Chapter

2

Rise of Autonomous States

After the decline of the Mughal Empire, the second major theme of the 18th century Indian polity was the rise of autonomous states. From the debris of the Mughal Empire arose a large number of autonomous and semi-autonomous states which the British had to overcome before emerging supreme in India. Thus, in this chapter, you will learn about the Indian States and Society on the eve of British conquest.

By 1761, the Mughal Empire was an empire only in name. Its weaknesses had enabled regional powers to assert their independence. Yet the new states did not directly challenge the authority of the Mughal emperor, as he continued to be seen as the source of political legitimacy. These states also continued the Mughal institutions in many areas of governance. Thus, the emergence of these states in the 18th century, therefore, represented a transformation rather than collapse of the polity. It signified a decentralisation of power and not a power vacuum or political chaos.

Broadly three kinds of states arose:

1. **The Successor States:** They broke away from Mughal Empire and arose as a result of assertion of autonomy by governors of Mughal provinces. These were Hyderabad, Carnatic, Bengal and Awadh.
2. **The New States:** They arose as a result of rebellion by local chiefs against Mughal authority. These were the states set up by the rebellious Marathas, Sikhs, Jats and Afghans.
3. **The Independent States:** They had been only nominally a part of Mughal Empire and now in the 18th century became completely independent. These were the regions on the south-west and south-east coast of India, i.e. Mysore, Kerala and the Rajputs.

These states were strong enough to destroy Mughal power but none was able to replace it. Though some states were very prosperous and some gained considerable military power, none could achieve resources and power to maintain an all-India polity. One of the major weaknesses of these states was their backwardness in science and technology. This became one of the major reasons for the total subjugation of India by the most modern country of the time—the Great Britain.

The Successor States-Hyderabad, Carnatic, Bengal and Awadh

These states started exercising full autonomy, without formally renouncing their allegiance to the Mughal Emperor, thus giving rise to a new political order within the Mughal institutional

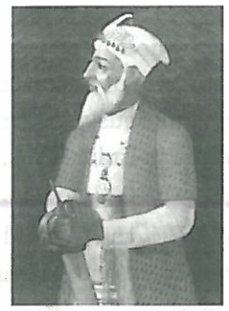
framework. The fiction of Mughal sovereignty was kept alive through the following:

- Annual revenues were sent to the imperial treasury.
- Emperor's formal confirmation was taken for the appointment to high offices.
- Orders, titles, etc., were given in the name of the Mughal Emperor.

Hyderabad and the Nizams

Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah (1724–48)

The state of Hyderabad was founded in 1724 by a powerful noble of the Turani group at the imperial court, Qamar-ud-din Siddiqi. He is also known by his titles Chin Qilich Khan (awarded by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1690–91), Nizam-ul-Mulk (awarded by Farrukhsiyar in 1713) and Asaf Jah (awarded by Muhammad Shah in 1725).



Asaf Jah I
(ruled 1724-1748), founder and first Nizam of Hyderabad state.

As Viceroy of Deccan (1713–22): During the Mughal days, the Subahdar of Deccan was appointed at Hyderabad. The idea of an independent state in Deccan was first conceived by Zulfiqar Khan, who had obtained the viceroyalty of the Deccan in 1708. After his death in 1713, Qilich Khan became the Deccan Viceroy upon insistence of Farrukhsiyar who conferred upon him the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk. As Viceroy of Deccan, he reorganised the administration and streamlined the revenue system.

Later, Farrukhsiyar called upon Nizam-ul-Mulk to fight off the Sayyid Brothers (leaders of Hindustani group). However, the Sayyids proved to be too clever for Emperor Farrukhsiyar who was soon blinded and killed by the brothers with the help of Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath. However, in 1720 Nizam-ul-Mulk successfully assisted Mohammed Shah in killing the Sayyid brothers. He was then rewarded with the post of wazir in the court of Mohammad Shah.

As Wazir of the Mughal Empire (1722–24): As wazir, he tried to reform the corrupt Mughal administration and earned many enemies for himself, who successfully poisoned the mind of the Emperor against him.

Establishment of Hyderabad State (1724): Disgusted with the fickle-mindedness and suspicious nature of the emperor, Nizam-ul-Mulk decided to pursue his own ambition. He then decided to leave the emperor and his empire to their fate and marched south to found the state of Hyderabad in the Deccan. His departure was symbolic of the flight of loyalty and virtue from the empire. The physical breakup of the Mughal Empire had begun.

In 1724, Nizam-ul-Mulk resigned from his post and set off to Deccan only to find that Mubariz Khan, the then Viceroy of Deccan, refused to vacate his post. Nizam-ul-Mulk defeated and killed Mubariz in the Battle of Shakr-Kheda (1724). The Emperor then bestowed upon him the title of Asaf Jah.

Asaf Jah never openly declared his independence, but in practice he acted like an independent ruler and founded the Asaf Jah Dynasty. His successors came to be known as the Nizams of Hyderabad. He conducted wars, signed treaties, conferred mansabs and made important appointments without any reference to the emperor. At the same time, the Nizam posed as the defender of Mughal Empire on several occasions. For instance, in the Battle of Karnal (1739), the Nizam accompanied the emperor to fight against Nadir Shah.

The Nizam was a wise statesman and a benevolent ruler. He reformed the revenue system, subdued the power of the zamindars and followed a tolerant policy towards the Hindus (a Hindu, Puran Chand, was his Diwan). He also cleverly diverted Maratha energy by suggesting to the Peshwa the possibility of Maratha expansion in the north, a suggestion readily accepted by Baji Rao I.

War of Succession (1748): After his death in 1748, a bloody war of succession followed between his son Nasir Jung and grandson, Muzaffar Jung. Taking advantage of the political crisis, the Marathas, Mysore and the Carnatic, all settled their scores against Hyderabad. The Marathas invaded the state at will and collected chauth. The French under Dupleix also used this opportunity to play off one group against the other and supported Muzaffar Jung in return for handsome monetary and territorial rewards.

The Carnatic

Nawab Saadatullah Khan (1710–32) and Dost Ali (1732–40)

In the 18th century, the Mughal subah (province) of Carnatic came under the authority of Governor of Deccan (Nizam of Hyderabad). But just as in practice the Governor of Deccan had freed himself from the control of the Mughal Emperor, the Deputy Governor or the Nawab of Carnatic, had also established his independent authority. Accordingly, the Nawab Saadatullah Khan of Carnatic, headquartered at Arcot, appointed his nephew Dost Ali as his successor, without the prior approval of his superior, the Nizam. However, in 1740, the Marathas invaded the Carnatic, killed Nawab Dost Ali and took his son-in-law Chanda Sahib as prisoner to Satara.

Thereafter, the affairs of the Carnatic deteriorated and this provided an opportunity to the European trading companies to directly interfere in Indian politics. For nearly 20 years from 1744 to 1763, the English and the French remained embroiled in a bitter war in south India, a series of conflicts popularly known as the Carnatic Wars (1740–63).[1]

Carnatic Region: Carnatic region is the name given to the Coromandel Coast and its hinterland. Though no longer a political or administrative division, it is of great historical significance.

Bengal and the Nawab Nazims

The province or subah of Bengal emerged as an independent autonomous state in the first half of the 18th century and though the sovereignty of the Mughal emperor was not challenged, practically independent and hereditary authority of the governor was established by two men of exceptional ability—Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan.

[1] Read about the Carnatic Wars and the British Conquest of South India in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Bengal in 18th Century: Under the Mughals

Bengal Provincial Administration

- Bengal in the 18th century comprised of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It was an integral part of the Mughal imperial system. Officials like Nazim and Diwan were directly recruited by Mughal emperors. The Diwan was separately appointed in order to keep control over the Nazim. The main officials in the subah or province were-
  - **Diwan**-Head of revenue administration
  - **Nazim**- Executive head of other matters of civil and military administration
  - **Bakshi**-Military pay master of the subah
  - **Kotwal**-head of police department
  - **Qazi**-dispensed justice
  - **Waqai navis**-collection of news bearing political significance
- A subah was divided into Sarkars (headed by Faujdars), Sarkars were further divided into Parganas. At local level, zamindars had maximum control over local people and administration. This system acted well till 17th century. In 18th century, gradually the relationship of the central authority with the provincial administration became loose and distanced. It merely received a tribute, and gradually even the tribute became irregular.

Nizamat and Diwani: The Mughal provincial administration had two main branches: Nizamat and Diwani. Broadly speaking, Nizamat meant civil administration and Diwani, revenue administration. The provincial subahdar was in charge of Nizamat (He was also called Nazim, the Governor or Viceroy of the province). The Diwan was in charge of revenue administration of the province. To ensure checks and balances in subah administration, the two key officers were appointed by the Mughal emperor and were directly responsible to him. Thus the Diwan worked independent of the Nazim.

Bengal in 18th Century: Towards Autonomy (The Nawab Nazims)

Murshid Quli Khan (1717–27): The independent state of Bengal was founded in 1717 by Murshid Quli Khan, also known as Mohammad Hadi. Murshid Quli's tryst with Bengal began in 1700, when Aurangzeb sent him to Bengal as Diwan where he proved to be a successful revenue administrator.

Murshid Quli Khan

As Diwan and Subahdar of Bengal: In 1717, Farrukhsiyar appointed him as Subahdar or governor (Nizam or Nazim) of Bengal, thus holding the post of Subahdar and Diwan at the same time. He was given the unprecedented privilege of holding the two offices of Nazim (executive and military head) and Diwan (collector of revenue) simultaneously. The division of power, which was maintained throughout the Mughal period to keep both the imperial officers under control through a system of checks and balances, was thus done away with. This helped Murshid Quli, who was already known for his efficient revenue administration, to consolidate his position further. He now declared himself as the Nawab of Bengal.

As Nawab of Bengal: Murshid Quli became the first independent Nawab of Bengal. He shifted the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad, proved to be a capable ruler and made Bengal a prosperous state.

Rationalisation of Land Revenue System: In the field of revenue collection, the main challenge faced by Murshid Quli Khan was that the whole province had been allotted to the officers as jagirs in lieu of their salary. To rationalise revenue collection, he adopted two measures. Firstly, he resumed all the jagirs and converted them into khalisa lands (state lands) and gave the dispossessed officers fresh jagirs in the wild province of Orissa. Secondly, he replaced the Mughal jagirdari system with the system of revenue farming or ijara or malzamini system. This was a contract system under which ijaradars, i.e. contractors were granted contracts for collection of land revenue by taking security bonds from them. In choosing the ijaradars, Quli Khan is known to have preferred the Hindus. The second or third generation of these contractors came to be known as 'the zamindars'.

Rise of new powerful elite classes under Murshid Quli: Thus, under Murshid Quli, the old hereditary zamindars were largely extinguished and a new official capitalist class emerged. In this way, he created a new class of landed aristocracy in Bengal whose position was later confirmed by Permanent Settlement in 1793. Further, Quli Khan was able to raise revenue collection by paying attention to details. But at the same time, in matters of revenue collection, he was uncompromising to the extent of being ruthless. The system of revenue farming also increased pressure on zamindars and peasants, leading to the growing importance of monied and commercial elements. The relentless pressure on zamindars to pay their obligations in full opened up opportunities for financiers. This period saw the emergence of the House of the Jagat Seths who not only acted as guarantor of the larger zamindars but also assumed full responsibility of the remittance of the Bengal revenue to Delhi, thus enjoying unstinted patronage of the Nawab.

