

Revision Notes
Chapter – 10
Eighteenth-Century: Political Formations

By 1765, the British had captured major chunks of Indian territory in eastern India. The boundaries of the Mughal Empire were reshaped by the emergence of a number of independent kingdoms.

With Aurangzeb's death in 1707, many new states emerged in India.

The Crisis of the Empire and the Later Mughals:

(i) After reaching its zenith, the Mughal empire started declining under Emperor Aurangzeb. This was because of Aurangzeb's military and religious policy which depleted the financial resources of the Mughals by fighting a long war in the Deccan.

(ii) Under his successors, the efficiency of the imperial administration broke down. It became difficult to check governors and mansabdars. Nobles appointed as governors (subadars) often controlled the offices of revenue and military administration (diwani and faujdari) as well.

(iii) This gave them extraordinary political, economic and military powers over vast regions of the Mughal Empire. As the governors consolidated their control over the provinces, the periodic remission of revenue to the capital declined.

(iv) Peasant and zamindari rebellions in many parts of northern and western India added to these problems. These revolts were sometimes caused by the pressures of mounting taxes. The Mughal emperors after Aurangzeb were unable to stop the gradual shifting of political and economic authority into the hands of provincial governors, local chieftains and other groups.

(v) In the midst of this crisis, Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 and invasions of Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali between 1748-1761, weakened the Mughal empire.

(vi) The nobility was divided into two major groups- **Iranis** and **Turanis**. For a long time, the

later Mughal emperors were puppets in the hands of either one or the other of these two powerful groups. The worst humiliation came when two Mughal emperors, Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719) and Alamgir II (1754-1759) were assassinated, and two others Ahmad Shah (1748-1754) and Shah Alam II (1759-1816) were blinded by their nobles.

Emergence of New States:

(i) With the decline of Mughal authority, the governors of large provinces, *subadars*, and the great zamindars consolidated their authority.

(ii) Broadly speaking, the states were divided into three overlapping groups:

(1) Old Mughal provinces like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad

(2) States which enjoyed considerable independence like Watan Jagirs . These included several Rajput principalities, and

(3) the last group included states ruled by the Marathas, the Sikhs and the Jats. These were of differing sizes and had seized their independence from the Mughals after a long-drawn armed struggle.

The Old Mughal Provinces:

(i) These included the states of Hyderabad, Awadh and Bengal.

(ii) All three states were founded by members of the high Mughal nobility who had been governors of large provinces – Sa‘adat Khan (Awadh), Murshid Quli Khan (Bengal) and Asaf Jah (Hyderabad).

(iii) All three states had occupied high mansabdari positions and enjoyed the trust and confidence of the emperors.

Hyderabad:

(i) Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah, the founder of Hyderabad state, was one of the most powerful members at the court of the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar.

(ii) He was entrusted first with the governorship of Awadh, and later given charge of the Deccan. As the Mughal governor of the Deccan provinces, Asaf Jah already had full control

over its political and financial administration.

(iii) Taking advantage of the turmoil in the Deccan and the competition amongst the court nobility, he became the actual ruler of that region.

(iv) Asaf Jah brought skilled soldiers and administrators from northern India who welcomed the new opportunities in the south. He appointed mansabdars and granted jagirs. The Mughal emperor merely confirmed the decisions already taken by the Nizam.

(v) The state of Hyderabad was constantly engaged in a struggle against the Marathas to the west and with independent Telugu warrior chiefs (nayakas) of the plateau.

(vi) The Nizam wanted to control the rich textile-producing areas of the Coromandel coast, however, the British kept a check on him as their influence was increasing in the area.

Awadh:

(i) Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan was appointed subadar of Awadh in 1722 and founded a state which was one of the most important to emerge out of the break-up of the Mughal Empire. Burhan-ul-Mulk also held the combined offices of subadari, diwani and faujdari.

(ii) Awadh was a prosperous region, controlling the rich alluvial Ganga plain and the main trade route between north India and Bengal.

