NINETEEN

Climax and Disintegration of the Mughal Empire—II

THE RISE OF THE MARATHAS

We have already seen that the Marathas had important positions in the administrative and military systems of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, and that their power and influence in the affairs of government had grown as the Mughals advanced towards the Deccan. Both the Deccani sultans and the Mughals made a bid for their support, and Malik Ambar used them in his army in large numbers as loose auxiliaries. Although a number of influential Maratha families—the Mores, the Ghatages, the Nimbalkars, etc., exercised local authority in some areas, the Marathas did not have any large, well-established states as the Rajputs had. The credit for setting up such a large state goes to Shahji Bhonsale and his son, Shivaji. As we have seen, for some time, Shahji acted as the kingmaker in Ahmadnagar, and defied the Mughals. However, by the treaty of 1636, Shahji yielded the territories he was dominating. He joined the service of Bijapur and turned his energies to Karnataka. Taking advantage of the unsettled conditions, Shahji tried to set up a semi-independent principality at Bangalore, just as Mir Jumla, the leading noble of Golconda, tried to carve out such a principality on the Coromandel coast. A number of other chiefs, such as the Abyssinian chiefs on the western coast, the Sidis, behaved in a similar manner. This forms the background to Shivaji's attempt to carve out a large principality around Poona.

EARLY CAREER OF SHIVAJI

Shahji had left the Poona *jagir* to his neglected senior wife, Jija Bai, and his minor son, Shivaji. Shivaji showed his mettle when at the young age of 18, he overran a number of hill forts near Poona—

Rajgarh, Kondana and Torna in the years 1645–47. With the death of his guardian, Dadaji Kondadeo in 1647, Shivaji became his own master, and the full control of his father's *jagir* passed to him.

Shivaji began his real career of conquest in 1656 when he conquered Javli from the Maratha chief, Chandra Rao More. The Javli kingdom and the accumulated treasure of the Mores were important, and Shivaji acquired them by means of treachery. The conquest of Javli made him the undisputed master of the Mavala area, or the highlands, and freed his path to the Satara area and to the coastal strip, the Konkan. Mavali foot soldiers became a strong part of his army. With their help, he strengthened his position by acquiring a further series of hill forts near Poona.

The Mughal invasion of Bijapur in 1657 saved Shivaji from Bijapuri reprisal. Shivaji first entered into negotiations with Aurangzeb, then changed sides and made deep inroads into Mughal areas, seizing rich booty. When Aurangzeb came to terms with the new Bijapur ruler in preparation for the civil war, he pardoned Shivaji also. But he distrusted Shivaji, and advised the Bijapur ruler to expel him from the Bijapuri area he had seized, and if he wanted to employ him, employ him in Karnataka, away from the Mughal frontiers.

With Aurangzeb away in the north, Shivaji resumed his career of conquest at the expense of Bijapur. He burst into the Konkan, the coastal strip between the Ghats and the sea, and seized its northern part. He also overran a number of other hill forts. Bijapur now decided to take stern action. It sent against Shivaji a premier Bijapuri noble, Afzal Khan, at the head of 10,000 troops, with instructions to capture him by any means possible. Treachery was common in those days, and both Afzal Khan and Shivaji had resorted to treachery on a number of occasions. Shivaji's forces were not used to open fighting and shrank from an open contest with this powerful chief. Afzal Khan sent an invitation to Shivaji for a personal interview, promising to get him pardoned from the Bijapuri court. Convinced that this was a trap, Shivaji went prepared, and murdered the Khan (1659) in a cunning but daring manner. Shivaji put his leaderless army to rout and captured all his goods and equipment including his artillery. Flushed with victory, the Maratha troops overran the powerful fort of Panhala and poured into south Konkan and the Kolhapur districts, making extensive conquests.

Shivaji's exploits made him a legendary figure. His fame grew and he was credited with magical powers. People flocked to him from the Maratha areas to join his army; and even Afghan mercenaries who had been previously in the service of Bijapur, joined his army.

Meanwhile, Aurangzeb was anxiously watching the rise of a Maratha power so near the Mughal frontiers. Aurangzeb instructed the new Mughal governor of the Deccan, Shaista Khan, who was related to Aurangzeb by marriage, to invade Shivaji's dominions.

At first, the war went badly for Shivaji. Shaista Khan occupied Poona (1660) and made it his headquarters. He then sent detachments to wrest control of the Konkan from Shivaji. Despite harassing attacks from Shivaji, and the bravery of Maratha defenders, the Mughals secured their control on north Konkan. Driven into a corner, Shivaji made a bold stroke. He infiltrated into the camp of Shaista Khan at Poona, and at night attacked the Khan in his haram (1663), killing his son and one of his captains, and wounding the Khan. This daring attack put the Khan into disgrace and Shivaji's stock rose once again. In anger, Aurangzeb transferred Shaista Khan to Bengal, even refusing to give him an interview at the time of transfer as was the custom. Meanwhile, Shivaji made another bold move. He attacked Surat, which was the premier Mughal port, and looted it to his heart's content (1664), returning home laden with treasure.

Treaty of Purandar and Shivaji's Visit to Agra

After the failure of Shaista Khan, Aurangzeb deputed Raja Jai Singh of Amber, who was one of the most trusted advisers of Aurangzeb, to deal with Shivaji. Full military and administrative authority was conferred on Jai Singh so that he was not in any way dependent on the Mughal viceroy in the Deccan, and dealt directly with the emperor. Unlike his predecessors, Jai Singh did not underestimate the Marathas. He made careful diplomatic and military preparations. He appealed to all the rivals and opponents of Shivaji, and even tried to win over the sultan of Bijapur in order to isolate Shivaji. Marching to Poona, Jai Singh decided to strike at the heart of Shivaji's territories—Fort Purandar where Shivaji had lodged his family and his treasure. Jai Singh closely besieged Purandar (1665), beating off all Maratha

attempts to relieve it. With the fall of the fort in sight, and no relief likely from any quarter, Shivaji opened negotiations with Jai Singh. After hard bargaining, the following terms were agreed upon:

(i) Out of 35 forts held by Shivaji, 23 forts with surrounding territory which yielded a revenue of four lakhs of *huns* every year were to be surrendered to the Mughals, while the remaining 12 forts with an annual income of one lakh of *huns* were to be left to Shivaji 'on condition of service and loyalty to the throne'.

