Indian States and Society in the 18th Century

ON the debris of the Mughal Empire and its political system arose a large number of independent and semi-independent powers such as Bengal, Avadh, Hyderabad, Mysore and the Maratha Kingdom. It is these powers which challenged the British attempt at supremacy in India in the second half of the 18lh century. Some arose as a result of the assertion of autonomy by governors of Mughal provinces, others were the product of rebellion against Mughal authority.

The rulers of these states established law and order and viable economic and administrative states. They curbed, with varying degrees of success, the lower local officials and petty chicfs and 2ammdars who constantly fought with higher authorities for control over the surplus pro* duce of the peasant, and who sometimes succeeded in establishing [oca! centres of power and patronage. The politics of these states were invariably non-communal or secular, the motivations of their rulers being similar in economic and political terms. These rulers did not discriminate on religious grounds in public appointments, civil or military; nor did the rebels against their authority pay much attention to the religion of the rulers

None of these states, however, succeeded In arresting the economic crisis. The zamindats and jagirdars, whose number constantly increased, continued to fight over a declining income from agriculture, while the condition of the peasantry continued to deteriorate. While these states prevented any breakdown of internal trade and even tried to promote foreign trade, they did nothing to modernise the basic industrial and commercial structure of their states,

Hyderabad[1] and the Carnatic

The state of Hyderabad was founded by Nizam-ul-Mulk As if Jah in 1724- He was one of the leading nobles of the post-Aurangzeb erai Hr p'o'-ed arr'f ;n the overthrow of the Saiyid brothers and was re-

- i:h *!■_*' iiv; ^ ..1^ of the Deccan. From 17l0 to 1752 he can solid- ated his hold over the Deccan by suppressing all opposition to his viceroyalty and organising the administration on efficient lines. From 1722 to 1724 he was the *wazir* of the Empire. But he soon got disgusted with that office as the Emperor Muhammad Shah frustrated all his attempts at reforming the administration. So lie decided to go back to the Deccan where he could safely maintain his supremacy. Here he laid the foundations of the Hyderabad State which he ruled with a strong hand. He never openly declared his independence from the Central Government but in practice he acted like an independent ruler. He waged wars, concluded peace, conferred titles, and gave jagirs and offices without reference to Delhi. He followed a tolerant policy towards the Hindus, For example, a Hindu, Puran Chand, was his Dewan. He consolidated his

power by establishing an orderly administration in the Deccan. He forced the big, turbulent zamindars to respect his authority and kept the powerful Marathas out of his dominions. He also made an attempt to rid the revenue system of its corruption. But after his death in 1748, Hyderabad fell prey to the same disruptive forces as were operating at Delhi,

The Carnatic was one of the *subahs* of the Mughal Deccan and as such came under the Nizam of Hyderabad's authority. But just as in practice the Nizam had become independent of Delhi, so also the Deputy Governor of the Carnatic, known as the Nawab of Carnatic, had freed himself of the control of the Viceroy of the Deccan and made his office hereditaiy. Thus Nawab Saadutullah Khan of Carnatic had made his nephew Dost Ali his successor without the approval of his superior, the Nizam. Later, after 1740, the affairs of the Carnatic deteriorated because of the repeated struggles for its Nawabship and this provided an opportunity to the European trading companies to interfere in Indian politics.

Bengal

Taking advantage of the growing weakness of the central authority, two men of exceptional ability, Murshid Quh Khan and Alivardi Khan, made Bengal virtually independent, Even though Murshid Quh Khan was made Governor of Bengal as late as 1717, he had been its effective ruler since 1700, when he was appointed its Dewan. He soon freed himself from central control though he sent regular tribute to the Emperor. He established pcace by freeing Bengal of internal and external danger. Bengal was now also lelatively free of uprisings by zamindars. The only three major uprisings during his rule were first by Sitaram Ray, Udai Narayan and Ghulani Muhammad, and then by Shujat Khan, and finally byNajat Khan Aftei defeating them, Murshid Quli Khan gave their zamvndaris to his favounte, Ramjivan. Murshid Quh Khan died m 1727, and his son-in-law Slmja-ud-din ruled Bengal till 1739. In that year,

Alivardi Khan deposed and killed Shuja-ud-din's son, Sarfaraz Khdn, and made himself the Nawab.

These three Nawabs gave Bengal a long period of peace and orderly administration and promoted its trade and industry. Mursliid Quli Khan effected economies in the administration and reorganised the finances of Bengal by transferiing large parts of jagir lands into *khahsah* lands by carrying out a fresh revetnie settlement, and by introducing the system of revenue-farming. He also granted agricultural loans (*taccavi*) to the poor cultivators to relieve their distress as well as to enable them to pay land revenue in time. He was thus able to increase the resources of the Bengal Government But the system of revenue-farming led to increased economic pressure on the peasant. Moreover, even though he demanded only the standard revenne and forbade illegal cesses, he collected the levenue from the zamindars and the peasants with utmost cruelty. Another result of his reforms was that many of the older zamindars were driven out and their place taken by upstart revenue- farmers.

Murshid Quli Khan and the succeeding Nawabs gave equal opportunities for employment to Hindus and Muslims. They filled the highest civil posts and many of the military posts with Bengalis, most of whom were Hindus. In choosing revenue farmers Murshid Quli Khan gave preference to local zamindars and *mahajans* (money-lenders) who were mainly Hindus. He thus laid the foundations of a new landed aristocracy in Bengal.

All the three Nawabs recognised that expansion of trade benefited the people and the Government, and, therefore, gave encouragement to all merchants, Indian or foreign. They provided for the safety of roads and rivers from thieves and robbers by establishing regular *thancts* and *chowkies.* They checked private trade by officials. They prevented abuses in the customs administration. At the same time they made it a point to maintain strict control over the foreign trading companies and their servants and prevented them from abusing their privileges. They compelled the servants of the English East India Company to obey the laws of the land and to pay the same customs duties as were being paid by other merchants. Alivardi Khan did not permit the English and the French to fortify their factories in Calcutta and Chandranagar. The Bengal Nawabs proved, however, to be short-sighted and negligent, in one respect, They did not firmly put down the increasing tendency of the English. East • India Company after 1707 to use military force, or to threaten its use, to get its demands accepted. They had the power to deal with the Company's threats, but they continued to believe that a mere trading company could not threaten their power. They failed to see that the English Company was no mere company of traders but was the representative of the most aggressive and expansionist colonialism of the time. Their ignorance of, and lack of contact with, the lest of the world was to cost the state dear. Otherwise, they would have known of the devastation caused by the Western ti tiding companies m Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America.

The Nawabs of Bengal neglected to build a strong army and paid a heavy price for it. For example, the army of Murshid Quh Khan consisted of only 2000 cavalry and 4000 infantry Alivardi Khan was constantly troubled hy the repeated invasions of the Marathas and, in the end, he had to cede a laige part of Oiissa to them. And when, in

1756-57, die English East India Company declaied war on Siraj-ud-Daulah, the successor of Ahvardi, the absence of a strong army contributed much to the victory of the foreigner. The Bengal Nawabs also failed to check the growing corruption among their officials Even judicial officials, the *qazis* and *muftis,* were given to taking bribes. The foreign companies took full advantage of this weakness to undermine official rules 'and regulations and policies.

Avadh

The founder of the autonomous kingdom of Avadh was Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk who was appointed Governor of Avadh in 1722. He was ail extremely bold, energetic, iron-willed, and intelligent pet son. At the time of his appointment, rebellious zamindars had raised their heads everywhere in the province. They icfused to pay the iand tax, organised their own private aimies, erected forts, and defied the Imperial Government For yeais Saadat Khan had to wage war upon them. He succeeded in suppressing lawlessness and disciplining the big zamin- dars and thus, increasing the financial resouices of his government. Most of the defeated zamindars were, however, not displaced. They were usually confirmed in their estates after they had submitted and agreed to pay their dues (land revenue[1]) regularly Moreover, they continued to be refractory. Whenever the Nawab's military hold weakened or he was engaged in some other direction, they would rebel, thus weakening the Nawab's power. As Safdar Jang, Saadat Khan's successor, later wrote. "The Avadh chiefs., were capable of creating a disturbance in the twinkling of an eye and were more dangerous than the Marathas of the Deccan "

Saadat Khan also'earned out a fresh ie venue settlement in 1723 He is said to have improved the lot of the peasant by levying equitable land revenue and by protecting him from oppression by the big zamindars.