After 1717, Bengal's link with Delhi remained limited to sending tribute. Indeed, the Bengal revenue was often the only regular income for the beleaguered Mughal emperors during periods of financial uncertainty. Behind the veneer of formal allegiance to the Mughal ruler, Murshid Quli began to enjoy considerable autonomy and established a dynastic rule, ensuring that the Nizamat of the province would pass on to a member of his family and not to an outsider. He was indeed the last governor of Bengal appointed by the Mughal emperor.

Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan (1727–39): Murshid Quli named his daughter's son Sarfaraz Khan his successor. But Sarfaraz was ousted by his father Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan, who took control of the two provinces of Bengal and Orissa in 1727. In this way, Murshid Quli's son-in-law Shuja-ud-Din ruled Bengal from 1727 till 1739.

Sarfaraz Khan (1739–40): After Shujauddin's death in 1739, his son Sarfaraz Khan became the Nawab. But Sarfaraz was soon deposed and killed by Alivardi Khan, the Deputy governor of Bihar, in the Battle of Gheria (10 April 1740).

Alivardi Khan (1740–56): After emerging victorious in the Battle of Gheria, Alivardi Khan made himself the Nawab with the help of the banking family of Jagat Seth and a few powerful zamindars. His reign showed a virtual break with the Mughals, two important forms of imperial control over province, i.e. payment of annual tribute to the emperor and appointment of higher provincial officials by the emperor—were not visible during Alivardi's reign. However, like the Nizam of Hyderabad and Nawab Wazirs of Awadh, Alivardi Khan also kept alive the fiction of Mughal sovereignty.

External Threats faced by Alivardi Khan: Alivardi faced two strong external threats during his regime—one from the Marathas and the other for the Afghan rebels. In fact, Alivardi's rule of 15 years was spent in fighting the Maratha menace which had assumed alarming proportions during this period. Driven by the dream of a Maratha Empire and the desire for wealth, the Marathas attacked Bengal three to four times during 1742 to 1751. In 1751, Alivardi finally signed peace with the Marathas; he agreed to pay annual chauth and parted with Orissa on the condition that the Marathas will not enter Alivardi's territory in future. Alivardi faced another formidable challenge from the Afghan General, Mustafa khan. These prolonged wars that Alivardi had to fight against the Marathas and the Afghans put severe strain on the Bengal government.

In 1756, Alivardi died, nominating his grandson Siraj-ud-Daulah as his successor.

Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan:

- **Strengths**- Both were men of exceptional quality and were fiercely independent. They gave Bengal a long period of peace and orderly administration. The Bengal rulers established regular thanas and chowkies and did not discriminate on religious grounds in making public appointments. They promoted its trade and industry at the same time maintained strict control over foreign companies trading in their realm. They checked private trade by officials and prevented abuses in customs administration. Alivardi Khan rightly did not allow fortifications of French and English factories at Chandernagore and Calcutta.
- **Weakness**- However, the Bengal Nawabs proved to be short sighted and ignorant in one aspect. They failed to see that the English Company was not merely a company of traders, but the representative of most aggressive colonial force of the time. Their lack of contact with the rest of the world was to prove them dear, or else they would have known how these European trading companies devoured Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America.

Bengal in 18th Century: Towards Political Subjection

Siraj ud-Daulah (1756–57): Siraj's succession was challenged by two other contenders for the throne, Shaukat Jung (Faujdar of Purnea) and Ghaseti Begum (Alivardi's daughter). This resulted in intense court factionalism and support was offered to different warring groups by a dominant group in the Nawab's court comprising of Jagat Seth, Umichand (or Amir Chand), Raj Ballabh, Rai Durlabh, Mir Jafar, zamindars and others who were also opposed to Siraj. This seriously destabilised the administration of Bengal and the advantage was taken by English East India Company.

Conflict with East India Company: Though the Farman of 1717 had become a perpetual source of conflict between the Company and the Bengal Nawabs, the breaking point came when

the English Company, anticipating another round of Anglo–French struggle, began to strengthen the fortifications of Fort William and mounted guns on its walls. The Bengal Nawabs had objected to these fortifications time and again, but the conflict became particularly acrimonious during Siraj's reign and led to a military conflict.

The disaffected nobles of Siraj's court, particularly the Jagat Seths, Rai Durlabh, Amir Chand (or Umichand) joined hands with the English to oust Siraj and install their protégé, leading to the Plassey Conspiracy of 1757. More than the might of the English, it was the treachery of the Nawab's confidants that decided the fate of the battle of Plassey where the British victory ended the rule of Siraj and inaugurated a new phase of Company's rule and British relations with India.[2]

Awadh

The subah of Awadh was strategically situated between the north bank of the Ganges and the Himalayas. It extended from Kannauj district in the west to the river Karmnasa in the East. It comprised Benaras and some districts near Allahabad.

Its proximity to Delhi added to its importance. Awadh was also economically prosperous in the 18th century and enjoyed flourishing agriculture and trade. The rise of Awadh as an autonomous state was the result of political pursuit by the Irani and Shiite family of Burhan-ul-Mulk Saadat Khan.

Saadat Khan (1722–39)

Saadat Khan was the founder of independent kingdom of Awadh. He was a very bold and intelligent person. In 1722, he was appointed Governor of Awadh by the Mughal Emperor. He was given the difficult charge of subduing rebellions zamindars who had sprung up everywhere in the province. They had refused to pay land tax and behaved like autonomous chiefs with their forts and armies. He was successful in this task within a year and in appreciation, the Emperor Muhammad Shah conferred on him the title of Burhan-ul-Mulk.

Saadat Khan, the First Nawab of Awadh

Soon afterwards, he returned to Delhi but ended up in a quarrel with one of the emperor's favourites and was forced to return to Awadh. Frustrated with court politics, he decided to build up a power base in Awadh. As a first step, he got his nephew and son-in-law Safdar Jung recognised by the emperor as his deputy governor. In this way, he made the province a hereditary possession and gradually secured the independence of Awadh.

In 1723, Saadat Khan introduced a new land revenue settlement and improved the lot of the peasants by levying equitable land revenue. Like the Bengal Nawabs, he too did not discriminate between the Hindus and the Muslims. His troops were well trained and well paid. His administration was efficient.

[2]Read about the British conquest of Bengal in detail in the upcoming chapters.

By 1735, Saadat Khan extended his influence to the adjoining regions of Kora, Jahanabad, Banaras, Jaunpur, Ghazipur and Chunargarh. During this entire period, he kept the communication channels open with the imperial court.

In 1739, Saadat Khan was called to Delhi to assist the Mughal Empire in fighting against the invader, Nadir Shah. However, he was taken prisoner in the Battle of Karnal. He felt further frustrated when the position of Mir Bakshi went to the Nizam despite his support during the invasion. He considered this a betrayal and in vengeance changed sides and joined Nadir Shah. His dirty game recoiled on him when the invader demanded a sum of ₹20 crore promised to him. In sheer frustration, Saadat Khan poisoned himself to death, thus committing suicide the day after the occupation of Delhi.

Safdar Jung (1739–54)

Nadir Shah remained the emperor of India for just two months. He recognised Safdar Jung as the successor in Awadh by accepting ₹2 crore as peshkash. Jung's opportunity really came when both Muhammad Shah and Nizam-ul-Mulk died in 1748 and he was appointed wazir by the new emperor Ahmad Shah. He and his successors popularly came to be known as Nawab Wazirs. He was also granted the province of Allahabad.

He gave a long period of peace and stability to the people of Awadh and Allahabad before his death in 1754. He also suppressed rebellious zamindars and made an alliance with the Maratha sardars to save his province form Maratha incursions. He set up an equitable justice system. He too did not discriminate on religious grounds. The highest post in his government was held by a Hindu-Maharaja Nawab Rai.

Safdar Jung maintained a very high standard of personal morality. In fact, all the founders of the three autonomous states—Hyderabad, Bengal and Awadh—were men of high personal morality. They led austere and simple lives.

Shuja-ud-Daula (1754–75)

After Safdar Jung's Death in 1754, his son Shuja-ud-Daula (not to be confused with Shuja-ud-din of Bengal) was appointed the governor of Awadh.

Role in the third Battle of Panipat (1761): When Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali arrived again in India in 1761 and fought the Battle of Panipat against the Marathas, Shuja joined the Afghan invader to see his opponents, the Marathas, humbled and weakened. Within his own domain of Awadh and Allahabad his autonomy and power remained unchallenged till his encounter with the English East India Company in the Battle of Buxar.

Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Third Nawab of Awadh

Role in the Battle of Buxar (1764): In the Battle of Buxar, the combined forces of the Nawab of Bengal, Shuja-ud-Daula (Nawab of Awadh) and the Mughal Emperor were defeated by the English Company and Awadh was brought into the British dragnet by the

Treaty of Allahabad (16 August 1765). As per the Treaty, among other things, Shuja was required to pay war indemnity of ₹50 lakh and enter into a reciprocal arrangement with the Company for defence of each other's territory. In the following years, seeing the prosperity of Awadh, the company gradually stepped up its fiscal demands by yet another treaty in 1773; the Nawab agreed to pay ₹2,10,000 monthly for each brigade of company troops that would remain present in Awadh. This led to Awadh's chronic indebtedness to the Company. The military presence of English troops in Awadh also seriously undermined the Nawabi regime.

Asaf-ud-Daula (1775–97)

After the death of Shuja-ud-Daulah in 1775, his son Asaf-ud-Daula became the Nawab. In 1775 itself, he shifted the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow. Despite English threat, he concentrated his energies in cultural pursuits and built up around Lucknow court a vibrant cultural arena, giving rise to a distinct Lucknow culture. Lucknow soon rivalled Delhi in its patronage of arts and literature. It became a second home for sensitive men of letters who had left Delhi and lamented for the world they had lost. These luminaries and poets included Mirza Rafi Sauda and Mir Ghulam Hasan. He also built the famous monument Bara Imambara. The Nawab also earned a lot of fame for his generosity and gave rise to a well-known saying in Lucknow, 'he who does not receive from the Lord, will receive it from Asaf-ud-Daula' (Jisko na de Moula, usko de Asaf-ud-Daula).

Till 1801, the English saw Awadh as a buffer state protecting Bengal against the western powers notably the Marathas and they did not contemplate annexation. Soon afterwards, Awadh became an obstacle to further British expansion and was finally taken over in 1856.[3]

Prelim Capsule

Hyderabad, Carnatic, Bengal and Awadh

Regional Power	Nawabs	Important Events
Hyderabad (1724)	**Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah (r. 1724–48)**	In 1713, Chin Qilich Khan was made Viceroy of the Deccan by Emperor Farrukhsiyar and given the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk. In 1720, he assisted Mohammed Shah in killing the Sayyid brothers. In 1722, he was appointed wazir in the court of Mohammad Shah. In 1724, he founded the independent state of Hyderabad in the Deccan. He founded the Asaf Jah dynasty. His successors came to be known as the Nizams of Hyderabad.
Carnatic (Early 18th century)	**Nawab Saadatullah Khan (1710–32)**	He appointed his nephew Dost Ali as his successor. In 1740, the Marathas invaded the Carnatic, killed Nawab Dost Ali and took his son-in-law Chanda Sahib as prisoner to Satara.