(ii) Territory worth four lakhs of *huns* a year in the Bijapuri Konkan, which Shivaji had already held, was granted to him. In addition, Bijapur territory worth five lakhs of *huns* a year in the uplands (Balaghat), which Shivaji was to conquer, was also granted to him. In return for these, he was to pay 40 lakhs *huns* in instalments to the Mughals.

Shivaji asked to be excused from personal service. Hence, a *mansab* of 5000 was granted in his place to his minor son, Sambhaji. Shivaji promised, however, to join personally in any Mughal campaign in the Deccan.

Jai Singh cleverly threw a bone of contention between Shivaji and the Bijapuri ruler. But the success of Jai Singh's scheme depended upon Mughal support to Shivaji in making up from Bijapur territory the amount he had yielded to the Mughals. This proved to be the fatal flaw. Aurangzeb had not lost his reservations about Shivaji, and was doubtful of the wisdom of a joint Mughal-Maratha attack on Bijapur. But Jai Singh had larger ideas. He considered the alliance with Shivaji the starting point of the conquest of Bijapur and the entire Deccan. And once this had been done, Shivaji would have no option but to remain an ally of the Mughals since, as Jai Singh wrote to Aurangzeb, 'We shall hem Shivaji in like the centre of a circle.'

However, the Mughal-Maratha expedition against Bijapur failed. Shivaji who had been deputed to capture Fort Panhala was also unsuccessful. Seeing his grandiose scheme collapsing before his eyes, Jai Singh persuaded Shivaji to visit the emperor at Agra. If Shivaji and Aurangzeb could be reconciled, Jai Singh thought, Aurangzeb might be persuaded to give greater resources for a renewed invasion of Bijapur. But the visit proved to be a disaster. Shivaji felt insulted when he was put in the category of *mansabdars* of 5000—a rank which

had been granted earlier to his minor son. Nor did the emperor, whose birthday was being celebrated, find time to speak to Shivaji. Hence, Shivaji walked off angrily and refused imperial service. Such an episode had never happened, and a strong group at the court argued that exemplary punishment should be meted out to Shivaji in order to maintain and assert imperial dignity. Since Shivaji had come to Agra on Jai Singh's assurance, Aurangzeb wrote to him for advice. Jai Singh strongly argued for a lenient treatment for Shivaji. But before any decision could be taken, Shivaji escaped from detention (1666). The manner of Shivaji's escape is too well known to be repeated here.

Aurangzeb always blamed himself for his carelessness in allowing Shivaji to escape. There is little doubt that Shivaji's Agra visit proved to be the turning point in Mughal relations with the Marathas—although for two years after his return home, Shivaji kept quiet. The visit proved that, unlike Jai Singh, Aurangzeb attached little value to the alliance with Shivaji. For him, Shivaji was just a 'petty *bhumia*' (land-holder). As subsequent developments proved, Aurangzeb's stubborn reservations about Shivaji, refusal to recognize his importance and attaching a low price to his friendship were among the biggest political mistakes made by Aurangzeb.

Final Breach with Shivaji—Shivaji's Administration and Achievements

Aurangzeb virtually goaded Shivaji into resuming his career of conquest by insisting upon a narrow interpretation of the treaty of Purandar, although with the failure of the expedition against Bijapur, the bottom had dropped out of the treaty. Shivaji could not be reconciled to the loss of 23 forts and territory worth four lakhs *huns* a year to the Mughals without any compensation from Bijapur. He renewed the contest with the Mughals, sacking Surat a second time in 1670. During the next four years, he recovered a large number of his forts, including Purandar, from the Mughals and made deep inroads into Mughal territories, especially Berar and Khandesh. Mughal preoccupation with the Afghan uprising in the northwest helped Shivaji. He also renewed his contest with Bijapur, securing

Panhala and Satara by means of bribes, and raiding the Kanara country at leisure.

In 1674, Shivaji crowned himself formally at Raigarh. Shivaji had travelled far from being a petty *jagirdar* at Poona. He was by now the most powerful among the Maratha chiefs, and by virtue of the extent of his dominions and the size of his army could claim a status equal to the effete Deccani sultans. The formal coronation had, therefore, a number of purposes. It placed him on a pedestal much higher than any of the Maratha chiefs, some of whom had continued to look upon him as an upstart. To strengthen his social position further, Shivaji married into some of the leading old Maratha families—the Mohites, the Shirkes, etc. A formal declaration was also made by the priest presiding over the function, Gaga Bhatta, that Shivaji was a high class kshatriya. Finally, as an independent ruler it now became possible for Shivaji to enter into treaties with the Deccani sultans on a footing of equality and not as a rebel. It was also an important step in the further growth of Maratha national sentiment.

In 1676 Shivaji undertook a bold new venture. With the active aid and support of the brothers, Madanna and Akhanna at Hyderabad, Shivaji undertook an expedition into the Bijapuri Karnataka. Shivaji was given a grand welcome by the Qutb Shah at his capital, and a formal agreement was arrived at. The Qutb Shah agreed to pay a subsidy of one lakh *huns* (five lakhs of rupees) annually to Shivaji and a Maratha ambassador was to live at his court. The territory and the booty gained in Karnataka was to be shared. The Qutb Shah supplied a contingent of troops and artillery to aid Shivaji and also provided money for the expenses of his army. The treaty was very favourable to Shivaji and enabled him to capture Jinji and Vellore from Bijapuri officials and also to conquer much of the territories held by his half-brother, Ekoji. Although Shivaji had assumed the title of '*Haindava-Dharmoddharak*' (Protector of the Hindu faith), he plundered mercilessly the Hindu population of the area. Returning home laden with treasure, Shivaji refused to share anything with the Qutb Shah, thus straining his relations with him.