Like the Bengal Nawabs, he too did not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims. Many of his commanders and high officials were Hindus, and he curbed refractory zamindars, chiefs, and nobles irrespective of their religion. His troops'were well-paid, well-armed, and well-trained His administration was efficient. Before his death in. 1739, he had become virtually independent and had made the province a hereditary possession. He was succeeded by his nephew Safdar Jang, who was simultaneously appointed the *wazir* of the Empire in 1748 and granted in addition the province of Allahabad.

Safdar Jang gave a long period of peace to the people of Avadli and Allahabad before his death in 1754. He suppressed rebellious zamindars and made an alliance with the Maratha *sardars* so that his dominion was saved from their incursions. He carried on warfare against the Rohelas and the Bangash Pathans. In his war against the Bangash Nawabs in 1750-51, he secured Maratha military help by paying a daily allowance of Rs. 25,000 and Jat support by paying Rs. 15,000 a day. Later, he entered into an agreement with the Pesmva by which the Peshwa was to help the Mughal Empire against Ahmad Shah Abdali and to protect it from such internal rebels as the Indian Pathans and the Rajput rajas. In return the Peshwa was to be paid Rs. 50 lakhs, granted the *chauth* of the Punjab, Sindh, and several districts of northern India, and

made the Governor of Ajmer and Agra. The agreement failed, however, as the Peshwa went over to Safdar Jang's enemies at Delhi who promised him the governorship of Avadh and Allahabad.

Safdar Jang also organised an equitable system of justice. He too adopted a policy of impartiality in the employment of Hindus and Muslims. The highest post in his Government was held by a Hindu, Maharaja Nawab Rai.

The prolonged period of peace and of economic prosperity of the nobles under the government of the Nawabs resulted in time in the growth of a distinct Lucknow culture around the Avadh court. Luck* now, for long an important city of Avadh, and the seat of the Avadh Nawabs after 1775, soon rivalled Delhi in its patronage of arts and literature. It also developed as an important centre of handicrafts.

Safdar Jang maintained a very high standard of peisonal morality. All his life he was devoted to his only wife. As a matter of fact all the founders of the three autonomous kingdoms of Hyderabad, Bengal, and Avadh, namely, Nizam-uI-Mulk, Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan, and Saadat Khan and Safdar Jang, were men of high personal morality. Nearly all of them led austere and simple , Jives. Their lives give lie to the belief that all the leading nobles of the 18th century led extravagant and luxurious lives. It was only in their public and political dealings that they resorted to fraud, intrigue and treachery,

Mysore

. Next to Hyderabad, the most important power that emerged in South India was Mysore under Haidar Ah. The kingdom of Mysore had

Tipu Sultan
Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi

preserved its precarious independence ever since the end of the Vijaya- nagar Empire, Early in the 18th century two ministers Nanjaraj (the Sarvadhikan) and Devraj (the Dulwai) had seized power in Mysore reducing the king Chikka Krishna Raj to a mere puppet. Haidar All, born in 1721 in an obscure family, started his career as a petty officer in the Mysore army. Though uneducated he possessed a keen intellect and was a man of great energy and daring and determination. He was also a brilliant commander and a shrewd diplomat.

Haidar Ali soon found his opportunity in the wars which involved Mysore for more than twenty years. Cleverly using the opportunities that came his way, he gradually rose in the Mysore army. He soon recognised the advantages of western military training and applied it to the troops under his own command. He established a modern arsenal in Dindigul in 1755 with the help of French experts In 1761 he overthrew Nanjaraj and established his authority over the Mysore state. He extended full control over the rebellious poligars (zamindars) and conquered the territories of Bidnur, Sunda, Sera, Canara and Malabar. Though illiterate he was an efficient administrator. He took over Mysore when

it was a weak and divided state and soon made it one of the leading Indian powers. He practised religious toleration and lus first Dewan and many other officials were Hindus.

Almost from the beginning of the establishment of his power, he was engaged in wars with the Maratha *sardais,* the Nizam, and the British. In 1769, he repeatedly defeated the British forces and reached the walls of Madras. He died in 1782 in the course of the second Anglo-Mysore War and was succeeded hy his son Tipu.

Sultan Tipu, who ruled Mysore till his death at the hands of the British in 1799, was a man of complex character. He was, for one, an innovator. His desire to change with the times was symbolised in the introduction of a new calendar, a new system of coinage, and new scales of weights and measures His personal library contained books on such diverse subjects as religion, history, military science, medicine, and mathematics. He showed a keen interest in the French Revolution. He planted a 'Tree of Liberty' at Sringapatam and he became a member of a Jacobin Club. His organisational capacity is borne out by the fact that in those days of general indiscipline among Indian armies his troops remained disciplined and loyal to him to the last. He tried to do away with the custom of giving jagirs, and thus increase state income. He also made an attempt to reduce the hereditary possessions of the poligars. However, his land revenue was as high as that of other contemporary rulers—it ranged up to 1 /3rd of the gross produce. But he checked the collection of

Soldier in Uniform—In the Service of Tipu Sultan *Courtesy. National Archives of India, New Delhi*

Illegal cesses, and he was liberal in granting remissions.

His infantry was armed with muskets and bayonets in fashion which were, however, manufactured in Mysore. He effort to build a modern navy after 1796. For this purpose two dockyards, the models of the ships being supplied 1 himself. In personal life he was free of vices and kept I luxury. He was recklessly brave and, as a commander, 1 was, however, hasty in action and unstable in nature.

As a statesman, he, more than any other 18th century recognised to the full extent the threat that the English p> India as well as to other Indian powers He stood forth a foe of the rising English power. The English, in turn, loo as their most dangerous enemy in India.

Though not free from contemporary economic backwar flourished economically under Haidar All and Tipu, especi. in contrast with its immediate past or with the rest of the cc the British occupied Mysore after defeating and killing they were completely surprised to find that the Mysore pea more prosperous than the peasant in British occupied John Shore, Governor-General from 1793 to 1798, wrote peasantry of his dominions are protected, and their laho and rewarded." Tipu also seems to have grasped the modem trade and industry. In fact, alone among the Ini understood the importance of economic strength as the military strength. He rt^e some attempts to introduce tries in India by importing foreign workmen as experts an state support to many industries. He sent embassies to f Iran and Pegu to develop foreign trade He also trade He even tried to set up a trading company on the .patter companies. , ... _

Some British historians have described Tipu as a rel But this is not borne out by facls. Though he was ortho gious views, he was in fact tolerant and enlightened in toward other religions. He gave, money for the constmclic of goddess Sarda in the Shnngcri Temple after the latter the Maratha horsemen m 1791. He regularly gave gifts tc well as several other temples. The famous temple of Sri] situated barely 100 yards from his palace.

Kerala

At the beginning of the 18ih century Kerala was divide large number of feudal chiefs and lajas. The four most in were those of Calicut undei the Zaniorin, Chirakkal, Cochi

core. The kingdom of Travancore rose into prominence after 1729 under King Martanda Varma, one of the leading statesmen of the 18th century. He combined rare foresight and strong determination with courage and daring. He subdued the feudatories, conquered Quilon and Elayadam, and defeated the Dutch and thus ended their political power in Kerala. He organised a strong army on the western model with the help of European officers and armed it with modern weapons. He also constructed a modern arsenal. Martanda Varma used his new army to expand northwards and the boundaries of Travancore soon extended from Kanya Kumari to Cochin. He undertook many irrigation works, built roads and canals for communication, and gave active encouragement to foreign trade.