(iii) Burhan-ul-Mulk tried to reduce the influence of the Mughals by reducing the number of jagirdars. He also reduced the size of jagirs, and appointed his own loyal servants to vacant positions. The accounts of jagirdars were checked to prevent cheating and the revenues of all districts were reassessed by officials appointed by the Nawab's court. He seized a number of Rajput zamindaris and the agriculturally fertile lands of the Afghans of Rohilkhand.

(iv) The state depended on local bankers and mahajans for loans. It sold the right to collect tax to the highest bidders. These "revenue farmers" (ijaradars) agreed to pay the state a fixed sum of money. Local bankers guaranteed the payment of this contracted amount to the state. In turn, the revenue-farmers were given considerable freedom in the assessment and collection of taxes.

(v) These developments allowed new social groups, like moneylenders and bankers, to influence the state revenue system's management.

Bengal:

- (i) Bengal gradually broke away from Mughal control under Murshid Quli Khan who was appointed as the naib, deputy to the governor of the province. Although never a formal subadar, Murshid Quli Khan very quickly seized all the power that went with that office.
- (ii) Like the rulers of Hyderabad and Awadh, he also commanded the revenue administration of the state. In an effort to reduce Mughal influence in Bengal, he transferred all Mughal jagirdars to Orissa and ordered a major reassessment of the revenues of Bengal.
- (iii) Revenue was collected in cash with great strictness from all zamindars. As a result, many zamindars had to borrow money from bankers and moneylenders. Those unable to pay were forced to sell their lands to larger zamindars.
- (iv) The close connection between the state and bankers was evident in Bengal under the rule of Alivardi Khan (r. 1740- 1756). During his reign the banking house of Jagat Seth became extremely prosperous.

The common features of the states of Hyderabad, Awadh and Bengal:

- (i) First, though many of the larger states were established by erstwhile Mughal nobles, they were highly suspicious of some of the administrative systems that they had inherited, in particular the jagirdari system.
- (ii) Second, their method of tax collection differed. Rather than relying upon the officers of the state, all three regimes contracted with revenue-farmers for the collection of revenue. The practice of ijaradari, thoroughly disapproved of by the Mughals, spread all over India in the eighteenth century.
- (iii) The third common feature in all these regional states was their emerging relationship with rich bankers and merchants. These people lent money to revenue farmers, received land as security and collected taxes from these lands through their own agents.

The Watan Jagirs of the Rajputs:

(i) Many Rajput Kings, particularly those belonging to Amber and Jodhpur had served under the Mughals with distinction. They got considerable autonomy and thus were called watan jagir. In exchange, they were permitted to enjoy considerable autonomy in their watan jagirs.

(ii) Ajit Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur, was also involved in the factional politics at the Mughal court.

(iii) The Rajput kings tried to extend their territories by seizing portions of imperial territories neighbouring their watans. Nagaur was conquered and annexed to the house of Jodhpur, while Amber seized large portions of Bundi. Sawai Raja Jai Singh founded his new capital at Jaipur and was given the subadari of Agra in 1722.

(iv) Maratha expansion after 1740s put restriction on growth of Rajput expansion.

Seizing Independence:

The Sikhs:

(i) The Sikhs arose as a power under Guru Gobind Singh who inspired the Khalsa with the belief that their destiny was to rule.

(ii) Several battles were fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Rajput and Mughal rulers, both before and after the institution of the Khalsa in 1699. After his death in 1708, the Khalsa rose in revolt against the Mughal authority under Banda Bahadur's leadership, declared their sovereign rule by striking coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and established their own administration between the Sutlej and the Jamuna.

(iii) The Sikhs organized themselves into a number of bands called jathas, and later on misls. Their combined forces were known as the grand army (dal khalsa). The entire body used to meet at Amritsar at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali to take collective decisions known as "resolutions of the Guru (gurmatas)".

(iv) A system called rakhi was introduced, offering protection to cultivators on the payment of a tax of 20 per cent of the produce.