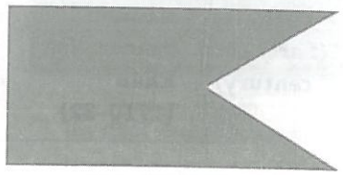
[3]Read about the British Conquest of Awadh in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Bengal (1717)	**Murshid Quli Khan (1717–27)**	In 1717, he became the first to hold the two offices of Nizam and Diwan of Bengal simultaneously. Using this opportunity, he now declared himself as the Nawab of Bengal. He shifted the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad. He replaced the Mughal jagirdari system with the system of revenue farming or ijara or malzamini system. His reign saw the rise of new elite classes (zamindars and the bankers) in Bengal. For e.g., The House of the Jagat Seths.
	Alivardi Khan (1740–56)	He killed Sarfaraz Khan in the Battle of Gheria and became the Nawab. During his reign, payment of annual tribute to the emperor stopped. He agreed to pay chauth and ceded Orissa to the Marathas. He faced challenge from the Afghan General, Mustafa khan.
	Siraj ud-Daulah (1756–57)	He was defeated by the EIC in the Battle of Plassey (1757).
Awadh (1722)	**Saadat Khan (1722–39)**	He subdued the rebellions zamindars of Awadh and was given the title of Burhan-ul-Mulk by the emperor. He got his nephew and son-in-law Safdar Jung recognised by the emperor as his deputy governor and made the province a hereditary possession. He was taken prisoner by Nadir Shah in the Battle of Karnal (1739).
	Safdar Jung (1739–54)	He and his successors popularly came to be known as Nawab Wazirs.
	Shuja-ud-Daula (1754–75)	He joined Abdali against the Marathas in the Third Battle Panipat (1761). He was defeated by the EIC in the Battle of Buxar (1764).
	Asaf-ud-Daula (1775–97)	He shifted the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow. He concentrated his energies in cultural pursuits, giving rise to a distinct Lucknow culture. He also built the famous monument Bara Imambara.

The New States-the Marathas, the Sikhs, the Jats and the Afghans

The Marathas

Historical Context: The Maratha kingdom was constituted in the 17th century in western Deccan. In the 18th century, it became the nucleus of the much wider Maratha swarajya (sovereign state). The Marathas were the most significant of all the regional powers. The first part of the 18th century saw the decline of the Mughals, the last part saw the rise of the British and the middle part saw the swaying political fortunes of the Marathas, the lone Indian power that was strong enough to offer an alternative to the Mughal rule.



Flag of the Maratha Empire

After the Mughals retreated from the Deccan, the Marathas grew as a confederacy of military leaders called Maratha sardars. Originally, the Maratha sardars only held temporary assignments of land revenue. But in practice, they tended to become hereditary once they established themselves. But the Maratha sardars lacked unity and vision for founding an all India empire. However, they successfully waged continuous struggle against the Mughals till they were destroyed.

Relationship with the Mughals: Marathas had a long history of suppression by the Mughals, particularly during the 27-year war started by Aurangzeb in 1681. The Marathas believed in Hinduism and the religious intolerance practiced by the Mughal emperors further provoked the Maratha resentment.

Coronation of Shivaji

In 1689 Aurangzeb defeated and killed Shivaji's son and successor Sambhaji and captured his son Shahu. Aurangzeb had treated Shahu and his mother with great dignity hoping to arrive at a political agreement with Shahu. However, the whole Maratha nation rose in arms against the Mughals in what was to become a people's war. The younger son of Shivaji, Raja Ram carried on the struggle till his death in 1700 and thereafter the struggle was carried on further by his wife Tarabai, acting as a regent for his minor son Shivaji II. In 1707 after Aurangzeb's death, his successors released Shivaji's grandson Shahu in the hope of throwing an apple of discord in Maharashtra.

As expected by the Mughals, Shahu's release divided the Marathas into two rival camps—one led by Tarabai at Kolhapur and the other led by Shahu at Satara. Tarabai, Shahu's aunt, declared Shahu as an imposter and refused to recognize Shahu's right to succession. The consequence was a long civil war in which Shahu ultimately emerged victorious mainly with the help of a group of new independent sardars and an able Chitpavan Brahmin from Konkan, Balaji Vishwanath.

In this way, the civil war between Shahu and Tara Bai gave rise to a new system of Maratha government under the leadership of Balaji Vishwanath, the Peshwa (Prime Minister) of King Shahu. This change marked the beginning of the second period in Maratha history—the period of Peshwa domination. It was in this period that the Maratha state transformed into an empire.

First Peshwa- Balaji Vishwanath

First Peshwa-Balaji Vishwanath (1713–20)

In recognition of the services rendered by Balaji Vishwanath, King Shahu appointed him as the Peshwa or Prime Minister in November 1713. By virtue of his diplomacy and statesmanship, Balaji Vishwanath turned the office of the Peshwa as the functional head of the Maratha Empire while Raja Shahu became a mere figurehead.

Help to Sayyid Brothers: In 1719, Balaji helped the Sayyid brothers remove Farrukhsiyar from the Mughal throne and place a puppet emperor in Delhi. He had himself gone to Delhi with a Maratha contingent of 15,000 troops. This gave him the opportunity to witness firsthand the weakness of the Empire and filled him with ambition of expansion in the North. Moreover, as a reward, he secured for the Maratha king a Mughal sanad (imperial order).

Mughal Sanad of 1719: As per the Sanad, the Marathas were allowed to collect chauth (literally: one-fourth of revenues) and sardeshmukhi (an additional 10% of revenues) from the entire Deccan (Aurangabad, Berar, Bidar, Bijapur, Hyderabad and Khandesh) and Karnataka. In return for the above privileges, the Marathas were to place at the Emperor's disposal a contingent of 15,000 troops, maintain peace and order in the Deccan and pay an annual tribute of ₹10 lakh to the emperor. In this way, the Maratha king became the sardeshmukh of the entire Deccan and Karnataka. The sanad is also known in history as 'the Magna Carta of the Maratha dominion'.

Foundation of Maratha Confederacy: For the efficient collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi of the Deccan, Balaji Vishwanath assigned separate areas to Maratha sardars, thus laying the foundation of the Maratha Confederacy. This system of watans and saranjams (grants of land) was just another form of Jagir system which Balaji found as best suited to bring peace from anarchy at that time. However, it later turned into a major Maratha weakness as it made the King largely dependent on the sardars for his finances. The sardars now began to establish their control in distant lands of Mughal Empire where they gradually settled down as more or less autonomous chiefs. In this way, the conquests of the Marathas outside their original kingdom were not made directly by the Maratha king or the Peshwa, but by the sardars with their own private parties. During these conquests, they often clashed with one another and did not hesitate to join hands with the enemies, be they the Nizams, the Mughals or the English.

Balaji Vishwanath has been rightly called 'the second founder of the Maratha State'. After his death in April 1720, he was succeeded by his 20-year-old son Baji Rao I.

Second Peshwa-Baji Rao I (1720–40)

Balaji Vishwanath was succeeded by his eldest son, Baji Rao I as the Peshwa in April 1720. In spite of his youth, he was a bold commander and a wise statesman and has been called 'the greatest exponent of guerilla tactics after Shivaji'.

Maratha Expansion under Baji Rao I

- He formulated a new policy of Maratha imperialism which aimed at expanding the Maratha kingdom beyond the Narmada. He proposed his policy of conquest of the north in the following words: 'Let us strike at the trunk of the withering tree (Mughal Empire) and the branches will fall off themselves. Thus, should the Maratha flag fly from the Krishna to the Indus.' He preached the ideal of 'Hindu Pad Padshahi', i.e. 'Hindu Empire' to secure the support of Hindu chiefs against the Mughals.
- All the 20 years of his Peshwaship, Baji Rao kept marching and winning battles. Under his leadership, the Marathas won control over Malwa, Gujarat and parts of Bundelkhand. He is remembered in Maharashtra as the fighting Peshwa. It was he who picked up war leaders like the Scindias and the Holkars who rose into prominence during this time.

- Baji Rao faced severe challenge from the Nizam-ul-Mulk in the Deccan. Twice the two met in the battlefield and both times the Nizam was defeated and compelled to grant the Marathas the chauth and sardeshmukhi of the six Mughal provinces in the Deccan.
- In 1733, Baji Rao launched a campaign against the Sidis of Janjira Island and in the end expelled them from the mainland. Simultaneously, he also started a campaign against the Portuguese. In the end, Salsette and Bassein were captured.
- Baji Rao also transformed the kingdom of Maharashtra into an empire expanding in the north. It was his forward policy which brought the provinces from Punjab to Bengal under Maratha influence by 1760.

However, strong foundation for the empire could not be laid and little attention was paid to the administration of new territories. This was because the interest of the new sardars remained limited to revenue collection. Baji Rao made no attempt to check the dangerous feudal tendency which in the end proved ruinous to the Maratha Kingdom. In 1740, Baji Rao met a premature death at the age of 42.

Third Peshwa-Balaji Bajirao (1740–61)

Bajirao's 18-year-old son Balaji Bajirao also known as Nana Sahib, was the Peshwa from 1740 to 1761. After the death of Chhatrapati Shahu in 1749, Nana Sahib became the supreme authority in Maratha polity. Shahu's successor Raja Ram executed a document known as the Sangola Agreement (also known as constitutional revolution of 1750) which transferred the supreme power from the Chhatrapati to the Peshwa. Henceforth, the Peshwa became the de facto ruler of the Maratha State, and as a symbol of this fact, shifted the government to Poona, his headquarters.

Balaji Bajirao's rule also witnessed the appearance of new powers in the political scene, namely the Afghans, the Sikhs, the French and the English.

Maratha Expansion under Balaji Bajirao

- The Maratha power achieved its territorial zenith during the rule of Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, extending form Cuttack to Attock. The Maratha armies now overran the whole of India.
- In the east, Marathas under Raghuji Bhonsle regularly raided Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (then ruled by Alivardi Khan). The raids were stopped after a treaty in 1751, under which Alivardi surrendered Orissa and agreed to pay ₹1,20,000 as annual chauth for the three provinces.
- In south, the states including the state of Mysore were forced to pay tribute.
- In the north, the Maratha bands regularly raided the Rajput kingdoms of Jaipur, Udaipur, Bundi, Kotah, etc. Soon they also became the power behind the Mughal throne. In the face of Afghan invasion, a treaty in 1752 brought the Mughal emperor under Maratha protection. In 1952, the Marathas helped Imad-ul-Mulk to become the new wazir and in 1753, they installed their chosen candidate on the Mughal throne.

Conflict with Abdali: The Marathas were not content with their victories in the north and looked greedily at Punjab, which was ruled by an agent of Abdali. This was a blunder. Abdali had retreated from India taking away whatever he could. But now he decided to return and challenge the ever-growing ambitions of the Marathas.

Abdali formed an alliance with Najib-ud-Daulah of Rohilkhand and Shuja-ud-Daulah of Awadh, both of whom had suffered in the face of Maratha depredations. Seeing the importance of the coming struggle, the Peshwa dispatched an army to the north under the nominal command of his minor son Vishwas Rao. But the actual command was in the hands of Peshwa's cousin Sadashiv Rao Bhau (son of Chimaji Appa, younger brother of Peshwa Baji Rao I). The army also had a contingent of European style infantry and artillery commanded by Ibrahim Khan Gardi.

The Marathas now also tried to find support from northern powers. But their earlier behaviour had antagonised all such powers. For instance, they had imposed heavy fines and tributes upon the Rajputana, Punjab and Awadh. Therefore they had to fight their enemy all alone, except for the weak support of Imad-ul-Mulk.