By 1763, all the petty principalities of Kerala had been absorbed or subordinated by the three big states of Cochin, Travancore, and Calicut, Haidar All began his invasion of Kerala in 1766 and in the end annexed northern Kerala up to Cochin, including the territories of the Zamorin of Calicut.

The 18th century saw a remarkable revival in Malayalam literature. This was due in part lo the rajas and chiefs of Kerala who were great patrons of literature. Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, became in the second half of the 18th century a famous centre of Sanskrit scholarship. ' Rama Varma, successor of Martanda Varma, was himself a poet, a scholar, a musician, a renowned actor, and a man of great culture, He conversed fluently in English, took a keen interest in European affairs, and regularly read newspapers and journals published in London, Calcutta and Madras.

Areas around Delhi

77ie *Rajput Stales:* The principal Rajput states took advantage of the growing weakness of Mughal power to virtually free themselves from central control while at the same time increasing their influence in the rest of the Empire. Tn the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah the rulers of Amber and Marwar were appointed governors of important Mughal provinces such as Agra, Gujarat, and Malwa.

The Rajputana states continued to be as divided as before. The biggei among them expanded at the cost of their weaker neighbouis, Rajput and non-Rajput. Most of the larger Rajput slates were constantly involved in petty quarrels and civil wats, The internal politics of these states were often characterised by the same type of corruption!, intrigue, and treachery as prevailed at the Mughal court Thus, Ajit Singh of Marwar was killed by his own son.

The most outstanding Rajput ruler of the iStti century was Raja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber (1681-1743). He was a distinguished statesman, law-maker, and reformer. But most of all he shone as a man of science in an age when Indians were oblivious to scientific progress. He founded the city of Jaipur in the territory taken from the Jats and made it a great seat of science and art. Jaipur was built upon strictly scientific principles and according to a regular plan. Its broad stieets are intersected at right angles.

Jai Singh was above everything a great astronomer. He erected observatories with accurate and advanced instruments, some of them of his own invention, at

Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi, and Mathura. His astronomical observations were remarkably accurate He drew up a set of tables, entitled Zij Muhammadshahi, to enable people to make astronomical observations. He had Euclid's ''Elements of Geometry", translated into Sanskrit as also several works on trignometry, and Napier's work on the construction and use of logarithms.

Jai Singh was also a social reformer. He tried to enforce a law to reduce the lavish expenditure which a Rajput had to incur on a daughter's wedding and which often led to infanticide. This remarkable prince ruled Jaipur for nearly 44 years from 1699 to 1743.

The Jats\ The Jats, a caste of agriculturists, lived in the region around Delhi, Agra and Mathura. Oppression by Mughal officials drove the Jat peasants around Mathura to revolt. They revolted under the leadership of their Jat zamindars in 1669 and then again in 1688. These revolts were crushed but the area remained disturbed. After the death of Aurang- zeb, they created disturbances all around Delhi. Though originally a peasant uprising, the Jat revolt, led by zamindars, soon became predatory. They plundered all and sundry, the rich and the poor, the jagirdars and the peasants, the Hindus and the Muslims. They took activc part in the Court intrigues at Delhi, often changing sides to suit their own advantage. The Jat state of Bharatpur was set up by Churaman and Bad&n Singh, The Jat power reached its highest gloiy under Suraj Mai, who ruled from 1756 to 1763 and who was an extremely able administrator and soldier and,a very wise statesman. He **extended** his authority over a large area which extended from the Ganga in the East to Cham bat in the South, the Subah of Agra in the **West to the Subah** of Delhi in the North. His **state** Included among otficis **the districts** of Agra, Mathura, Meerut, and Aligarh. A contemporary Imturian **has** described him as follows:

> **Though he wore the <Jress of a fj.imei and could si'eak onlj his ov>n Jliuj dialed, he WiiS the Pluto of l lie Jill tribe In prurience A nil skill, and ability lo manage the revenue and civil affair* he fiat) no equal among ilic crumlecs of Hindustan except Asaf Jah Bahadur.**

After his death in 1763, the Jat stale declined and was split up among petty zamindars most of whom lived by plunder.

Btiguh Path nos and Rohelas

Muhammad Khan Bangash, an Afghan adventurer, established his control over the territory around Farmkhabad, between what are now Aiigarh and Kanpur, during the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Sfiah. Similarly, during the breakdown of administration following Nadir Shah's invasion, Ali Muhammad Khan carved out a separate principality, known as Rohilkhand, at the foothills of the Himalayas between the Ganga in the south and the Kumaon hills in the north with its capital at first at'AoIan in Bareilly and later at Rampur. The Rohelas clashed constantly with Avadh, Delhi, and the Jats.

Hie Sikhs

Founded at the end of the 15th century by Guru Nanak. the Sikh religion spread among the Jat peasantry and other lower castes of the Punjab. The transformation of the Sikhs into a militant, fighting community was begun by Guru Hargobind (1606-1645). It was, however, under the leadership cf Guru Gobind Singh (1664-1708),.the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, that they

became a political and military force. From 1699 onwards, Guru Gobind Singh waged constant war against the armies of Aurangzeb and the hill rajas. After Aurangzeb's death Guru Gobind Singh joined Bahadur Shah's camp as a noble of the rank of 5000 *sat* and 5000 *sowar* and accompanied him to the Deccan where he was treacherously murdered by one of his Pathan employees.

After Guru Gobind Singh's death the institution of Guruship came to an end and the leadership of the Sikhs passed to his trusted disciple Banda Singh, who is more widely known as Banda Bahadur. Banda rallied together the Sikh peasants of the Punjab and carried on a vigorous though unequal struggle against the Mughal army for eight years. He was captured in 1715 and put to death. His death gave a set-back to the territorial ambitions of the Sikhs, and their power declined.

The invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali and the consequent dislocation of Pui\jab administration gave the Sikhs an opportunity to rise once again. In the wake of the marches of the invaders' armies, they plundered all and sundry and gained wealth and military power. With the withdrawal of Abdali from the Punjab, they began to fill the political vacuum. Between 1765 and 1800 they brought the Punjab and Jammu under their control. The Sikhs were organised into 12 *mills* or confederacies which operated in different parts of the province. These *misls* fully cooperated with each other. They were originally based on the principle of equality, with all members having an equal voice in deciding the affairs of a *misl* and in electing its chief and other officers. Gradually the democratic character of the *misls* disappeared and powerftil chiefs

dominated them. The spirit of brotherhood and unity of the *khatsa* also disappeared as these chiefs constantly quarrelled with one another and set themselves up as independent chieftains.

The Punjab under Ranjit Singh: At the end of the 18th ccntury, Ranjit Singh, chief of the Sukerchakia *Mis!,* rose into prominence. A strong and courageous soldier, an efficient administrator, and a skilful diplomat, he was a born leader of men. He captured Lahore in 1799 and Amritsar in 3802. He soon brought all Sikh chiefs west of the Sutlej under his control and established his own kingdom in the Punjab. Later, he conquered Kashmir, Peshawar, and Multan. The old Sikh chiefs were transformed into big zamindars and jagirdars. He did not make any changes in the system of land revenue promulgated earlier by the Mughals. The amount of lanJ revenue was calculated on the basis of 50 per cent of the gross produce.