The Karnataka expedition was the last major expedition of Shivaji. The base at Jinji built up by Shivaji proved to be a haven of refuge for his son, Rajaram, during Aurangzeb's all-out war on the Marathas.

Shivaji died in 1680, shortly after his return from the Karanataka expedition. Meanwhile, he had laid the foundations of a sound system of administration. Shivaji's system of administration was largely borrowed from the administrative practices of the Deccani states. Although he designated eight ministers, sometimes called the *Ashtapradhan*, it was not in the nature of a council of ministers, each minister being directly responsible to the ruler. The most important ministers were the Peshwas who looked after the finances and general administration, and the *sar-i-naubat* (*senapati*) which was a post of honour and was generally given to one of the leading Maratha chiefs. The *majumdar* was the accountant, while the *wakenavis* was responsible for intelligence, posts and household affairs. The *surunavis* or *chitnis* helped the king with his correspondence. The *dabir* was master of ceremonies and also helped the king in his dealings with foreign powers. The *nyayadhish* and *panditrao* were in charge of justice and charitable grants.

More important than the appointment of these officials was Shivaji's organisation of the army and the revenue system. Shivaji preferred to give cash salaries to the regular soldiers, though sometimes the chiefs received revenue grants (*saranjam*). Strict discipline was maintained in the army, no women or dancing girls being allowed to accompany the army. The plunder taken by each soldier during campaigns was strictly accounted for. The regular army (*paga*) consisting of about 30,000 to 40,000 cavalry, as distinct from the loose auxiliaries (*silahdars*), were supervised by *havaldars* who received fixed salaries. The forts were carefully supervised, Mavali foot soldiers and gunners being appointed there. We are told that three men of equal rank were placed in charge of each fort to guard against treachery.

The revenue system seems to have been patterned on the system of Malik Ambar. A new revenue assessment was completed by Annaji Datto in 1679. It is not correct to think that Shivaji abolished the *zamindari* (*deshmukhi*) system, or that he did not award *jagirs* (*mokasa*) to his officials. However, Shivaji strictly supervised the *mirasdars*, that is, those with hereditary rights in land. Describing the situation, Sabhasad, who wrote in the eighteenth century, says that these sections paid to the government only a small part of their collections. 'In consequence, the *mirasdars* grew and strengthened themselves by

building bastions, castles and strongholds in the villages, enlisting footmen and musketeers... This class had become unruly and seized the country.' Shivaji destroyed their bastions and forced them to submit.

Shivaji supplemented his income by levying a contribution on the neighbouring Mughal territories. This contribution which came to one-fourth of the land revenue, began to be called *chauthai* (one-fourth) or *chauth*.

Shivaji not only proved to be an able general, a skilful tactician and a shrewd diplomat, he also laid the foundation of a strong state by curbing the power of the *deshmukhs*. The army was an effective instrument of his policies, rapidity of movement being the most important factor. The army depended for its salaries to a considerable extent on the plunder of the neighbouring areas. But the state cannot thereby be called just a 'war-state'. It was regional in character, no doubt, but it definitely had a popular base. To that extent, Shivaji was a popular king who represented the assertion of popular will in the area against Mughal encroachments.

Aurangzeb and the Deccani States (1658–87)

It is possible to trace three phases in the relations of Aurangzeb with the Deccani states. The first phase lasted till 1668 during which the main attempt was to recover from Bijapur the territories belonging to the Ahmadnagar state surrendered to it by the treaty of 1636; the second phase lasted till 1684 during which the major danger in the Deccan was considered to be the Maathas, and efforts were made to pressurize Bijapur and Golconda into joining hands with the Mughals against Shivaji and then against his son, Sambhaji. The Mughals nibbled at the territories of the Deccani states and at the same time tried to bring them under their complete domination and control. The last phase began when Aurangzeb despaired of getting the cooperation of Bijapur and Golconda against the Marathas, and decided that to destroy the Marathas it was necessary to conquer Bijapur and Golconda first.

The treaty of 1636, by which Shah Jahan had given one-third of the territories of Ahmadnagar state as a bribe for withdrawing support

to the Marathas, and the promise that the Mughals would 'never ever' conquer Bijapur and Golconda, had been abandoned by Shah Jahan himself. In 1657–58, Golconda and Bijapur were threatened with extinction. Golconda had to pay a huge indemnity, and Bijapur had to agree to the surrender of the Nizam Shahi territories granted to it in 1636. The 'justification' for this was that both these states had made extensive conquests in Karnataka and that 'compensation' was due to the Mughals on the ground that the two states were Mughal vassals, and that their conquests had been made possible due to benevolent neutrality on the part of the Mughals. In reality the cost of maintaining the Mughal armies in the Deccan was high, and the income from the Deccani areas under the control of the Mughals was insufficient to meet it. For a long time, the cost was met by subsidies from the treasuries of Malwa and Gujarat.

The resumption of a policy of limited advance in the Deccan had far-reaching implications which, it seems, neither Shah Jahan nor Aurangzeb adequately appreciated: it destroyed for all times confidence in the Mughal treaties and promises, and made impossible 'a union of hearts' against the Marathas—a policy which Aurangzeb pursued with great perseverance for a quarter of a century, but with little success.

The First Phase (1658–68)

On coming to the throne, Aurangzeb had two problems in the Deccan: the problem posed by the rising power of Shivaji, and the problem of persuading Bijapur to part with the territories ceded to it by the treaty of 1636. Kalyani and Bidar had been secured in 1657. Parenda was secured by bribe in 1660. Sholapur still remained. After his accession, Aurangzeb asked Jai Singh to punish both Shivaji and Adil Shah. This shows Aurangzeb's confidence in the superiority of the Mughal arms and the underestimation of his opponents. But Jai Singh was an astute politician. He told Aurangzeb, 'It would be unwise to attack both these fools at the same time.'

Jai Singh was the only Mughal politician who advocated an all-out forward policy in the Deccan during this period. Jai Singh was of the opinion that the Maratha problem could not be solved without a

forward policy in the Deccan—a conclusion to which Aurangzeb finally came 20 years later.