Third Battle of Panipat (14 January 1761): The forces of Abdali and the Marathas met at Panipat on 14 January 1761. The Maratha army was completely routed, causing about 50,000 casualties. This marked the beginning of the decline of the Maratha glory. Both Vishwas Rao and Sadashiv Rao Bhau perished along with many other Maratha commanders and 28,000 soldiers. Those who fled were chased by the Afghan cavalry and robbed by the Jats, Ahirs and Gujars of Panipat region. The Peshwa got the news while he was on his way to the north to help his cousin. Shocked by the tragic news, he met with an early death in June 1761. In this way, Ahmad Shah gave a death blow to the Maratha glory.

Neither the Marathas nor the Afghans benefitted from this battle. The beneficiaries were the British who grasped this opportunity to expand influence in Bengal. In reality, the Third Battle of Panipat did not decide who would rule India, but rather who would not. It, therefore, cleared the way for the rise of British power in India... "If Plassey had sown the seeds of British supremacy in India, Panipat afforded time for their maturing and striking roots."

After this there was no looking back. In 1772, Peshwa Madhav Rao died and followed a factional struggle for power. This exposed the Marathas to defeat at the hands of the British in the first Anglo–Maratha war.[4]

Causes of Maratha Defeat in the Third Battle of Panipat:

- Abdali's forces outnumbered the Maratha forces. While Abdali's army was estimated at 60,000, the Maratha forces did not exceed 45,000.
- Abdali's forces were better organised and better equipped. While Abdali's men fought with muskets (light gun with a long barrel) and swivel guns (small cannon mounted on a swivelling stand), the Maratha forces mostly fought with their swords and lances.
- The Marathas fought alone without any support. Their overbearing attitude and policy of indiscriminate plunder had estranged the Muslims and the Hindu chiefs alike, such as the Jats, the Rajputs and the Sikhs. On the other hand, the Muslim powers of North India rallied with Abdali.
- Near famine conditions prevailed in the Maratha camp as the road to Delhi was cut-off by the Afghan war. The Maratha camp turned into a virtual hell owing to the stench of carcasses lying around unburied.
- Mutual jealousies infested the Maratha leadership which also considerably weakened their position. Bhau took pride in his Brahmin birth and looked down upon Malhar Rao Holkar.

[4]Read about the Anglo-Maratha Wars in detail in the upcoming chapters.

Significance of the Battle of Panipat

- Neither side benefitted from this battle.
- It produced disastrous consequences for the Marathas and seriously deflected the course of Maratha imperialism.
- The Marathas suffered immense losses in terms of men, money and prestige. The Marathas lost the cream of their army and their political prestige suffered a big blow.
- The Marathas could never recover their pre-1761 position or status. Their defeat gave an opportunity to the British East India Company to consolidate its power in Bengal and south India.
- Afghans too did not benefit from their victory. They could not even hold the Punjab.

Fourth Peshwa-Madhav Rao (1761–72)

The 17-year-old Madhav Rao became the Peshwa in 1761. He was a talented statesman and within a short period of 11 years, he restored the lost fortunes of the Maratha Empire, a phenomenon known as Maratha Resurrection, with the help of his able minister, Nana Phadnavis (abbreviated as Nana Phadnis). Nana Phadnis played a pivotal role in holding the Maratha Confederacy together in the midst of internal dissension and the growing power of the English Company.

Madhav Rao successfully subdued the old enemies, the Rohillas, the Rajputs and the Jat Chiefs in the north and Mysore and Hyderabad in the south. In 1771, the Marathas brought back Emperor Shah Alam to Delhi, who now became their pensioner. Thus it appeared as if Maratha ascendency in the north had been recovered. However, Madhav Rao died of tuberculosis in 1772.

Fifth Peshwa-Narayan Rao (1772–73)

After the death of Madhav Rao, the Maratha Empire was thrown into a state of confusion. At Poona there was a struggle for power between Raghunath Rao (younger brother of Balaji Bajirao) and Narayan Rao (younger brother of Madhav Rao). Narayan Rao succumbed to the intrigues of his uncle Raghunath Rao in 1773.

Sixth Peshwa-Raghunath Rao (1773–74)

He became the Peshwa of the Maratha Empire for a brief period from 1773 to 1774. He was deposed by Nana Phadnis and 11 other administrators (Baarbhai) in what is known as 'the Baarbhai Conspiracy'. The Baarbhai included influential Maratha sardars like Mahadji Shinde (or Scindia) and Tukojirao Holkar.

Mahadji Shinde (or Scindia, 1768–94): Mahadji was a Maratha Sardar who ruled over the Gwalior state in central India. He was instrumental in resurrecting Maratha power in north India after the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761. Along with Madhav Rao I and Nana Phadnavis, he was one of the three pillars of Maratha Resurrection.

During his reign, Gwalior became the leading state in the Maratha Empire and one of the foremost military powers in India. He started recruiting some Rajputs and even Muslims in the army. He reorganised his army along European and scientific lines. For this reason, he also appointed a Savoy resident, Count Benoit de Boigne (from the Duchy of Savoy in Italy, but under French occupation during 1792–1814) and later on Monsieur Perron, as specialists.

Mahadji Shinde

The Marathas under Mahadji returned to northern India, overrunning the Rajputana, defeating the Jats and expelling the Rohillas from the Doab and captured Delhi (February 1771) and reinstated Shah Alam II at Delhi throne under Maratha suzerainty. During 1772–73, he along with the Mughal Emperor, led expeditions against the Rohillas and even destroyed the power of the Jats of Mathura.

During the First Anglo-Maratha War (1775–82), Mahadji played the most important role from the Maratha side since he humbled the British in Central India single-handedly, which resulted in the Treaty of Salbai in 1782. In the Treaty of Salbai, British government accepted him as an independent king. After his death, he was succeeded by Daulat Rao Scindia.

Seventh Peshwa-Sawai Madhav Rao or Madhav Rao II (1774–95)

The Baarbhai installed Narayan Rao's posthumous son, Madhav Rao II, as the Peshwa with themselves, led by Nana Phadnavis, as the Regents (known as Baarbhai Council). Madhav Rao II was made Peshwa when he was barely 40 days; his time in power was dominated by the political intrigues of Nana Phadnis. The succession of Sawai Madhav Rao (Sawai means 'One and a Quarter') gravely frustrated Raghunath Rao's ambitions and he turned to the British and tried to capture power with their help, resulting in the First Anglo–Maratha war.

The Peshwa's power now gradually waned. Poona became the seat of constant intrigues between the supporters of Sawai Madhav Rao, headed by Nana Phadnis and the supporters of Raghunath Rao. Taking advantage of the weakening of central authority, the big Maratha sardars or chiefs carved out semi-independent states in the north. These were the-Holkar (Indore), Scindia (Gwalior), Gaekwad (Baroda) and Bhonsle (Nagpur). They possessed their own armies and their allegiance to the Peshwas became more and more nominal. Among the Maratha sardars in the north, Mahadji Shinde was the most important. He organised a powerful European style army with the help of French and Portuguese officers, consisting equally of Hindu and Muslim soldiers.

Sawai Madhav Rao committed suicide in 1795 probably because of the highhandedness of Nana Phadnis. A power struggle ensued among the Maratha nobles for control of the Confederacy. The powerful chief, Daulat Rao Scindia, and minister, Nana Phadnis, installed Baji Rao II, son of Raghunath Rao, as a puppet Peshwa.

Eighth and Ninth Peshwa-Baji Rao II (1796–1818)

Baji Rao II was the last Peshwa of the Maratha Empire. By now, the British had decided to put an end to the Maratha challenge. The British divided the warring sardars through clever diplomacy and then defeated them in separate battles in the Second Maratha War (1803–05) and Third Maratha War (1817–18). The seat of the Peshwa was extinguished while the Maratha states were allowed to exist as subsidiary states.

First Reign (1796–1802): His first reign saw the Second Anglo–Maratha War (1803–05). After the death of Nana Phadnavis (March 1800), the Poona court once again fell victim to various court conspiracies. In the struggle for power in Maratha polity, Peshwa Baji Rao II, Daulat Rao Scindia and Yashwant Rao Holkar emerged as the main Maratha leaders. Peshwa and Scindia formed an alliance against Holkar and tried to insult him. In 1801, Peshwa brutally killed Holkar's brother Vithoji Rao Holkar (also known as Vithoba). This made Holkar attack Poona (battle of Poona), who then defeated the combined armies of Peshwa and Scindia near Hadapsar

and captured Poona. Peshwa fled, took refuge in Bassein and approached Wellesley for help. This provided the British an ideal opportunity to intervene in the Maratha affairs. Baji Rao II accepted subsidiary alliance and signed the Treaty of Bassein in 1802. This affected the patriotic feelings of other Maratha chiefs and provoked the Second Anglo–Maratha War that began the breakup of the Maratha confederacy.

Second Reign (1803–18): During his second reign began the Third Anglo–Maratha War. On 3 June 1818, Peshwa surrendered before the British. He was dethroned and pensioned off and ordered to spend his last days in Bithoor near Kanpur.

Nana Sahib (Tenth Peshwa): He was a leader during the Revolt of 1857. As the adopted son of the exiled Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II, he sought to restore the Maratha confederacy and the Peshwa tradition.

In this way, the Maratha dream of establishing their own empire could not be realised. This was mainly because the Maratha Empire represented the same decadent social order as the Mughal Empire did and suffered from the same weaknesses. Their revenue system and administration were quite similar. The Marathas did not try to develop a new economy, nor did they encourage science and technology or trade and industry. Like the Mughals, their dominion depended on force and force alone. They failed to establish a bond with the common people and their interest remained limited to squeezing out revenue from the helpless peasantry. Nearly half of the agricultural produce was collected as tax. Thus, the Marathas failed to transform themselves into a modern state, and made way for the rise of the British.[5]

Prelim Capsule

The Marathas

Peshwas	Important Events
Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath (1713–20)	He supported Shahu against Tara Bai in the Maratha civil war; in return, Shahu appointed him as his Peshwa (Prime Minister). He launched the period of Peshwa domination during which the Maratha state transformed into an empire.
	In 1719, Balaji helped the Sayyid brothers remove Farrukhsiyar. As reward, he secured the Mughal sanad of 1719, known in history as 'the Magna Carta of the Maratha dominion'. The Maratha king became the sardeshmukh of the entire Deccan and Karnataka. He laid the foundation of the Maratha Confederacy. He is known as 'the second founder of the Maratha State.'
Peshwa Baji Rao I (1720–40)	He preached the ideal of 'Hindu padpadshahi'. He is remembered in Maharashtra as the fighting Peshwa. In 1733, he defeated the Sidis of Janjira Island.