Ranjit Stngfi built up a powerful, disciplined, and -well-equipped army along European lines with the help of European instructors. His new army was not confined to the Sikhs. He also recruited Gurkhas, Biharis, Oriyas, Pathans, Dogras, and Punjabi Muslims. He set up modern foundries to manufacture cannon at Lahore and employed Muslim gunners to man them. It is said that he possessed the second best army in Asia, the first being the army of the English East India Company,

Ranjit Singh had great capacity for choosing his ministers and officials. His court was sfcidded with outstanding men. He was tolerant and liberal in religious matters, While a devout Sikh he was "known to step down,from his throne to wipe the dust off the feet of Muslim mendicants with his long grey heard." Many of his important ministers and commanders were Muslims and Hindus.' The most prominent and trusted of his ministers was Fakir Azizuddin, while his Finance Minister was Dewan Dina Nath. In fact, in no sense W&s the Punjab, ruled by Ranjit Singh, a Sirkh state. Poli'.'cal power 'ip^'neft used for exclusive' Sikh benefit On the O'VN haul, ihe Sikh pedant A as ui much t'ppiesscd by Sikh chieft aswas'thj Hindu r>rt!ie %fu<.!'r*i pi'asur.t I.i ia%t the s', IMUCC of the Punjab as. a '■fee mdci Ranul S'in»!i wjs Mrriiia: to il.o Mm^iurc of the other Indian' siii'is of iha jSt'i ivniuii

When the-British forbade Ranjrf Singh m 1809 to cross tlic Sutlej and took the Sikh/states east of the river under their protection, he kept quiet fbr heVealised that his sfrength was no matbh for the British, Thus by his diplomatic realism and military strength he temporarily saved his kingdom fiom English'encroachment. But he did not remove the foreign lhi'cat, he o:il> left n PUT to hi> successors. And so, aftei his death, whcit'hi* kir^ilom WJS '.^rn h\ an intense internal struggle for-power, the 1'nglish moved in and conquered it

The Rise and Fall of (he Maratha Power

The most important challenge to the decaying Mughal power came from the Maratha Kingdom which was the most powerful of the succession stales. In fact, it alone possessed the stiength to fill the political vacuum created by the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. Moreover, it produced a number of brilliant commanders and statesmen needed for the task. But the Maratha *sardars* lackcd unity, and they lacked the outlook and programme which were necessary for founding an alHndia empire, And so they failed to replace the Mughals. They did, however, succeed in waging continuous war against the Mughal Empire, till they destroyed it.

Shahu, grandson of Shivaji, had been a prisoner in the hands of Aurangzeb since 1689. Aurangzeb had treated him and his mother with great dignity, honour, and consideration, paying full attention to their religious,, caste, and other needs, hoping perhaps to arrive at a political agreement with Shahu. Shahu was released in 1707 after Aurangzeb's death. Veiy soon a civil war broke out between Shahu at Satara and his aunt Tara Bai at Kolhapur who had carried out an anti-Mughal struggle since 1700 in the name of her son Shivaji II nfter the death of her husband Raja Ram. Maratha *sardars*, each one of whom had a large following of soldiers loyal to himself filone, began to side with one or the other contender for power. They used this opportunity to increase their power and influence by bargaining with the two contenders for power. Several of them even intrigued with the Mughal viceroys of the Deccan. Arising out of the conflict between Shahu and his rival at Kolhapur, a new system of Maratha government was evolved under the leadership of Balaji Vishwanath, the PesWa of King Shahu. With this change began the second period—the period of Peshwa domination in Maratha history in which the Maratha state was transformed into an empiie

Balaji Vishwanath, a brahmin, started life as a petty revenue official and then rose step by step as an official. He rendered Shahu loyal and useful service in suppresssing his enemies. He excelled in diplomacy and won over many of the big Maratha *sardars* to Shahu's[1] Cause. Th 1713, Shahu made him his Peshwa or the *niukh pradtian* (chief minister). Balaji Vishwanath gradually consolidated Shahu's hold and his own over Maratha *sardars* and over most of Maharashtra except for the region south of Kolhapur where Raja Ram's descendents ruled. The Peshwa concentrated power in his office and eclipsed the other ministers and *sardars.* In fact he and his son Rao I made the Peshwa' the functional head of the Maratha Empire. L,

Balaji Vishwanath took full advantage of the internal conflicts of thi Mughal officials to increase Maratha power. 'He had induced Zulfiqar Khan to pay the *chauth* and *saidesli/tuikhi* of the Deccaii. In the end, he signed a pact with the Saiyid brothers. All the territories that had earlier formed Shivaji's kingdom were restored to Shahu who was also assigned the *chautk* and *sardeshmtikhl* of the six provinces of the Deccan. In return Shahu, who had already recognised, though nominally, Mughal suzerainty, agreed to place a body of 15,000 cavalry troops at the Emperor's service, to prevent rebellion and plundering in the Deccan, and to pay an annual tribute of 10 lakh rupees. In 1719, Balaji Vishwanath, at the head of a Maratha force, accompanied Saiyid Hussain Ali Khan to Delhi and helped

the Saiyid brothers in overthrowing Farrukh Siyar. At Delhi he and the other Maratha *sardars* witnessed at first hand the weakness of the Empire and were filled with the ambition of expansion in the North.

For the efficient collection of the *chautb* and *sardnhmukhi* of the Deccan, Balaji Vishwanath assigned separate areas to Maratha *sardars* who kept the greater part of the collection for their expenses. This system of assignment of the *chaulh* and *sardeshmukiu* also enabled the Peshwa to increase his personal power through patronage. An increasing number of ambitious *sardars* began to flock to his side. In the long run this was to be a major source of weakness to the Maratha Empire Already the system of *watans* and *saranjams* (jagirs) had made Maratha *sardars* strong, autonomous, and jealous of central power. They now began to establish their control in the distant lands of the Mughal Empire where they gradually settled down as more or less autonomous chicfs. Thus the conquests of the Marathas outside their original kingdom were not made by a central army directly controlled by the Maratha king or the Peshwa but by *sardars* with their own private armies. During the process of conquest these *sardars* often dashed wilh one another, If the central authority tried to control them too strictly, they did not hesitate to join hands with enemies, be they the Nizam, the Mughals, or the English.

Balaji Vishwanath died in 1720. He was succeeded as Peshwa by his 20-year old son Baji Rao I. In spiie of his youth, Baji Rao was a bold and brilliant commander and an ambitious and clever statesman. He has been described as “the greatest exponent of guerrilla tactics after Shivaji". Led by Baji Rao, the Marathas waged numerous campaigns against the Mughal Empire trying to compel the Mughal officials first to give them the right to collect the *chaulh* of vast areas and then to cede these areas to the Maratha kingdom. By 1740, when Baji Rao died, the Marathas had won control over Malwa, Gujarat, and parts of Bundel- khand. The Maratha families of Gaekwad, Holkar, Sindhia, and Bhonsle came into prominence during this period.

All his life Baji Rao worked to contain Nizam-ul-Muik's power in the Deccan. The latter, on his part, constantly intrigued with the Raja of Kolhapur, the Maratha *sardars,* and Mughal officials to weaken the **Peshwfl’s** authority. -Twice the two met on the field of battle and both

times the Nizam was worsted and was compelled to grant the Marathas the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the Deccan provinces.

In 1733, Baji Rao started a long campaign against the Sidis of Janjira and in the end expelled them from the mainland. Simultaneously, a campaign against the Portuguese was started. In the end Salsette and Bassein were captured. But the Portuguese continued to hold their other possessions on the west coast.

Bsji Rao died in April 1740. In the short period of 20 years he had changed the character of the Maratha state. From the kingdom of Maharashtra, it had been transformed into an Empire expanding in the North. He, however, failed to lay firm foundations for an empire. New territories were conquered and occupied but little attention was paid to their administiation. The chief concern of the successful *sardars* was with the collection of revenues.

Baji Rao's 18-year old son Balaji Baji Rao (known more widely as Nana Saheb) was the Peshwa from 1740 to 1761. He was as able as his father though less energetic. King Shahu died in 1749 and by his will left all management of state -affairs in the Feshwa's hands. The office of the Peshwa had already become hereditary and the Peshwa was the *de facto* ruler of the state. Now he became the official head of the administration and, as a symbol of this fact, shifted the government to Poona, his headquarters.

