalsa. The Sikhs rose in revolt under his leadership. The aim of this organisation was to safeguard Sikhs against the Mughals. Many Sikhs joined him to avenge the death of the gurus. In 1710, the first Sikh state was established. Now the Sikhs organised themselves into 12 misls or jathas. Later Maharaja Ranjit Singh became the leader of all the misls. He expanded the borders of the Sikh kingdom. Even the British did not dare attack and conquer this area until Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death.



Guru Gobind Singh's Katar

Guru Teg Bahadur's Kripan

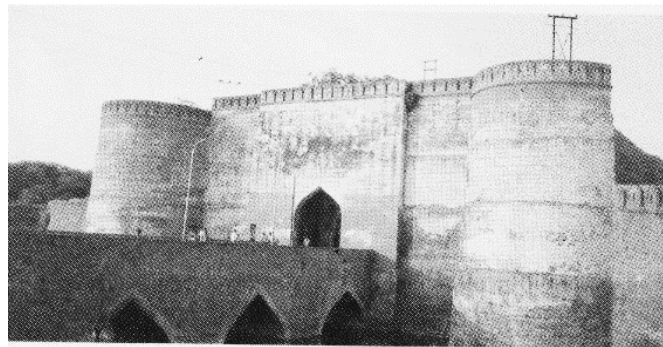
History Reveals

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is known as the Lion of Punjab.

Jats

The Jats are spread over northern India and have a history of being brave and ready fighters. They offered heavy resistance against any foreign force that treated them unjustly. They came to prominence in the seventeenth century, when they rebelled against the atrocities carried out by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. The more successful second rebellion began in 1686, and continued post the death of Aurangzeb. Churaman, the Jat leader was determined to clear Jat lands of the Mughals. He built up an army and even constructed a fort at Thoon (near Agra). The Jats had established their region in the areas surrounding Delhi and Agra under the leadership of Churaman. They were able to establish an independent kingdom with Bharatpur as its capital. Several other major and minor Jat kingdoms followed. The major ones were Panipat and Ballabhgarh.

The Jats were agriculturists and established important trading centres. The later leaders, Suraj Mal and Jawahir Shah further strengthened the Jat kingdom.



Lohagarh Fort, Bharatpur

Mysore

Mysore rose to prominence under the leadership of Haider Ali. He extended the boundaries of Mysore and was a brilliant administrator. He strongly resisted expansion of colonial rule and fought two wars against the British. After his death, his incomplete mission was carried forward by his son, Tipu Sultan. He fought against the British valiantly. He was an able military strategist. He worked for the welfare of people and undertook many public works and promoted agriculture, trade and commerce. He was a true patriot and realised the potential danger of the East India Company. Four Anglo-Mysore Wars were fought between 1776 and 1799. Fighting with all his valour, Tipu Sultan eventually died defending his capital, Seringapatam in 1799. His rule was short but eventful. His patriotic spirit inspired the Indian freedom fighters in later years.

History Reveals

Tipu Sultan left behind royal memorabilia that included his exquisitely ornamented weaponry, the mechanical 'Tipu's Tiger', his golden tiger head throne, Tipu's coinage, as well as the famous engraved royal 'Sword of Tipu Sultan', which he possessed in person when he breathed his last.

Marathas

Shivaji Bhonsle (1630-1680) founded the Maratha kingdom in the Deccan. The Maratha Empire posed a military challenge for the Mughals and played a vital role in hastening its decline.

Shivaji was the son of Shahji Bhonsle and Jijabai. His father was a noble in the court of Bijapur. His mother groomed him well. He had an excellent teacher, Dada Konddev ji, who taught him the art of warfare. He dreamt of building a Maratha Empire by uniting all the Marathas under one independent kingdom.

The Deccan was controlled by three Islamic states. The Nawab of Bijapur sent Afzal Khan, a fearless general, to kill Shivaji. But Shivaji defeated and killed Afzal Khan. The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb sent Shaista Khan to defeat Shivaji but he was also unsuccessful. In 1664, Shivaji invaded Surat and looted it to get funds for his army. He posed a serious threat to the Mughals, so Aurangzeb sent a huge army to defeat him. Shivaji fought bravely but the sheer strength of the Mughal army forced him to ask for a peace treaty. The **Treaty of Purandhar** was signed in 1665 CE. He and his son were taken to Agra and put under house arrest but they escaped.

Shivaji was crowned as king in 1674 at his capital, Raigad. He assumed the title of Chhatrapati. He achieved and re-established Maratha rule in his homeland after being ruled by Muslim dynasties for over hundred years. His administrative and military administration helped to lay the foundation of a strong empire.