[5]Read about the British Conquest of the Maratha state in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Peshwa Balaji Bajirao (1740–61)	He was also known as Nana Sahib. It was during his reign that Raja Ram executed the Sangola Agreement (also known as constitutional revolution of 1750) which transferred the supreme power from the Chhatrapati to the Peshwa. Maratha power reached its territorial zenith. Marathas were defeated by Abdali in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761). The Marathas fought under the nominal command of his minor son Vishwas Rao, but the actual command was in the hands of Peshwa's cousin Sadashiv Rao Bhau. Maratha army had a contingent of European style infantry and artillery commanded by Ibrahim Khan Gardi.
Peshwa - Madhav Rao (1761–72)	He restored the lost fortunes of the Maratha Empire, a phenomenon known as Maratha Resurrection, with the help of his able minister, Nana Phadnavis. In 1771, the Marathas re-installed Emperor Shah Alam to Delhi.
Narayan Rao (1772–73)	He succumbed to the intrigues of his uncle, Raghunath Rao.
Raghunath Rao (1773–74)	He was deposed by Nana Phadnis and 11 other administrators (Baarbhai) in what is known as 'the Baarbhai Conspiracy'. Baarbhai included influential sardars like Mahadji Shinde and Tukojirao Holkar.
Sawai Madhav Rao (1774–95)	His succession frustrated Raghunath Rao who now went over to the British and tried to capture power with their help, resulting in the First Anglo–Maratha war. Taking advantage of the weakening of central authority, the big Maratha sardars carved out semi-independent states: Holkar (Indore), Scindia (Gwalior), Gaekwad (Baroda) and Bhonsle (Nagpur). In 1795 Sawai Madhav Rao committed suicide.
Peshwa- Baji Rao II (1796–18)	The British divided the warring sardars and then defeated them in separate battles in the Second Maratha War (1803–05) and Third Maratha War (1817–18). The seat of the Peshwa was extinguished. In 1818 Peshwa was dethroned by the EIC and pensioned off and ordered to spend his last days in Bithoor near Kanpur.

The Sikhs

The development in the Punjab, former Mughal province of Lahore, was somewhat different as compared to other Mughal provinces. In other Mughal provinces, it was some Mughal provincial governor who established an autonomous state. But in the case of Punjab, it was a group of local people, the Sikhs.

Guru Nanak Dev

Sikhism: Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region in the 15th century. The Sikh Panth was as old as the Mughal Empire. When Guru Nanak began to preach his message of devotion and equality in Punjab in the 15th century, Babur was founding the Mughal Empire. 'Sikh' literally means learner or disciple. In the course of time, the new cult took the form of a religious movement and spread quickly among the Jat peasantry and other lower castes in Punjab. Guru Nanak's religious movement was peaceful and secular. Nanak was succeeded by nine Gurus; all the ten Sikh Gurus emphasised on simplicity of religion and freedom from bigotry.

1. **Guru Nanak**- founder of Sikhism.
2. **Guru Angad**- developed the Gurumukhi script, introduced the langar (free kitchen) and tradition of mall akhara for the youth.
3. **Guru Amar Das**- composed the Anand Sahib, introduced the simple Anand Karaj marriage and abolished sati among the Sikhs.
4. **Guru Ram Das**- laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar (earlier known as Ramdaspur and Guru-ka-Chak) and initiated the construction of the Golden Temple.
5. **Guru Arjan Dev**- compiled the Adi Granth and completed the construction of the Golden Temple (It was during Ranjit Singh's reign that the shrine of the temple was richly decorated with marble and gold plates and came to be known as the Golden Temple).
6. **Guru Hargobind**- created the Sikh marital art called Gatka, trained the Sikhs in military art and war tactics, built the Akal Takhat, and was known as the 'soldier saint'.
7. **Guru Har Rai**- he maintained the large army of Sikh soldiers that the sixth Sikh Guru had amassed, yet avoided military conflict, and was known as the 'tender-hearted guru'.
8. **Guru Har Krishan**- was the youngest of all gurus, installed as guru at the age of five.
9. **Guru Teg Bahadur**-he refused to convert to Islam and was beheaded in Delhi on the orders of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.
10. **Guru Gobind Singh**- transformed the Sikhs into a military force by establishing the body of the Khalsa in 1699.

Relationship with the Mughals

The last four gurus were persecuted by the Mughals, Guru Arjan and Guru Teg Bahadur were tortured and brutally killed for refusing to convert to Islam. Subsequently, Sikhism militarised to oppose Mughal dominance. Aurangzeb was initially not very hostile to the Sikhs; but as the community grew in size and challenged the central authority of the Mughals, the emperor turned against them. Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed in Delhi in 1675 (however, the emergence of Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh was characterised by religious tolerance and pluralism).

Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708)

He was installed as the Sikh guru at age nine, after his father, Guru Teg Bahadur, was beheaded by the Mughals for refusing to convert to Islam. Four of his sons were also killed during his lifetime, falling victim to Mughal–Sikh conflict.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last guru of the Sikhs transformed the Sikhs into a military force by establishing the body of Khalsa in 1699. Members were initiated into the body by the guru himself, who were obliged to show their allegiance by five signs including kesh (uncut hair) and kirpan (short sword). Perhaps the guru was now convinced about the need of armed

resistance for the defence of the panth. It might have also been due to the rise of Jat peasantry among the Sikhs as carrying arms was already a part of Jat cultural tradition. The Khatri traders were another component of the Sikh community. Their aspiration for equality with the Jats was fulfilled when Guru Gobind Singh decided to end the guruship, the power of guru was henceforth to be vested in the panth and the granth.

Guru Gobind Singh's conflict with Aurangzeb is well known. From about 1696, Guru Gobind had tried to carve out an autonomous domain in and around Anandpur. In 1704, Anandpur was captured by the Mughals and the guru was compelled to leave. Guru Gobind was murdered in a conspiracy in 1708 and the leadership of Sikhs passed to his disciple, Banda Bahadur.

Banda Bahadur (1708–15)

Banda Singh or Banda Bairagi, more widely known as Banda Bahadur, waged a relentless though unequal struggle against Aurangzeb's successors for eight years. The Mughals tried to suppress the rebellion ruthlessly as Punjab was strategically crucial. In the course of time, the position of Banda Bahadur had weakened due to dissension within the Sikh community. Some of the Jat zamindars and Khatri revenue farmers went to the Mughal side (for instance, Churaman Jat of Agra). Banda Bahadur was captured and was put to death in 1715. Even this could not suppress the Sikhs who finally succeeded in establishing their political power in the Punjab.

Banda Singh Bahadur

Factors that contributed to the political supremacy of the Sikhs in the Punjab were as follows:

- **The weakening of the Mughal imperial authority** in the early decades of the 18th century.
- **The series of Persian and the Afghan invasions** from 1739 onwards seriously undermined the Mughal authority in the Punjab.
- **The Maratha incursions took place** in the wake of foreign invasions and consequent turmoil in the province. The Marathas also tried to establish control over the Punjab.
- **The ensuing internal struggle within provincial administration was another reason.** Zakariya Khan was the Mughal governor of Lahore during 1726–45. His death resulted in a fratricidal struggle among his three sons over the governorship of the Punjab.

All the above factors created a very fluid situation in Punjab in the 18th century, allowing the Sikhs to emerge supreme. The adversity of the Mughal Empire proved to be a beneficial opportunity for the Sikhs. The invasion of Nadir Shah and Abdali seriously undermined Mughal authority in the Punjab. The Afghans under the leadership of Abdali also crushed the Marathas in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761. In this way, the defeat of the Mughals and the Marathas at the hands of the Afghans allowed Sikhs to consolidate their position in the Punjab.

With the withdrawal of Abdali from the Punjab, the Sikh confederacies began to fill the political vacuum. Between 1765 and 1800, they brought the Punjab and Jammu under their control. In this way, the period from 1765 onwards saw steady development of Sikh political power which culminated in the establishment of an autonomous state in the early 19th century.

Misls: During the second half of the 18th century, power in the Sikh polity became more horizontally structured, as misls (brotherhood or confederacies based on kinship ties) now held territories as units.

Period of Sovereign Sikh Rule in the Former Mughal Province of Lahore (1765–1845)

Sikh Confederacies

In the face of severe Mughal repression, the Sikhs had organised themselves into several small mobile bands called Jathas, each headed by a Jathedar. After 1765, numerous small Jathas regrouped themselves into 12 larger regional confederacies or Misls led by local chiefs. These included the Bhangis, the Ramgarhias, the Kanhayias, the Singhpurias, the Ahluwalias and the Sukerchakias. The misls did occasionally unite, but largely the political authority in Punjab remained decentralised and more horizontally dispersed during this whole period until Ranjit Singh, the chief of the Sukerchakia misl, tried to raise a more centralised Sikh state at the end of the 18th century. Thus, Punjab's rise to prominence had to wait till the end of the century for Ranjit Singh.

The Punjab under Ranjit Singh (1801–1839)

Maharaja Ranjit Singh

At the end of the 18th century, Punjab rose to prominence under Ranjit Singh, who was the son of Mahan Singh, the leader of Sukerchakia misl. He was a courageous soldier, an efficient administrator and a skilful diplomat. He brought under his control the area extending from Sutlej to Jhelum. He conquered Lahore in 1799 and Amritsar in 1802.

Conflict with the English- When the Sikhs were trying to establish themselves as a political power in the north, simultaneously, the English Company was trying to establish itself in eastern India. Having emerged supreme in the east, the English turned their attention to the north, thus making their conflict with the Sikhs inevitable. In 1809, Ranjit Singh signed the Treaty of Amritsar with the British East India Company. As per the terms of the treaty, the English recognised him as the sole sovereign ruler of Punjab, permitting him complete freedom of action to the north of the Sutlej, but the British established their control over cis-Sutlej Sikh States, thus preventing Ranjit Singh from any further expansion to the south of the Sutlej.

Expansion north of the Sutlej- Later he also conquered Kashmir, Peshawar and Multan. In this way, he established his own kingdom. He made no changes in the land revenue system and allowed the Mughal system to continue. Land revenue was charged at the rate of 50 per cent of the gross produce. Ranjit Singh, popularly known as 'Sher-e-Punjab', was an efficient administrator. He greatly modernised his army along European lines with the help of European instructors. His

army was not confined to the Sikhs. He recruited Gorkhas, Biharis, Oriyas, Pathans, Dogras and even Punjabi Muslims.

As a person, Ranjit Singh was tolerant and liberal in religious matters. He was a devout Sikh, but he also patronised Hindu and Muslim holy men. He is known to 'step down from his throne to wipe the dust off the feet of Muslim mendicants with his long grey beard'. Fakir Azizuddin and Diwan Dina Nath were some of his most trusted Ministers. The Punjab under Ranjit Singh was in no sense a Sikh State.

Tripartite Treaty of 1838- With his diplomatic realism, Ranjit Singh was temporarily able to save his kingdom from British encroachment. But towards the close of his reign, the British forced him to sign a Tripartite Treaty (1838) with Shah Shuja and the English Company whereby he agreed to provide passage to British troops through Punjab, enabling them to place Shah Shuja on the throne of Kabul.

After 1809 till 1839, when Ranjit Singh died, there was no major tension between the Sikhs and the English. Ranjit Singh's eldest son Kharak Singh proved to be an unworthy successor and suddenly died in 1839. Kharak Singh's son Naunihal also accidently died while returning from his father's funeral, leading to an anarchic situation in the Punjab. An intense internal struggle for power followed and the British moved quickly to conquer the Punjab. The First Anglo–Sikh war began in 1845 and the British finally annexed the Punjab in 1849. In this way, within a decade after the death of Ranjit Singh, the mighty Sikh State was absorbed into the arms of British imperialism.[6]

Cis-Sutlej States: The term, now obsolete, first came into use in 1809, when the Sikh chiefs south of the Sutlej passed under British protection. The term was generally applied to the country south of the Sutlej and north of the Delhi territory.

The Jats

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century, a few smaller states also emerged in north India. These were the Jats and the Afghans. The Jats were an agriculturist caste that inhabited the Delhi–Agra belt. They revolted against the oppressive policies of Aurangzeb under the leadership of the Jat zamindars in the latter half of the 17th century. Even though the revolt was suppressed, the region remained disturbed. Despite its origin as a peasant rebellion, the Jat state remained feudal, with zamindars holding the main power (the revenue demand under Suraj Mal were higher than under the Mughals).