Balaji Baji Rao followed in the footsteps of his father and further extended the Empire in different directions taking Maratha power to its height. Maratha armies now overran the whole of India. Maratha control over Malwa, Gujarat, and Bundelkhand was consolidated. Bengal was repeatedly invaded and, in 1751, the Bengal Nawab had to cede Orissa. In the South, the state of Mysore and other minor principalities were forced to pay tribute. In 1760, the Nizam of Hyderabad was defeated at Udgir and was compelled to cede vast territories yielding an annual revenue Of Rs. 62 lakhs. Tn the North, the Marathas soon became the power behind the Mughal throne. Marching through the Gangetic Doab and Rajput$na they reached Delhi where, in 1752, they helped Imad-ul-Mulk to become the *wazir*. The new *wazir* soon became a puppet in, their hands. From Delhi they turned to the Punjab and soon brought it under control after expelling the agent of Ahmad Shah Abdali. This brought them into conflict with the doughty warrior-king of Afghanistan, who once again marched into India to settle accounts with the Maratha power.

A major conflict for mastery over North India now began. Ahmad Shah Abdali soon formed an aUiance with Najib-ud-daulah of Rohilkhand and Shuja-ud-dau 1 ah of Avadh, both of whom had suffered at the hands of the Maratha *sardar*s. Recognising the great importance of the coming

struggle, the Peshwa despatched a powerful army to the north voder the nominal command of his minor son, the actual command being in the hands of his cousin Sadashiv Rao Bhau. An important arm of this force was a contingent of European style infantry and artillery commanded by Ibrahim Khan Gardi. The Marathas now tried to find allies among the northern powers. But their earlier behaviour and political ambitions had antagonised all these powers. They had interfered in the internal affairs or the Raj pu tana states and levied huge tines and tributes upon them. They had made large

territorial and monetary claims upon Avadh. Their actions in the Punjab had angered the Sikh chiefs. Similarly, the Jat chiefs, on whom also heavy fines bad been imposed by thim, did not trust them. They had, therefore, to fight their enemies all atone, except for the weak support of Imad-ul-Mulk; Moreover, the senior Maratha commanders constantly bickered with each other.

The two forces met at Panipat on 14 January 1761. The Maratha army

Afghan Soldiers in Winter Dress
Courtesy: National Archives of India, New Delhi

A Soldier in the Service of Marathas
Courtesy: National Archives of India, New Delhi

was completely routed. The Peshwa's son, Vishwas Rao, Sadashiv Rao Bhau and numerous other Maratha commanders perished on the battle field as did nearly 28,000 soldiers. Those who fled were pursued by the Afghan cavalry and robbed and plundered by the Jats, Ahirs, and Gujars of the Panipat region.

The Peshwa, who was marching north to render help to his cousin, was stunned by the tragic news. Already seriously ill, his end was hastened and he died in June 1761.

The Maratha defeat at Panipat was a disaster for them. They'lost the cream of their aimy and their political prestige suffered a big blow. Most of all, their defeat gave an opportunity to the English' East India Company to consolidate its power in Bengal and

South India. Nor

Soldiers' Bazar in a Maratha Camp *Courtesy: National Archives of India, New Delhi*

did the Afghans benefit from their victory. They could not even hold the Punjab. In fact, the Third Battle of Panipat did not decide who was to rule India but rather who was not. The way was, therefore, cleared for the rise of the British power in India.

The 17-year old Madhav Rao became the Peshwa in 1761. He was a talented Soldier and statesman. Within the short period of 11 years, he restored the lost fortunes of the Maratha Empire. He defeated the Nizam, compelled Haidar Ali of Mysore to pay tribute, and reasserted control over North India by defeating the Rohelas artd subjugating the Rajput states and Jat chiefs. In 1771, the Marathas brought back to Delhi Emperor Shah Alam, who now became their pensioner.

Thus it appeared as if Maratha ascendancy in the north had been recovered.

Once again, however, a blow fell on the Marathas for Madhav Rao died of consumption in 1772. The Maratha Empire was now in a state of confusion. At Poona there was a struggle for power between Raghu- nath Rao, the younger brother of Balaji Baji Rao, and Narayan Rao, the younger brother of Madhav' Rao. Narayan Rao was killed in 1773. He was succeeded by his posthumous son, Sawai Madhav Rao, Out of frustration, Ragbunath Rao went over to the British and tried to capture power with their help. This resulted in the First Anglo-Macatha War.

The Peshwa's power was now on the wane. At Poona there was constant intrigue between the supporters of Sawai Madhav Rao, headed by Nana Phadnis, and the partisans of Raghunath. Rao. In the meanwhile the big Maratha *sardars* had been carving out semi-independent states in the North, which could seldom cooperate. Gaekwad at Baroda, Bhonsle at Nagpur, Holkar at Indore, and Sindhia at Gwalior were the most important. They had established regular administrations on the pattern of Mughal administration and possessed their separate armies. Their allegiance to the Peshwas became more and more nominal. Instead they joined opposing factions at Poona and intrigued with the enemies of the Maratha Empire.,

Among the Maratha rulers in the North, Mahadji Sindhia was the most important. He organised a powerful army with the help of French officers and established control over Emperor Shah Alam in 1784. From the Emperor he secured the appointment of the Peshwa as the Emperor's Deputy *(Natb-i-Munaib)* on the condition that Mahadji would act on behalf of the Peshwa. But he spent his energies in intriguing against Nana Phadnis. He was also a bitter enemy of Holkar of Indore. He died in 1794. He and Nana Phadnis, who died in 1800, were the last of the great soldiers and statesmen who had raised the Maratha power to its height ,in the 18th ,century.

Sawai Madhav Rao died in 1795: and was succeeded by the utterly worthless Baji Rao II, son of Raghunath Rao. The British had by now decided to put an end to the Maratha challenge to their supremacy in India. The British divided the mutually-warring Maratha *sardars* through clever diplomacy and then overpowered them in separate battles during the second Maratha War, 1805-1805, and the Third Maratha War, 1816- 1819, While other Maratha states were permitted to remain as subsidiary states, the house of the Peshwas was extinguished.

Thus, the Maratha dream of controlling the Mughal Empire and establishing their own Empire over large parts of the country could not be realised. This was basically because the Maratha Empire represented the

same decadent social order as the Mughal Empire did and suffered from the same underlying weaknesses. The Maratha chiefs were very similar to the later Mughal nobles, just as the *saranjami* system was similar to the Mughal system of jagirs. So long as there existed a strong central authority and the need for mutual cooperation against a common enemy, the Mughals, they remained united in a loose union. But at the first opportunity they tended to assert their autonomy. . If anything, they were even less disciplined than the Mughal nobles. Nor did the Maratha *sardars* try to develop a new economy. They failed to encourage science and technology or to take much interest in trade and industry. Their revenue system was similar to that of the Mughals as also was their administration. Like the Mughals, the Maratha rulers were also mainly interested in raising revenue from the helpless peasantry. For example, they too collected nearly half of agricultural produce as tax. Unlike the Mughals, they failed even to give sound administration to the people outside Maharashtra, They could not inspire the Indian people with any higher degree of loyalty than the Mughals had succeeded in doing. Their dominion too depended on force and force alone. The only way the Marathas could have stood up to the rising British power^was to have transformed their state into a modem state, This they falied to do.

Social and Economic Conditions of the people

India of the 18th century failed to make progress economically, socially, or culturally at a pace which would have saved the country from collapse.

The increasing revenue demands of the state, the oppression of the officials, the greed and rapacity of the nobles, reveuue-farmers, and zamindars, the marches and counter-marches of the rival armies, and the depredations of the numerous adventurers roaming the land during the first half of the 18th century made the life of the people quite wretched.

India of those days was also a land of contrasts. Extreme poverty existed side by side with extreme riches and luxury. On the one hand, there were the rich and powerful nobles steeped in luxury and comfort, on the other, backward, oppressed and impoverished peasants living at the bare subsistence level and having to bear all sorts of injustices and inequities Even so, the life of the Indian masses was by and large better at this time than it was after over 100 years of British rule at the end of the 19th century.