While planning his invasion of Bijapur, Jai Singh had written to Aurangzeb, 'The conquest of Bijapur is the preface to the conquest of all Deccan and Karnataka.' But Aurangzeb shrank from this bold policy. We can only guess at the reasons: the ruler of Iran had adopted a threatening attitude in the northwest; the campaign for the conquest of the Deccan would be long and arduous and would need the presence of the emperor himself for large armies could not be left in charge of a noble or an ambitious prince, as Shah Jahan had discovered to his misfortune. Also, as long as Shah Jahan was alive, Aurangzeb could not afford to go away on a distant campaign.

With his limited resources, Jai Singh's Bijapur campaign (1665) was bound to fail. The campaign recreated the united front of the Deccani states against the Mughals, for the Qutb Shah sent a large force to aid Bijapur. The Deccanis adopted guerilla tactics, luring Jai Singh on to Bijapur while devastating the countryside so that the Mughals could get no supplies. Jai Singh found that he had no means to assault the city since he had not brought siege guns, and to invest the city was impossible. The retreat proved costly, and neither money nor any additional territory was gained by Jai Singh by this campaign. This disappointment and the censures of Aurangzeb hastened Jai Singh's death (1667). The following year (1668), the Mughals secured the surrender of Sholapur by bribery. The first phase was thus over.

The Second Phase (1668–84)

The Mughals virtually marked time in the Deccan between 1668 and 1676. A new factor during the period was the rise to power of Madanna and Akhanna in Golconda. These two gifted brothers virtually ruled Golconda from 1672 almost till the extinction of the state in 1687. The brothers followed a policy of trying to establish a tripartite alliance between Golconda, Bijapur and Shivaji. This policy was periodically disturbed by faction fights at the Bijapur court, and by the overweening ambition of Shivaji. The factions at Bijapur could not be depended upon to follow a consistent policy. They adopted a pro or anti-Mughal stance depending upon their immediate interests. Shivaji looted and

alternately supported Bijapur against the Mughals. Although seriously concerned at the growing Maratha power, Aurangzeb, it seems, was keen to limit Mughal expansion in the Deccan. Hence, repeated efforts were made to install and back a party at Bijapur which would cooperate with the Mughals against Shivaji, and which would not be led by Golconda.

In pursuit of this policy, a series of Mughal military interventions were made, the details of which are of little interest.

The only result of Mughal diplomatic and military efforts was the re-assertion of the united front of the three Deccani powers against the Mughals. A last desperate effort of Diler Khan, the Mughal Viceroy, in 1679–80 to capture Bijapur also failed, largely because no Mughal viceroy had the means to contend against the united forces of the Deccani states. A new element which was brought into play was the matchlock armed Karnataki foot soldiers. Thirty thousand of them sent by the Berar chief, Prem Naik, were a major factor in withstanding the Mughal siege of Bijapur in 1679–80. Shivaji, too, sent a large force to relieve Bijapur and raided the Mughal dominions in all directions. Thus, Diler Khan could achieve nothing except laying Mughal territories open to Maratha raids. Hence, he was recalled by Aurangzeb.

The Third Phase (1684–87)

Thus, the Mughals achieved little during 1676–80. When Aurangzeb reached the Deccan in 1681 in pursuit of his rebel son, prince Akbar at first, he concentrated his forces against Sambhaji, the son and successor of Shivaji while making renewed efforts to detach Bijapur and Golconda from the side of the Marathas. His efforts did not have an outcome different from those of the earlier ones. The Marathas were the only shield against the Mughals, and the Deccani states were not prepared to throw it away.

Aurangzeb now decided to force the issue. He called upon the Adil Shah as a vassal to supply provision to the imperial army, to allow the Mughal armies free passage through his territory, and to supply a contingent of 5000 to 6000 cavalry for the war against the Marathas. He also demanded that Sharza Khan, the leading Bijapuri

noble opposed to the Mughals, be expelled. An open rupture was now inevitable. The Adil Shah appealed for help both to Golconda and Sambhaji, which was promptly given. Even the combined forces of the Deccani states could not withstand the full strength of the Mughal army, particularly when it was commanded by the Mughal emperor himself. However, it took 18 months of siege, with Aurangzeb being personally present during the final stages, before Bijapur fell (1686). This provides ample justification for the earlier failures of Jai Singh (1665), and Diler Khan (1679–80) against Bijapur.

A campaign against Golconda was inevitable following the downfall of Bijapur. The 'sins' of the Qutb Shah were too many to be pardoned. He had given supreme power to the infidels, Madanna and Akhanna, and helped Shivaji on various occasions. His latest 'treachery' was sending 40,000 men to aid Bijapur, despite Aurangzeb's warnings. Earlier in 1685, despite stiff resistance, the Mughals had occupied Golconda. The emperor had agreed to pardon the Qutb Shah in return for a huge subsity, the ceding of some areas and the ousting of Madanna and Akhanna. The Qutb Shah had agreed. Madanna and Akhanna had been dragged out into the streets and murdered (1686). But even this crime failed to save the Qutb Shah. The Mughals opened the siege of Golconda early in 1687 and after more than six months of campaigning the fort fell on account of treachery and bribery.

Aurangzeb had triumphed but he soon found that the extinction of Bijapur and Golconda was only the beginning of his difficulties. The last and the most difficult phase of Aurangzeb's life began now.

Aurangzeb, the Marathas and the Deccan—the Last Phase (1687–1707)

After the downfall of Bijapur and Golconda, Aurangzeb was able to concentrate all his forces against the Marathas.