Q. why did Shivaji give himself the title "Chhatrapati"?

Administration

Shivaji was a proficient administrator. He looked into the welfare of his people. He was assisted by a cabinet of eight ministers. The chief minister was the Peshwa. He was responsible for the welfare of people and co-ordination of various departments. The Amatya looked after the accounts. The Mantri was the home minister and the Sachiv was responsible for all royal letters and accounts of the Paraganas. The Senapati recruited and trained soldiers. The highest judicial authority was the Nyayadhish. Danadhyakshya looked after the charitable works.



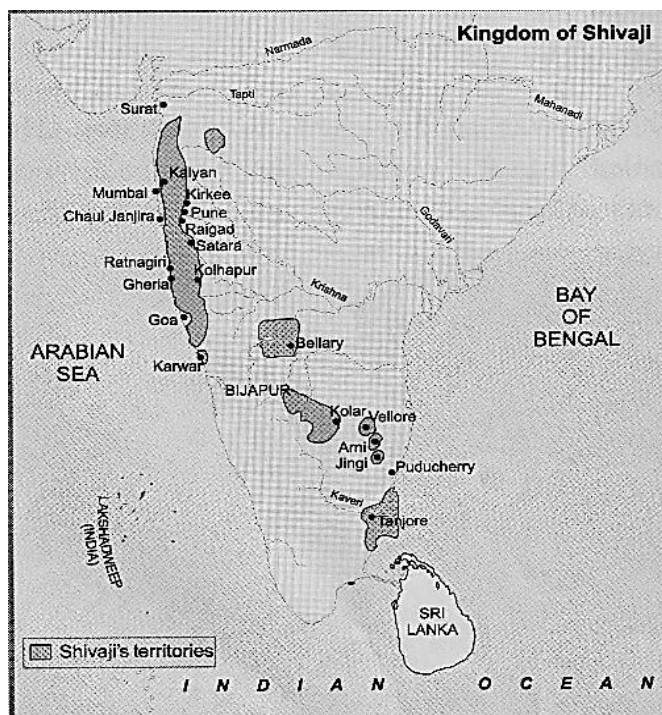
A Statue of Shivaji

Shivaji's revenue system was well-organised. The farmers paid two-third of the produce as revenue. In parts of the Mughal Empire which were under Shivaji's authority, two types of taxes were levied. Chauth

was one-fourth of the land revenue. Sardeshmukhi was one-tenth of the land revenue. He cautioned the officials against harassment. Shivaji was just and approachable to all.

Military

Many changes were introduced in the military administration. Shivaji had a standing army called



Mop No. 10.2 the Maratha Empire in 1600 CE

Paga. He introduced guerilla and commando warfare. He initiated the use of bagh nakh (tiger claw), a traditional weapon designed to fit over the knuckles. He also invented a weapon called vita. He had infantry, cavalry and navy. He enforced strict disciplinary measures in the army and had an efficient network of spies. The tiny kingdom established by Shivaji grew and in the course of time, became the strongest power in India. Shivaji became an icon of freedom fighters in India struggle for independence.

Shivaji's Successors

After Shivaji's death, his son Sambhaji took over. However, he was captured and killed by the Mughals. After him, his brother Rajaram was crowned king. After him, Shahuji, Shivaji's grandson ruled the empire till 1749.

The Peshwas

The Peshwa or Prime minister was appointed to act as the head of the state in times of emergency in the kingdom. With time, the Peshwas became the real rulers of the empire while the successors of Shivaji were just nominal heads of the state. The office of Peshwa became hereditary. The first Peshwa was Balaji Vishwanath. He procured rights to self-administration and revenue collection in six Mughal provinces.

After him his son Bajirao I became the Peshwa. He captured the Malwa territory in the north and drove out the Portuguese from their occupations in the Western Ghats. He plundered territories up to Delhi. He died in 1740.

Balaji Bajirao succeeded as the next Peshwa. He defeated Ahmad Shah Abdali near Delhi in 1756. But in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761), between the Marathas and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Marathas lost the war. Balaji Bajirao died soon after the war.

Madhavrao became the next Peshwa and he restored the glory of the Maratha Empire to a large extent. In 1796, Bajirao II became the next Peshwa. He signed a treaty with the British which weakened the Peshwa power. His son, Nana Saheb Peshwa opposed the British and attempted to revive the Maratha glory. However, the Peshwa power came to an end after the Revolt of 1857.



Balaji Bajirao

Around the World

In the 1700s, the British were well-established in the east coast of North America. They had thirteen colonies which they ruled strictly. The colonists had to pay more taxes than the people in Britain. They considered it unfair and riots broke out. The British levied a tax which made it very expensive to buy tea in America. In 1773, the colonists climbed onboard ships delivering tea to the Port of Boston and threw all the tea chests into the sea. This famous protest is known as the Boston Tea Party. Fighting broke out between the colonists and the British. The colonists began to think of themselves as Americans and in 1776, the leaders of all thirteen colonies signed a document called the Declaration of Independence. According to this, the colonies were now an independent country and the new country was called the United States of America.