The foundation for the Jat state of Bharatpur in Rajasthan was laid by Churaman and Badan Singh-

Churaman (1695–1721): Churaman built a strong fort at Thoon and challenged Mughal authority in the region. When, in 1721, the Mughal army led by Jai Singh II (governor of Agra) attacked and captured his fort, Churaman committed suicide.

[6]Read about the British conquest of Punjab in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Badan Singh (1721–56): Badan Singh, Churaman's nephew, now assumed leadership of the Jats. He considerably strengthened his position and built four forts at Deeg, Kumher, Weir and Bharatpur, consolidating the Bharatpur kingdom.

Suraj Mal (or Sujan Singh, 1756–63): However, the Jat power reached its glory under Suraj Mal. He was a brave soldier and an able administrator. His state extended from Delhi in the north to Chambal in the south, Agra in the west to Ganga in the east; including the subahs of Agra, Mathura, Meerut and Aligarh.

Suraj Mal's Role in the Third Battle of Panipat: The struggle against the Afghan invader Abdali was given the appearance of a great religious battle by the Marathas. Agents of the Peshwa visited the court of every Hindu prince to gather support, including that of Suraj Mal. Following a meeting with Sadashiv Rao Bhau, Suraj Mal decided to join the Marathas against Abdali. Soon differences emerged between them on the plan of campaign against Abdali and Bhau had made an enemy of the only powerful Hindu Raja who had come to serve him with all his resources. Abdali at once seized this opportunity and tried to secure Suraj Mal's neutrality, if not active assistance. Raja Suraj Mal agreed to maintain neutrality, but his sympathies continued to be with the Marathas.

The neutrality of Raja Suraj Mal is considered to be a major contributory factor in the defeat of the Marathas. Vast areas around Delhi had been completely ruined due to constant ravages; during the struggle while Abdali depended on supplies from Rohilkhand, the Marathas depended on the Jat kingdom. With his arrogant attitude, Bhau had lost this resource and the Marathas had to fight on empty stomach at Panipat.

However, when the Maratha survivors fled form Panipat and entered the Jat kingdom, the Jats provided them with food, medicine and clothes for relief. Had it not been for Suraj Mal's generosity, few of them would have been able to cross the Narmada to tell the woeful tale of Panipat to the Peshwa. Hence it is clear that the Jats under Suraj Mal did not participate in the Battle of Panipat. They, however, provided considerable assistance to the Maratha soldiers and civilians who escaped the fighting.

Suraj Mal has been called as the 'Plato of the Jat tribe' and as 'the Jat Ulysses' for his steady intellect and clear vision. However, his rule was short-lived and he died on 25 December 1763 fighting the Rohillas under Najib-ud-Daulah. His death marked the end of the Jat state.

The Afghans (at Farrukhabad and Rohilkhand)

The states of Farrukhabad and Rohilkhand were a fallout of the Afghan migration in the mid-18th century because of political disruption in Afghanistan.

Farrukhabad: Muhammad Khan Bangash (also known as Ahmad Khan Bangash), an Afghan adventurer, established his control over Farrukhabad (territory between present day Aligarh and Kanpur), during the reigns of Farrukhsiyar and Mohammad Shah.

Rohilkhand: Similarly, an Afghan (Pathan or Pashtun) soldier Daud and his son Ali Muhammad Khan carved out an independent principality for themselves. Ali Muhammad Khan took advantage of the collapse of authority in north India following Nadir Shah's invasion to set up a petty kingdom—Rohilkhand. It was located at the Himalayan foothills (north-west of present state of UP, between Kumaon in the north and the Ganga in the south) with its capital at Aolan in Bareilly and later at Rampur.

The Afghani use of artillery, particularly the flint-gun, ended the domination of cavalry since the discovery of the stirrup in the early medieval times. Politically, the role of the Afghans was negative. Both the Rohillas and the Bangash helped Ahmad Shah Abdali during the Third Battle of Panipat and accentuated the decline of the Mughals. The Rohillas themselves suffered heavily at the hands of other powers in the area—the Jats and the Awadh rulers, and later the Marathas and the British.

Independent Kingdoms—Mysore, Kerala and the Rajputs

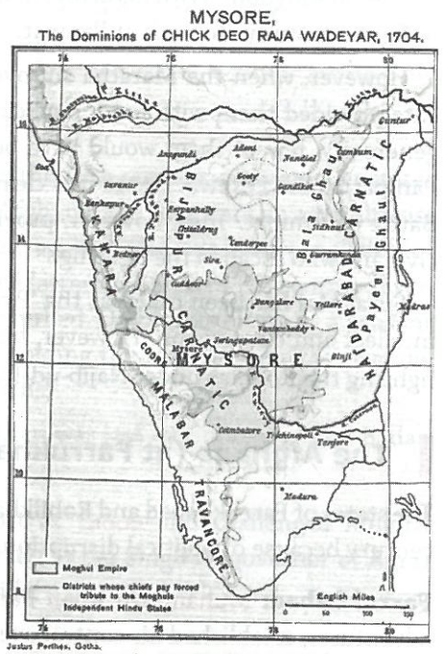
The independent kingdoms constituted a third category of states which were neither the result of a breakaway from or rebellion against Delhi. They had already enjoyed considerable amount of autonomy in the past and now in the 18th century became completely independent.

Mysore

Mysore was located south of Hyderabad at the junction of Eastern and Western Ghats. It was originally a viceroyalty under the Vijayanagara Empire in the 16th century. The Kingdom of Mysore had preserved its fragile independence ever since the end of Vijayanagara Empire and had been only nominally a part of the Mughal Empire.

In the early 18th century, Mysore was ruled by Wadiyar (or Wodeyar) King Chikka Krishnaraja. Two of his ministers, Nanjaraja (the Sarvadhikari or prime minister) and Devaraja (the Dulwai or commander in chief) seized power and reduced the king to a mere puppet. The mid-18th century saw the emergence of Mysore as the second most significant power in south India, after Hyderabad. The foundation of Mysore power was laid by Hyder Ali, which was later consolidated by his able son, Tipu Sultan.

From Wadiyars to Tipu Sultan, Mysore was sought after by various powers (Marathas, Hyderabad, Carnatic and the English) who turned it into a constant battlefield.



Map of Mysore (1704)

Hyder Ali (1761–82)


Hyder Ali

In 1721, Hyder Ali was born in an obscure family and started his career as a petty officer in the Mysore army (hostile English contemporaries often termed him as a usurper). Though uneducated, he was a man of great energy and intellect. He gradually rose in the Mysore army to be a brilliant commander. In 1761, Hyder overthrew Nanjaraja and established his authority over Mysore state.

Expansion under Hyder Ali

- Hyder Ali established control over rebellious poligars (zamindars) and conquered Bidnur, Sunda, Sera, Canara and Malabar. Major reason for occupation of Malabar was to have access to the Indian Ocean.
- Hyder was an expansionist at heart and naturally clashed with other regional powers—the Marathas, the Nizam and the English.
- He faced Maratha raids in 1764, 1766 and again in 1771 as the Marathas recovered fast under Peshwa Madhav Rao. However, after the death of Peshwa in 1772, Hyder Ali not only quickly recovered the territories earlier lost to the Marathas, but also acquired several territories in the Krishna-Tungabhadra Doab.
- He also inflicted a heavy defeat on the English near Madras in 1769.

Hyder's most remarkable achievement was his realisation that only a modern army could be the basis for a powerful state. Thus, he inducted French experts and established a modern arsenal at Dindigul with their help. He made an attempt to induce organisational discipline along European lines. He organised his army through the system of risalas, with a clear chain of command going upto the ruler. He practiced religious toleration and many of his ministers were Hindus.

Hyder died during the course of the second Anglo-Mysore war (1782) and was succeeded by his son, Tipu Sultan.

Tipu Sultan (1782–99)


Tipu Sultan

Tipu Sultan strongly asserted his autonomy, unlike other 18th-century states. In 1787, he assumed the title of Padshah, issued coins in his name without any reference to the Mughal emperor, and instead of Emperor Shah Alam's name he inserted his own name in the khutba (Friday sermons at the mosque) and even issued a new calendar. He also sought a sanad (royal order) from the Ottoman Khalif to legitimise his rule. At the same time, he did not completely sewer the links with the Mughal monarch. Being a realist, he recognised Mughal authority when it suited him and defied it when it did not.

As ruler and administrator, Tipu Sultan was successful and earned the praise of his contemporaries. In spite of the absence of any checks on his authority, he did not behave like an irresponsible despot and took great care to work for the welfare and happiness of his people. More than any other 18th-century Indian ruler, Tipu thoroughly recognised the threat that the English posed to South India. Accordingly, Tipu raised an efficient military force. He employed French officers to train his troops and even raised a French corps. He also made an effort to build a modern navy after 1796.

Economically, Mysore flourished under Tipu, though not free from contemporary economic backwardness. He understood the importance of modern trade and industry. He was the lone Indian ruler who recognised economic strength as the foundation of military strength. Hence he promoted both inland as well as foreign trade, but also imposed tight government control over it. He set up a number of factories in Mysore state which manufactured a wide range of articles such as paper sugar, silk fabrics, tools and implements, etc. He sent emissaries to France, Turkey, Iran and Pegu Myanmar to develop foreign trade. He also tried to set up trading companies on the lines of European companies. He worked for modernisation of agriculture and introduced sericulture in Mysore.

Tipu, almost a folk hero, was an innovator and a modernist in many ways. He was an avid learner and had a library with books on diverse subjects. He showed proper appreciation for western thought and sciences which had freed his mind of 'eastern conservatism and apathy'. Tipu showed a keen interest in French Revolution. He is believed to have planted a 'Tree of liberty' at Seringapatam, became a member of the Jacobin Club and allowed himself to be addressed as Citizen Tipu.

The imperialist writers depict Tipu as a 'monster pure and simple' and a 'bigoted monarch'. These views are obviously biased. The Sringeri Letters reveal that he issued funds for repair and other temple works and never interfered with worship in temples situated within the Seringapatam fort. In personal life, he remained free from vices. He would fondly say that it was "better to live a day as a lion than a lifetime as a sheep".

Battle of Seringapatam (1799)

Tipu Sultan ruled Mysore till his death at the hands of the British in 1799—he died defending his capital Seringapatam (or Srirangapatnam) during the course of the Fourth Anglo–Mysore war. Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan fought four wars against the British before the final surrender of Mysore in 1799. The Marathas, the Nawab of Carnatic and the Nizam of Hyderabad aligned with the British from time to time to subdue the Mysore ruler.[7]

[7]Read about the British conquest of Mysore in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Tipu Sultan's Administration: Tipu Sultan's government, like all other governments of the time, was a despotic one. The Sultan himself was the highest civil, political and military authority of the state. There was no office of the wazir in his administration. However, there were 7 principle departments, each under a Mir Asif including:

- **Mir Asaf Cutchehri:** Revenue and Finance department
- **Mir Miran Cutchehri:** Military department
- **Malikut-Tujjar Cutchehri:** Commerce department
- **Mir Yam Cutchehri:** Marine department
- **Mir Khazain Cutchehri:** Treasury and mint department

Kerala

At the beginning of 18th century, Kerala was divided among a large number of chiefs and rajas. The four most important states were Calicut (under Zamorin), Chirakkal, Cochin and Travancore. Travancore, the southernmost state, had always maintained its independence from Mughal rule. It also withstood the shock of Mysorean expansion in 1766 when Hyder Ali invaded Kerala and annexed Malabar and Calicut; Travancore was spared. The kingdom of Travancore had its initial capital at Padmanabahapuram (1729–95), later shifted to Thiruvananthapuram (1795–49).

