
Chapter 10

Eighteenth Century Political Formations

❖ The crisis of the empire and the later Mughals

- The crises faced by the Mughals at the end of the seventeenth century were caused by the strain on financial and military resources due to Aurangzeb's war in the Deccan.
- Peasants and zamindar rebellions in many parts of northern and western India were caused by the pressures of mounting taxes.
- Emperors after Aurangzeb were unable to stop the influence and ambitions of provincial governors, local chieftains and other groups. The attacks by invaders like Nadir Shah damaged the strength of the empire.
- The nobility was divided into two competing groups of the Iranis and the Turkish.
- The later Mughal emperors were little more than puppets in the hands of the divided nobility.

❖ Emergence of new states

- Through the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire broke up into a number of independent regional states as provincial governors asserted their authority.
- The states of the eighteenth century can be divided into three overlapping groups:
 - Old Mughal provinces like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad
 - Semi- independence states under the Mughals like the Watan Jagirs of Rajputs
 - States under the control of Marathas, Sikhs and others like the Jats

❖ Old Mughal provinces

- **Hyderabad**
 - Nizam-ul- Mulk Asaf Jah, the founder of Hyderabad state served at the court of the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar. He was entrusted first with the governorship of Awadh, and later given charge of the Deccan.
 - Asaf Jah brought skilled soldiers and administrators from northern India who welcomed the new opportunities in the south.
 - The state of Hyderabad was constantly engaged in a struggle against the Marathas to the west and with independent Telugu warrior chiefs of the plateau.
- **Awadh**

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- The state of Awadh was founded by Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan who was appointed its *subadar* in 1722.
 - Awadh was a prosperous region as it controlled the rich alluvial Ganga plain and the main trade route between North India and Bengal.
 - Burhan-ul-Mulk tried to decrease Mughal influence in the Awadh region by reducing the number of office holders appointed by the Mughals.
 - The state sold the right to collect tax to the highest bidders called *ijaradars*. The moneylenders who guaranteed the payment by bidders, gained influence in the management of revenue system.

- **Bengal**

- Bengal broke away from Mughal control under Murshid Quli Khan who was appointed as the *naib*, deputy to the governor of the province.
- Revenue was collected in cash, and many *zamindars* had to borrow money from lenders to pay it.
- Bankers gained influence in the matters of state under the rule of Alivardi Khan. During his reign, the banking house of Jagat Seth became extremely prosperous.

- **Watan Jagirs of Rajputs**

- The Rajput rulers, who were the holders of *watan jagirs* or autonomous states, tried to extend their influence in their neighbouring regions.
- Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur held the governorship of Gujarat, while Sawai Raja Jai Singh of Amber became the governor of Malwa.
- Further expansion of Rajputs was checked by the emergence of the Marathas.

- ❖ **Seizing Independence**

- **The Sikhs**

- The Sikhs organized themselves politically to create a separate state. Many battles were fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Rajput and Mughal rulers.
- Under many able leaders in the eighteenth century, the Sikhs organized themselves into a number of bands called *jathas*, and later on *mils*.
- The Khalsa was inspired by Guru Gobind Singh with the belief that their destiny was to rule.
- Protection was offered to cultivators on the payment of a tax of 20 percent of the produce.
- Their well-knit organization successfully resisted the Mughal governors and the invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh united the Sikh territories and established his capital at Lahore in 1799.

- **The Marathas**

- The Marathas were a powerful regional kingdom first organized by Shivaji with the support of powerful warrior families.
- Under the Peshwas, Marathas developed a very successful military organization. Their success lay in bypassing the fortified areas of the Mughals, by raiding cities and by engaging Mughal armies in areas where their supply lines and reinforcements could be easily disturbed.
- At its height, the Maratha domination extended over the entire Deccan peninsula. They dealt the most severe blow to the authority of the Mughal Empire by capturing Malwa and Gujarat.
- Hostility towards the Marathas grew among local rulers. As a result, they did not support the Marathas during the third battle of Panipat in 1761.
- The Marathas developed an effective administrative system. Revenue demands were introduced on the basis of local conditions. This led to the encouragement of agriculture and trade.
- The cities of Ujjain, Baroda, Indore and Nagpur were prominent centres of Maratha power while Poona was the capital.

- **The Jats**

- The Jats grew in power during the late seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries.
- They acquired control over territories to the west of the city of Delhi, and by the 1680s they had begun dominating the region between Delhi and Agra.
- The Jats became prosperous through agriculture. The important trading centres in the areas under Jats were Panipat and Ballabgarh. Under Suraj Mal, the kingdom of Bharatpur emerged as a strong state.