Indian agriculture during the 18th century was technically backward and stagnant. The techniques of production had remained stationary for centuries. The peasant tried to makeup for technical backwardness by working very hard. He, in fact, performed miracles of production; Moreover, he did not usually suffer from shortage of land.. But, unfortunately, he seldom reaped the fruits of his labour, Even though it wa$ his produce that supported the rest of the society, his own reward was miserably inadequate. The state, the zamindars, the jagifdars, and the revenue-farmers tried to extract the maximum amount from him. This was as true of the Mughal state as of the Maratha or Sikh chiefs or other successors of the Mughal state.

Even though Indian villages were largely self-sufficient and imported little from outside and the means of communication were backward, extensive trade within the country and between India and other countries of Asia and Europe was carried on under the Mughals. India imported pearls, raw silk, wool, dates, dried fruits, and rose water

from the Persian Gulf region; coffee, gold, drugs, and honey from Arabia; tea, sugar, porcelain, and silk from China; goid, musk and woollen cloth from Tibet; tin from Singapore; spices, perfumes, arrack, and sugar from the Indonesian islands; ivory and drugs from Africa; and woollen cloth, metals such as copper, iron, and lead, and paper from Europe. India's most important article of export was cotton textiles which were famous all over the world for their excellence and were in demand everywhere. India also exported raw silk and silk fabrics, hardware, indigo, saltpetre, opium, rice, wheat, sugar, pepper and other spices, precious stones, and drugs,

Since India was on the whole self-sufficient in handicrafts and agricultural products, it did not import foreign goods on a large scale. On the other hand, its industrial and agricultural products had a steady market abroad, Consequently, it exported more than it imported and its trade was balanced by import of silver and gold. In fact, India was known' as a sink of precious metals,

Constant warfare and disruption of law and order in many areas during the 18th century harmed the country's internal trade and disrupted its foreign trade to some extent and in some directions. Many trading centres were looted by the contestants for power and by foreign invaders. Many of the trade routes were infested with organised bands of robbers, and traders and their caravans were regularly looted. Even the road between the two[1] imperial cities, Delhi and Agra, was made unsafe by the marauders. Moreover, with the rise of autonomous provincial regimes and innumerable local chiefs, the number of custom houses or *chowkies* grew by leaps and bounds. Every petty or large ruler tried to increase his income by imposing heavy customs duties on goods entering or passing through[1] his territories. All these factors had an injurious effect on trade though much less than generally believed. The impoverishment of the nobles, who were the largest consumers of luxury products in which trade was conducted, also injured internal trade.

Political factors which hurt trade also adversely affected urban industries. Many prosperous cities, centres of flourishing industry, were

> sacked and devastated. Delhi was plundered by Nadir Shah; Lahore, Delhi and Mathura by Ahmad Shah Abdali; Agra by the Jats; Surat and other cities of Gujarat and the Deccan by Maratha chiefs; Sarhind by the Sikhs, and so on. Similarly, artisans catering to the needs of the feudal class and the court suffered as the fortunes of their patrons declined. The decline of internal and foreign trade also hit them hard in some parts of the country. Nevertheless, some industries in other parts of the country gained as a result of expansion in trade with Europe due to the activities of the European trading companies.
>
> Even so India remained a land of extensive manufactures. Indian artisans still enjoyed fame all the world over for their skill. India was still a large-scale manufacturer of cotton and silk fabrics, sugar, jute, dye-stuffs, mineral and metallic products like arms, metal wares, and saltpetre and oils. The important centres of textile industry were Dacca and Murshidabad in Bengal, Patna in Bihar, Surat, Ahmedabad and Broach in Gujarat, Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, Burhanpur in Maharashtra, Jaunpur, Varanasi, Lucknow, and Agra in U.P., Multan and Lahore m the Punjab, Masulipatam, Aurangabad, Chicacole and Vishakha- patnam in Andhra, Bangalore in Mysore, and Coimbatore and

Madurai in Madras. Kashmir was a centre of woollen manufactures. Ship-building industry flourished in Maharashtra, Andhra, and Bengal. Writing about the great skill of Indians in this respect, an English observer wrote: "in ship-building they probably taught the English far more than they learr.t from them." The European Companies bought many Indian-made ships for their use.

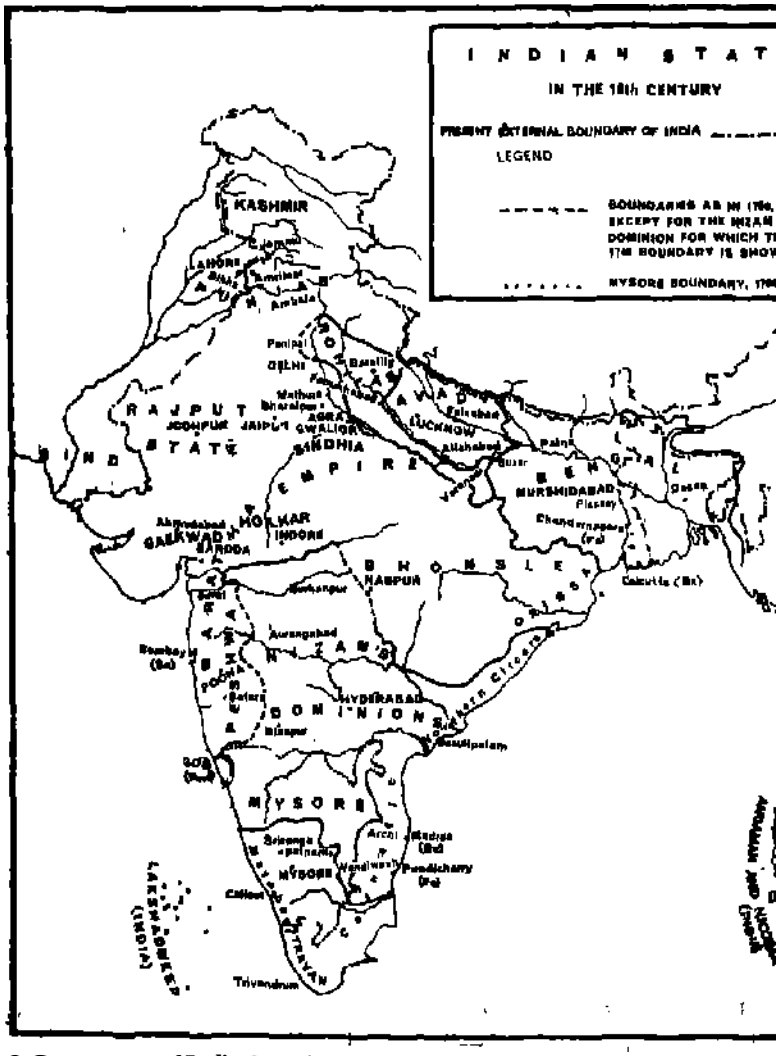
In fact, at the dawn of the 18th century, India was one of the main centres of worJd trade and industry, Peter the Great of Russia was led to exclaim:

> **Bear in mind that the commerce of ID dials the commerce of the world and.., .he who can exclusively command it is the dictator of Europe.**

Education

Education was not completely neglected in 18 th century India, But it was on the whole defective. It was traditional and out of touch with the rapid developments in the West. The knowledge which it imparted **Was** confined to literature, law, religion, philosophy, and logic, and excluded the study of physical and natural sciences, technology, and geography. Nor did it concern itself with a factual and rational study of society. In all fields original thought was discouraged and reliance placed on ancient learning.

The centres of higher education were spread all over the country and were usually financed by nawabs, rajas, and rich zamindars. Among



© Govrmment of India Copyri

Baaed upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor of India.
TTie territorial waters of India extend into the to a distance of twelve miicn measured from the appropriate base line.

the Hindus, higher education was based op Sanskrit learning and was mostly confined to *Brahmins*. Persian education being based on the official language of the time was equally popular among Hindus and Muslims.