Rise of Travancore (After 1729)

- **Marthanda Varma:** Travancore had risen into prominence after 1729 under King Marthanda Varma. He expanded his kingdom from Kanyakumari to Cochin with the help of modern army trained on Western lines. He defeated the Dutch and ended their political power in Kerala.
- **Rama Varma:** His successor Rama Varma was a man of great creativity and learning, including western knowledge. He conversed fluently in English and regularly read newspapers published in London, Calcutta and Madras. He was responsible for making Trivandrum, the capital centre of scholarship and art. After his death, the state lost its glory and soon succumbed to British pressure, accepting a resident in 1800.

Rajputs

Rajputs were warrior clans that ruled in overwhelming majority in Rajasthan and Saurashtra. Since the time of Akbar, Rajput chiefs were patronised by Mughal emperors following a policy of indirect rule. They paid an annual tribute (peshkash) to the emperor as a mark of subordination and enjoyed autonomy in matters of internal administration. Many of them were given high military ranks in the Mughal army. In this way, they contributed to the strength of the empire and in return they were given help to consolidate their own hold over their kingdoms.

Relationship with the Mughals

Eighteenth century was marked by a love–hate relationship between the Mughals and the Rajputs. Rajput rulers did not lag behind in taking advantage of the declining Mughal Empire to consolidate their position and tried to re-establish their independence.

According to Bipan Chandra, the desire for independence partially arose from the harsh treatment of the Rajputs dating back to Aurangzeb's reign. Aurangzeb had led many ruthless campaigns in Rajasthan. He practiced religious intolerance and revived jeziah. Such harsh treatment aroused the anger of many Rajputs and left a sore which never healed. Thus, a race which had been the right arm of the Mughal Empire at the beginning of the Mughal period, was gradually alienated and never again served the throne without distrust.

Shekhar Bandopadhyaya writes that Aurangzeb did not discriminate against the Rajput sardars, but he could not tolerate the continuous territorial expansion of Mewar. The situation took an ugly turn when he interfered in the succession of Marwar. Aurangzeb refused to recognize Ajit Singh (the posthumous son of Rana Jaswant Singh of Marwar) as Rana. Instead he appointed Inder Singh Rathore, a nephew of Jaswant Singh, as Rana there. Consequently, Ajit Singh of Marwar rose in revolt and was ably helped by Mewar.

Anti-Mughal League (1708)

In 1708, Emperor Bahadur Shah marched towards Jodhpur and forced Ajit Singh into submission. It led to the formation of an anti-Mughal League led by Ajit Singh, Jai Singh II and Durgadas Rathore (a senior officer of Jaswant Singh). They adopted the method of slowly loosening their ties with Delhi and function as independent states in practice. They participated in the struggle for power in the Delhi court and gained lucrative governorships.

For instance, in the Farrukhsiyar–Sayyid brothers' tussle in Delhi, the Rajput chiefs of Jodhpur and Jaipur followed the policy of "opportune adherence or aloofness". In order to win Ajit Singh to their side, the Sayyids appointed Ajit Singh with the governorship of Ajmer and Gujarat, a position he held till 1721. On the other hand, the anti-Sayyid party appointed Jai Singh II of Jaipur as the governor of Agra in 1721. In this way, at one point, the Rajputs controlled the entire territory from 600 miles south of Delhi to Surat on the western coast.

However, the Rajputs rulers remained divided among themselves and none proved powerful enough to compete with the Marathas or the English for the position of paramount power.

Jai Singh II or Raja Sawai Jai Singh (1699–1743): The most powerful Rajput chief of this time was Raja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber who ruled in Jaipur from 1699 to 1743. He was a distinguished statesman and reformer. His interest in science was the most remarkable aspect of his personality, especially at a time when Indians were in oblivion of scientific progress.

Jai Singh founded the city of Jaipur and made it a seat of science and art. Jaipur was scientifically built based on a city plan, having broad streets which intersected at right angles. Jai Singh was also a great astronomer. He erected observatories at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura; some of them had instruments which were his own invention. He drew up a set of tables called Zij Muhammadshahi, to enable people to make astronomical observations. He got several important texts on geometry and trigonometry translated into Sanskrit including Euclid's 'Elements of Geometry'.

Jai Singh was also a social reformer. He tried to reduce lavish expenditure by Rajputs on their daughters' weddings which had given rise to the practice of female infanticide.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the regional powers were unable to take the place of the Mughals; none had the resources to provide an all India polity. The regional powers could not reverse the general economic stagnation that had plagued the Mughal economy. The jagirdari crisis intensified as income from agriculture declined while the number of contenders for a share of the surplus multiplied. Consequently, many regional powers made desperate attempts to preserve internal and external trade.

Satish Chandra argues that it is wrong to talk of generalised socio-economic stagnation in the 18th century. He points out that there were considerable economic variations. There was creation of new wealth and social power in the provinces, which resulted in the decline of the centralised Mughal power. Those regions with considerable amounts of resources actually attracted the English and other European traders and triggered off a competition among them for supremacy in the subcontinent.

The biggest weakness of the regional states lay in their scientific backwardness; limited attempts were made to modernise industry and commerce. These backward regional states easily succumbed to the superior British system.

18th-century India—Economic and Social Conditions (Indian Economy and Society on the Eve of British Conquest)

Socially and economically, 18th-century India failed to progress at an adequate pace. India was a land of contrasts as extreme poverty and extreme luxury existed side by side. While the common people remained impoverished, backward and oppressed, the rich and the powerful enjoyed a life of luxury and abundance. Yet, the life of the masses in general was better than what it became after 100 years of British rule. The socio-economic life of the people in the 18th century may be understood under the following heads-

Economic Conditions

Village Economy

- **Self-sufficient, self-governing village community:** In the beginning of 18th century, the basic unit of Indian economy was the self-sufficient, self-governing village community which produced almost everything for its local needs (except perhaps a few items like salt and iron) and had very little to do with the outside world.
- **Agriculture and handicraft industry:** The two industries worked in close union; while the peasant grew crops, his family carried out spinning and weaving and other secondary activities to produce goods needed for the family. Various other services were provided by craftsmen like carpenter, potter, goldsmith, blacksmith and others who received a share in the village crops in return. Handicrafts had reached a high level of development and

were in much demand. Some of the famous handicrafts of the time included cotton, silk and woollen fabrics and metal works.

- **Agrarian structure:** The concept of private property in land had not yet developed. Land in the village was plentiful and belonged collectively to the cultivating community, each family having its share of arable land. Karl Marx had described this kind of collective ownership of land as the Indian form of communism. Different classes connected with land possessed certain rights. The actual cultivators enjoyed the right to cultivate and had security of tenure provided a fixed share of produce was paid to the overlord. The land revenue was collected by the village headman or Patil and passed onto the ruler or Nawab. The state demand of revenue generally varied from one-sixth to one-third. Other land related issues and disputes were settled by the Patil in consultation with the village Panchayat.
- **Self-governance:** The villages were also self-governing. The Village Panchayat administered the village affairs and settled disputes. The local chief or the subahdar did not interfere in the day-to-day village affairs and limited himself to claiming a share in the village crops. In this way, the main link of the village with the state was the payment of land revenue. Even as rulers and dynasties changed continuously, the life in the villages carried on as usual, phenomena referred to as the "unchangeableness of Asiatic communities" by Karl Marx. It has been aptly said that the village communities in India 'lasted when nothing else seemed to last'.
- **Stagnation:** The unchanging character of village communities was responsible for socio-economic stability on one hand and stagnation on the other. Agriculture was technically backward and stagnant. Though the farmer's produce supported the rest of society, yet his own reward was miserably inadequate. The farmers had to pay exorbitant amounts to the state, the zamindars and the revenue farmers. The isolation of village communities obstructed the creation of a wider market for Indian handicrafts. The caste-bound socio-economic structure permitted little mobility of individual and labor. Political indifference acted as a barrier to growth of national consciousness. As a result, Indian villages represented a picture of stagnation, untouched from all modern scientific developments taking place in other parts of the world.

Urban Economy

- Even as economic stagnation continued, India remained a land of extensive manufacturers and Indian manufactures enjoyed a worldwide renown. Though urban economy presented a better picture, there was no sharp division between urban centres where industries were concentrated and rural centres which supplied raw materials. Industrial production in India continued to be largely a rural-based activity.

Condition of Indian Industry

- **Textiles:** Cotton textiles which were produced virtually all over India constituted the most important manufacture. The cotton manufactures of Bengal (Dacca, Murshidabad), Gujarat (Ahmedabad, Surat, Bharuch) and Andhra (Masulipatam, Aurangabad, Vishakhapatnam) the silk fabrics of Murshidabad, Lahore and Agra, woollen shawls and carpets of Agra, Lahore and Kashmir were in demand both in India and abroad.
- **Other agro-based industries:** In addition to cotton and silk, dye stuffs (particularly indigo) and sugar were the next most important commercial industrial products. Significant agro-based industries included oils, tobacco, opium and alcoholic beverages.
- **Mining and ship-building:** Though mining was inadequately developed, India was self-sufficient in iron. Ship-building was another important and developing industry.
- **Luxury goods:** High-class luxury goods were also produced and largely consumed by the rich nobility.
- **Manufacturing centres:** Some other important manufacturing centres included Patna (Bihar), Chanderi and Burhanpur (MP), Juanpur, Varanasi, Lucknow (UP), Multan, Lahore (Punjab), Bangalore, Coimbatore and Madurai (south India). The emerging Indian cities had also developed their own banking system comprising Shroffs, Mahajans, Chetties and others.
- **Stagnation:** Though India was, on the whole, self-sufficient in agriculture and craft industries, some observers feel that the pre-British industrial sector was stagnant and technically backward and there was an overall declining trend in agriculture and craft industry production. However, this decline was far greater in the post-British 18th and 19th centuries.

Condition of Indian Trade

- **Favourable balance of trade:** As India was self-sufficient in food grain production and handicrafts, it did not import goods on a large scale. On the contrary, its agricultural and industrial produce was in great demand in the foreign market. The 17th century saw Indian cotton textiles emerge as the most important Asian import to the West, displacing spices (the marked expansion of cotton textile exports provided employment to a sizeable section of Indian population). Hence India exported more than it imported and its trade was heavily balanced in India's favour.
- **Inflow of bullion:** The remarkable rise in Indian textile exports ensured a steady flow of bullion into India from buyer nations and India came to be known as the sink of precious metals. Indian trade with Europe then was essentially based upon the price differential between Asia and the rest of the world. The European merchants bought Indian goods at a low price and sold them at a much higher price in Europe, Africa and other New World markets. Since there was no demand for European goods in India, the purchases of Indian goods had to be financed by bullion payments. This comprised the main problem faced by European companies in Indian trade.
- **Rise of merchants and bankers:** Flourishing trade brought into existence the merchant capitalists and bankers who further promoted trade and commerce. In fact, in the beginning of 18th century, India was one of the main centres of world trade and industry.
- **Major items of export:** These included cotton textiles (most important export item), silk, indigo, saltpeter, rice, wheat, sugar, spices, precious stones and drugs.