In 1689, Sambhaji was surprised at his secret hide-out at Sangameshwar by a Mughal force. He was paraded before Aurangzeb and executed as a rebel and an infidel. This was undoubtedly another major political mistake on the part of Aurangzeb. He could have set a seal on his conquest of Bijapur and Golconda by coming to terms

with the Marathas. By executing Sambhaji, he not only threw away this chance, but provided the Marathas a new cause. At the same time, in the absence of a single rallying point, the Maratha sardars were left free to plunder the Mughal territories, disappearing at the approach of the Mughal forces, and rallying again. Instead of having destroyed the Maratha state, Aurangzeb made the Maratha opposition all-pervasive in the Deccan. Rajaram, the younger brother of Sambhaji, was crowned as king, but had to escape when the Mughals attacked his capital. Rajaram sought shelter at Jinji on the east coast and continued the fight against the Mughals from there. Thus, Maratha resistance spread from the west to the east coast.

However, for the moment, Aurangzeb was at the height of his power, having triumphed over all his enemies. Some of the nobles were of the opinion that Aurangzeb should return to north India, leaving to others the task of mopping-up operations against the Marathas. Earlier, there was an opinion which, it appears, had the support of the heir-apparent, Shah Alam, that the task of ruling over Karnataka should be left to the vassal rulers of Bijapur and Golconda. Aurangzeb rejected all these suggestions, and imprisoned Shah Alam for daring to negotiate with the Deccani rulers. Convinced that the Maratha power had been crushed after 1690, Aurangzeb, concentrated on annexing to the empire the rich and extensive Karnataka tract. However, Aurangzeb bit off more than he could chew. He unduly extended his lines of communications which became vulnerable to Maratha attacks. This resulted in his failure to provide a sound administration to Bijapur which was the hub of Maratha activities.

During the period between 1690 and 1703, Aurangzeb stubbornly refused to negotiate with the Marathas. Rajaram was besieged at Jinji, but the siege proved to be long drawn out. Jinji fell in 1698, but the chief prize, Rajaram, escaped. Maratha resistance grew and the Mughals suffered a number of serious reverses. The Marathas recaptured many of their forts and Rajaram was able to come back to Satara.

Undaunted, Aurangzeb set out to win back all the Maratha forts. For five and half years, from 1700 to 1705, Aurangzeb dragged his weary and ailing body from the siege of one fort to another. Floods, disease and the Maratha roving bands took fearful toll of the Mughal

army. Weariness and disaffection steadily grew among the nobles and in the army. Demoralization set in, and many *jagirdars* made secret pacts with the Marathas and agreed to pay *chauth* if the Marathas did not disturb their *jagirs*.

In 1703, Aurangzeb opened negotiations with the Marathas. He was prepared to release Shahu, the son of Sambhaji, who had been captured at Satara along with his mother. Shahu had been treated well. He had been given the title of raja and the *mansab* of 7000/7000. On coming of age he had been married to two Maratha girls of respectable families. Aurangzeb was prepared to grant to Shahu, Shivaji's swarajya and the right of *sardeshmukhi* over the Deccan, thus recognising his special position. Over 70 Maratha sardars actually assembled to receive Shahu. But Aurangzeb cancelled the arrangements at the last minute, being uncertain about the intentions of the Marathas.[1]

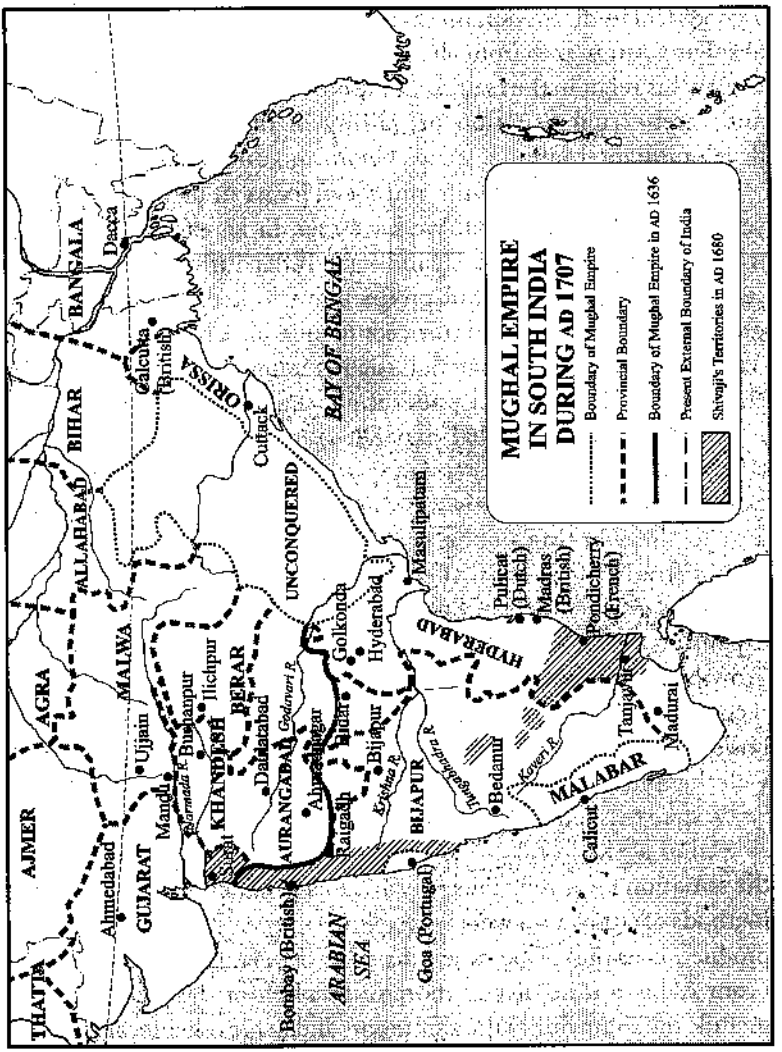
By 1706, Aurangzeb was convinced of the futility of his effort to capture all the Maratha forts. He slowly retreated to Aurangabad while an exulting Maratha army hovered around and attacked the stragglers.

Thus, when Aurangzeb breathed his last at Aurangabad in 1707, he left behind an empire which was sorely distracted, and in which all the various internal problems were coming to a head.