(v) Guru Gobind Singh had inspired the Khalsa with the belief that their destiny was to rule

(raj karega khalsa). Their well-knit organization enabled them to put up a successful resistance to the Mughal governors first and then to Ahmad Shah Abdali who had seized the rich province of the Punjab and the Sarkar of Sirhind from the Mughals.

(vi) The Khalsa declared their sovereign rule by striking their own coin again in 1765.

(vii) The Sikh territories in the late eighteenth century extended from the Indus to the Jamuna but they were divided under different rulers. One of them, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, reunited these groups and established his capital at Lahore in 1799.

The Marathas:

(i) The Maratha kingdom rose under Shivaji. After Shivaji's death, the Peshwa led the Maratha empire to its zenith.

(ii) Shivaji carved out a stable kingdom with the support of powerful warrior families (deshmukhs). Groups of highly mobile, peasant pastoralists (kunbis) provided the backbone of the Maratha army. Shivaji used these forces to challenge the Mughals in the peninsula.

(iii) After Shivaji's death, effective power in the Maratha state was wielded by a family of Chitpavan Brahmanas who served Shivaji's successors as Peshwa (or principal minister). Poona became the capital of the Maratha kingdom.

(iv) Marathas collected huge revenue from taxes of chuth and Sardshmukhi in the entire kingdom.

(v) Maratha chiefs included Peshwa, Sindhia, Gaekwad and Bhonsle. Their territory touched near Delhi in its peak stages.

(vi) Between 1720 and 1761, the Maratha empire expanded. It gradually overcame the authority of the Mughal empire. Malwa and Gujarat were seized from the Mughals by the 1720s.

(v) By the 1730s, the Maratha king was recognised as the overlord of the entire Deccan peninsula. He possessed the right to levy chauth and sardeshmukhi in the entire region.

(vi) After raiding Delhi in 1737 the frontiers of Maratha domination expanded rapidly: into Rajasthan and the Punjab in the north; into Bengal and Orissa in the east; and into Karnataka

and the Tamil and Telugu regions in the south. These were not formally included in the Maratha empire, but were made to pay tribute as a way of accepting Maratha sovereignty.

(vii) These military campaigns also made other rulers hostile towards the Marathas. As a result, they were not inclined to support the Marathas during the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

(viii) Alongside endless military campaigns, the Marathas developed an effective administrative system as well.

- Once conquest had been completed and Maratha rule was secure, revenue demands were gradually introduced taking local conditions into account.
- Agriculture was encouraged and trade revived. This allowed Maratha chiefs (sardars) like Sindhia of Gwalior, Gaekwad of Baroda and Bhonsle of Nagpur the resources to raise powerful armies.
- Maratha campaigns into Malwa in the 1720s did not challenge the growth and prosperity of the cities in the region.
- Ujjain expanded under Sindhia's patronage and Indore under Holkar's. These cities were large and prosperous and functioned as important commercial and cultural centres.
- New trade routes emerged within the areas controlled by the Marathas.
- The silk produced in the Chanderi region now found a new outlet in Poona, the Maratha capital.
- Burhanpur which had earlier participated in the trade between Agra and Surat now expanded its hinterland to include Poona and Nagpur in the south and Lucknow and Allahabad in the east.

The Jats:

(i) Like the other states the Jats consolidated their power during the late seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries.

(ii) Under their leader, Churaman, they acquired control over territories situated to the west of the city of Delhi, and by the 1680s they had begun dominating the region between the two imperial cities of Delhi and Agra.

(iii) The Jats were prosperous agriculturists, and towns like Panipat and Ballabgarh became important trading centres in the areas dominated by them. Under Suraj Mal, the kingdom of Bharatpur emerged as a strong state.

(iv) When Nadir Shah sacked Delhi in 1739, many of the city's notables took refuge there. His son Jawahir Shah had 30,000 troops of his own and hired another 20,000 Maratha and 15,000 Sikh troops to fight the Mughals.

(v) While the Bharatpur fort was built in a fairly traditional style, at Dig the Jats built an elaborate garden palace combining styles seen at Amber and Agra. Its buildings were modelled on architectural forms associated with royalty under Shah Jahan.