Elementary education was quite widespread. Among the Hindus it was imparted through town and village schools while among the Muslims through

the Maulvis in *maktabs* situated in mosques. In those schools the young students were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, Though elementary education was mostly confined to the higher castes like *Brah- m!nx,* Rajputs, and *Vaishyas,* many persons from the lower castes also often received it. Interestingly enough, the average literacy was not less than what it was under the British later. Though the standard of primary education was inadequate by modern standards, it sufficed for the limited purposes of those days. A very pleasant aspect of education then was that the teachers enj'oyed high prestige in the community. A bad feature of it was that girls were seldom given education, though some women of the higher classes were an exception.

Sods! and Cultural Life

Social life and culture in the 18th century were marked by stagnation and dependence on the past. There was, of course, no uniformity of culture and social patterns all over the country. Nor did all Hindus and all Muslims form two distinct societies. People were divided hy religion, region, tribe, language, and caste. Moreover, the social life and culture of the upper classes, who formed a tiny minority of the total population, was in many'respects different from the life and culture of the lower classes.

Caste was the central feature of the social life of the Hindus. Apart from the four *varnas,* Hindus were divided into numerous castes (*Jatis*) which differed in their nature from place to place. The caste system ■ rigidly divided people and permanently fixed their place in the social scale. The higher castes, headed by the *Brahmins,* monopolised all social prestige and privileges. Caste rules were extremely rigid. Intercaste marriages were forbidden. There were restrictions on inter- dining among members of different castes. In some cases persons belonging to higher castes would not take food touched by persons of the lower castes. Castes often determined the choice of profession, though exceptions did occur. Caste regulations were strictly enforced by caste councils and paqchayats and caste chiefs through fines, penances *(prayaschitya)* and expulsion from the caste. Caste was a major divisive force and element of disintegration in the India of 18th century. It often'split Hindus living in the same village or region into many social atoms. It was, of course, possible for a person to acquire a higher social status by acquisition of high office or power, as did the Holkar family in the I8th century. Sometimes, though not often, an entire caste would succeed in raising itself in the caste hierarchy.

Muslims were no less divided by considerations of caste, race, tribe, and status, even though their religion enjoined social equality. The Shia and Sunni nobles were sometimes at loggerheads on account of their religious differences. The Irani, Afghan, Turani, and Hindustani Muslim nobles and officials often stood apart from each other. A large number of Hindus converted to Islam carried their caste into the new religion and observed its distinctions, though not as rigidly as before. Moreover, the *sharif* Muslims consisting of nobles, scholars,

priests, and army officers, looked down upon the *ajlaf* Muslims or the lower class Muslims in a manner similar to that adopted by the higher caste Hindus towards the lower caste Hindus.

The family system in the 18th century India was primarily patriarchal, that is, the family was dominated by the senior male member and inheritance was through the male line. In Kerala, however, the family was matnlineal. Outside Kerala, women were subjected to nearly complete male control. They were expected to live as mothers and wives only, though in these roles they were shown a great deal of respect and honour. Even during war and anarchy women were seldom molested and were treated with respect. A European traveller, Abbe J.A. Dubois, commented, at the beginning of the 19th century: "A Hindu woman can go anywhere alone, even in the most crowded places, and she need never fear the impertinent looks and jokes of idle loungers_____ A house inhabited solely by women is a sanctuary which the most shameless libertine would not dream of violating." But the women, of the time possessed little individuality of their own. This does not mean that there were no exceptions to this rule. Ahilya Bai administered Indore with great success from 1766 to 1796. , Many other Hindu and Muslim ladies played important roles in 18th century politics. Whi|e women of the upper classes were not supposed to work outside their homes, peasant women usually worked in the fields and women of the poorer classes often worked outside their homes to supplement the family income. The *purdah* was common mostly among the higher classes in the North* It was not practised in the South.

, Boys and girls were not permitted to mix with each other. All marriages were arranged by the heads of the families, Men were permitted to have more than oije wife, but, .except for the well-off, they normally had oniy one. On the other hand a woman was expected to marry only once in her life-time. The custom of early marriage prevailed all over the country. Sometimes chjldr^n were married when they were only three or four years of age.

Among the upper classes, the evil customs of incurring heavy expenses on marriages and of giving dowry to the bride prevailed. The evil of dowry was especially widespread in Bengal and Rajputana. In Maharashtra it was curbed to some extent by the energetic steps taken by the Peshwas.

Two great social evils of the 18th century India, apart from the caste system, were the custom of *sati* and the condition of widows. *Sali* involved the rite of a Hindu widow burning herself along with the body of her dead husband. It was mostly prevalent in Rajputana, Bengal and other parts of northern India. In the South it was uncommon; and the Marathas did not encourage it. Even in Rajputana and Bengal it was practised only by the families of rajas, chiefs, big zamindars and upper castes. Widows belonging to the higher classes and higher bastes could not remarry, though in some regions and in some castes, fop exampk, among *non-brahmins* in Maharashtra, the Jats and people of the hil!-regions of the North, widow remarriage was quite common. The loi of the Hindu widow was usually pitiable. There were all sorts of restrictions on her clothing, diet, movements, etc. In general, she was expected to renounce all the pleasures of the earth and to serve selflessly the members of her husband's or her brother's family, depending on where she spent the remaining years of her life. Sensitive Indians were often touched by the hard and harsh life of the widows. Raja Sawai Jai

Sati: A Widqw Being Burnt on Her Husband's Pyre *Courtesy: National Archives of India, New Delhi*

Singh of Amber and the Maratha General Prashuram Bhau tried to promote widow remarriage but failed.

Culturally, India showed signs of exhaustion during the 18th century. Cultural

continuity with the preceding centuries was, of course, maintained. But at the same time culture remained wholly traditionalist. Cultural activities of the time were mostly financed by the Royal [1] Court, rulers, and nobles and chiefs whose impoverishment led to their gradual neglect. The most rapid decline occurred precisely in those branches of arts which depended on the patronage of kings, princes, and nobles. This was true most of all of Mughal architecture and painting. Many of the painters of the Mughal school migrated to provincial courts and flourished at Hyderabad, Lucknow, Kashmir, and Patna. At the same time new schools of painting were born and achieved distinct ion. The paintings of Kangra and Rajput Schools revealed new vitality and taste. In the field of architecture, the Imambara of Lucknow reveals proficiency in technique but a decadence in architectural taste. On the other hand, the city of Jaipur and its buildings ate an example of continuing vigour. Music continued to develop and flourish in the 18th century. Significant progress was made in this field in the TCigU of Muhammad Shah.

Poruv in nsariy all the Indian languages lost its touch with life and became decorative, artificial, mechanical and traditional. Its pessimism reflected ths prevailing sense of despair and cynicism, while its content reflected the impoverishment of the spiritual life of its patrons, the feudal nobles and kings,

A noteworthy feature of the literary life of the 18th century was the spread of Urdu language and the vigorous growth of Urdu poetry. Urdu gradually became the medium of social intercourse among the upper classes of northern India. While Urdu poetry shared, in common the weaknesses of the contemporary literature in other Indian languages, it produced brilliant poets like Mir, Sauda, Nazir, and in the 19th century, that great genius Mirza Ghalib.

Similarly, there was a revival of Malayalam literature, especially under the patronage of the Travancore rulers, Martanda Varma and Rama Varma. One of the great poets of Kerala, Kunchan Nambiar, who wrote popular poetry in the language of daily usage, lived at this time. The 18th century Kerala also witnessed the full development of *Kathakali* literature, drama^and dance. The Padmanabhan Palace with its remarkable architecture and mural paintings was also constructed in thq 18th centuiy.

Tayaumanavar (1706-44) was one of the best exponents of *sittar* poetry in TamiL 3n line with other *slitar* poets, he protested against the abuses of temple-nile and the caste system. In Assam, literature developed under the patronage of the Ahom kings. Dayaram, cue of the great lyricists of Gujarat, wrote during the second half of the 18th century. *Beet Ranjha,* the famous romantic epic in Punjabi, was composed-at this time by Warris Shah. For Sindhi literature, the 18th century was a period of enormous achievement. Shah Abdul Latif composed his famous collection of poems, *Risalo.* Sachal and Sami were the other great Sindhi poets of the century.