Decline of the Mughal Empire—Responsibility of Aurangzeb

The Mughal empire declined rapidly after the death of Aurangzeb. The Mughal court became the scene for faction fighting among the nobles, and soon ambitious provincial governors began to behave in an independent manner. The Maratha depredations extended from the Deccan to the heartland of the empire, the Gangetic plains. The weakness of the empire was proclaimed to the world when Nadir Shah imprisoned the Mughal emperor and looted Delhi in 1739.

1 It has been said that Aurangzeb offered the kingdom to Shahu on condition of his turning a Muslim. Contemporary records do not support this. If Aurangzeb had wanted to convert Shahu to Islam, he could have done so while he was his captive during the preceding 13 years. Normally, a converted Hindu prince, lost the right to his kingdom.


MUGHAL EMPIRE
IN SOUTH INDIA
DURING AD 1707
Boundary of Mughal Empire
Provincial Boundary
Boundary of Mughal Empire in AD 1636
Present External Boundary of India
Shivaji's Territories in AD 1680
THATTA
AJMER
AGRA
GUJARAT
Ahmedabad
MALWA
Ujjain
Mandu
Burhanpur
Jilchpur
KHANDESH
BERAR
Daulatabad
AURANGABAD
Ahmednagar
Raigarh
Bombay (British)
ARABIAN SEA
Goa (Portugal)
ALLAHABAD
BIHAR
Patna
Calcutta (British)
BANGALA
Dacca
ORISSA
Cuttack
BAY OF BENGAL
UNCONQUERED
Golkonda
Hyderabad
Bidar
Bijapur
BIJAPUR
HYDERABAD
Masulipatam
Pulicat (Dutch)
Madras (British)
Pondicherry (French)
Bedanur
MALABAR
Calicut
Tanjore
Madurai
Narmada R.
Godavari R.
Krishna R.
Tungabhadra R.
Kaveri R.

To what extent was the downfall of the Mughal empire due to developments after the death of Aurangzeb, and to what extent was it due to the mistaken policies adopted by Aurangzeb? There has been a good deal of discussion on this point among historians. While not absolving Aurangzeb from all responsibility, the recent trend has been to view his reign in the context of the economic, social, administrative and intellectual situation prevailing in the country, as also the developing international trends before and during his reign.

The working of economic and social forces in medieval India has yet to be fully understood. We have seen in an earlier chapter that trade and commerce were expanding in India during the seventeenth century and that handicraft production was keeping pace with the growing demand. This, in turn, could only have been made possible if the production of raw materials such as cotton, indigo, etc., expanded simultaneously. The area under *zabti*, that is, where the system of measurement was followed, expanded, according to official Mughal statistics. There is some evidence, in fact, that the total area under cultivation expanded. This was due not only to population growth, and to the working of the economic forces but, in part, to the administrative policies pursued by the Mughals. Every noble, even a religious grantee was expected to take personal interest in the expansion and improvement of cultivation, and careful records of such growth were maintained. Historians are surprised at the detailed records that were maintained regarding the number of ploughs, bullocks and wells in each village, the increase in their numbers as well the number of cultivators and the area under cultivation.

Despite this, there is reason to believe that trade and manufacture, as well as agricultural production were not expanding as rapidly as the situation required. This was due to a number of factors. No new methods of cultivation were available to counter the trend of declining production as the soil became exhausted. The land revenue was heavy. From Akbar's time, it was more or less half of the produce,[1] if we include the share due to the zamindars and to the other local elements.

1 Under Akbar, the standrd rate was one third of the average produce, but the share of the zamindar and other local elements was not included in it. From the middle of the seventeenth century, the state share generally rose to half, but it included the share of the zamindar and local elements (village headman etc.)

The state demand varied from area to area, being less in the less fertile areas of Rajasthan and Sindh, and more in such fertile areas as the saffron-producing areas in Kashmir. However, it was not, generally speaking, so heavy as to drive the peasant away from land. In fact, figures from eastern Rajasthan show that new villages were continuously being founded during the second half of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century. (We do not have figures for the earlier period.) The basic reasons for the limited expansion, it appears, were social and partly administrative. Since the population of the country during the period is estimated to be about 125 million, there was plenty of surplus cultivable land available. However, we hear of landless labourers in many villages. The bulk of these people, it seems, can be broadly classified as untouchables or Dalits. The cultivating communities, and the zamindars who often belonged to the general (*Shudra*) and upper castes, had little desire or incentive for making it possible for the Dalits to settle new villages and thus acquire proprietary right in land. They had, in fact, a vested interest in keeping them in the village as a reserve labour force, and for performing various menial jobs for them, such as skinning the dead animals, making leather ropes, etc. The rural landless and poor (i.e. those who had very small holdings) had neither the necessary capital nor the organisation needed for settling new villages or breaking uncultivated lands on their own. The state did, sometimes, take the initiative in settling new lands, but had to depend on the local zamindars and the village headmen (*muqaddams*) in the enterprises. Often, these sections belonged to specific caste groups and had their own vested interests, as we have noted.

While agricultural production increased slowly, the demands and expectations of the ruling classes expanded rapidly. Thus, the number of *mansabdars* rose from 2069 at the time of Jahangir's accession in 1605, to 8000 in 1637 during Shah Jahan's reign, and to 11,456 during the latter half of Aurangzeb's reign. While the number of nobles rose five times, the revenue resources of the empire increased only slowly. During the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the empire hardly expanded. Moreover, Shah Jahan inaugurated what may be called an age of magnificence. The opulence of the nobles who already enjoyed the highest salaries in the world increased further during the period.

Though many nobles took part in trade and commerce directly or through merchants acting on their behalf, income from trade and commerce could only supplement their income which continued to be mainly from land. Their problems worsened by the fact that the prices rose during the first half of the 17th century. Hence, they tried to increase their income from land by squeezing the peasants and the zamindars as far as they could.