- **Major items of import were:**
  - (From) **Persian Gulf**-pearls, silk, wool, dates, dry fruits, rose water
  - **Arabia**-coffee, gold, drugs, honey
  - **China**-tea, sugar, porcelain and silk
  - **Tibet**-gold, musk, woollen sloth
  - **Indonesian islands**-spices, perfume, sugar
  - **Africa**-ivory, drugs
  - **Europe**-woollen cloth, metals, paper
- **Disruption:** However, political disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century inevitably brought economic fragmentation as well. Economic activities were disrupted by continuous wars and conflict between the regional powers. New agencies of pillage and plunder sprang up. Every small or large ruler tried to increase his income by imposing heavy duties on goods passing through his territories. Many trading centres were looted by foreign invaders (like Nadir Shah and Abdali) and European trading companies began to dabble in Indian politics.

A Bengali woman in fine muslin silk, 18th century

Examples of Trading Centres Looted by Foreign Invaders were:

- Delhi was plundered by Nadir Shah
- Lahore, Delhi, Mathura was plundered by Abdali
- Agra was plundered by Jats
- Gujarat and Deccan were plundered by Marathas
- Sarhind was plundered by Sikhs

Main Industrial Products of India in the 18th Century: India was a large-scale manufacturer of cotton and silk textiles, dyes, sugar, oils, tobacco, opium, alcoholic beverages, jute, ivory, ships, iron and other mineral and metallic products (like gold and silver jewellery, arms and shields, etc.) and high-class luxury goods.

Social Conditions

Despite political upheavals of the 18th century, the social life of the masses remained traditional, marked by stagnation and dependence.

Social Stratification

At the apex of the social order was the emperor, followed by the nobility. During peace time, they led a life of luxury with a taste for wine, women and music. The middle classes comprised of the merchants, shopkeepers, etc. The lowest rung of the society comprised of vast numbers of the poor peasants and artisans. Society was divided on the lines of religion, region, tribe, language

and caste. In fact, caste was a central feature of the social life of the Hindus. Caste rules prevailed in matters of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Even though Islam preached social equality to the Muslims, they too were divided along class and caste lines. These considerations kept not only Shia and Sunni apart but also Irani, Afghani, Turani and Hindustani Muslims apart from each other.

Status of Women

Family system was primarily patriarchal (Kerala Nairs were an exception) and the will of the male head of the family usually prevailed. Though examples can be sighted of women who played significant roles in polity or arts, the status of women was certainly not of equality. Evils of child marriage, dowry and purdah system prevailed. Polygamy was common among the rich classes. In fact, the caste system, the custom of sati and the conditions of widows were the greatest social evils of 18th-century India.

Slavery

Prevalence of slavery was yet another social evil of the time. European travellers and administrators have reported widespread practice of slavery in India. Extreme poverty or natural calamities compelled some to sell off their children. However, slaves in India were treated better than their counterparts in America or Europe. They were usually seen as hereditary servants rather than as menials. They were allowed to marry among themselves and their children were considered free citizens. Slave trade in India touched new dimensions with the coming of Europeans. The European companies bought slaves from the markets of Bengal, Assam and Bihar and sold them in the American and European markets. In 1789, trafficking of slaves was abolished by a proclamation, yet it continued to survive in various forms until recent times.

State of Education

The education system prevalent in India in 18th century was traditional, decadent and out of touch with modern developments in the West. The idea of Indian education (both Hindu and Muslim systems) was culture and not literacy; learning was linked with religion. Vocational education was imparted according to one's varna or family tradition.

- **Elementary education** was fairly widespread, though mainly confined to males of higher castes. Elementary schools were called pathshalas and maktabs and were often attached to temples or mosques. School's curriculum included instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic as well as moral and religious instruction. The study of science and technology was excluded. Original thought and innovation was discouraged.
- **Higher education** centres were called chatuspathis or tols (for Sanskrit) and madrasas (for Persian and Arabic). Persian was the court language and was learnt by Muslims as well as the Hindus. The French traveller Bernier described Kashi or Banaras as 'the Athens of India'.
- **Literacy:** Interestingly, literacy was not less than what it was under the British later. In 1813, Warren Hastings wrote that Indian had in general 'superior endowments in reading, writing and arithmetic than the common people of any nation in Europe'. A good feature was that the teachers enjoyed high prestige in society.

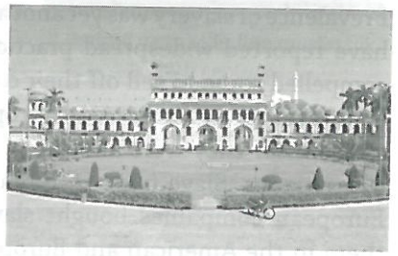
Hindu–Muslim Relations

In 18th-century India, Hindus and Muslims enjoyed friendly relations with one another. They respected each other's religion and practiced religious tolerance. This was particularly true among common people in villages and towns, where Hindus and Muslims cooperated with one another in socio-cultural affairs. This resulted in the emergence of composite Hindu–Muslim culture, accelerated by the development of Urdu language.

Art and Culture

Culturally too, there were some signs of exhaustion. It remained wholly traditionalist. The most rapid decline was seen in those arts which depended on patronage of kings and nobles (for example,- Mughal architecture and painting). Yet the 18th century cannot be called a dark age. With the decline of Delhi, talent fled to newly established state capitals like Hyderabad, Lucknow, Murshidabad and Jaipur. Cultural continuity with preceding centuries was maintained and local traditions continued to evolve.

- **In the field of architecture**
  - **Jaipur:** Sawai Jai Singh built the famous pink city of Jaipur. He also built five astronomical observatories at Jaipur, Delhi, Banaras, Mathura and Ujjain.
  - **Lucknow:** Asaf-ud-Daula built the Bara Imambara (building for celebration of the Muharram festival) in 1784.
  - **Amritsar:** Maharaja Ranjit Singh renovated the Sikh shrine, decorating the entire upper portion with a thin layer of gold, giving it the modern name of Golden Temple.
  - **Kerala:** The famous Padmanabhapuram Palace was built with its remarkable architecture and mural paintings.



Bara Imambara, Lucknow

- **In the field of literature**
  - The spread of Urdu language and poetry was a distinct feature of 18th century and saw the emergence of famous Urdu poets like Mir, Sauda, Nazir and Mirza Ghalib.
  - Vernacular languages also greatly developed during this period including languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese and Telugu. In South India, Malayalam literature was revived under Travancore rulers Marthanda Varma and Rama Varma. Kunchan Nambiar arose as one of the great poets of Kerala. Katahakali literature, dance and drama saw its full development during this period. Some famous Sindhi poets of the 18th century were Shah Abdul Latif, Sachal and Sami. Latif composed the famous collection of poems called Risalo. Warris Shah wrote the famous romantic epic in Punjabi-Heer Ranjha. In Assam, literature developed under the patronage of Ahom Kings. Dayaram was a great lyricist from Gujarat.

Thus, we see that, 18th-century India was characterised by traditional outlook and stagnation. It was totally ignorant of the scientific, cultural, political and economic achievements of the West. Though some preconditions for development along modern lines did exist, such a development was severely hampered due to political instability, feudal society and presence of European companies with deep politico–economic interests. The greatest weakness of Indian life and society lay in the field of science. This weakness became the most significant reason for the total subjugation of India by the most advanced country of the time.

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. Who among the following streamlined the last Maratha administration after Sambhaji? **[UPSC 2000]**
   (a) Raja Ram
   (b) Balaji Vishwanath
   (c) Ganga bai
   (d) Nanaji Deshmukh
2. Who among the following Indian rulers established embassies in foreign countries on modern lines? **[UPSC 2001]**
   (a) Hyder Ali (b) Mir Qasim
   (c) Shah Alam II (d) Tipu Sultan
3. What was the immediate reason for Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade India and fight the third Battle of Panipat? **[UPSC 2010]**
   (a) He wanted to avenge the expulsion of his viceroy Taimur Shah from Lahore by the Marathas
   (b) The frustrated governor of Jullundhar Adina Beg Khan invited him to invade Punjab
   (c) He wanted to punish Mughal administration for non-payment of the revenues of the Chahar Mahal(Gujarat, Aurangabad, Sialkot and Pasrur)
   (d) He wanted to annex all the fertile plains of Punjab up to the borders of Delhi to his Kingdom

Previous Years' Questions – Main Exam

1. Clarify how mid-eighteenth century India was beset with the spectre of a fragmented polity. **[UPSC 2017].**

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. Which of the following is/are correctly matched?
   1. Guru Angad- developed the script Gurumukhi
   2. Guru Ram Das- compiled the Adi Granth
   3. Guru Arjan Dev- laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar

   Select the correct answer from the following option:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

2. In 18th-century India, what did 'misls' refer to?
   (a) A type of weapon used by the Afghans
   (b) A post in state administration
   (c) Sikh confederacies
   (d) none of the above
3. Which of the following were among the consequences of the Third Battle of Panipat?
   1. The victorious Afghans established firm control over the North-West India.
   2. It seriously deflected the course of Maratha imperialism.
   3. It gave an opportunity to the British East India Company to consolidate its power in Bengal and south India.

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3
4. Which of the following is/are correctly matched?
   1. Martanda Verma-Kerala
   2. Tipu Sultan-Carnatic
   3. Suraj Mal-Rajput

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3
5. Examine the following statements with reference to Tipu Sultan-
   1. He issued coins without any reference to the Mughal emperor.
   2. He tried to set up trading companies on the lines of European companies.
   3. He showed a keen interest in Russian Revolution.

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3
6. Which of the following statements is/are correct with regard to Raja Sawai Jai Singh?
   1. He founded the city of Jaipur.
   2. He built astronomical observatories in Delhi, Jaipur and Bhopal.
   3. He was instrumental in starting the tradition of lavish expenditure by Rajputs on their daughters' weddings.

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3
7. Which of the following factors contributed to the political supremacy of the Sikhs in the Punjab?
   1. Afghan invasions
   2. Maratha incursions
   3. Internal Struggle within Mughal Provincial Administration

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3
8. With regard to the Sikhs, which of the following statements is/are true?
   1. The Sikh panth was founded by Guru Gobind Singh.
   2. Guru Hargobind trained the Sikhs in military art and war tactics.

   Select the correct answer from the following options:
   (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
   (c) both (d) neither
9. Which of the following was/were true regarding the Marathas in the 18th century?
   1. The revenue system and administration of the Marathas were quite similar to that of the Mughals.
   2. The Marathas established a strong bond with the common people.

   Select the correct answer from the following options
   (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
   (c) both (d) neither

10. Which of the following statements is/are true regarding Hyder Ali?
    1. He belonged to the royal Wodeyar dynasty.
    2. He modernised the Mysore army along European lines.
    3. He was well educated and a man of great energy and intellect.

    Select the correct answer from the following options:
    (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
    (c) 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Practice Questions – Main Exam

1. "The emergence of autonomous states in the 18th century represented a transformation rather than collapse of the polity." Critically analyse the statement.
2. Discuss the expansion of the Maratha power under the first three Peshwas. Why did the Marathas fail to establish a Pan-India empire?
3. Discuss the causes of the rise and growth of regional kingdoms with special reference to Deccan in the 18th century.
4. 'The first part of the 18th century saw the decline of the Mughals, the last part saw the rise of the British and the middle part saw the swaying political fortunes of the Marathas.' Substantiate.
5. 'It was the Marathas and not the Mughals who fought the Afghans under Abdali in 1761'. What does this statement imply? Critically evaluate it.

Answers

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (a)

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. (a) 2. (c) 3. (c) 4. (a) 5. (b)
6. (a) 7. (d) 8. (b) 9. (a) 10. (c)