The main weakness of Indian culture lay in the field of science. Throughout the 18th century India remained far behind the West in science and technology. For the last 200 years Western Europe had been undergoing a scientific and

economic revolution that was leading to a spate of inventions and discoveries. The scientific outlook was gradually pervading the Western mind and revolutionising the philosophic, political, and economic outlook of the Europeans and their institutions. On the other hand, the Indians who had in earlier ages made vital contributions in the fields of mathematics and natural sciences, had been neglecting the sciences for several centuries, The Indian mind was still tied to tradition; boih the nobles and the commo n people were superstitious to a high degree. The Indians remained almost wholly Ignorant of the scientific, cultural, political, and economic achievements of the West. The 18th century Indian rulers did not show any interest in things western except in weapons of war and techniques of military training. This weakness in the realm of science was to a large extent responsible for the total subjugation of India by the most advanced country of the time,

Struggle for power and wealth, economic decline, social backwardness, and cultural stagnation had a deep and harmful impact on the morals of a section of the Indian people. The nobles, in particular, degenerated m their private and public, life. The virtues of loyalty, gratitude, and faithfulness to their pledged word tended to disappear in the single-minded pursuit of selfish aims. Many of the nobles were prey to degrading vices and excessive luxury. Most of them took bribes when in office. Surprisingly enough, the ^common people were not debased to any marked extent. They continued to exhibit a high degree of personal integrity and morality. For example, the well known British official John Malcolm remarked in 1821:

> I do not know, the example of any great population, in similar circumstaiKW, preserving through such & period of changes and tyrannical rule, so nuch virtue and so many .qualities as are to be found la a great proportion of the inhabitant! of (his country.

In particular, he praised "the absence of the common vices oHheft, drunkenness, and violence.", Similarly, Cranford, another European writer, observed:

> Their rolea of morality are most benevolent: and hospitality and charity arc not only strongly inculcated but I believe nowhere more universally practised than amongst Hindus.

Friendly relations between Hindus and Muslims were a very heJthy feature of life in 18th. century India. Even though the nobles and chiefs of the time fought each other incessantly, their fights and their alliances were seldom based on distinctions of religion. In other words, their politics were essentially secular. In fact, there was little communal bitterness or religious intolerance in the country. All people, high or low, respected one another's relijion and a spirit of tolerance, even harmony, prevailed. 'The mutual relations of Hindus and Muslims were those of brothers among brothers.' This was particularly true of the common people in the villages and towns who fully shared one another's joys and sorrows, irrespective of religious affiliations.

Hindus and Muslims cooperated in non-religious sphere s such as social life and cultural affairs. The evolution of a composite Hindu-Muslim culture, *ot* of common ways and attitudes, continued unchecked. Hindu writers often wrote in Persian while Muslim writers wrote in Hindi, Bengali, and other vernaculars, often dealing with subjects of Hindu social life and religioln, such as Radha and Krishna, Sita and Ram, and Nal and Damyanti. The development of Urdu language and literature provided a new meeting ground between Hindus and Muslims.

Even in tbe religious sphere, the mutual influence and respect that had been developing in the last few centuries as a result of the spread of the Bhakti movement among Hindus and Sufism among Muslims, continued to grow. A large number of Hindus worshipped Muslim saints and many Muslims showed equal veneration for Hindu gods and saints. Muslim rulers, nobles, and commoners joyfully joined in the Hindu festivals such as Holi, Diwali, and iDurga Puja,[1] just as Hindus participated in the Muharram processions. It is noteworthy that Raja Rammohun Roy, the greatest Indian of the first half of the 19th century, was influenced in an equal measure by the Hindu and the Islamic philosophical and religious systems.

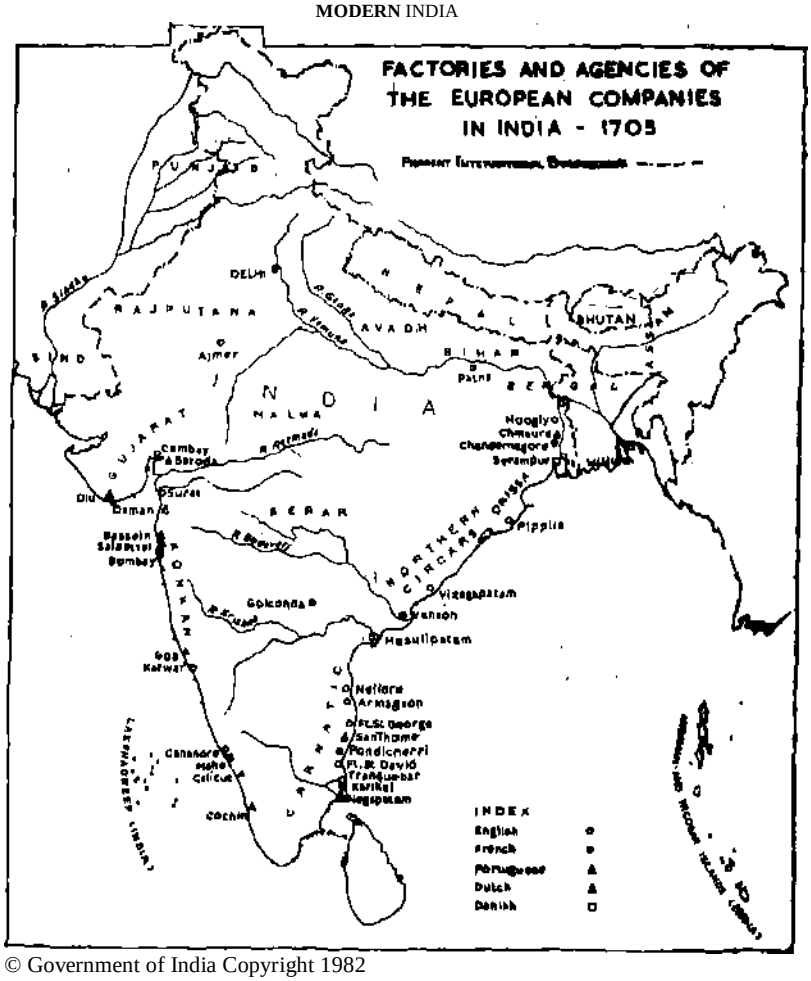
It may also be noted that religious affiliation Was not the main point of departure in cultural and social life. The ways of life of the upper class Hindus and Muslims converged much more than the ways of life of upper class and lower class Hindtis or of upper class and lower class Muslims. Similarly, regions or areas provided points of departure. People of one region had far greater cultural synthesis irrespective of religion than people following tbe same religion spread over different regions. People living in the villages also tended to have a different pattern of social and cultural life than that of the town dwellers.

E X E R C I S E S

1. Examine the policies followed by the rulers of the states of Hyderabad, Bengal, and Avadh.

2. Give a critical appreciation of the character and achievements of Tipu Sultan.
3. Trace the rise of the Sikhs in the Punjab in the 18th century. Discuss Ranjit Singh's administration of the Punjab.
4. Trace the rise of the Maratha Empire under the first three Peshwas? Why did it fail to survive?
5. Bring out the main features of Indian economic life in the 18th century. To what extent were they related to contemporary political developments?
6. 'What were the main features of social lire in India in the lBth century? Bring out some of the differences between the lower and the higher classes and castes in this respect.
7. Discuss the major cultural developments in India in the 18th century. How far were these developments influenced by the nobles, chiefs, and kings?
8. Briefly examine Hindu-Muslim relations in the 18th century. To what extent were the politics of the 18th century motivated by religious considerations?
9. Write short notes on:

(a) Raja Jai Singh of Amber, (b) The Third Battle of Panipat, (c) [1] Haidar AH, (d) Kerala in the 18th century, (e) The Jat State of Bharatpur, (f) Education in 18th century India, (g) Science in 18th century India, (h) Economic condition of the peasant in the 18th century.



Bated upon Survey of India map wiih the permission of the Surveyor General of India.
The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles nyasured from the appropriate base line.