We know very little about the number of zamindars and their living standards. Mughal policy towards the zamindars was contradictory. While on the one hand, the zamindars were considered the main threat to the internal stability of the empire, on the other hand, efforts were made to draw them into the task of local administration. Many of them—Rajputs, Marathas and others—were given *mansabs* and political offices in an effort to broaden the political base of the empire. The zamindars, who as a class had become more powerful and influential in the process, were in no mood to submit to the illegal exactions of the nobles. Nor was it easy to increase the exactions on the peasantry still further, especially when there was plenty of surplus cultivable land and the zamindars, and the village headmen vied with each other to try to attract new cultivators to their lands. The movement of these migrant peasants called *pahis* or *uparis* from village to village in search of better conditions is a little noticed feature of medieval rural life.

Thus attempts to realize more from the *jagirs*, often by means not sanctioned by the state, brought to the surface all the internal contradictions of medieval rural society. It led to peasant discontent in some areas, uprisings led by zamindars in some others, and attempts to carve out independent local kingdoms in still others. At the administrative level, it led to growing dissatisfaction and factionalism in the nobility and to the growth of what has been called the crisis of the *jagirdari* system. The nobles were unable to get from their *jagirs* the income indicated on paper. In consequence, many of them were unable to maintain their stipulated quota of troops. The position in the Deccan was particularly bad. Due to the disturbed conditions, and the lack of a proper contingent on the part of the nobles, we are told by a contemporary observer, Bhim Sen, they were sometimes unable to realize even a farthing. According to him, in consequence

many of the *mansabdars* entered into private agreements with the Maratha sardars to pay *chauth*, i.e. share a quarter of their income if they did not create disturbances in the *jagirs*.

Another problem was shortage of *jagirs*. Following the annexation of Bijapur and Golconda, the best and most easily manageable *jagirs* had been kept by Aurangzeb in the *khalisa*, i.e., direct management in order to pay for the war. *Jagirs* in the newly conquered areas, i.e. the Karnataka yielded little income since the area was still unsettled. Hence, there were no takers for *jagirs* in the area. Even the existing *jagirdars*, especially those holding small *jagirs*, were harassed by the corruption of the clerks and other office holders who demanded bribes, and were often transferred to poorer, less paying *jagirs* if they failed to pay the bribes.

The crisis of the *jagirdari* system put the nobility under pressure. In order to grant *jagirs* to larger and larger numbers, and also to meet the gap between the paper income of the *jagir* and its realization, Shah Jahan had reduced the number of horses and *sawars* a *mansabdar* was expected to maintain. This was expressed in the formula that the salary would be equivalent to six or five months' salary in a year. But the problem of shortage of *jagirs* persisted, and became specially acute during the latter part of Aurangzeb's reign. The conquest of the Deccan did not solve the problem because Aurangzeb was keen to accommodate the officials of the former Deccani kingdom, as also the Marathas, who were active and influential in the area.

To conserve resources, Aurangzeb put a virtual ban on new recruitment. This led to acute disappointment to the sons and sons-in-law of the old nobles who had been awaiting long for the grant of a *mansab* and *jagir*. In the picturesque language of the historian, Khafi Khan, grant of a *jagir* became like "one pomegranate among a hundred sick."

The nobility was one of the most important institutions which developed under the Mughals. We have seen how the Mughals were able to attract to their services some of the most competent people irrespective of race or creed, from various sections within the country, and also from outside. The nobility functioned successfully in a system which emphasized accessibility and attention to grievances, public or personal. It also helped to maintain a fair state of security and

peace in the country. But this role the nobility played as the service to the emperor served their own interests. It is wrong to argue, as some historians have done, that the nobility decayed because the 'vivifying' stream of immigrants from Central Asia stopped after the death of Aurangzeb. By the time Aurangzeb ascended the throne, the bulk of the Mughal nobility consisted of those who had been born in India. The belief that there was something wrong in the Indian climate which led to the decline of character was really a racialist argument put forward later by the British historians to justify India's domination by people coming from colder climates. Such an argument cannot be accepted by us.

It has also been argued that the Mughal nobility acted in an anti-national manner, because it was drawn from diverse communities and ethnic and racial groups and hence lacked a national character. A sense of nationalism, as we understand the term today, did not exist in medieval times. But the concept of loyalty to the salt was effective enough to ensure loyalty to the Mughal dynasty and a broad sense of patriotism. As we have seen, the nobles who came from abroad had few links left with the country of their origin and shared the Indo-Mughal cultural values and outlook.

The Mughals had devised a careful system of checks and balances at various levels in the administrative machinery and tried to balance various ethnic and religious groups in such a way that the ambitions of individual nobles or groups of them could be kept under control. Nobles began to assume independent airs only when the administrative machinery was allowed to decay by the successors of Aurangzeb, and on account of the steady accentuation of the crisis of the *jagirdari* system. Thus, disintegration was speeded up not because of but as a result of the breakdown of the Mughal administrative system. The Mughal administrative system was highly centralized and needed a competent monarch to run it. In the absence of such monarchs, *wazirs* tried to fill the bill, but they failed. Thus, individual failures and the breakdown of the system reacted on each other.

It has been argued that by the time Aurangzeb came to the throne, the Mughal army had become outmoded, on account of neglect of the infantry armed with flint guns, and a mobile field artillery. Such forces might also have enabled Aurangzeb to deal more effectively

with Maratha held forts in the Deccan. But such a development needed larger resources, and would have been resisted by the nobles since decline of the cavalry would have influenced their prestige as well.

In the political field, Aurangzeb committed a number of serious mistakes. We have already referred to his inability to understand the true nature of the Maratha movement, and his disregard of Jai Singh's advise to befriend Shivaji. The execution of Sambhaji was another mistake, for it deprived Aurangzeb of a recognised Maratha head to negotiate with. Apparently, Aurangzeb had no desire to negotiate with the Marathas. He was convinced that after the extinction of Bijapur and Golconda, the Marathas were at his mercy and that they had no option but to accept his terms—a truncated *swarajya* (the term used by Maratha writers for the state carved out by Shivaji) and promise of loyalty and service to the Mughal emperor. When Aurangzeb realised his mistake and opened negotiations with the Marathas, the demand for *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* proved a serious obstacle. Even this had been, by and large, surmounted. In 1703, agreement had been, more or less arrived at, but Aurangzeb could not bring himself to trust Shahu and the Maratha sardars.

Aurangzeb failed to solve the Maratha problem and thus left an open sore. He did give *mansabs* to many Maratha sardars; in fact, Maratha sardars had more *mansabs* at the highest levels than the Rajputs ever had. Yet, the Maratha sardars were not trusted. Unlike the Rajputs, they were never given offices of trust and responsibility. Thus, the Marathas could not be integrated into the Mughal political system. Here again, a political settlement with Shivaji, or Sambhaji or Shahu might have made a big difference.

Aurangzeb has been criticized for having failed to unite with the Deccani states against the Marathas, or for having conquered them thereby making the empire 'so large that it collapsed under its own weight.' A unity of hearts between Aurangzeb and the Deccani states was 'a psychological impossibility' once the treaty of 1636 was abandoned, a development which took place during the reign of Shah Jahan himself. After his accession, Aurangzeb desisted from pursuing a vigorous forward policy in the Deccan. In fact, he postponed as long as possible the decision to conquer and annex the Deccani states.

Aurangzeb's hand was virtually forced by the growing Maratha power, the support extended to Shivaji by Madanna and Akhanna from Golconda, and his fear that Bijapur might fall under the domination of Shivaji and the Maratha-dominated Golconda. Later, by giving shelter to the rebel prince Akbar, Sambhaji virtually threw a challenge to Aurangzeb who quickly realised that the Marathas could not be dealt with without first subduing Bijapur and possibly Golconda.

The attempt to extend Mughal administration over Golconda, Bijapur and Karnataka, stretched the Mughal administration to a breaking point. It also laid Mughal lines of communications open to Maratha attacks, so much so, that the Mughal nobles in the area found it impossible to collect their dues from the *jagirs* assigned to them and sometimes made private pacts with the Marathas, as has been noted above. This, in turn, raised the power and prestige of the Marathas, led to demoralisation in the nobility, and a setback to the imperial prestige. Perhaps, Aurangzeb might have been better advised to accept the suggestion put forward by his eldest son, Shah Alam, for a settlement with Bijapur and Golconda, annex only a part of their territories, and let them rule over Karnataka which was far away and difficult to manage.

The impact of the Deccani and other wars on the Mughal empire and of the prolonged absence of Aurangzeb from northern India, should not be overestimated. Despite the mistakes of policy and some of the personal shortcomings of Aurangzeb, such as his excessive suspiciousness and his narrow and cold temperament, the Mughal empire was still a powerful and vigorous military and administrative machinery. The Mughal army might fail against the elusive and highly mobile bands of Marathas in the mountainous region of the Deccan. Maratha forts might be difficult to capture and still more difficult to retain, but in the plains of northern India and the vast plateau extending up to the Karnataka, the Mughal artillery was still master of the field. Thirty or forty years after Aurangzeb's death, when the Mughal artillery had declined considerably in strength and efficiency, the Marathas could still not face it in the field of battle. Continuous anarchy, wars and the depredations of the Marathas may have depleted the population of the Deccan and brought its trade, industry and agriculture to a virtual standstill, but in northern India which was

the heart of the empire and was of decisive economic and political importance in the country, the Mughal administration still retained much of its vigour, and trade and industry not only continued to flourish, but expanded. The administration at the district level proved amazingly tenacious, and a good deal of it survived and found its way indirectly into the British administration.

Politically, despite the military reverses and the mistakes of Aurangzeb, the Mughal dynasty still retained a powerful hold on the mind and imagination of the people.

As far as the Rajputs are concerned, we have seen that the breach with Marwar was not due to an attempt on Aurangzeb's part to undermine the Hindus by depriving them of a recognized head, but due to a miscalculation on his part; he wanted to divide the Marwar state between the two principal claimants, and in the process alienated both, including the ruler of Mewar who considered Mughal interference in such a delicate matter to be a dangerous precedent. The breach with Mewar and the long drawn-out war which followed damaged the moral standing of the Mughal state. However, the fighting was not of much consequence militarily after 1681. It may be doubted whether the presence of Rathor Rajputs in larger numbers in the Deccan between 1681 and 1706 would have made much difference in the outcome of the military conflict with the Marathas. The demands of the Rajputs related to grant of high *mansabs* as before and restoration of their homelands. These demands having been accepted within half a dozen years of Aurangzeb's death, the Rajputs ceased to be a problem for the Mughals. They played little active role in the subsequent disintegration of the empire, nor help in arresting the process of decline.

Aurangzeb's religious policy should be seen in the social, economic and political context. Aurangzeb was orthodox in his outlook and tried to remain broadly within the framework of the Islamic law. But this law had developed outside India under vastly different circumstances, and could hardly be applied rigidly to India. His failure to respect the susceptibilities of his non-Muslim subjects on many occasions, his enunciation of a policy which led to the destruction of many temples of old standing, and re-imposition of *jizyah* as laid down by the Islamic law did not help him to rally the Muslims to his side,

or to generate a greater sense of loyalty towards a state based on Islamic law. On the other hand, it alienated segments of the Hindus and strengthened the hands of those section which were opposed to the Mughal empire for political or other reasons. By itself, religion was not a point at issue. *Jizyah* was scrapped within half a dozen years of Aurangzeb's death, and restrictions on building new temples eased. But these, again, had no effect on the rapidly accelerating decline and disintegration of the empire in the 18th century.

In the ultimate resort, the decline and downfall of the empire was due to economic, social, political and institutional factors. The neglect of modern science and technology by the Mughal ruling class was also an important factor. Akbar's measures helped to keep the forces of disintegration in check for some time. But it was impossible for him to effect fundamental changes in the structure of society. By the time Aurangzeb came to the throne, the socio-economic forces of disintegration were already strong. Aurangzeb lacked the foresight and statesmanship necessary to effect fundamental changes in the socio-political structure, or to pursue policies which could, for the time being, reconcile the various competing elements.

Thus, Aurangzeb was both a victim of circumstances, and helped to create the circumstances of which he became a victim.